

ome
issue 1



beginnings

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Crafting this first issue of Omelette Magazine has been a journey and a half. Then again, maybe we should've expected it to be. Starting a magazine in a pandemic with only two people on staff, while said two people are also struggling with a full semestral (university) workload, other commitments and a whole lot of pandemic burnout? It turns out that's not, y'know, the *least ambitious idea* we've ever had.

In that vein, what we'd like to do most in this foreword is to thank all of our contributors, readers, and everyone who's submitted to us in the past few months for your endless kindness and patience. It's been a long quarter year, and we're so grateful for your support and understanding throughout this period – y'all are awesome. To our contributors, thank you so much for continuing to trust us with your work and your words, even when we made the executive decision to delay the issue. To our readers, thank you for picking up this virtual copy; we hope you love these pieces as much as we do. And to everyone who's taken the plunge and submitted your work to us, please know that we loved your art too – we just didn't have the space to accept it!

But you came to this magazine to read the works we've curated, not our rambling, so we'll get to the point. We asked you for your work about *beginnings*, and boy, did you deliver. Compiled in this issue are no less than 30 beautiful pieces submitted under the theme that moved us, took our breath away, and left us wanting more – and wanting to share them with the world. We only hope our readers will feel the way we did with these pieces.

Thank you for trusting us and for giving us this platform. All we want to do is curate work that we love and that we hope other people love too, and we couldn't have hoped for a better first issue.

Enjoy!

Nikki & Serene

foreword

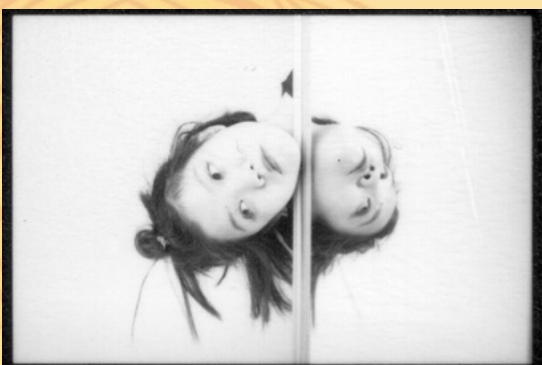
I Awoke

Yen Ee

I AWOKE –

Hazy lavender light
Crept up on me
I did not say no.
And there it was
Plain as the day yet to arrive
Just as I had pleaded
It was laying all the while in wait –
I only had to let it happen –
Inklings of a past skin
Shrugged back upon my body
Creature comforts
Returning with open arms
No shame here
They proclaimed
Quiet and firm
No need to prove
Unquestioned declaration
Draping the quilt of belonging
upon my shoulders
Unabashed provincial assuredness
You are, dear child,
They sang
And I with them
You are, in your own right.

You are You are You are.



Yen Ee considers herself lost in the world, enraptured by all things found within and without it. She is currently on the grand and necessary mission of gathering sufficient courage to place her human experience under the sun, where all is frighteningly visible.

A Monsoon Man

Ismim Putera

in the beginning			
	there	is	a body in delight
like plankton		/	flattened by light
the body		is	a 23-year-old monsoon man falls
			in love, with a fisherman
the man loves him too, it		is	mutualistic, but dreamy
he hides his feelings		/	like how a deep-sea starfish hides its
			face
the feeling		is	warm and hazy, often snowy with
			bouts of heatwave
			cheeks flushes like two
			sea cucumbers
			burst open
			seedless
the kiss		is	even hotter—a mouthful of
			ground chillies with anchovies
			redder than a scoop of <i>sambal</i>
			an aftertaste of shrimp
			prolongs the salty lust
			swirling in the
			vortex
in the beginning, the monsoon			
	man is		loving the fisherman
			like how the clouds
			loves the rainbow
			in the
			rain



Ismim Putera (he/him) is a poet and writer from Sarawak, Malaysia. His works can be found in online literary magazines such as *Ghostheart Literary*, *Ayaskala*, *Prismatica*, *Orris Roots*, *Eksentrika*, *Anak Sastra* and elsewhere. Find him on Instagram and Twitter @ismimputera.

Two Astro Love Stories

Cathy Ulrich

Only a Reflection of the Sun

The astronaut, when she comes home from space, will do yin yoga for an hour every day, her breath hissing in and out, in and out, will rub and stretch her muscles, will think of the word *atrophy*.

She will take a bath in the clawfoot bathroom tub, big enough for her and her wife both (and maybe they will take a bath together, maybe later), but for now the astronaut will bathe alone, turning the water so hot it reddens her skin, leaves her lightheaded and floating, her wife standing in the hallway, hand pressed to tight-closed door, thinking *you are still so far away*.

In space, the astronaut was weightless. In space, the astronaut was connected to everything. She looked out at the stars and thought *they are so much closer now*, thought *I can nearly touch them*. She played solitaire with a deck of cards that lifted away and away, she told jokes with the other astronauts, *is the bar tender here*, she sent videos home to her wife, *wish you were, wish you were, wish you were here*.

When she comes home from space, the astronaut will feel so heavy. She will lift her arms from her sides, marvel at the immense weight of them. She will hold her wife's hand when they go out together, *so I don't float away*; she will do interviews with blue-eyed reporters, *oh yes, it's good to be home, it's so good to be home*.



She will tip her face to the sky when she is outside, she will always be looking out windows, she will feel the curve and turn of the earth beneath her feet. She will tell her wife when she looked down at the earth — she thought of it as down, thought of herself as above, thought of herself as *godlike*, remembered the hymn they sang at her mother's funeral, *come, Spirit, come*, they sang, and the other astronauts said *are you crying, why are you crying*, and she said, *no, no, it's only the reflection of the sun in my eyes*.

She will tell her wife: *The world was filled with thousands and thousands of lights*.

She will tell her wife: *And you were the brightest one*.



The Moon Was So Far Away

When the astronaut comes home from space, her wife will rub her shoulders, kiss her neck. Her wife will show her the flowers from the neighbors, vase and vase and vase. She will tell the astronaut she has been learning about dwarf hippopotamuses, she will say *the last Cyprus dwarf hippo went extinct nine thousand years ago, she will say what do you think it's like to be the last?*

The astronaut's wife will say: *While you were gone, the moon was so far away.*

She will show the astronaut the scarves she has crocheted, the place on the bathroom floor where her hair fell when she shaved it off, the cascarnés she bought at the fiesta where her oldest niece danced, *do you remember these*, how the smallest children ran after each other through the green-grass park, cracking eggs over each other's heads and watching the confetti rain down and down, *do you remember?*

The astronaut will remember weightlessness, cold space.

The astronaut's wife will say *come and see the daisies*, and they will be white-petaled, yellow-faced to the sun, tipping up the way the astronaut will tip her own head up, *the weight*, she'll say, *the weight, the weight, the weight, the weight of the world.*

The astronaut's wife will entwine her fingers with the astronaut's, will think *don't float away, don't fly away.*

She will think of dark night and dial tone, she will think of looking up and up, she will think of the astronaut's voice, crackling with distance: *Wish you were here.*

She will say: *It wasn't home.*

She will say: *It wasn't home without you here.*



Cathy Ulrich has recently learned how to spell hippopotamuses correctly on the first try, every time. Her work has been published in various journals, including *Cream City Review*, *Sun Dog Lit* and *Pine Hills Review*.

sago't gulaman

Noreen Ocampo

I (careless diaspora child) was nineteen
when I discovered that
my favorite childhood drink simply mixes
brown sugar & water.

Perhaps
some of the magic has dissolved,
but Chicago & San Francisco still disappoint
if you grew up on my father's recipe,
which states:

when he returns home
from his home, he must fight to defend his
strange domed blocks
of sugar from airport security.

Today
we boil dark tapioca pearls of the
Ready In 5 Minutes! variety
because we never get the consistency right
otherwise.

Then add insistently hand-
shaved ice & silky grass jelly in a tall
chipped glass.

Somewhere in between:
banana essence (or vanilla extract,
if preferred).

Serve immediately, appreciate the magic,
& enjoy.

Noreen Ocampo is a Filipina American writer based in metro-Atlanta. She studies English and film at Emory University, and you can find her poems in *Marías at Sampaguitas*, *perhappened mag*, and *Nightingale & Sparrow*, among others. She also retweets things @maybenoreen.

How to Bake Pure Happiness

Kyle Tam

Making cookies from scratch is a special kind of magic, and doing the busy work of preparing for and inevitably baking a dozen is like brewing up a potion for pure delight. Everything has to be just so, proportioned in just the right way for maximum chew, maximum chunk, and that really nice golden brown bottom that means you get just a bit of toffee crunch when you bite down. Best of all, it's magic that anyone can learn and execute, if they have a little patience, strong arms, and a lot of butter.

First, you start with a recipe you can trust. There are thousands floating around the internet, but my personal favourite comes from *Tasty*. You know *Tasty* - they're all over your Facebook feed, infiltrating your ads and promotions through the magic of browser histories, and they make a mean chewy chocolate chip. From there, make sure that you have everything measured just so. While baking isn't always an exact science, measurements are, and there's something very zen about making sure that the levels of your various cups and spoons are just right. It's a little rush of accomplishment, knowing that today you're getting something done.

Once you have everything measured out, the real hard work begins. After all, there's whisking to be done. The nice thing about whisking is that you can feel the progress you're making in the way that a truly ready blend of sugar and butter will give under your grip when it's ready. You'll whisk and whisk in endless circles, certain that your melted butter and sugar blend will never stop feeling like you're stirring quicksand, and then all of a sudden the resistance gives way and it's silky smooth like... well, butter. Then come eggs and vanilla, mixed until they come off your whisk in ribbons. To be honest, this is the part that always confuses me. When you lift the whisk up there are always going to



be trails of cookie-to-be that drip off it and come oozing back into the batter. Are the ribbons meant to be thicker than trails? Is the ooze supposed to be even slower in its descent? I usually go by “this is probably good enough”, and the cookies have always turned out incredible, but that’s getting ahead of myself.

Whisking gives way to folding, another practical application of upper body strength. If there’s been one thing motivating me to work out it’s been making cookies, which is better known as a culinary irony. As the batter becomes suffused with flour it thickens, as even the most amateur of bakers knows, and with that thickening comes the overconfidence of the dough. It is growing, changing, and fighting, and you have to fight back. Press the flour in. Remind it that YOU are the baker here, dangit, and YOU are in charge. But not too much because it’s still sensitive and all of a sudden you’ll have cakey cookies. Then you do the same with your chocolate, whether in chip form or chunks patiently cut by you or for you by a waiting assistant/sibling/fae helper.

Once that’s done, you now optionally have your very first wait. If you’re feeling impatient and are desperately craving that sweet, sugary high, go ahead and skip this paragraph. But there are spiritual and tangible benefits to leaving the dough in the fridge and waiting. Part of it comes from an increased complexity in flavour, the chill of refrigeration enriching and deepening the toffee notes to bring out the surprising richness of your cookie. The other part comes from the satisfaction of a job well done, and the sweet sorrow of parting. It will help enhance your appreciation so much more. So leave it in the fridge for an hour, or two, or even overnight, and then when you’re ready bring your dough out and prepare for the final bake.

Scoop out dollops carefully, either with an ice cream scoop or your hands, making sure that none of them bleed into the other and make megacookies (unless that’s your thing in which case go for it). Don’t worry too much about exactness of size - you’re making this for personal or familial satisfaction, not to sell in a store. No matter how big or how small they end up being, they’ll all turn out delightful. Did you preheat the oven? Make sure, because you don’t want to end up wasting your time or the doughs. 350’s a good Goldilocks number - not



too big, not too small, but precisely right for your cookies. Take your tray, slide it in, and set your timer.

Then you have your elevator music time, where you're idling on your phone or with a book and waiting the 12-15 minutes you need for the cookies to rise. You can spend it gazing at clouds, or diving headfirst into a novel, or trying to pay bills online and swearing at the janky system. Or you can be me and spend the whole time crouched right next to the oven, watching your little chocolate dreams come to life. Whatever you choose to do, you'll be stuck in the temporal anomaly of time being too fast and not fast enough for your cookies, so make sure that you've set the timer appropriately to keep your baking grounded on Planet Earth.

Once time is up and you've done the age-old toothpick in the cookie test without any strangely wet portions coming out, you might be asking if they're ready for consumption. Wait! I beg of you to wait. They're still hot and fresh out of the oven, and still somewhat goopy. I know you're impatient - you've been waiting for so long. Trust me, though, it's not ready. Just a little bit longer, just another chapter or a few Instagram videos left.

Is it now?
Not yet.
Is it now?
Not just yet.
How about now?
Just a little longer....
Now?

YES! Your cookies are done. They've cooled just fine, they look a nice golden brown with all the chunks embedded into their surface. Now for the part you've been looking forward to this whole time. Take a cookie from the tray, whichever one happens to catch your eye, lift it to your mouth and bite. Savour the flavour. Do you feel that sugary goodness, sweet but not too sweet, melding with the flood of chocolate? Do you feel those toffee notes rolling across the tongue? Are those endorphins popping in your head? They very well should be. Enjoy the cookies one at a time or all at once. Go on. You've earned them.

Kyle Tam is an author, writer, and full-time complainer. Her work has been published in *Rejection Lit*, *Re-Side*, and *433 Magazine*. Baking is her new quarantine hobby, and is possibly her new hobby for life. You can find her on Twitter at @PercyPropa.

Two Poems

Colin James

Confessions of an Obtuse Traditionalist

Tuesdays were an endless symphony,
tea at the Confucius Cafe
then an hour at the cinema
until white noise became unbearable.
A slow dragged out conversation
with an unattended kiosk, better
than some other fatalistic emphasis
unheard above portable chairs.
A very short visit to the pet shop
offering belated enthusiasms,
disappointing no one there.
Observed a notable increase in pace
while passing the local cemetery
peripheral adjustments waived
in hindsight to those monuments of care.

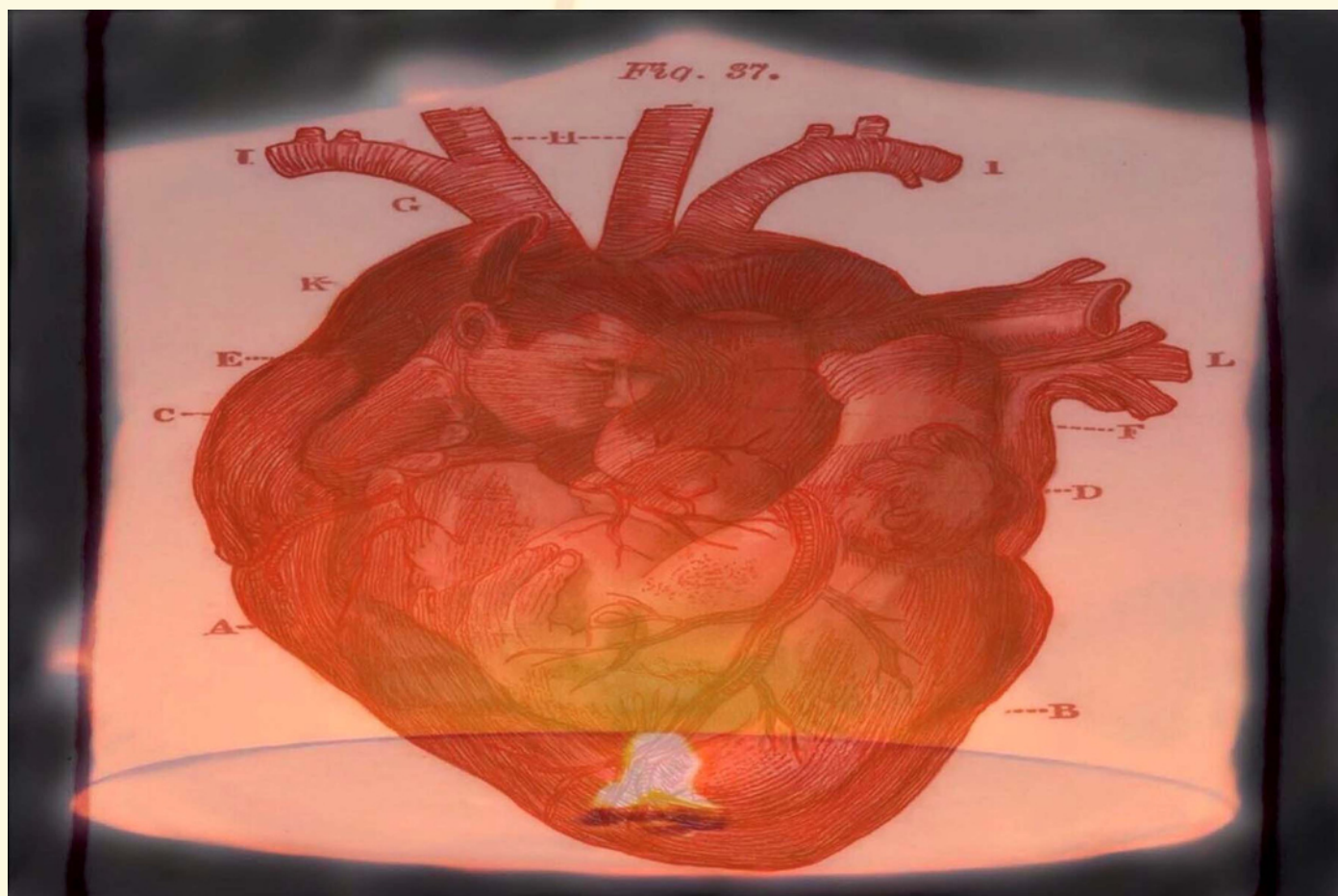


Still Pretending

From the hill we look down
to a house surrounded by trees.
Pine, Oak, Ashe & Maple.
We can run from each to each
without being seen inside the house.
Even in daylight standing still.
There are two family dogs.
They enjoy our lamb treats,
& never bark in anticipation.
As we inspect the house,
there are always gaps in the curtains
noses on windowsills leave a wetness
& fingers touch cornices for balance.
We rub the wood lathe expanding it.
Conversations from inside drift unfinished.
Outside, our hand signals are ethereal.
Sometimes car lights expose us circling,
by then we are walking slowly
unconcerned, unhurried, almost home.

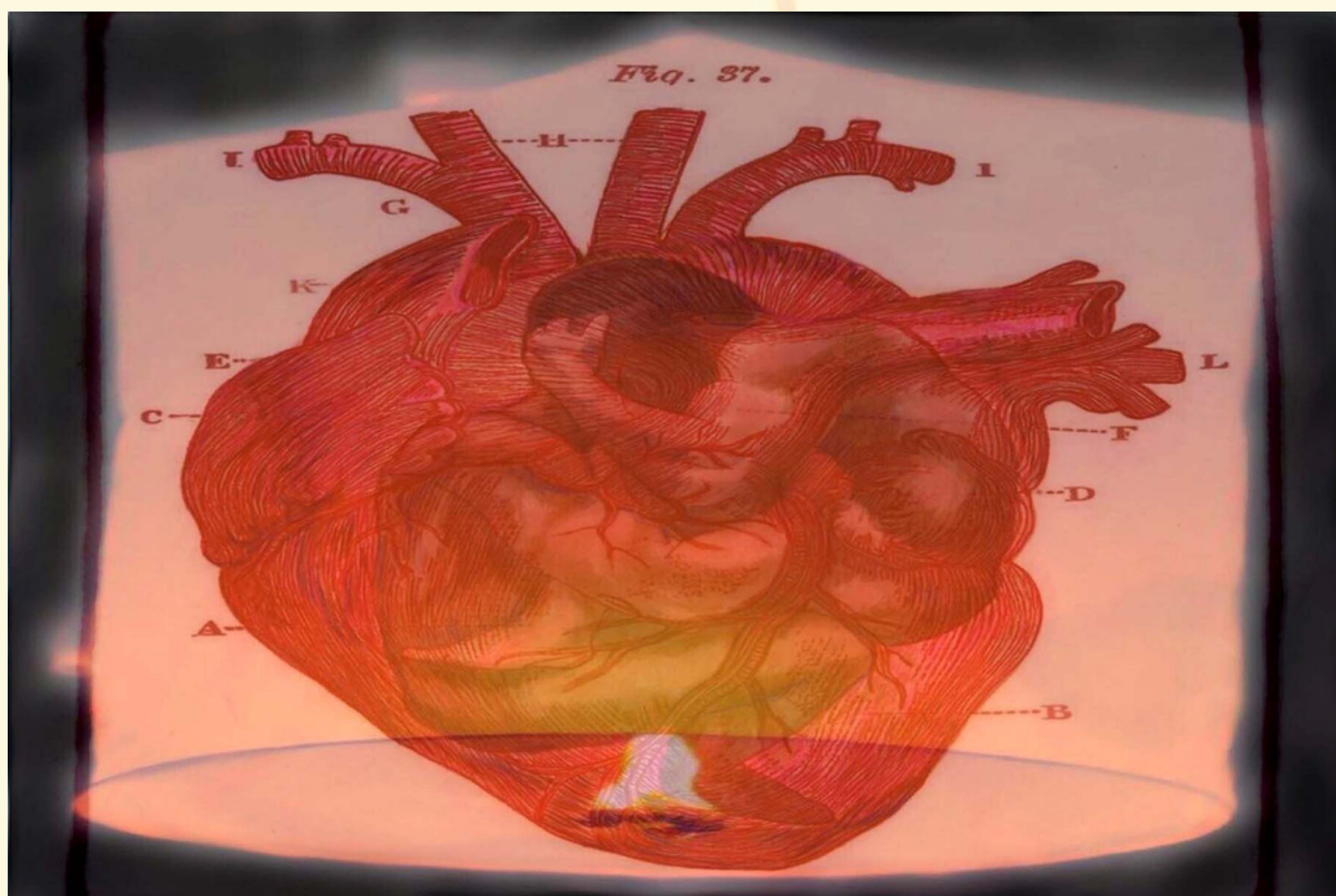


Colin James has a book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, from *Sagging Meniscus Press*, and a chapbook of poems forthcoming from *Scriptor Press*.



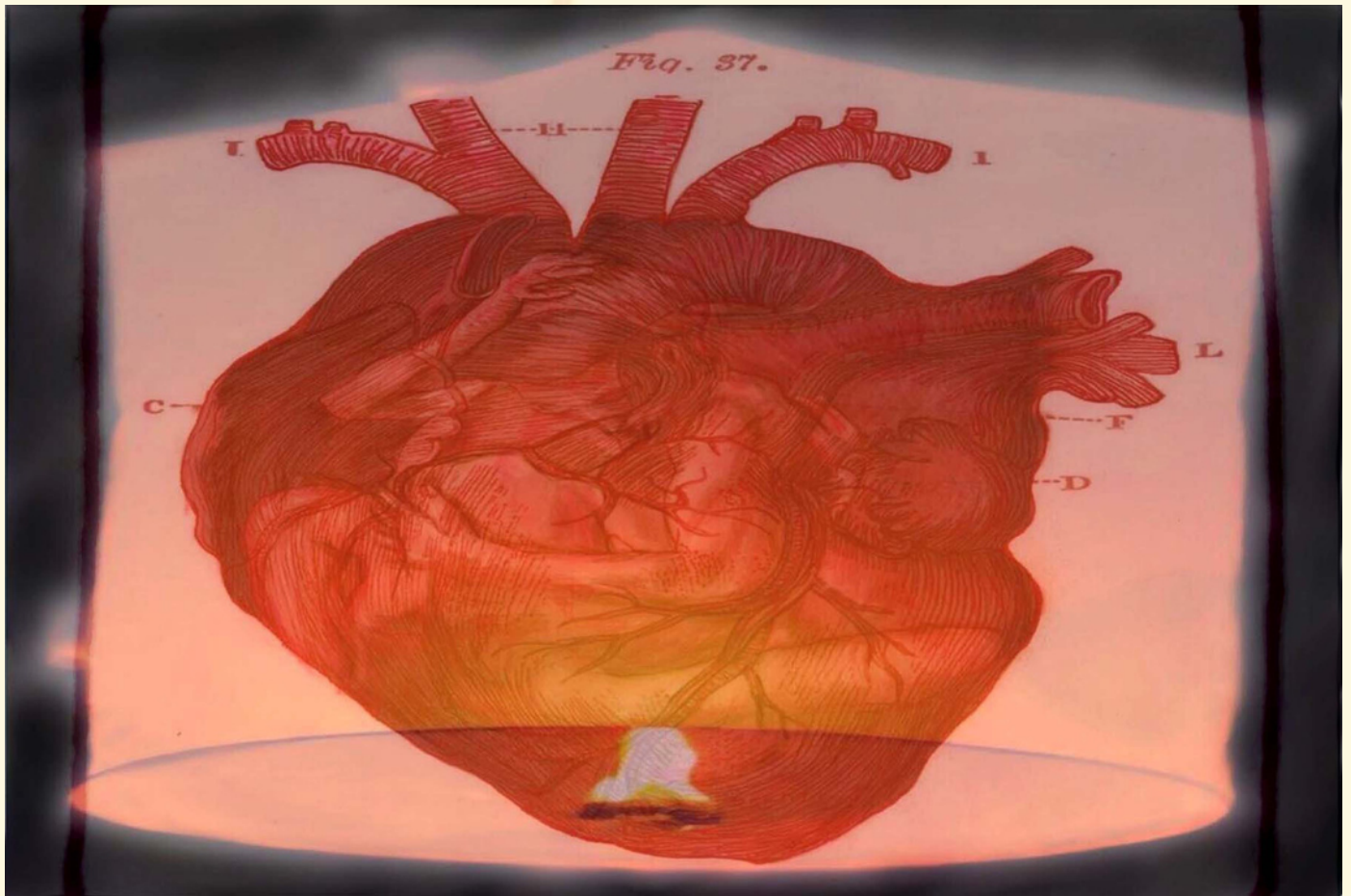
The Heart's Anatomical Intimacy (1), series-in-progress.
Art by Stephen Mead.



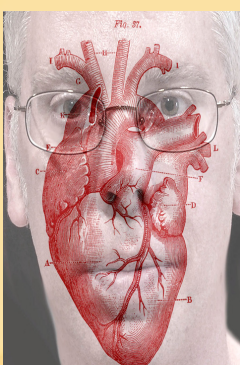


The Heart's Anatomical Intimacy (2), series-in-progress.
Art by Stephen Mead.





**The Heart's Anatomical Intimacy (3), series-in-progress.
Art by Stephen Mead.**



Stephen Mead is an Outsider multi-media artist and writer. Since the 1990s he's been grateful to many editors for publishing his work in print zines and eventually online. He is also grateful to have managed to keep various day jobs for the Health Insurance. Currently he is resident artist/curator for The Chroma Museum, artistic renderings of LGBTQI historical figures, organizations and allies predominantly before Stonewall, Find him at <https://thestephenmeadchromamuseum.weebly.com/>.

Cath Barton

15

Her Hands

Cath Barton

waking again, couldn't sleep fingers all curled and stiff, no-one to massage her
hands, ease them out hands in her lap unless I
says the rain makes her arthritis worse the only kind of conversation we
now better than talking about the pollution in the rivers though (so angry)
bugs are eating those crab apples from the inside the rain like
peteering out cars rumble on wet tarmac I told her that's why they fall give me
hand
d on the apex of the roof opposite just sitting smell this, like roses ah
early nearly
take her hand in mine my thumb on her palm find the place,
pressure point
Water glugs down a drain the place in front of the house where the tarmac is
en, where the hole is getting bigger and one day they'll do another temporary repair
that will break up again soon enough and she's in no position to
fingers have stopped hurting now for now fruit falls off the tree thump,
p, surprisingly loud on the flagstones
will continue all day the intermittent falling the relentless noise of the
c me holding her hand its warmth
just a little longer

Cath Barton lives in Abergavenny, a small town nestled between hills in South Wales, UK. Her prize-winning novella *The Plankton Collector* is published by New Welsh Rarebyte and her second novella, *In the Sweep of the Bay*, by Louise Walters Books. Cath is also active in the on-line flash fiction community and recently won the Strands International Flash Fiction Competition 10. Read more about her writing on her website <https://cathbarton.com> and follow her on Twitter @CathBarton1.

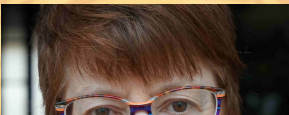
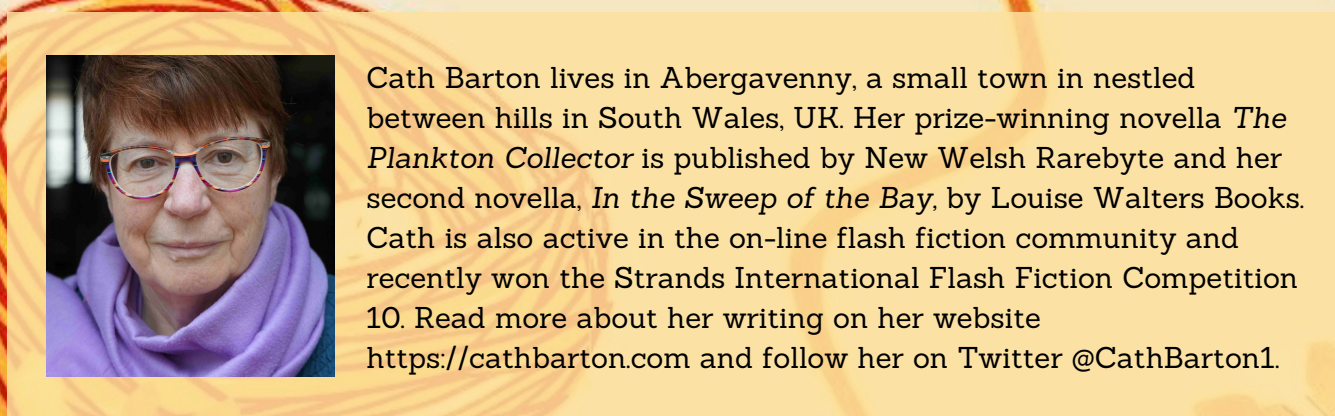
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A portrait of Cath Barton, a woman with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a purple scarf. The background is dark and out of focus.

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First Memory

Natasha Lim

It is on these icy steps that my mother leaves me alone, afraid, and at the hands of an unpredictable world. She tucks my tiny blanket in, desperate to protect every inch of my fragile skin from the cold, but the more she pulls, the more it stretches at its frayed ends. So she makes do with one last kiss on my forehead, the warmth from her emaciated hand still lingering when she slips away with the daybreak.

I try to understand as I watch her disappear, the whispers of her apology floating away with the frigid wind.

Natasha Lim is a student from Singapore. She writes poetry and prose, and is an editor for the *Interstellar Literary Review*. In her spare time, she enjoys drinking copious amounts of coffee and reading books that make her cry.

Travelogue

Martins Deep

2 May, 1999, en route to Warri? i remember it--- how my father
weaved the rainfall, like long crystal hems, into canvas;

opened his mouth to the strokes
of a paintbrush-for-a-tongue

i. how that a pilgrim emptied a moiety of his windpipe
into a coin mold, & set it
to be stricken by a flan;

ii. how that at the market of life, he bought
him a stallion, & a map that faded into
the whispers of a famished path, at the crossroad;

iii. how that this man returned in a body bag
in splinters, & fodder for gossips:
*the very same mouths who had cheered
his legs into the limbs of a mountain goat as he left home.*

as father's tale ended, there was the scene
of myself, a pilgrim, galloping on the back of this man's horse
because of the tricycle's wheel
riding roughly on the tarred road;

imagery:

*of mama, vainly, avoiding the wounds on my skin
as she smeared balm with a damp rag*



11:30 p.m. there was a sudden crash against the gory tusk of fate!

cold. shivering. i limped towards home, coughing
they said i must not spit just yet
because those words on my father's
lips was himself burying his corm in my belly.

they say it is my child's ears i must empty my mouth in;
after a certain pilgrimage to womanhood, they said;
after shredding the fibres of a girl's skirt on my waist.



Martins Deep is a Nigerian poet, & photographer. He is deeply committed to telling the stories of the African experience in his creative works. His creative juices have spilled, or are forthcoming on *Agbowó Magazine*, *Barren Magazine*, *Writers Space Africa*, *The Lumiere Review*, *The Alchemy Spoon*, *Ruptured Anthology*, *The Peace Exhibit*, & elsewhere. Find him on Twitter @martinsdeep1.





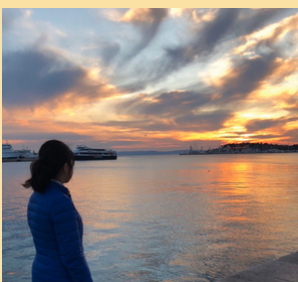
Homesick (2020).
Photographed by David Tay.

Tomorrow's here, Singapore

Jessica Kim

for all the songs I've never sung

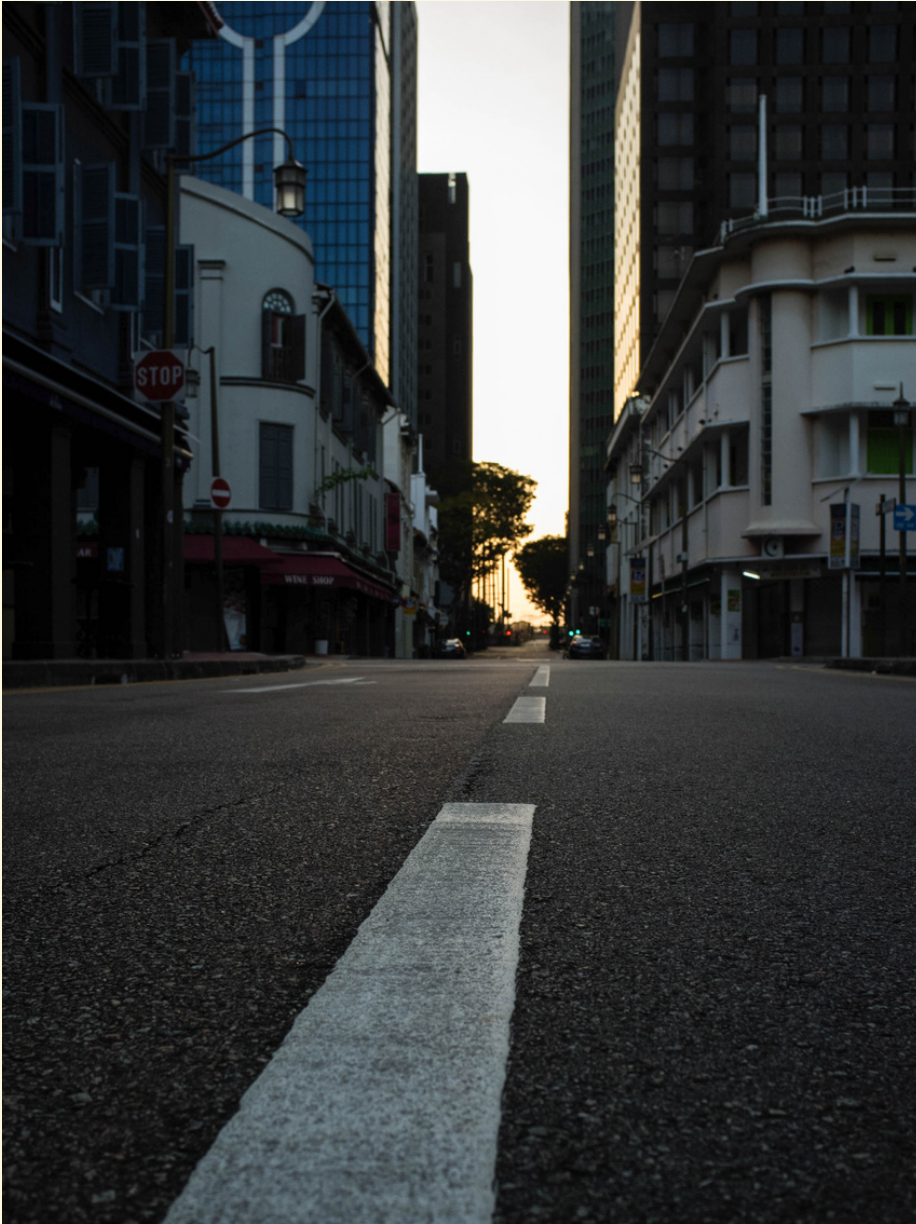
We've reached out for the skies and landed in Singapore,
the sultry draught along the jetway a mere juxtaposition
to the frigid Korean winters that thawed
on our nostalgia-drenched palms holding a rusted five-cent coin
for the first time. These were the days
when being caricatures of blur tourists were the expectation
and we'd frolic along the banks of Clarke Quay and Marina Bay Sands,
rambutan ice cream in hand, dripping
with sugar-coated dreams and everything seemed so big.
But in a heartbeat,
the sunny island became a little red dot
of ink splattered on our fifth grade math worksheets
crumpled with the silent mockery of our American accents
Can repeat or not? We've been taught to stand up for Singapore
and so we waved our star-shaped batons, sang *Majulah Singapura*
in murmurs dissolving into the heterogeneous mixture
of star-spangled banners and red and white
and blue. We've learned to abide by the rules:
no eating in MRTs, to mind the gap
please lah. We have fallen
into that small slit others only trample over,
a Fair Price to pay for a refuge in a country where we
sit like shadows in hawker centers, drooling over *ban mian*
and roasted chicken rice. But we only realize
after tomorrow's here today, that there's no place we'd rather be
because it's Singapore and now we can only multiply
the ticking minutes on our expired pocket watches,
counting on Singapore, scavenging for a reconciliation, a new beginning
oblivious to the second hand pointing to one
because there was only one. One Singapore.



Jessica Kim is a poet from California who previously attended Raffles Girls' Secondary School in Singapore. A two-time 2021 Pushcart nominee, her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Wildness Journal*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Grain Magazine*, *Longleaf Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, and more. She is the founding editor of *The Lumiere Review*. Find her at www.jessicakimwrites.weebly.com, or @jessicable on twitter and instagram.



Jaywalking.
Photographed by David Tay.



Untitled.
Photographed by David Tay.



David Tay is a Sarawakian studying in Singapore. While you'll hear him talk about street photography and "documenting the human condition", he probably spends most of his time taking pictures of cats when he's out with his camera. Take a look at his other photos on Instagram [@oidavidah](#).

On My Way to Somewhere

Hema Nataraju

The dead pigeon is still lying by the sidewalk. From the corner of my eye, I see it - a bluish gray lump with a little splotch of white. I don't bring my eyes to look at it fully, although there's nothing gruesome or bloody there. It's not roadkill, looks like it died of natural causes, whatever they are in pigeons. It's like she - I feel like it was a she, maybe a mom like me - was tired so she sat down by the sidewalk, closed her wings around her like a blanket and never woke up. When I first saw her a couple of days back, I thought she moved ever so slightly. But then the sun was beating down on the asphalt and sometimes the heat makes you see things that aren't real. What could I have done even if she was a tiny bit alive? Pigeons die all the time, right? Right. And yet, today, on my way to somewhere, I see her lifeless body and once again, my pace quickens. I cannot stop wondering what will become of her chicks, so I go home and hug my kids tight.

#

On my way to somewhere, I see the janitor from my old apartment complex walking towards me. He looks different when removed from the surroundings I'm used to seeing him in. He's on the opposite side of the road and going by the approximate speed at which we're walking, I will surely run into him. The back of my neck is suddenly itchy. It's a narrow street, there's nowhere else to go. I rummage through my bag for my sunglasses, but they're at home. Should I smile at him or not? He has held the lift open for me a few times when my hands were full of grocery bags or when I was pushing the baby stroller. Maybe I should. But will it be weird if I smile at him now, after we've moved away? People get wrong ideas sometimes. Makes me think of that grocery store employee I smiled at once and then he used to follow me around, always wanting to help me, a bit too much.

#



I stopped shopping there. Will it be rude if I don't smile at the janitor? I'm not snooty. A few seconds later, we're right opposite each other. He walks away without a blink of recognition, helping me yet again by making the decision easy for me. I silently thank him.

#

I know that girl on the escalator going in the opposite direction. She works at Guzman y Gomez, the new Mexican place at the mall. Her eyes are heavily lined in black. She has a drink in her hand with a white bendy straw hanging by the corner of her dark maroon stained lips. Her t-shirt screams "Badass" in bold. She's leaning against the escalator on her elbow, rolling her eyes at the world. And yet, on her (and my) way to somewhere, she steals glances at everyone, probably to check if anyone's noticing her. I smile at her, but she doesn't. Not unexpected. The following day, I'm at Guzman y Gomez getting takeout. Her eyes are unlined. She looks younger, happy even. I'd like to think it's because I noticed. Maybe. Just maybe.



Hema Nataraju is a flash-fiction writer based in Singapore. Her work has appeared or will be coming soon in *Atlas & Alice*, *Mac(ro)Mic*, *Ellipsis Zine*, *Moria Online*, *Spelk Fiction*, *Sunlight Press*, and in print anthologies including *Bath Flash Fiction 2020*, *Best MicroFiction 2020*, and *National Flash Fiction Day*. She tweets about her writing and parenting adventures as @m_ixedbagg.

In between

Doodle Town











Doodle Town lives in a town and likes to doodle. Hello, all! Find her on Instagram @doodletown29.

In which the earth sings Vivaldi in spring, or an ode to feral days

Ashley Cline

"i've told this story so many times, in my sleep, that the garden bed is full."

[your mother, before the funeral]

i.

if you want to talk origin stories, this is how i remember it:
with the soil in my mouth. a whole world sitting beneath

my tongue. & in my throat, a budding howl. & this is how
i liked it, best. & this is how i liked it, best. & this is how—

ii.

i like it, best. this thing called *living*, which is just the practice of becoming that
which unmakes you, eventually. & the untamed ground we grew beneath knows,
this—& holds, this. & feeds, this: to the dandelions, purring in her corners. to the
swollen earth, claiming more than she could ever chew. & we don't need a reason

to celebrate our undoings because there will be time enough for that, one day.
so, for now, we tuck chocolate mint & martian berries inside our cheeks; we dig
up big tooth aspens & limoncello thyme & they remind us how we've always
liked to fuck with dressed-down metaphors. & *that is how it should be*—our



bodies growing lean & wild things. & *that is how i remember it*—our bodies, made golden; sweetened by the heat. & *that is how i like it, best*—our bodies: gathering each other up, so tender, like daisies uprooted at the hip. & we don't need to be untied by familiar hands to know that love is a god in fur-skin & lemon drag because

our jaws will pull us towards that sky, eventually—just like they always promised, just like mirror-images of thirst. & this is how i will forgive hunger: with the rainfall in my open mouth (how she sits just like *mother* on the tongue). & *this is how it should be*—with our bodies blushing between speakers.

& *this is how i remember it*—our wild days of borrowing poetry from fanged & ripened fruit. & *this is how i like it, best*: with our bodies blooming blooming

blooming—bloomed.

iii.

& the shovel in my hand is just a metaphor;
& the soft grave in my mouth is just practice
for a different kind of

living.



iv.

& what if we were to return to the days when our bodies begged for something less than feral wants; to the days when our aches were simple, but we howled in full? & what if we were to return to the nights when our needs were pulled, like gold, from the streams of one another's chests—& jaws? & hips? & we turned pistons into petals & drank straight from strangers' palms—& called it prayer? & what if we were to return to the river, & ask if we may call her by her name, again—& ask her to forgive us for forgetting it in the first place? & what if we were to return from sweat—from soil? from gnawed tempos & disco-coated lungs? to be made dizzy by the wet floor, asking: *what's your hurry? we've got all night, don't you worry 'bout a thing—*

v.

love, i found all this jungle / between my
teeth. & i do not bite down / i do not bite

down—i do not bite down.



An avid introvert and full-time carbon-based life-form, Ashley Cline crash landed in south Jersey twenty-nine years ago and still calls that strange land home. Most often found listening to Carly Rae Jepsen, her essays on music and feelings have been published by *Sound Bites Media*, while her poetry has appeared in *404 Ink*, *Landlocked Magazine* and *SCUM Mag*. She graduated from Rowan University in 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism, and her best at all-you-can-eat sushi is 5 rolls in 11 minutes. Her first chapbook, "*& watch how easily the jaw sings of god*" is forthcoming from *Glass Poetry Press*. Find her on Twitter @the_Cline and Instagram @clineclinecline.



Can't Run But.
Art by Geneviève Dumas.

Two Poems

Laetitia Keok

Kaleidoscope

we were up at seven, hands fumbling
for a space to settle into, [the truth] pressed
hard against our cheeks—

tell me you're afraid & I will love you even
more. half animal, half prayer, I will love
you, splintering,

until ache, or its derivative, bridges this
impossible distance— two bodies, & a
landscape of hunger.

in the end, there [is only] time & our waiting
for it. only loneliness settling into the curve
of our backs,

only the train ride home & two hearts
threatening cardiac arrest. in the scaffolds
of [violence], I memorise your touch—

fingers [weaving through] a light so sharp, it
cuts the truth into half. on purpose, I
[touch] you again.



Departures

—for A, now that the world is ending

what else are we left with, except the distance between here
& where you are & a sky scratched raw with longing?

let me imagine: the soft of your body untouchable, folded
into something I had once touched & that once touched me.

what if memory, frayed, is just another way to die? & what if
a bridge, flanked, is ending enough for a world where you can
love me tender?

creation myth rewritten, by hands bleached blue with want,
as if to say: here, here is your kinder lifetime—

here is forgiveness, enough to begin again. here is a girl,
whose name you can say without unravelling, here is

your name, cradled by the girl you love. she is saying:
I love you, look at me,

without shrapnel, without surrender, I awaken in the girl's
mouth, without a gun emptying guilt into itself.

in this world without witness, I love her bloody, I love her
bare, I hold her so close, it is enough to fissure us into another.



Laetitia Keok is a poet, writer & English Literature major from Singapore. Her work has appeared in *Vagabond City Lit*, *Diode Poetry Journal* & elsewhere. You can find her at laetitia-k.com.



Why Don't You Just Know?
Art by Geneviève Dumas.



Precious Mold

Elliott Love

I wear my mother's glasses. They suit my hair.
I wear my mother's earrings. They accent my neck.
I wear my mother's guilt as a necklace.
It is a heirloom. I polish it after every use.
I touch it to make sure it stays put.
I pull on the chain. The necklace extends.
I try to change the pendant.
I try to change the chain.
I try to undo the clasp.
I am not a jeweler.

If I cut my head, can I have a daughter?

Elliott Love (they/them) is a writer from Montreal. They currently attend UQÀM (Université du Québec à Montréal) as an English major undergrad. They have won a scholarship for academic excellence during their first semester at university. Their work can be found under @elliottlovewrites on Instagram and Tumblr.



Remember Me.
Art by Geneviève Dumas.



Geneviève Dumas is a Montreal based printmaker artist behind the brand Goldengen. She's using collage and screen printing to build up momentum and stories. You can find her on Twitter @Gen_Goldengen, on Instagram @goldengenprint, and at her website <https://goldengen.ca/>.

Nazreen

Faiza Bokhari

TW: rape

Nazreen woke up with a stomach-ache. It pierced through her slender hip bones and burrowed deep inside her gut. When she stood up, it felt as though she was emerging from tepid water. Small beads of sweat began to amass on her forehead - threatening to spill onto her brows. Noises echoed from other rooms in the house and Nazreen realised she had overslept once again.

She rolled up her small mattress with expert speed and tucked it away in the corner of the pantry. Breakfast time. When she'd learnt the word 'breakfast' made some kind of sense because you were actually breaking a fast, she wondered if lunch or dinner had a similar meaning.

Nazreen cracked four eggs into a shiny steel bowl. Madam liked spicy omelette with salty paratha. Sir took his tea with three heaped spoons of sugar. Their two sons preferred fancy cereals that could only be bought from the shop that sold imported goods. Like American teenagers, they filled their bowls to the brim with coloured loops and golden balls.

Suddenly, her stomach began to churn. 'I think I've swallowed a baby,' she whispered to the pots and pans. 'Maybe it happened while I was sleeping.'

Months had passed since she had reached her hand deep into the bottom drawer of the cupboard in the pantry that was reserved for her. This is where Madam periodically placed sanitary pads and small coloured flaky soaps. The first time Madam told her they were there, Nazreen's cheeks had involuntary darkened. The pads were the coarse thick kind, that felt like a brick between the legs.



Once breakfast was laid out, Nazreen returned to the kitchen and washed her face. She tore small pieces from a slice of bread and dipped them into her glass of chai, watching the fragile morsels swell and dissipate. Mouthful on top of mouthful began to congregate in her throat. She wondered how it came to be, this baby in her belly.

She remembered the tall man at the corner fruit stand. He'd gripped her wrist with two sinewy fingers when she handed him crumpled rupees. The mangoes were so ripe that day, their soft flesh already splitting through skin while they sat in the paper bag. There was the tailor who pressed his frontside hard against her backside when she passed him in the doorway. A shrill chiming sounded out as she pulled the door shut behind her. She guessed the shape of his belt buckle.

Breakfasts, lunches, and dinners passed by unnoticed. When Nazreen complained that her cooking was never praised, the washing lady shook her head, 'be thankful, these people only speak when there's something to complain about.' Winter came and Nazreen wrapped a large black dupatta around her growing frame. Her back ached and prickly red spots sprouted across her broadened cheeks. Fingers and toes were swollen, her whole body a vessel of water just waiting to spill.

Nazreen's baby was born beside the pantry, promptly sliding out onto a clean kitchen floor. It had the tailor's nose and the fruit seller's strong grip. It cried out sonorously like Madam and crinkled its large eyes which were dark like Sir's. It had fair skin like an American teen and was born hungry. Before Nazreen noticed any of this, she simply guided it to her sweaty chest, sight unseen. Here, it began to empty her, bit by bit.



Faiza has a Pakistani background, was born and raised in Australia and currently lives in Hong Kong. With a Masters in Psychology, she has always been incurably obsessed with stories. Her writing has appeared in places like *Djed Press*, *Indian Review*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, *Burnt Roti Magazine*, and elsewhere. She was shortlisted for the 2018 'Stuart Hadow Short Story Prize'. Find her on Twitter @AllesFaiza.

Two Poems

Nathan Lee

On her

she is my silhouette:
a piercing almost
i drowned in

whitewater. it
didn't work:
we came back

river-clean &
yearning
for something

greater than us.
this shadow-boy /
ghost-girl

trying to fill up
the aching space
between wanting

& becoming.



resurrection

this, in itself, is a miracle: / coaxing
ourselves out of hollow, bloody bones. // us,
born out of waiting and wanting, we know /
the push and pull between the dark hair in
the mirror / and the dark scars of our
dreams / just as well as the tides know the
haunting of the moon. // and so it is that
our holiness lies in the breath between
blinks / in the tremble before a confession /
in the wine-dark sea. // after all / we are
not what the poets sing of / we are more. //



Nathan Lee (he/they) is an emerging transgender Singaporean-American poet from the California Bay Area. He'll be attending the University of California, Davis as a freshman in the fall. His work is forthcoming in *Polyphony Lit*, *Parallax Literary Journal*, and *Lambda Literary's* collection *Writing Out of the Closet*. Outside of writing, Nathan likes to swim and garden. He can be found on Instagram and Twitter under @poetrynate.

Confession

Daniele Nunziata

Story-telling commences here
as I breathe the languished words of confession,
or at least it would if I could
stop staring, instead,
at the ornate latticework
of the mahogany parting in the dark
and the softly burnt light outlines
along every segment of wood
stealing just enough visual attention
to halt speech.

So, when does this begin,
this beginning again
of new life?
Don't heap coals of fire upon my head –
And I linger over the fact
that the fog of frankincense outside,
but draining inward,
is my third-favourite smell
and it distracts
as I ruminate softly over the gold
vaulted ceilings of an ancient cathedral hundreds of miles
away –
or was it down the road maybe? –
and, like spent candle smoke, I can't see it anymore.

But now I'm musing
over my second-favourite smell:



the release of flowers dying
in a chapel or catacomb
and my already-haphazard thoughts
disperse to two of my grandparents' tombs
deep underneath that unremarkable London church
where the lilies die
so full of grace in the darkness
and the rhythmic sound of underground
trains and busy overgrown cobwebs
and the reek of damp mixing with
unspent pollen.

Across all musing this I utter nothing,
but the regular formulas,
to the shadow behind the wall,
and leave behind this quiet chamber of disturbance
knowing I never really needed it at all.



Daniele Nunziata is a poet and a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Oxford where he researches postcolonial writing. Many of his poems explore his cultural identity belonging to a migrant family in multicultural Britain, as well as the important connections between natural landscapes and acts of decolonisation. His poetry has been performed live on BBC Radio and has been published in numerous magazines and journals, including (most recently) *Constellate Literary Journal*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Green Ink Poetry*, and the *Oxonian Review*. Find him on Twitter @DannyNunziata.

Beginnings

Nishtha Tripathi

When I untangled a fistful of my wild mane;
finally clicked shut down on my laptop that
had been on sleep for very long; archived
a conversation no longer visited; clamped
the placenta on my stillborn child *~the love
that never was, the hope that never died ~*
I made a new beginning.

When I welcomed the tiny hair spouting
on my upper lip, reared it with my
dark
hands, watered it with my darker
blood; when I caressingly rescued the
gentle swell of my tummy *~from
society's shackles of breath sucked in,
jeans skin-fit and beauty skin-deep ~*
I made a new beginning.

When my insides no longer crawled at every
achievement that is not mine; when the
winding rat race I made myself no longer
mind, like an old cat lady, serene, yet,
feline *~a whirling dervish united with the
Divine~*
I made a new beginning.

When I let ideas in my mother-tongue spill
onto my paper-thin soul, and pierced right
through the belittling constructs of a tongue
that ruthlessly chokes, *colonizes ~ an Asian
revolt that rumbled across all of Europe ~*
I made a new beginning.



Nishtha is a law student who thinks there can never be enough said about self-love. She also likes playing with the strangest of metaphors. Some of her poems are due for feature in *Mid-Heaven Magazine*, *Teen Belle Magazine* and *Versification Zine*.

When not writing, she can be found struggling through college assignments.

Rewritten

Surina Venkat

She buys the journal on a whim, sees it in an antique shop and falls in love with the bronze dragon burned into the cover. *This can't go worse than the last time I kept a diary*, she thinks. She tries writing in it, but the brittle paper absorbs her ink like salt water steals heat, illuminating words very different from what she envisioned. *A secret history*, she realizes, one no other person has heard before. Another person's lifetime for her to remember. She goes to the store and buys bottles of ink to drench the journal's yellowed pages in, watches the words swirl into shape to form a story. She reads it and angers. This person has taken her favorite fairy tales and twisted her heroes into monsters. Her princess didn't slay her dragon; she stole credit from her servant. The prince didn't marry the elvin empress; he gutted her from head to toe because he didn't like the pointy ears.

She takes her quill and starts the arduous process of rewriting all the words, determined to stick to the beginning she knows and not the ones she sees tendrils of truth in. Only it isn't as arduous as she thought it would be. She is the present and this person is dead, so she controls the past. Even if the past isn't hers to own.



Surina Venkat spent most of her childhood sneaking books into her room so she could read when she was supposed to be sleeping. If she isn't reading, listening to a podcast, or on a run with her dog, you'll be able to find her on Twitter @SurinaVenkat or Instagram @surinavenkat.

