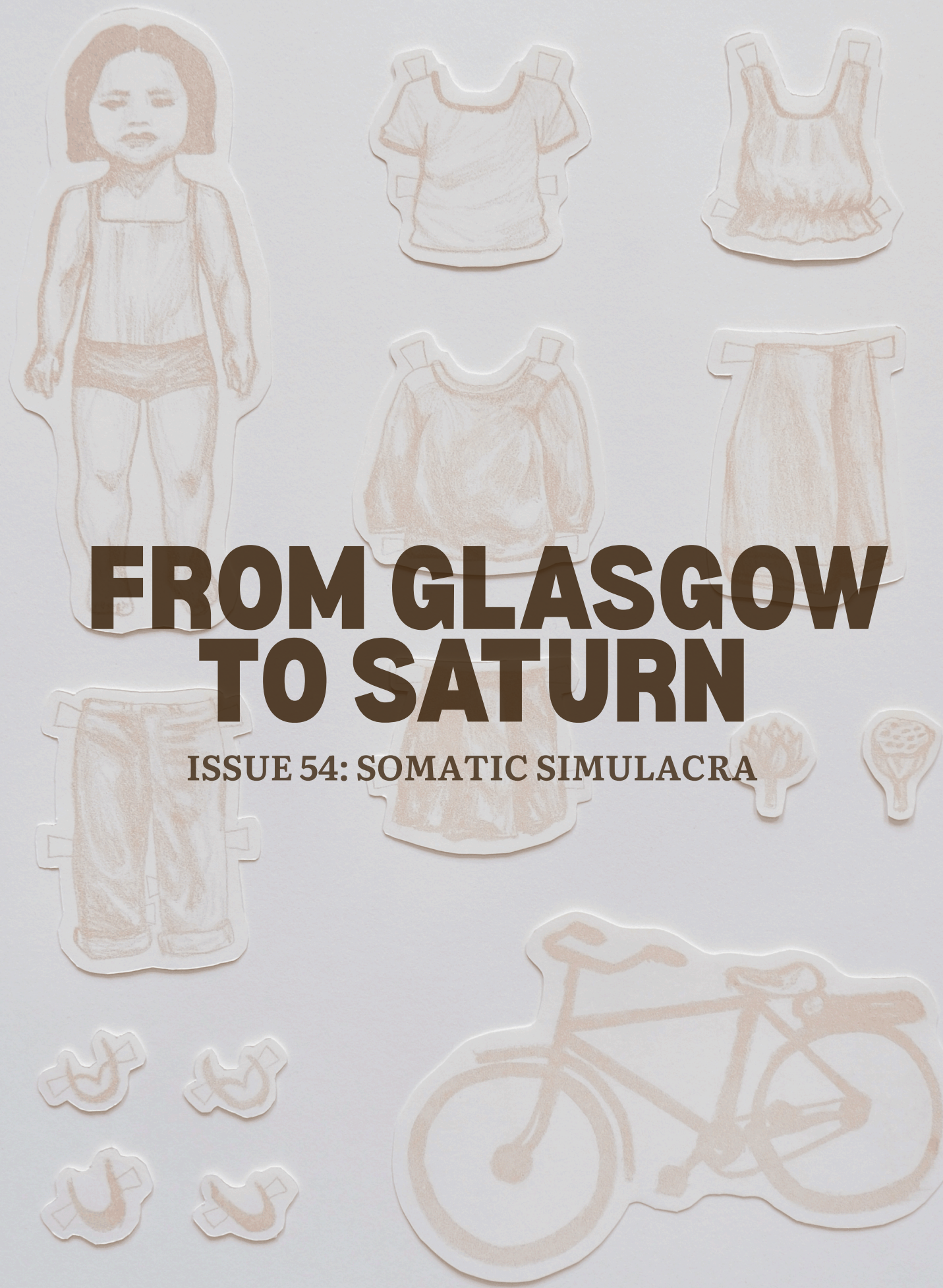




FROM GLASGOW TO SATURN

ISSUE 54: SOMATIC SIMULACRA

From Glasgow to Saturn
Issue 54: Somatic Simulacra

A Note from the Editors

'There is no more hope for meaning. And without a doubt this is a good thing: meaning is mortal. But that on which it has imposed its ephemeral reign, what it hoped to liquidate in order to impose the reign of the Enlightenment, that is, appearances, they, are immortal, invulnerable to the nihilism of meaning or of nonmeaning itself. This is where seduction begins.' - **Jean Baudrillard, 'On Nihilism', Simulacra and Simulation**

Navigating our rapidly changing world is akin to finding one's way through a hall of mirrors. An individual, surrounded by hundreds of reflections, observed from multiple unfamiliar angles, knocking into surfaces and coming to face your own being - warped, uncanny, not as you might have imagined. Issue 54: Somatic Simulacra responds to the question of an embodied simulative experience, corrupting traditional ideas of nature and art, of meaning and origin, in favour of immediate presence and sensuous experience - based entirely on surface and appearances. No longer wedded to ideas of reality, universal truth or defining purpose, and thus cognisant of the fact reality is actively constructed by the stories, symbols and images repeated to us every day, every minute.

Through this collection of work, the reader will be haunted in outer space, frozen in glacier-torn tarns, fall through Blakean toroidal binary churning to be spat out on the other side. The rug pulled from beneath us is just another Monday; what used to be the very fabric of reality and society as we knew it, is torn from our needy, outstretched hands, and tossed aside. We fall, and in falling, we land somewhere. We can hold each other, or fling ourselves unaided into the yawning abyss. We believe this issue investigates, problematises and holds this tension due to the incredible body of work submitted to us.

We want to thank our contributors for their work. To create is to imagine something different - an act of resistance within itself. To allow oneself time and space away from the grinding monotony of daily life and responsibilities within that to nurture the human desire to imagine, create, make and produce, with joy or suffering, is an act of rebellion. When we, as writers, editors and artists, reject meaning-making, what does that leave in the wake of art? Our contributors have refused the Platonic ideal of 'poem', 'story', 'art' and each piece is a dedicated exploration of psyche and commitment to craft.

New editors Annie and Kat R would also like to thank Kat M, KM Dougan and Tara Jackson for their patience and guidance in holding and passing the mantle of the institution that is From Glasgow to Saturn. We hope you find something in this issue to hold, to take with you.

Kat MacKinnon | Kayla M Dougan | Annie Bowles | Kat Ryan | Tara Jackson

hound's tooth

KM Dougan

c s e i u
r m a r r
o o t c o
u k i l r
c i n e f
h n g d a
i g e i b
n s n n r
g w c f ic
snapping biting ripping
the bars from your cage

McLaren Nose

Kat Ryan

'McLaren nose', my mum would say
Different eyes, but passed for
brother and sister.
Same laugh, the toothy grin
smiling up through fogged glass.

Walking to meet you now.
Verdant breath, skitter of leaf-
dappled sun on my skin.
Choruses in the boughs, angels
waiting in the
wings

I reach your stone,
sit next to you while the space is still empty and
think back to Fife, us pressed
on a bench, harbour-side,
warm at my side,
salt and laughter striking my ribs.
Six years and now six feet between us,
minimum,
mandatory.
Dirt beneath my nails but
not enough to count.

Lie in the grass with a face full of dew,
phase
through
the
earth
to get back to you.
You,
who were not a loss
but a theft:
Crush my chest again, I implore you.
Bring new meaning to bear hug.
Bruise me like you did.

I leave you sleeping and turn
towards the sun.

Deborah Foreman

Tara Jackson

Deborah Foreman from *Valley Girl* looks just like my mum. It's uncanny, in certain lights. As if she's led a double-life all this time. It's possible that at some point in her past she fell in love and decided to leave the cameras behind to raise a family and have a daughter of her own. Swapping movie stardom for motherhood. The L.A. skyline for Sauchiehall Street. Who knows? Deborah Foreman could be my mother. Don't mistake me: this isn't about Julie, a.k.a Juliet, the prom queen, with her *totally* kitsch one-liners and white teeth and fated narrative. I remember watching it on telly once, most of it anyway, and there was a good soundtrack and lots of sun, but I was struck entirely by her. Seeing her there in front of me. Talking about boys while shopping. Laughing with her soft blushed cheeks and bright eyes and plumes of chestnut hair stiff with hairspray, hair she is now letting turn silver. The way her eyes invite you to love her. The hope in her naive smile and high cheekbones, the ones she inherited from her dad who died when she was barely a teenager. And that cream lace peasant blouse, buttoned up to the neck, which was given to my sister on her graduation. All of it swooning of the 80s. It was as though she'd stepped right out of my mum's dusty photo albums stacked in the office and sorted roughly by decade. The same albums she has sworn to digitise and do away with one day. Each time I take them out, one by one when I'm alone, and glide my fingers over the sticky plastic page covers, over her eyes *my eyes* looking somewhere, to someone maybe, off-camera, light enters through the ceiling and works its way into the chemical bonds of the dyes, breaking them down and pulling them apart like clouds, casting doubt, creating fissures in the paper whose edges curl up like seashells. I do remember one part of the film. The part where Randy tells Julie he loves her and to fuck off in the same scene, in the same doorway, and Julie holds in tears, but Deborah... Deborah acts. You can see her. She is living, reaching, deep inside, to address someone who is not there. Maybe it will be on again some day.

SOMATIC SIMULACRA

Contents

you n me 13	off the beaten track: on the inevitability of confronting grief 66
crack a rib 14	a portrait 67
tarn 15	aspect 68
the zombi 17	now/and then/and now 74
anniversary visit 21	like a body 75
bovine 22	billy 76
planet papa 23	moved in death 78
annie 24	ailsa craig's elect 79
what colour are her eyes? 27	of lowest frequency 80
swan dive 28	the cryptic nest 81
bandits in my bathtub 29	the motherland is foreign 85
the transplant 30	m'body 86
buddleia 31	global south urbanisms 87
material duty 35	the last of humanity 88
p.c. loving 36	leonardo's studies of the foetus in the womb 92
spoonbrained 37	white dress (solaris, 1968) 93
guts 40	ritual ascent 94
close 41	dormancy refuge 95
vienna knows 44	
a mimetic dance 45	
the eye's mouth 46	
walkabout 47	
blue flesh 49	
the nomad channel 50	
clocks went back at the weekend 51	
that dog in me 52	
the flatmate 54	
sluice 57	
i love you, i trust you (glitched) 58	
feeling falling again 59	
bunny 60	
the one still body on the doorstep 63	
reasons why your meringue is not peaking 64	

you n me

Jade Hughes

hatching beeping a whole new world
food please play time a tiny girl
you n me as pop leaks fae ma pocket
then the night spills
 weird sleep n lucid dreams
beep, buzzing like a bee in a bottle
the sun tugs on ma verticals, n A welcome the new
Ctrl C till the summer wis none,
till the leaves fell away
oh, my how ye've grown.
A realise it's been oor 21 days
diz that mean
A love ye mare
than ma Tamagotchi, Timone?

Crack a Rib

Molly Mallinder

I used to think I had too many ribs.
That there were too many bones in my body.

I envisioned them fighting their way out of me.
Pushing up against my skin they would race to snap off
and run towards whoever they were meant for.

I used to think my skin had been pulled too tight.
That I had been dressed in a coat of fake flesh.

I imagined itching my way out, layer by layer.
I'd scratch my skin until it became weak enough
to peel away and shred into small bloody bunches.

I used to think my hair had been sewn and stretched too far.
Picking away at my crown, I'd wind spindly locks around my fingers.

I pictured it growing thick and coarse.
Binding together it would become unyielding
and coil around my withered neck.

I used to think that there was no way out.
I believed I would feel this way forever.

Tarn

Tom Rae

Tarn, deep-dark tarn, glacier-torn tarn, yer
four tae five flat stanes weel-skeemed a
span,
way too wee tae swally a Hoose O Usher.

How deep ur ye little lochan, toaty tarn?
How far tae sink within yer paltry pan?

Yet tarn, ye unsettle me, summon dreid.
Like deid leaves rustle-n-whisper in Samhain woods,
like waves rollin oantae a desolate beach as
bored winds weave, an waste, eerie silica patterns.

Wur ye here when the first humans joined star-dots
tae tell tales? Mak sma' sense o' twinklin void?

And efter the last human heartbeat,
surely ye'll ripple here still. When
nae mair fu' o life laverocks hover high above
trilling the throaty, high-pitched songs that call,
Aw's richt wi the world.
Aw's richt wi the world.
a chorus tae mak a coward brave.

Listen tae me tarn.
Ah'd thrash naked acroass a quiet Corryvrekan,
Dip wi a sploosh in reservoirs deep and wide, cast
DANGER: SWIMMING FORBIDDEN signs aside.
Look, at 4-years-auld ah dived heid-first
fae Alloway Brig, wis
dragged oot dazed-n-drookit by ma da. So
whaur's impulsive courage noo ah'm grown?

Timid, ah staun untempted by yer peaty thrills
unner this tae-hot August sun, slick wi sweat fae hills,
climbed wi the cooling touch o-ah friendly breeze,
soothed bi the entomonic hum-n-buzz o bees.

Perhaps yer a worm-hole, tarn, that's why ah fret?
At nicht a place whaur comets-n-moon-n-Milky Way get weat?
A wild-swimming universe powers yer hidden depths,
fur innocent stars, or me, tae sink like stricken ships.

Or is ma dreid o' soul mair Calvin than Captain Kirk?
Yer dark water DNA feeding the spring o original sin?
Wha has faith tae bathe in such a predestined lot,
a hunner incarnations couldnae change wan jot?
Tae tak a dip in yer dark eternity,
risk shallow shock, profound mediocrity.

Naw, ah'll jist staun here n stare,
shivering noo in upland breezes, squint
at the still-warm, waning sun.
Then quickly, boldly, heid back doon, finding
nae tributaries tae follow, or lead me back tae here,
Yer barren bowl o dark potential, ancient fear.

The Zombi

Imogen Dobson

TW: rape

Raising the dead is far more straightforward than most people think. But maybe that's because I'm from Haiti. Zombis aren't the stuff of Romero or Michael Jackson – they are rooted in Haitian folklore. More importantly, they're real. I knew this before I even tried it. My granmè was a mambo, or a priestess of Vodou, and she witnessed the reanimation of corpses back in her day.

My manman distanced herself from that sort of thing, and she didn't like Granmè talking about it either, so we only discussed vodou when she wasn't around. Despite Manman's desire to move away from her parents' religion, she inadvertently helped me with my zombi venture. She works at the morgue, so all I needed were some scrubs and her keycard to access the underworld of stainless steel, arctic chill, and dead bodies.

To be clear, Granmè doesn't raise the dead. Technically, it's bokors, not mambos, that create zombis, and it is the sort of ritual that's too dark, even for Vodou. She heals the physical and mental malaise of our general community, and summons a lwa now and again while she drinks rum with Granpè. However, she had clearly read up about it, because when I found one of her old journals, there was a zombi ritual scribbled in Kreyòl, clear as spring water.

I don't make a habit of stealing from old ladies, least of all my own granmè. But I also don't normally raise zombis. I didn't even want to. But Monique, who was lying in a cooler, deserved better.

Monique was my best friend. We didn't share blood, yet we had acted like sisters since we were in our nappies. When we were together, everything was warm and soft-edged. Our manmans lived in the same village, and while they always knew of each other, they were never close. But then the earthquake struck Haiti a month or so after we were born, and they began to spend a lot of time together in the shelters. Tragedy like that bonds people, so they became friends, and then we became friends. It was natural. Monique loved all things Vodou, far more than I did. Maybe it was because her family was strictly Catholic, so she never got a chance to interact with that side of Haiti. We always used to brew potions and curse people we hated in our spare time. Of course, it was all nonsense, not actual Vodou. Manman didn't like it because she found it sinful, while Granmè didn't like it because she found it insulting to her religion. One time they caught Monique and I with a voodoo doll. Doll's the operative word, because it was just some stitched cloth and filling, affixed with drawing pins and a lock of hair. Granmè was furious because voodoo dolls have nothing to do with the religion – they are just fabrications from the American media. We'd only seen it on an old Scooby Doo VHS tape, never in real life. Granmè was about to school us good, but then Manman came home and chastised all three of us.

Monique told them it was her fault. She had wanted to torture a boy who had insulted me at school. She didn't need to get him back like that, because she had already pushed him off a swing. But she wasn't one to let go of a grudge. She was always protecting me.

The day before Monique died, we were walking home when a boy came up to us. He was a couple of school years ahead, or so Monique said, but I didn't recognise him. He flirted with Monique and made all these inappropriate comments. This wasn't an unusual occurrence for her. I have the same flat figure I've always had, but when Monique turned sixteen, she gained a woman's body, all buxom and curvaceous. But Monique rebuffed him. She told him to leave us alone – and he did – so we continued on our way. We both thought that was the end of it.

Men don't like rejection. Worse still, Haiti's got a gang problem, and that boy was in one. A lot of men tend to join gangs to survive, but I reckon this boy was just pretty sick, because later that evening, he stole into Monique's house when she was asleep. With the help of some other gang members, they bound and gagged her so she couldn't scream, and then bundled her into an unmarked van. They sped off to the outskirts of the village, the van slicing through the darkness like a knife. When they arrived, they raped Monique a bunch of times. Sometimes they used their bodies, but other times they used the junk around them, like broken beer bottles. When they were done, they made sure she couldn't speak and threw her in a ditch, which was brown and rotten and choking with rubbish. She died of her wounds sometime in the early morning.

The police didn't find Monique for ages. I told them who did it, but the officer said Monique shouldn't have been rude to the boy and that she should have known better. They didn't even follow up on the lead, not properly. They just waited around until a stranger rang them a few days later. He had found Monique while walking back from a bar. The police didn't even rule it a femicide, even though she was stabbed in her genitals. When does that happen in male homicides?

When the night was so dark it could eat my bones, I snuck out of the house. It was pretty easy to climb out the window, because all the rooms are on one level, like the old slave cabins. It was a bit of a walk to the morgue, but anyone I saw on my way didn't bother me because I was dressed like a boy.

Dead bodies are overflowing in Haiti, and the morgues are woefully understaffed. I probably could have snuck in even if Manman didn't work there.

Even though I knew the morgue was perfectly safe, fear rankled in my heart as I approached it. I walked past the autopsy room, with its metallic tables and clinical equipment, and made straight for the area where they keep the refrigerators and storage units. It didn't take long to locate Monique, because she was one of the fresher corpses. I thought I was made of strong stuff, but when I opened her locker, I vomited into a nearby bin.

Granmè's zombi ritual was a thunderbolt. I mean this literally – as I read it out, the tiled floor splintered. Coils of damp bloomed on the pale walls, unfurling with every word. My vision became so fuzzy that at one point I almost stopped the incantation, because Monique's face, crusted with frost, seemed to contract and elongate, making the whole scene even more grotesque than it already was.

I waved my hands over Monique's battered body, weaving the sinew of her organs and building back her pearly-white bones. By the time I finished pumping blood into her lungs, my hair was tangled and smoking from all the effort.

Without warning, Monique's body shuddered, and her eyes wrenched open. She had no pupils, so her eyes resembled clouded glass, and they bulged out of her skin. Her expression was sullen, and when she opened her mouth, wide and slack like a dead fish, I couldn't hear any words, just a gurgling deep in her gullet. Slowly, she propped herself up with her elbows. Her skin was stretched thin and easily torn, like tissue paper.

'Monique?' my voice wobbled as I stood back.

Monique turned to face me, her expression blank.

I offered her some clothes I'd stolen from my brother, but she either didn't understand or didn't respond, so I had to dress her myself. As I led her outside, I found that even though her eyes were still a smeary white, they gave the impression of dark, empty tunnels.

Taking Monique back home took longer than I anticipated. She dragged her heavy feet in arrhythmical, jerking movements, even when I told her to hurry up. It didn't help that her body was thin and frail, like a blade of grass.

I kept her in the shed outside, and as soon as everybody went out, I washed her. She smelled awful, like rotting food and mould, and the time spent in the bathroom didn't seem to help.

I knew Monique wasn't going to eat my brains, trigger a rage virus, or sprout mushrooms, like in the movies. She learned to do what I told her to, provided they were simple, clear instructions, like 'fetch me that book' or 'run around the garden'. But the only thing I truly wanted her to do – 'be Monique' – she couldn't seem to pick up.

As the mornings bled into the nights, Monique remained in the shed. She still didn't speak or 'be Monique'. I tried everything to work it out of her. I played one of her old konpa records, read a chapter from her favourite book, and braided her hair in her preferred style. She didn't respond to any of my efforts.

I'm not the best cook, yet I spent a while perfecting diri djon djon, her favourite meal. But when I spooned it in her mouth, the rice spilled down her chin, while the black mushrooms got caught in her teeth. She used to relish the mushrooms for their zest and fluffiness, but she clearly tasted nothing – it might as well have been sand in her mouth. After she was done, she just stared into the distance, her breath like a rattlesnake, while flakes of her skin, like strips of bark, sloughed off her body.

Eventually, I became so frustrated with the lack of progress that I broke the record and screamed at her. I thought nobody was home, but the door flung open. I tried to stuff Monique into a cupboard, but I couldn't get there in time.

It was Manman and Granmè. They both gasped when they saw Monique.

I expected them to be angry, the kind so palpable that it froths and bubbles. Strangely, nobody said anything. Manman didn't even raise her voice or reach for a flipflop. She just stared at me, her eyes as wide and glassy as Monique's.

Eventually, the latch on Granmè's tongue undid itself.

'It didn't work, did it?'

I was so taken aback by her calm tone, that it took me a few moments to respond.

‘No. She’s like one of Granpè’s old puppets.’

Granmè nodded.

‘That’s what necromancy is: the reanimation of flesh and bone.’

I didn’t respond.

‘Nothing can be done about the soul,’ Manman finally spoke up. ‘From the moment we pass on, it goes elsewhere. That’s not really Monique, just an imitation of her.’

‘But that’s a good thing,’ Granmè added. ‘You don’t have to worry about her body.’

‘But I do worry about her body,’ I shook my head. ‘It’s important. I want it to be okay too.’

‘But as a zombi, she’s just a slave, a body to be abused,’ said Granmè. ‘You don’t want that for her, do you?’

I hung my head, the grief a knife in my side.

‘Would you like us to help?’ asked Manman.

If you feed a zombi salt, their reanimated body will collapse. And that’s what we did after we bundled Monique up into Granpè’s old truck and took her back to the morgue.

Afterwards, Granmè had a long, difficult talk with Manman, all hushed tones and worried glances. But after they were done, and I awaited my punishment, all Manman said was that she would dress Monique up all nice for the funeral, and that Granmè could talk to me about Vodou, as long as I promised to never make a zombi again. She believed that if there was truly no way of stopping me from engaging with the practice, then I needed to understand it properly.

Monique’s body rests in a graveyard now. I greet her gravestone with rusting talismans and coloured handkerchiefs, to make sure she’s protected.

With Granmè’s voice in my head, I picture Monique’s body curled up in the furrows and warmth of the earth, safe from the tumultuous, loathsome darkness of life. She is caressed by tree roots, tubers, and mushrooms. Coupled with the rhythms of the surrounding wood, they all move as one, linked on the thread of a single pulse.

But I can’t always imagine her body in harmony with nature. The nights when I’m a black smoke of pain, I wake up screaming because I’ve seen Monique’s eyes boring into my soul, all dark-holed and maggot-filled, like cooked liver and onions.

When I see her mired in filth and dirt like this, my thoughts drift to the morgue, and a vision emerges. A zombi, who, under my careful instruction, visits those boys who killed Monique, and repays them in kind. The comfort cocoons me, and keeps me warm through the long, dark night.

Anniversary Visit

Tom Rae

Nah son, miners like it underground.

Will I go doon there...with centipedes?

Da stops trowelling, turns.

Not for a...looooong time.

Granda's gravestone's horizontal now: the Campsies

loom unchanged.

Bovine

Maya Price

my brother & me upbeat
our father coming with the hatchet
my mother singing

erring glitzy & nod
then violent

it couldn't have waited you see
the snow was thinning so was she
& bone-deep was not so deep

& thank you & please
& what

were we going to eat?

my father swinging
wide

desire the
cross section
sizzling on Teflon next morning

easy now: hold hands at the table
my father my brother & me

& say

a crazy old cow but boy could she sing

Planet Papa

Leilani Taneus-Miller

In the land of his migration,
where he moved for school and never went back,
the pine tree waited for him.

Swapped the honey he would make
in single nights' dreams for sap
gluttonous on the tree.

Pinesap for honey
stiffened over his hand
when he held mine.

Yet I still heard
the promise of his great aunt,
Honey we will make.

Those trees paper and unfurling,
her ink unravelling the bees,
haunting the hibiscus spiralling land and sky and
smelling of sea.

Chestnuts distending
from each wrinkle of his hand,
looping his fingers into mine.

My papa a strong man
who only pretends to forget
to keep me safe from night travels.

He must worry I'll get lost,
but I cling to his single sacrifice
held in sticky drops.

Annie

Gerard Campbell

The manor house was located just to the north of the village and sat amidst an oak grove, some half a mile from the church and the village cemetery. John had visited the Major not long before his sudden death and had sensed that the old boy had something he wanted to say but couldn't. He should have grasped the nettle, but he didn't, and now it was too late for that.

As he drove out to the house, he stopped by the Major's grave and pondered why his solicitor had requested to meet him at the manor. The bouquets of flowers were wilted, and the grave had a tardy look. He decided that he would ask the solicitor for permission to remove them. Annie would want that. The polished black headstone spelled out her name in gold. It was hard to believe that it was thirty years since the accident that killed Annie and her mother.

Up at the house, Mr Franklin, the solicitor, invited him into the Major's study. A room he knew well with its aroma from the ages. It was a distinctive mix of wood smoke, a dusty vanilla-like sweetness from the old books and beeswax furniture polish, all clinging to the heavy drapes around the large bay window. In front of him was the Major's beautiful mahogany desk. The green leather-inlaid top sat on a sturdy plinth that contained a set of four drawers on each side of the foot well and a central drawer above it. [KM(1) [GC2] Behind the desk stood a six-shelf Colonial Open Bookcase with the carved column borders. Franklin took the Major's chair behind the desk and invited John to sit on the other side.

"You know the house then", said Franklin, seeing a familiar look on John's face.

"Yes, my late mother worked here – I spent many days here way back. It hasn't changed much. Annie and I played as children in this very room – she used to hide under that desk, and we read books from those shelves".

A faint smile formed as he continued, "We were Peter and Wendy and later Pip and Estella, but once she was gone...you know", he tailed off.

Franklin continued, "And did you know the Major well?"

"Not especially well – we knew each other, of course, but we were a different generation. I called on him from time to time; the last time was not long before he died – it was around the thirtieth anniversary, and I thought he might appreciate a call."

"How did you find him?" Franklin probed.

"Something was bothering him, I think - he asked me why I had never married, which was strange – I simply batted it away."

"Why strange?"

“He never asked me about myself. He generally liked me to talk about the old days when my mother was here, and his wife was running the house and Annie and I were playing around the place. Then John asked, “Why is this of interest to you? Why have you called me here?”

“Well, John,” Franklin leaned forward slightly, “Before he died, the Major received a letter from a young lady in the United States who believed that she was Annie’s daughter. He asked us to investigate”

“What did you find?” John played for time.

His mind raced back to that fateful summer when Annie had gone to stay with an aunt in Dublin; those long months without a word, the sudden deaths as she was returning home. That balmy night when they listened to the tide lisp on the shore. When they wished on the stars outside the white-washed cottage with the red door. The embracing glow of the oil lamp, the turf fire breathing warmth into the room.

When he truly felt alive. When the firelight glinted in her hazel-brown eyes. When he felt her warm, soft skin and kissed those sweet lips. When her long brown hair shone, and the radiance on her face told him she loved him.

John checked himself to listen to Franklin’s reply.

“It seems that Annie did indeed have a daughter not long before she died”

He hesitated as John sat back; head tilted towards the ceiling at these words.

Franklin continued, “From what we understand, Annie’s mother sent her away to the nuns in Dublin until the child was born. The child was given up for adoption to a family from New York State. Her mother never told the Major. He was away on tour at the time. As you know, Annie and her mother died in an unexplained single-car crash as they returned home, not 10 miles from here.

“And you told the Major this?” asked John

“Yes”

“And he believed I was the father of Annie’s child.”

Franklin looked away momentarily at John’s candour; then he matched it.

“Yes, he strongly suspected you – could that be possible?”

John straightened in his chair and grasped both arms. He paused, as the enormity of the words he was about to utter weighed on him.

“Yes – Yes, it is. – I loved Annie – I had no idea – I couldn’t move on after she died”

“I think the Major knew that but couldn’t bring himself to ask you outright,” said Franklin.

As Franklin started to explain what he would do next to fully verify John as the father of Annie's daughter, a ray of sunlight caught the silver ink well on the Major's desk and scattered across the ceiling. John recalled his Wendy peeking out from under the desk saying "Look, Peter, it's Tinkerbell."

Franklin saw John to the door and they said their goodbyes.

John returned to the churchyard. As he sat in his car in sight of Annie's grave, an uncontrollable flood streamed down his face. He opened the car window for air and eventually composed himself again. "Time to lift those old flowers," he said as he swung open the car door.

Franklin moved fast, and just six weeks later, John waited in a hotel room near Dublin Airport. He rubbed his hands on his thighs as his feet tapped a steady beat, his eyes fixed on the door. Suddenly it opened. Before him stood a young woman with glinting hazel-brown eyes, her long brown hair shone, and the radiance on her face told him that he would love her.

what colour are her eyes?

Alexandra Morrison

Clear and blue like a struck match

Mother Mary blue

Blue of distant starlight

Alien blue, blue like you can't fathom

Lit like a Christmas tree

Blue like bone

Climb up a mountain and scream at the sky

In the blue frosted-over peaks of the Highlands in winter

Which form the architecture of my heart

I am empty from head to toe where I stand

There is nothing inside of me

And I am melting in the heat of it

And I am asking her to turn around

swan dive

Emily Davidson

my arm my arm outstretched pale slivers of wind illustrated blowing it
out of the water i'm an accordion bellow-ribbed and heaving out song

this old instrument is boxy and red and certainly not waterproofed
who am i to destroy the first birthday gift that mammy ever gave me

at least the vikings got a shroud when they fired towards the seabed
my hips sharpen in flex ready for my modern reincarnation as number

take left feet or wrongs two embarrassments can still finish the job right
and
if i slip through the cold membrane gently enough is it beauty or just
over

maybe i look better like this a poem on two legs
 but twisting midair angle-dependent
 you could regard me
 as a real
 bird
 !

Bandits in my bathtub

Leilani Taneus-Miller

Before time changed my head
and head changed my language,
I walked in pools of sweat, considering
whether I said the words in the right accent.

Whether I pricked the corners
of their lips into snigger
with my cross-Atlantic tongue.
Before I urged language to do me well.

And now, I'm holding my head
in my hands, feeling the weight
of betrayal to someone known in me
and somewhere grown in me.

And I will, gather a shawl around my head,
wishing it was wool, wishing it could stop
the pricks of rain from fluttering in, wishing
it was impermeable where I wasn't.

The Transplant

Chandra Grace Johner

X. I stitched & I sewed, suturing life into myself like a precious organ

At first it seemed my body, in its quiet mo(u)rning, rejected this transplant

This new/old thing sewn inside me lay quiet & still

A wasted effort, I was certain

Until one day

It pulsed

Rippled

& thrummed

Slow, but ready...

X. What was it worth after so much loss, to undertake such a risky intervention

With grief as sole nourishment, to go without seemed starvation.

Weaning painful punishment as the organ thrived

Its throbbing made me doubt, reconsider

Whether living again was really worth it, when

Before was easier

Quiet

& safe

Dull, but steady...

X. Now life beats to an anthem inside me, my careful stitches a success

Some days it flails, seems like it will fail, give out

Most days it is a fevered pitch,

A mix of despair-driven hopes

Tempered with not-so-lovely rages

A rhythmic tempest

Tempo

& staccato

Bold & heady...

Buddleia

Jules James

11:30PM on a Tuesday night and she is kissing this guy with a desperation that, tomorrow, she will pretend not to understand. She will hold it up in the group chat as evidence of her drunkenness, or horniness, or temporary insanity, or some combination of all three. The kiss is bad, not in any obvious way but with a kind of fundamental awkwardness. His teeth clunk against hers. They tilt their heads the same way. She imagines how she might tell the story of this kiss on their wedding day: I didn't like him that much at first, to be honest, but I'm so glad I gave him a chance! And he will laugh and shake his head, and they'll kiss again, and they will have worked kissing out by then and it will feel perfect. She imagines how he'll look as he brings her coffee and breakfast tomorrow morning. His house will be clean; his sheets will be crisp white linen. He will have food in the fridge. There will be a bottle of cold water with mint leaves floating inside. She imagines this because he talked knowledgeably about natural wine at the pub and because he is five years older than her and works at a bank. He will have Aesop soap, she thinks, and his life figured out.

Look, he says, and she blinks her eyes open, takes her hands off him. A fox roves past them in the dark street. The pizza shop is starting to roll down the shutters. He's pointing up at the building above, which looks semi-abandoned; crumbling stone and dark, broken windows, moss and little plants growing out of all the cracks. What? she says, what am I looking at? and tries not to notice how she's slurring. There. He points again, and she follows the line to the roof where a long, leafy stalk points straight up into the sky. Buddleia, he says. She doesn't want to say what? again, so she tries to kiss him, but he dodges her, literally dodges her, and it's kind of devastating. It makes her pull her hands inside her coat sleeves. He takes a bite of his slice of pizza and says, with his mouth full: that stuff is crazy. It's eating the city.

She looks at it again, this thin stalk shivering in the breeze, and it makes her shiver, too. What do you mean?

The roots, like, get into the structure of the building, get into the cracks and stuff. Destroys them. Crazy. He takes another bite and then just stands there, chewing, swaying, staring up at the building. His skin is bad, she thinks, blinking at a flaky patch of red by his ear as if she could erase it, and his shoes are weird, and he hasn't asked her a single question all night. He looks sort of like an uglier version of her ex, which is maybe why she chose him in the first place. Maybe the sex will be good. She says, right. Shall we go then?

He lives in one of the luxury new-build developments by the river. She's always wondered who they're for. He flicks the switch inside the door, and the light is cold and too bright and it's not what she pictured. He lives alone, which is something. How much is your rent? she asks, holding onto the wall as the room spins around her. Dirty dishes in the sink; last night's dinner and the night before, probably. He only seems to own a TV and a leather couch and no other furniture. The walls are white and completely bare. I own, he says, his hand finding the small of her back and making her jump. Easy, he laughs. But she does not feel easy suddenly. He touches her shoulder, no, grabs it, turns her around and shoves her gently into the wall. With his mouth inches from hers, his breath hot on her lips, he says, Hi.

It's supposed to be sexy but it's not sexy, she's not finding it sexy. Um, she says, is it ok if I use your toilet?

The bathroom is dirty—hair around the plughole, 3-in-1 shower gel just dropped in the bottom of the tub even though there's a little shelf right there, and there's only one sad square of toilet paper clinging to the tube. She opens the cupboard under the sink and finds it completely empty except for a dusty packet of floss. That's something, she thinks again, and she leans against the sink, presses her forehead up against the mirror, mercifully cold, and focuses on not being sick. You could just leave, she thinks. Opens her eyes and stares into them in the mirror. She feels the deep body tiredness of five glasses of wine. She can't think about getting into an Uber or going into her flat, dark and quiet and cold. She thinks, I'm here already. She thinks, homeowner. She runs cold water on the inside of her wrists. Then she goes back out.

*

He doesn't make breakfast. He doesn't even have any coffee. I don't drink it, he says, no caffeine, only matcha sometimes. He's standing at the end of the bed, already fully dressed, clinically watching her blink sleep out of her eyes. Listen. I have to go to work. Her head is pounding. Oh, right, ok, I'll just get dressed. The clock on his bedside table says 08:02 in red digits. She tries to remember the sex, but she only gets flashes of it. The rest is blank. Well, thanks, he says as he closes the door on her, that was fun. Have a good day.

On the bus, she opens Hinge. She's apocalyptically, catastrophically hungover: hands shaking; eyes barely focusing on the screen; reading the names and forgetting them in the same second. She looks at Tom, 34, bar manager and dog dad. She looks at Jack, 31, visiting from Australia and looking for someone to show him around. She imagines herself in Australia. She wonders why anyone would want to visit here from Australia, here where there's nothing to see and no one interesting to meet. She's had to delete and remake her Hinge account twice because she's swiped through everyone in the city.

She opens instagram and searches her ex's profile (private) and squints at the tiny profile picture and hates herself for unfollowing him after the breakup. Outside the window there's a building exploding with green. Leafy stalks bursting out of everywhere. She googles 'buddleia' and reads about fibrous roots that creep five feet, ten feet, forcing off roofs and prising bricks apart, silently growing in walls until there's more plant than building. She opens the group chat.

My date was sooo boring smh

Very Steven Bartlett atomic habits vibes!!!

He did own his flat tho

She tries to remember the sex again. Gets a flash of his head between her legs, sort of remembers moaning and writhing around dramatically even though it didn't feel that good. It's like everything is too dark to see and then some moments are lit by a flash of lightning. She has a weird feeling in her stomach. Maybe it's better that she can't really remember it since it probably wasn't very good anyway. Her phone vibrates with a response from the group chat: *will u see him again??* She thinks about that for a second. *Doubt it he was just like kthxbai this morning.* Her eyes slip out of focus for a second. The motion of the bus is making her feel so nauseous. Then she types, *he was medium ugly anyway.*

At work, she hopes they can't smell her. She hopes they don't notice that she's wearing the same outfit as yesterday or that she's been staring blank and motionless at the same word document for 25 full minutes. She takes two paracetamol from the first-aid box and thinks about asking to go home. At lunch she gets a message from Adam, 32, seeking long-term, open to short. *What u looking for on here?*

She can't remember matching him. He's not unattractive. He's a PhD student and a tutor, which must mean that he reads. She swipes back to the message and thinks about it. She hates this question because surely the answer is obvious without the indignity of actually having to say it: she wants someone to tell her she is ok. She wants to buy spinach and not watch most of it rot in the fridge. She wants to split rent. She wants to be so in love that nothing else in the world matters. She types *idk really, depends on the person :)* and then watches TikTok for the rest of lunch.

They make plans to have drinks tomorrow in messages punctuated by careful half-hour gaps, her stomach jolting every time her phone lights up on her desk. After work, she looks at the bottle of wine in her fridge and thinks, hair of the dog, and opens it, and then she stalks him online. She finds his instagram (private) and his linkedIn (too risky to click) and then his staff page on the university website. She tries to zoom in on the tiny black-and-white picture but it's too grainy. The next morning, she gets up an hour early in the cold to blow-dry her hair and do a face mask. She packs a pair of jeans, spare underwear, and two condoms into her work bag. She transfers £50 from her savings account in case she has to pay for her own drinks, pretending not to see the total balance.

Adam chooses the place: a cocktail bar in an old building that used to be a bank. She stands across the street to smoke before she goes in. Above the door, she can't believe it, two leafy little stalks of buddleia are blooming. She gets her phone out and then puts it away again, too embarrassed to message the group chat about being out on another first date. It'll be ok afterwards; she'll be able to laugh off the desperation she's scared they'll sense in her, and it'll all be justified when she's holding his hand telling the story: to be honest, I was still kind of hungover from the last date, I almost didn't even show up! But I just had a really good feeling about him. The second our eyes met I just felt so comfortable, everything just felt so right.

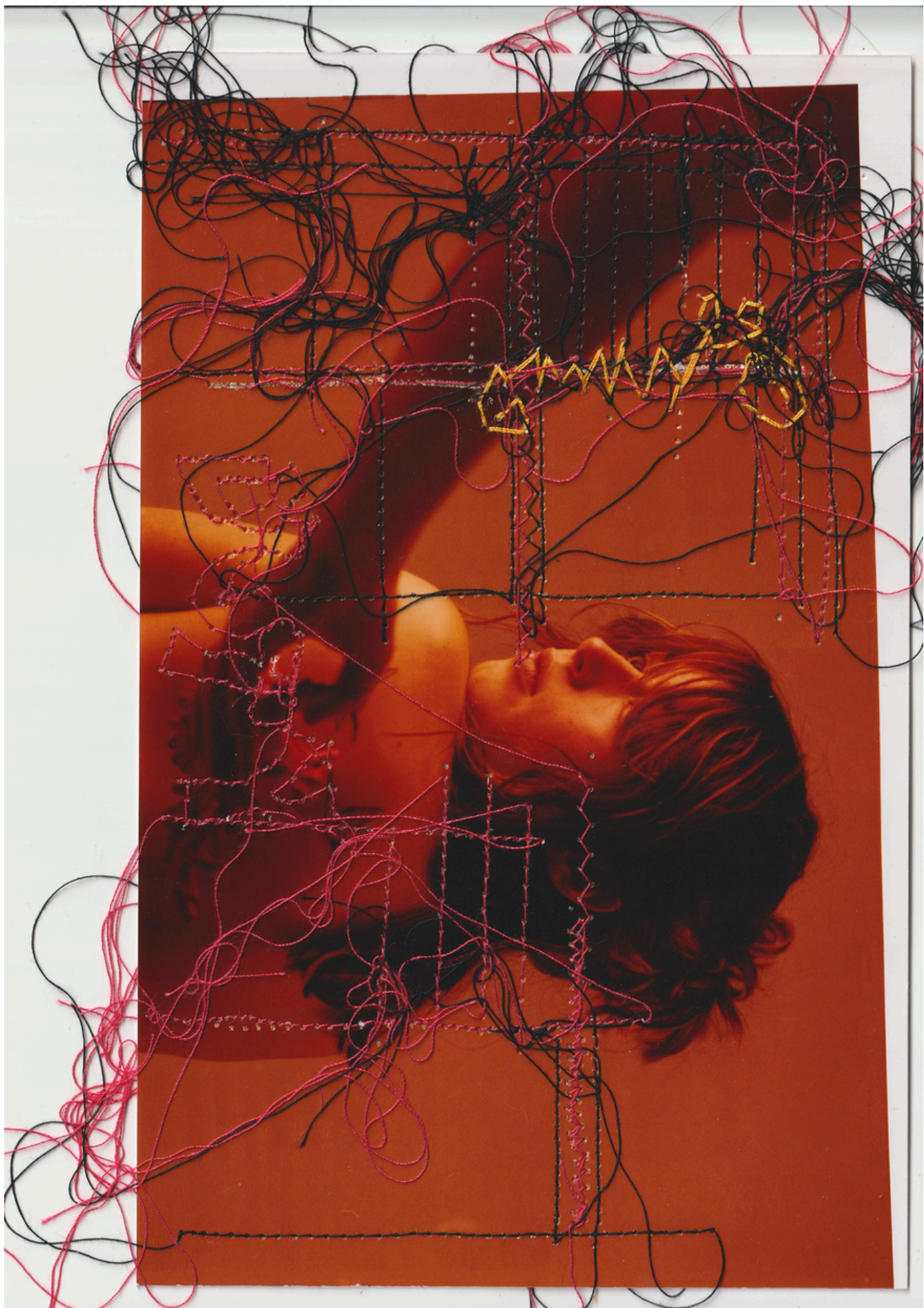
It's not like that. It's kind of awkward at first. And then, once they've had a drink and it's not awkward anymore, it's only fine. But he pays for the drinks! Well, he pays for the first two. She takes a picture of their cocktails for her story, his hand masculine and mysterious in the corner of the shot. In the doorway, under the buddleia like some kind of weird mistletoe, Adam kisses her. And it's a good kiss. Really. It just works. The soles of her feet tingle. He pulls back and she looks anxiously at his face for some sign that it felt the same for him. It's starting to rain. Well, he says, this was fun. Yeah. He kisses her again. It makes her feel dizzy to close her eyes and she stumbles a little, feels his hand close around her arm to catch her. She realises she's leaning toward him, pressing forward on her toes. She wants him to say, that was amazing, you're amazing. Instead he says, do you fancy coming to mine for another one? It's just round the corner. And that's fine, that's the next best thing, so she smiles. Ok, sure. In the future, maybe, they will have a houseful of books and a little orange cat. They'll go travelling and then have dinner parties where they'll show their friends the pictures. At night, in bed, they'll talk until they can barely hear each other, until they're dreaming.

While they walk, her face gets wet and cold with rain. He's telling some story about another girl from Hinge. I sort of hate dating, he says, I'm definitely more of a relationship guy. She feels herself blushing. He asks, how long have you been single? and she has to count it up. Eventually she says: about two years. The length of time always surprises her because isn't time supposed to heal all wounds? Adam's hand finds hers and she holds onto it like a rope he's thrown into the water for her. She's seeing fucking buddleia everywhere, springing out from all the dark walls, creeping around in the night. It's falling out of a window they walk past, standing up in silhouette in the orange streetlights. Is every building in this city abandoned and rotting?

She feels weird, something growing in her. Outside his building, Adam pulls her in for a kiss again and he smells like tobacco and patchouli, a tiny hint of sweat but not in a bad way. She suddenly remembers that he's a stranger. She suddenly wonders why she's here at all. She wants to pull away but she forces herself to stay, accepting his wet tongue in her mouth. She tries to imagine telling the story of this moment, how all the app dates and weeknight drinks and failed talking stages were worth it for this one perfect moment. But it is not perfect because the street is spinning and all she can think about is hungover mornings and blank spaces in her memory and all the pleading messages she sent her ex and men forgetting her name during sex and her own, endless wanting. All of this inside her spreading. She imagines a fibrous root growing in her belly, stretching up into her throat, and then it pushes out of her mouth and, horribly, she feels tears in her eyes. Adam must feel the wetness on his face because he pushes her back, holding her arms, pressing too hard with his fingers.

What— he says, and all she wants is for him to gently wipe the tears away or pull her into his arms and stroke her hair, but instead he's looking at her with something like annoyance or fear or disgust and she says It's just—and she's trying to stop crying, but all of this feels kind of unreal, like it's not really happening to her at all but to someone else—it's just, what are your, I don't know, intentions? With me? I mean— He's shaking his head slowly, looking at her like she's crazy, which she is, she knows she is and she can't stop it. Intentions? I thought we were having a good time. It's just, it's just that I really like you. He looks at her. He says, I think you've had a bit too much to drink. He looks past her, down the street, like he's scared someone will see. I'll book an Uber for you, ok? She wants to go back five minutes in time and just try to enjoy herself. She tries to think of something else to say.

Of course, he won't want to see her again. She's a funny story for him to tell on his next date. Maybe if she drinks more when she gets home she'll be able to forget this completely. Maybe she can find a way to make a joke out of it when she tells her friends, a story that can turn all her embarrassing sadness and loneliness into relatable drunkenness or the start of her luteal phase. A story in which she is not rotting. But she can't think of anything; the spot in her mind is blank. She understands that she will not tell anyone.



material duty by Riley Lawless

p.c. loving

Maya Price

every sickle's a symptom these days

meningitis

bacterial or otherwise
or tapeworm or
N. fowleri

I too have been wanting to feed

besides they are like us
elbows, knees

crucibled if it so pleases
and resisting calcification
still

when papule pushes pore
I counter

pro / anti
biotic
feast

post cibum
suckling for HUMAN
heat

I have not seen skin in weeks

Spoonbrained

Adrien Minsan

If I had known then what I know now, I never would've showed the new guy that stupid article. But here's the thing—when I first saw it, I wasn't thinking about the tragedy of the news content or the implications for humanity or whatever. I just thought that the headline was funny. You have to admit, *Scientists Discover Spoon's Worth of Microplastics in Human Brains* is some top-notch mental imagery.

It made me imagine that all the hotel guests, no matter how seriously they took their demands, were walking around with plastic spoons in their heads.

I thought the new guy would get a kick out of it, since he had a degree in neurobiology and used to work in a lab at Northwestern studying rat autism or something. Ideally, we would turn it into some sort of fun inside joke, in that semi-flirty way we had been doing since they assigned him to the front desk.

It's not like I could've known that in a couple of days, that stupid article was going to make him suicidal.

"What about the blood-brain barrier?", he asked defensively.

"The what?"

"Never mind", he said. "But thanks for ruining my day."

"You're welcome, spoon-for-brains."

The new guy frowned but said nothing.

The day after was our busiest since the holidays. There was some kind of wealth management convention at The Elk Lodge, and the place was teeming with beige-bland conservative types, all making the same tired jokes about whether it was already warm enough to take a dip in Lake Michigan (it wasn't), or whether they could hunt elk on the premises if they had packed their own gun (they couldn't). It was an unlucky day for the new guy to get a pesto stain on the lapel of his uniform—one of the convention attendees narc'd.

Right before lunch, Stan walked up to the front desk, put on his *I'm in charge here* face, and firmly suggested that the new guy throw his jacket in the wash during break.

He refused.

"It's polyester, Stan."

"So?"

“So you put it in the washing machine, then it breaks down and leaches into the water”, the new guy whisper-shouted.

“What are you talking about?”, Stan whisper-shouted back.

“You and all of these people have no clue, do you? We go on mindlessly pumping the lake full of polyester, and now it’s in our brains, our semen, even our fucking *newborns*!”

“Whoa, whoa, language, pal! Now, if you won’t wash the jacket, you’ll have to wear the spare. Jess, be a dear and grab it, will you?”

The spare jacket was so big it made the new guy look like that time Kermit the Frog impersonated David Byrne. When I told him that, he said he didn’t get the reference. But he laughed anyways, which was sweet of him, since I had said it to cheer him up in the first place.

It did get weird when he wouldn’t stop laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

“Kermit”, he sneered. ‘He’s made of polyester, isn’t he?’

The new guy wasn’t scheduled the following day, but at lunchtime, he texted me a photo of various cooking implements strewn about a black vinyl couch.

Stayed up reading how microplastics enter our food, so I’m getting rid of these.

I’ll take the couch, I texted back.

This isn’t funny. I can’t sleep anymore, can’t eat anymore.

Aww, just cheer up and enjoy the plasticky aftertaste.

The ellipses popped up a few times on my phone, then nothing.

When the new guy didn’t show up the next day, I asked Stan if he had been fired over the pesto stain situation. He insisted that the new guy wasn’t fired *yet*, but that he would be if he didn’t show up soon.

Lydia-Beth filled in and was her usual cheery dim-witted self. She kept asking who I thought would be manager when Stan retired. I had to keep reminding her that Stan was only 34.

“That’s, like, pretty old.”

I glared at her. It was enviable how carefree she looked in her black waistcoat, how older guests would often say she looked just like their granddaughters. Looking at Lydia-Beth’s placid smile made me wonder if the spoon in her brain was bigger than the one in mine.

I went to the new guy for his opinion, but when I saw he hadn't answered my last text, I didn't.

Today, Stan called an all-staff meeting. I definitely thought it was going to be about the recent complaints about the ground-floor rooms being too cold, but then Stan put on his gravest *I'm about to say something important* face. That's when I knew this was going to be about something bigger than the boiler.

"Alrighty folks, as some of you might know, there was an incident earlier this morning."

He looked right at me, and I had an awful sense I knew where this was going.

"An Elk Lodge employee tried to end their life at Forest Park Beach."

I felt a mixture of guilt and dread swirling in my stomach, like maybe the new guy had been right—that maybe it actually wasn't funny. Maybe it was too awful to be joking about in the first place, and I should've reached out instead. Said something real.

"Fortunately, a guest caught them, and their room was comped. The guest's room, that is. The former employee is now at the hospital."

The weirdest thing, though, was that Stan didn't look that concerned. No, he looked just like a puppet, reciting empty words from his script about *mental health* and *employee solidarity*.

It made me think of what the new guy said—that thing about plastic Kermit. And suddenly, it did all seem pretty funny, if even just a bit. So I figured I should visit the hospital after work, let the new guy know that at least, at the very least, he'd never have to wear that oversized jacket again.

guts

Rowan Bland

i have conversed long enough within my intestinal
tract
laced the long wet

through my fingers
eyed it as though i was
shuffling tarot
searching my fortune and fate in the fat i always trust my gut

i lie down on my soothsayers table nails as chalk against my stomach
like a flower opening and churning out red
red
red
fifteen feet of honesty and i
kiss my small intestine as it
spirals and curls out of my
body

i am the ceiling
she's gone now she's in ribbons
buried down in the bottom of
the earth
foetal position
holding herself trying to
keep things from spilling
cradling it all

morticians are bemused
at the stiff hands on the still wet organs

they don't understand

i know the end
i lie with my gut instincts.

close

MV Brown

F, 34

same sex relationship

vitals monitored

body prepared

washed

draped

foley spackman

after dilation of cervix

hasson entry at umbilicus

head down

capsule out

both ovaries suspended

on display like fruit

adhesions divided

adhesions divided

ureter vermiculating

a hole punched

followed to tunnel

avascular space opened

I am broken into

nodule excised

with MP hook

hooked into me

surgical powder

like makeup for my insides

ovaries released

uv fold *uv map*

excised with hook

through the screen

haemostasis
washout
still dry
yet elsewhere I am leaking

gas out
yet my abdomen still swells

ports out under vision
ports closed

*I woke with four small mouths
stitched shut*

estimated blood loss under 50ml
estimated love lost
junctional zone preserved
cervix unremarkable
its artefacts suggest otherwise

10cm chocolate cyst
the size of a grapefruit
shelled out

capture sent to
pathology
cached

You read my markers over the phone

mid / distal ureter medialised
Your distance materialised
right ureter lateralised
vermiculating to tunnel

tunnel vision

I am temporarily lost
write with path

I am temporarily lost
write with path

subcapsular lesions
spleen displaced

MV Beta has no breath

lungs clear
airways clear

washed
draped
shelled
rendered

blood loss minimal
still dry

yet wet
for someone new

recurrent between cycles
after sex

after you

Vienna Knows

Keith Moore

Uploading the final picture, she recalled reading that eBay listings were becoming poetic.

Returning to the item description, she added: 'At some point someone gave this as an act of love. There are stranger things out there, but I don't know what.'

Soon it would be gone.

Hilda first met Gary at a Tchaikovsky recital in Edinburgh. There was an immediate spark. She told Vienna of her excitement. "He's a nice guy. Kind. Handsome for his age and has a steady job."

The cat stared attentively, as always. For nine years they'd shared the house. Over six months, Hilda and Gary's romance grew in galleries, theatres and concert halls.

One night he arrived with a gift. "It was my mum's. That evening we first met? The orchestra played The Doll's Funeral". The vintage figurine he held reminded Hilda of her late mother, Agnes, whom she'd hated. Those cold, porcelain eyes. Fixed in appraisal. Hilda winced. Vienna hissed.

Ignoring her objections, Gary placed the doll on the dressing table. In bed, he reached for her. She recoiled as he touched her face. His hands were cold, like her mother's. They felt smooth. Glazed. She resisted his advances. She couldn't. Not with the doll watching. Vienna sat at the doorway, refusing to enter the room. Hilda barely slept.

The next morning she told Gary it was over. He cried. The tears felt wrong, weak, dispelling any doubts. He insisted on leaving Agnes behind. She was banished to the hall cupboard, whose door the cat occasionally scratched.

At night, Hilda swore she heard a faint rustling in the dark. Vienna, curled at her feet, twitched in her sleep - as if she heard it too.

Inspired by Rose Ruane.

A Mimetic Dance

Alexandra Morrison

Dyke on dyke is a mirror

Which is to say: a double cross

Which is to say: you see me and I see you

With heat sensing goggles.

Do not rebuke me the quirks of my body

Or the indignity of my pride.

We are self-same in reflection

Under a sky of tallow glass.

Bite into the apple of your throat

And pour out all my thoughts until

I'm a single point in space

diving through the head of a needle.

You're so clean and I'm dirty,

So I dig into the places where you aren't,

Unsure if I leave anything behind

The Eye's Mouth

Madhumaya Anandan Kumaran

Sitting with you on the bed, I'd caught a glimpse of us in the mirror of my room. Time does not flow in the realm of the mirror. We are over there, there where we are not. There, we are still sitting, where we may remain, always.

Such is the utopia of the mirror.

The photograph is perhaps the same. I press down on the shutter release, and let the camera glimpse you, beloved, as I do. The shape of our eyes is the shape of our mouths. The camera opens its soft mouth, and the sweet light you reflect lands on the film-tongue of gelatin & silver halide crystals. The crystals hold your light—delighted. It is always dark where they are. It is rare that they get to see light. They cannot have too much of it or they will swallow it all at once, and be sick.

Ill, now, I lay here.

I do not remember your eyes now,
but in warmth their image remains.

Walkabout

Ross Crawford

The simulacrum glides into view, a crude imitation of one of my oldest friends. Disembodied head and shoulders. Two floating hands, one clutching a golf club. The intention was to meet in-person for a coffee, but we couldn't line up our schedules. A game of virtual reality minigolf would have to do.

After some idle chat about work and the weather, I feel the pressure building to ask The Question. The one I'm beholden to ask and the one he must be sick of answering.

"So, how's eh... how's your mum?"

"Not good."

The avatar can only vaguely approximate his features – mustard hair, thin nose, blue eyes – but its voice is unmistakably his, except hammered flat. It is fed directly into my ears while the avatar's mouth oscillates like a waveform.

"We hoped she'd take to the treatment but... I don't think she's got long left."

Around us, a diorama of Venice acts as a colourful backdrop to the walk, the talk, and the golf. The picturesque streets and bridges are devoid of life and activity, apart from the automaton of a ginger cat stuck in an endless grooming loop. Gondolas slide past without boatmen, circling the flat blue canal water as if on rails.

"Oh no, I'm so sorry to hear that."

"Thanks, yeah."

"How long has it been since you found out?"

"We didn't really know what was up until just after Burns Night."

I look up at the blinding yellow sun, but its incandescence cannot warm my cheeks. Outside, in the otherworld, I hear the burble and clank of pipes as the heating turns on.

"God. That's so quick."

"Yeah. We've had some time to process, I suppose. Now it's just about spending as much time with her as possible."

"How... how are you feeling about it?"

"A bit all over the place. Mainly just shattered to be honest."

"I can imagine. Let me know if there's anything I can do. Even if it's just to talk."

I look into the blank cartoon eyes, willing my own to convey the sincerity I feel. The gondola slides past again, completing another loop.

“Thanks.” The avatar’s head bobs, looking down at non-existent feet, while my otherworld legs feel the bump and slink of a cat between them. “Sorry, is it my shot?”

“Yeah.”

The avatar blinks from view, reappearing further along the green. It lines itself up, rolls its shoulders in that familiar way, and swings into thin air.

Blue Flesh

Madhumaya Anandan Kumaran

In the hollow night a body
lays heavy in an empty sunken bed
leaking heat into foam and fibres
and leaky springs. From springs seep
sounds, rust, and oil, that pool only below.
Heat leaks from a near-empty
mug, holding only a tea bag, a bag full
of pulp, once fragrant blossoms.
Left is a bag, like a welt. Like
sticky dead flesh in a shroud.
In reach is only the mug,
and the māyam
of the screen.

Not the peppery smell of fabric
perspired into. Not
the fatty folds of flesh but
bodies siphoned, siphoned
through metal tubes and lenses.
They figure before her but are not there.

In only the light
the television emits,
her skin appears blue.

THERE IS NO WARM BODY HERE.
THERE IS NO WARM BODY HERE.



The Nomad Channel by Madie Blackbourn

clocks went back at the weekend

Alison Holliday

the dark creeps in. my body screams it is six o clock but
the oven and microwave conspire
i am mad: it is only five. i am the dog sat by the empty
bowl for an hour.

there is something else in charge but i cannot grasp my
master. instead, i just whine and am
made to feel unreal. i can be sold on winter: wet roads
reflect the lights in the dark

breath pools as we search for the first three stars of
evening;

let the lost hour bring us closer; i know we will gather
and rest,

fat and cream and sugar rule by candlelight; beckon the
solstices darkest night

exchange gifts and body heat; hibernate away from the
prying eye.

believe and make the darkest and coldest the warmest
and brightest.

usher in new years where we can gain back what we lost:

my dish will suddenly be filled

again. i may not be real right now.

scratch behind my ears in the meantime.

tell me i am good.

that dog in me

Alison Holliday

i want to be the dog in the morning overjoyed
to lick your face. i want to be sun on golden shoulders,
rippling the smooth water of the lake. i want to be the
dog
at the door smiling, the dog chasing
after the ball. my dog-body all-leaning in-to-touch.
i want to be the dog that hides newspapers in the
backyard, bury
my secrets move forward, homeward bound, clown and
hound,
look up at star filled skies, miss nothing but the colour
blue.

i want to be fed, and walked, and loved.
i do not want to read emails or drink coffee or have any
have tos
i want to bring smiles to strangers as i am spotted
on the street. i want the soft fur that covers my body to
be loved,
a tail to show my joy carefree, dark brown eyes for
someone to look into
and tell me i am good for once. i want to be a dog.

i want to be your dog

i want to be stupid love big-freely
and simple. i want to let
misplacement be

to bark

a simple dog mistake.
to bare my teeth.
to notice when i am kicked on
the side
of the rushing road
i want to no longer
be a bad girl
i want people to listen
when i growl.
i know you would love me
and give me
all i want:
i want to
be
happy.

The Flatmate

Grace Hussey

April was the first month the tiny flat was warm enough to wear a tank top in. Surrounded by hedges, it didn't get much sunlight coming into the living room, and a dehumidifier worked around the clock to try (and fail) to expel the dampness from the air. She felt exposed suddenly having the skin on her arms and chest poking out from her thin, brown top. It felt like a betrayal to even notice The Flatmate's eyes catch her skin as she stood in the doorway, as if even noticing this was a sign of subconsciously unfaithful thoughts. The hair on her arms prickled and the dragon tattoo wrapped around her right arm burned. She wasn't really used to men being around. She was consistently distrustful of them. Especially men over six feet tall, who knowingly nodded and attested that their fellow kind were disgusting, as if this absolved them from guilt or blame. The first time she walked into the living room wearing a pair of Nat's shorts, Nat and The Flatmate had looked startled and softly said 'oh' just loud enough for her to catch, as if the pale expanse of her calves were something intimate, suddenly exposed.

The flat was a pit of try-hard testosterone. She jokingly called it the frat house but secretly dreamt of decluttering the kitchen and adding rugs and blankets to the living room. It was the opposite of her tenement in Glasgow, filled with soft golden lamps and posters all over the walls. She would light sweet-smelling candles and stacked books on every surface possible. She couldn't judge too harshly; her flat back home wasn't always like this. For the first six months, the living room stood empty except for a small clothing rail. Nevertheless, she grew comfortable in Nat's flat, a calm sort of routine began. At night, the three of them would squash onto the stained sofa, heating blanket spread across their laps, and pick a gruesome horror film from Netflix. Over six months, they would watch the first three Saw movies, all of The Purge movies, and Ready or Not. Eventually, Jules eased into the awkwardness, and she no longer minded her knees touching The Flatmate underneath the blanket or making eye contact while they discussed the articles she would upload to her university's newspaper website. He was her friend. It felt good to be liked by someone else Nat knew.

During the days she stayed while Nat was at work, she would take showers in the tiny, dark bathroom, shrieking as boiling water turned icy as the boys above turned on their kitchen tap. She'd come out reeking of Head and Shoulders and Lynx body wash, only to dress again and wander about the shopping centre a seven-minute walk down the road, aimlessly sniffing the body sprays in Lush and pulling at sweaters in Primark.

She felt like she didn't fully exist on these days, like she was on a break from being alive in her own body. Instead, she was a ghost drifting about a foreign student town, passing time quietly until Nat would return home to climb into the creaky, metal bed and nestle into the space between her head and neck, falling asleep instantly. She often imagined them as cats, the way they'd fold into each other as if they were liquid. No gaps between their skin, just perfectly fit into a coil. There was something sacred about bed, in the words spoken 'let's go lie in bed'. It was a space of soft warmth, the smell of their shared laundry detergent and skin and the thin sweat that coated the back of Jules' neck after nightmares. Two jigsaw pieces slotted into each other. This is when she came to in her body, when she had a witness again. Feeling Nat's hot skin on hers reminded her that she could feel and that she did have skin.

She grew accustomed to the flat in the way that parents grow accustomed to an unwanted pet, she didn't particularly want to be there, but she got comfortable and fond of the dirt and clutter in a way that she couldn't imagine not being there. She loved Nat, and it didn't matter much to her where she had her, as long as she did.

She felt her reach out a hand she wouldn't yet recognise and search about in her chest looking for the answers to the 'real' her- sometimes she couldn't tell if that person was even inside of her or rather floating outside of her body, untethered. No one else really understood how the three of them could co-exist like that. Maybe she didn't want anyone else to understand, she thought. Maybe she just wanted to sink softly into the beige, cookie-coloured couch and forget about everything else outside that room. Forget there was a world through the single-paned window. Sometimes love did that, blended the rest of the universe into blurry streaks of light and colour, no longer definable to the eye. The way that her mum had started to refer to every Border Terrier as a 'Paddy-dog'.

'I saw a Paddy-dog today.'

And so, she had started this strange tradition too. Describing wiry, grey Paddy-dogs, fat Paddy-dogs, slow Paddy-dogs, all so different to her hyperactive childhood dog, yet all losing identity to him. None of these dogs were like her Paddy, but she could no longer see that, so blinded by her love for one dog. Sometimes forgetting is about love, not hate. She'd heard that somewhere before.

Winter turned to Spring. Six months came and passed. The Flatmate drove her home to Glasgow a couple of times, Rizzle Kicks playing lightly through the radio.

Sometimes she'd walk into the room to see Nat's arm wrapped across The Flatmate's back. Sometimes they'd ask her to leave the living room, give them a second to discuss an urgent matter, so she'd sit on the bed in the next room, face burning in shame like she'd done something incorrect, she just wasn't sure what.

It was moments like these that her heart would race, the sound of the fan in the small bathroom would drill deeper into her head. She questioned more and more if she was imagining it, if she was making monsters out of shadows, weaving string into knots simply from her own brain. At night Nat rubbed her back and told her, softly, that she didn't mind her intrusive thoughts, that she loved her even though her anxiety spun stories out of nothing.

Jules spent most of her time inside of her own head. As a child she was accused of having 'wagging ears' for all of the times she would sit silently in the background just listening to what the adults were talking about. She was always more of an observer, but it was weird to suddenly be an observer of her own life, rather than the lives of others.

Her nightmares only got worse. She would drift off to sleep and dream of Nat's tongue in her mouth only to look down and see The Flatmate's pale hands over her chest, squeezing until it hurt. In the depths of her sleep the three of them became a molten, conjoined beast, twisted around each other like vipers. Skin fused together as she tried in vain to curl away. She would wake guilty, covered again in cold sweat, wondering how her own brain, her own flesh, could construct such images.

Summer had brought a light reprieve from The Flatmate. A trip overseas, somewhere he couldn't follow without a thin white ticket and a passport. Jules spent the five days twisting herself into knots to try and entertain, Nat spent the five days glued to the thin, silver phone wedged into their back pocket. She'd glance over her shoulder some afternoons, just to see The Flatmate's name lit up on the screen. At night she would wrap Nat up in embrace, ignoring the dead look in her eyes as she lay on top of her.

She asked, only once, if she should be worried about The Flatmate. A sudden spike of courage led her to the question 'Don't you think that's a bit weird? Being so physical with your friend?'

For Nat to display a look of mock horror.

'Of course not! That's ridiculous, we're just both quite lonely, emotional people, baby.'

Not even an ocean could separate his hands from her Nat.

When Nat finally showed up in Glasgow to split the world apart, she looked sick. White and clammy. One week of silence. One week imagining ways she could convince Nat to take her back despite her accusations. Make her love her again. Forgive the part of her that had cracked and broken. Felt the insecurity of masculinity that had infiltrated their lives, the part of her that couldn't not recognise men as a threat, even to her sweet girlfriend.

Her mouth smelt like she hadn't drunk water in a while, like she'd gone to sleep for a very long time and had just woken up. Stale. She'd taken a step away from the door, bile rising in the back of her throat.

'Come in, then.' She whispered.

Silent until they reached the green couch. She sat on the edge, waiting for Nat to finally break the quiet, open that stale mouth again.

'I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry.'

'What have you done?'

'I slept with Will.'

Sluice

Maya Price

you do not have to show your ribs
you do not have to shift when the light hits

apostrophe / / creased blue bark
sweatstain

you do not even have to cope

marvel muggy hands
let fold
favoring palm over knuckle

mornings after empty bedpans

bless blue bodies (toe tags, twine)
 see to offsite incinerators (safely)
 become well-acquainted (pulp)

expect some closeness of opal to eye

but you do not have to marvel

you do not have to have hope



I love you, I trust you (glitched) by Kate Glenn

feeling falling again

Ellie Ballantine

do you know what it is
to be grateful
for that easy
human-animal
carved path
through the 'wilderness'
to feel yourself
split in two
between the one leg
that wants the waist-high
thigh-graze of meadow grass
buttercup, cow-parsley, wood horsetail
to have my care full body
subsumed and outnumbered
to feel that that is often right
and the other
that cannot find its rhythm
of the easy step
without conscious thought
over the corrugated
earth of the hillside
holes are chasms
one fall and I'm out of this world

Bunny

Hanna Louise

He appeared on a Sunday in March while Sam was out getting groceries. I was digging in the vegetable patch: knees in the damp soil, gloves reeking of compost, sowing parsnip and carrot seeds beneath a blanket of ice-blue sky. Peaceful. Then I saw him. Sleek black fur and cotton tail. I had an apple in my pocket, so I bit a chunk loose and spat it back into my hand. Held it out to him. 'Here, bunny,' I whispered. Eyes wide, nose twitching, he approached. A domestic rabbit, accustomed to people and treats, he was a perfect sphere. He came closer. One fearful, hopeful, effortful hop at a time. Bunnies are sugar fiends; he couldn't resist. I placed the apple on the ground and withdrew my hand. That was all it took. He hopped the last half metre towards his prize, and I swooped, scooping him quickly, holding him firm against my chest so he couldn't kick. 'It's okay, bunny,' I soothed. His heart hammered, frantic. A prey animal caught.

'Emma, why is there a rabbit in the kitchen?' Sam asked me later.

'I found him in the vegetable patch.'

'And now he lives in our kitchen?'

'Temporarily, yes. I've posted on Nextdoor. Hopefully his owner will get in touch.' 'What does he eat? He's massive.'

'Hay.'

'That explains the hay, then,' Sam laughed. 'How's the garden coming along?'

'The root veg is in. I'll do the broad beans tomorrow. Dinner's on.'

Sam walked over to where I stood at the mirror, brushing the day from my hair. I felt his long arms wrap around me; a kiss planted on the crown of my head.

'I'm proud of you, Em.'

I met his eyes in the mirror, medicinal blue. Maybe we could be these people, I thought. The ones we were pretending to be.

Bunny sat in the loaf position, his neck dissolving into the front of his body. He spent his evening in the hay, nibbling and depositing neat piles of nuggets as he ate. I crouched with my back to the door, accepting the distance Bunny needed to feel safe. If I moved, he thumped a big back paw and bolted into a corner. I hated to frighten him. I peeled an apple into ribbons and made a trail from the hay box to where I sat, cross legged, the last pieces resting on my thigh. Only minutes later he was following the trail, chomping his way towards me. At his tiny paws on my leg – the first sign of trust – my heart soared. He took the last morsel of apple and scampered away. It was then that I noticed his feet: the red, inflamed skin surrounded by yellowed and matted patches of fur. Something rose up in me, some long-buried swell of emotion.

'Poor Bunny,' I said, 'You're safe now.'

Later, in the bathroom, I lifted my shirt to trace where the bruises used to be, where the ghost of long-ago hands still touched me in moments of solitude, the nerves in my skin remembering. It was years ago, and yet it was ongoing. Happening somewhere inside me forever.

—

Bunny and I spent the morning eating apples on the floor. I learned to lie flat and still, to place the apple pieces on my stomach and steady my breathing. With enough patience, he would trust me. I tore myself from Bunny in the afternoon to plant the broad beans and start dinner for Sam coming home. Bunny circled my feet as I chopped carrots for the stew. I dropped the peelings down for him. He ate them greedily.

Sam's key in the lock startled Bunny. He thumped and ran, wedging his round body behind the hay box. At his fright, my heart cracked in two.

'Smells good in here, Em, how was your— oh. What's wrong?'

Sam's face faltered at the sight of mine. In Bunny's panicked movement, fear had travelled into my body from his. I felt it in the heart of my gut: threat, though there was none. Frozen as if slapped, I was caught between worlds. Sam held me. Endlessly patient, he prised the truth about Bunny from my trembling lips. His sore hocks, his fearfulness; mounting evidence of neglect.

'I'm sorry Emma, but I met the owner on my way in. The guy from 42? It's his kid's rabbit. He saw your post on Nextdoor and he's going to pop over any minute.'

Sam stepped back to brush tear-matted hair from my face. Smiled. Said we could get ourselves back on track now.

'Sam, no. We can't give Bunny back to that guy. Look at his feet.'

I went to the fridge for a piece of carrot to lure Bunny with. Made Sam watch his rear end as he hopped towards me.

'He's a chunky rabbit, maybe they're pressure sores? We can mention it to the owner. I'm sure Bunny's not neglected. The guy seemed pleased to have him found. If anything, I'd say he's over loved.'

'Sam, I'm not handing him over.'

As my face hardened, a familiar look passed across his. It conjured the times we swore were behind us. The times when I was unreasonable.

'That rabbit belongs to a little girl.'

When I said nothing, Sam moved towards Bunny. I stepped between them.

'No.'

'Things have been good. We've been doing well. You've been doing well.'

Neither of us moved, neither spoke. Then came a rough knock at the door. Sam went to open it, walking backwards, his eyes never leaving mine.

'I'm Dave from number 42. You found my daughter's rabbit?'

'Yes, my wife found him.'

Sam turned to me, motioned to Bunny. Mouthed 'Bring him here.' I didn't move.

'Just a minute, mate,' said Sam.

He walked past me into the kitchen, where Bunny was hiding behind the bin, breathing rapidly. Sam contemplated the situation, unsure how to trap the panicked creature. He slipped his hoodie off and threw it over Bunny, then grabbed the bundle and returned to the doorway, where Dave held up a crate.

'Put it in here, son.'

I watched Sam bundle Bunny inside, as Dave closed the mesh door and carelessly set the crate down. Bunny thumped; my heart twinged.

'Cheers,' Dave said, offering a hand for Sam to shake. 'My daughter's been beside herself. I don't know how it escaped the hutch, but she'll be chuffed to have it back.'

It. Hutch. Saltwater streamed from my eyes. Old bruises ached. Sam waved Dave off, then gently closed the door.

'Oh, Em.'

He moved towards me, exasperated but relentlessly good natured. Enfolding me in a hug, he said he was sorry we couldn't keep Bunny, but maybe we could get a rabbit of our own. Or another pet. Any pet I liked. I sobbed into his chest, hating him for seeing the best in Dave. Loving him for seeing the best in me. Hating him again, for putting the wants of a child above the welfare of an animal. Hating myself, for resenting the little girl.

—

Midnight. The crunch of gravel underfoot. I removed my shoes, tiptoed across the driveway in socks. What had Sam said earlier? That I was projecting the past onto the present. That I was looking for something to be unhappy about. That I was choosing to sabotage myself. I seethed. At the top of their driveway, I crept round the side of the house: number 42. It was exactly like ours, with a tall gate separating the driveway from the garden. Hutch, he'd said. Still shoeless, I tiptoed across a makeshift path of loose paving stones embedded in the grass. The moon lit my way.

To my left, a shed. I hoped to find Bunny in there, sheltered from foxes and the elements, but I tried the door and found it locked. To my right, a small conservatory jutted into the space where, in our parallel life up the street, we grew vegetables. Clinging to the house, I crept round behind it. The moon disappeared, plunging the garden into darkness. I paused. Would my phone's torch attract attention? Back at home, I'd left Sam sleeping peacefully. Beautiful Sam, who would surely, in the cold light of day, come to understand. Clouds shifted; the moon returned. Emboldened, I carried on. Would Sam understand? How much could I reasonably expect of him?

Behind the conservatory, between two large pots holding the decaying remnants of plants, I found it. Damp orange wood and mesh bars, a gentle rustling within. I moved closer. Bunny sensed my movements and thumped. He tried to bolt, but there was nowhere to go. His fear became my fear. Our hearts hammered in tandem. I peered through the mesh and sighed at the neglect and squalor of it. There was an indentation in the hay where Bunny had previously sat, exposing old newspaper saturated with piss, the smell seeping into the night air. Beneath the newspaper, hard metal bars. I remembered the sores on his feet and knew that I was doing the right thing. I opened the door and reached for him. He resisted, petrified. Became a dead weight flush against the back of the hutch. Eventually I pulled him out and wrapped him in the towel

I'd tied round my shoulders. I wriggled my feet into my trainers and walked back the way I came. Past the conservatory, then the shed. Through the garden gate. Down the drive, tiptoeing, noisier now in shoes, and out onto the street.

'You're safe now, Bunny,' I whispered.

At our driveway I paused. Momentarily, I saw myself as if from above: a woman and a rabbit in the streetlamp's orange glow. I thought of Sam, of the consequences, and realised that he would not understand. He would wrench Bunny from me and return him to number 42. Thinking clearly at last and with Bunny in my arms I considered the walk to the town's border, where a night bus left every hour, on the hour. I had only my bag and the essentials it contained – purse, phone, charger. My thinking became clearer still. The hutch, Bunny's prison. The town, mine.

Sams voice inside my head: 'You were doing so well.'

Lovely Sam. My prison. To hell with doing well. Bunny's frantic heartbeat slowed along with mine, and in my arms, he grew still and calm. My resolved hardened; I turned from our driveway and walked.

To One Still Body on the Doorstep

Alexander Ambler

There's one still body on the doorstep:
There's the feather an old lover collected
Much to my jealousy, from a pheasant.
There's a ball of various hair,
Dog, mother and sister,
Clogged vacuum, strangled brush.
There's an unreleased song,

a verse

*I deleted in haste as my sister's eye
Dangled over my shoulder.
The secret out to my mother
Who doesn't like poetry. At least
Not mine.*

It plays

*The heart
Of a small girl,
That cried out to her father*

A Christmas song from years ago

*But tangled into a foreign language.
Her father did not care
For the cries
Of a wild beast.*

It's no longer beating.
There's a dog, ribs jarring,
The tail of a cat as it retraced
Its loving line against my shin.
There's the gentle hum
Of the fly I killed five times,
But it might just be the light outside
That bleaches like motorway lights
Pallid and stark.
Light that couldn't be less absent,
I will never be a father to the living
Yet it followed me home
Like a child,
One still body on the doorstep.

Reasons Why Your Meringue Is Not Peaking

Jennifer McCormack

Other hikers laughed at me because microwaves are absurdly heavy. Is there concrete in their base? It feels like that. I stopped several times to adjust my grip. When I got there though, I just plunked it down under a birch tree, not far from the banks of the lake. No faffing around with tent poles. I pressed the springy rectangular button to release the door and rolled out my ground mat and sleeping bag on the thick glass plate.

A couple from The Black Forest stopped by. He had a large round belly and shaven head and face, except for the rectangular beard protruding from the end of his chin. The tall woman at his side with the high ponytail and neon yellow bum bag was glowering at me, even if she didn't mean to. He opened by asking about the model, as if this was the counter at Argos. I told him what I could. He got to the point: being small offers me a different genre of possibilities, true, but it's unhealthy to overnight inside a microwave, even one that's disconnected. I said that was why I was airing it out, but they just stood there, as if the matter was unresolved. I asked them if they were going to report me, but he said this was about wellbeing. The beard bobbed up and down as his mouth moved. I wanted to ask them about it, to understand its role in their relationship, but I didn't have a reason to back up the question. What I have in bucketloads is idle curiosity. I shifted my attention to a mosquito bite on my leg and they moved along.

A family of five from Liverpool stopped on their way to the camp shop. The dad said I would wake up smelling like chicken tikka masala. I felt an affinity with the teenage daughter. She said: And whose fault would that be? Everyone pointed at everyone else and I was a part of their in-joke. See you later, they said.

A Californian guy that was walking around barefoot said this was everywhere back home. I was inadvertently internalising an external pressure to minimise my existence because I have been made to believe I am not worthy of more. I asked him what he thought I should do. He said I should consciously extend myself. Then he stretched out his long arms to the sky, turning his hands at the wrists, fingers outspread, like a conductor of the universe. So, I went into the busy kitchen and dining area, sat on one chair and put my feet up on another. No one seemed to notice.

My phone rang then. My brother. Dad had taken a turn for the worse and I needed to drive to the hospital *like now*.

I told him that I sold my car eight months ago. I didn't mention that I lost my license. He said I am sensitive, so he needed to prepare me because it looked like Dad had been in an accident with all the bruising and swelling, but that was from the tubes and stuff to keep him breathing. Then he wept and I waited.

After a time, I realised it would make sense for me to start packing. Holding the phone to my ear with my shoulder, I folded up the blanket I had been sitting on and gathered my clothes and snacks.

At the entrance to the campsite I considered stealing a bicycle to get to the bus stop quicker.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

"I'm wondering if I should nick a bike," I said.

"Do it."

"The only one that's unlocked is a kid's."

"Oh."

"Yeah. I'll walk."

I heard him sniffing for most of the bus journey. I blew my nose into the cuff of my fleece and folded it. Can you visit a hospital wearing snotty clothes? This was not like him at all, to agree to me stealing a bike. As if our fates were some kind of see-saw, I was infused with a sense of duty. I was going to be more reliable from now on, that is, until I caught myself a moment later, for turning this into an opportunity for betterment. On the outskirts of town, his end went completely quiet.

Naturally, I left my microwave by the lake that day and for all I know it is still there. I revisit it in dreams and still find things that I have left behind. I know these things to be mine though I have, in truth, never owned them. I left an original Hockney swimming pool hanging on its rusty wall, wondering, as I walked away, just how much it was worth. I left a border collie pup there, lying fast asleep on my navy nylon sleeping bag, hoping some camper might take care of her. Most recently, I left a pavlova strewn with pomegranate seeds, on one of the hottest days in July. I had baked it for my brother's birthday. This was of note since I gave up making meringue years ago, suspecting mine failed to peak for two or more of the reasons on the list I googled. The abandoned microwave became a display case for my missteps; a 35lb Pandora's box of regret that I humphed to the middle of nowhere, for the promise of an easy life.

Off the Beaten Track: On the Inevitability of Confronting Grief

Esraa Husain

Foam and fuzz
Expulsion to afloat,
The sky is dark with broken ships
Imprints in the sand,
My frustration gleams and invokes
Descending into memories of magic,
Waking up
Clouded with blues,
Agents of the past, untamed
Sweaty
Looking at the walls to establish a beam of familiarity, and indeed, this is the room,
These are my arms,
Indeed, she has passed away.
We are no longer at the Al Khiran beach
awaiting the sun to sleep.

A Portrait

Nafsika Iadas

Perhaps I build you out of memory-

A ticking, whirring thing,

Coated in gossamer flesh,

Wires protrude, blue as veins around your eyes and neck.

Perhaps not quite solid,

A vague outline of what can be,

What, with time, may come to pass,

And so I weave thin strips of mind,

Shredded silks to form your hair.

Perhaps I borrow from Lalique's clock-work miracles of
quartz and brass,

And set them there, just right.

Perhaps you are alive-

Alive!

Should I exclaim as he once did,

From the pages of a scrunched-up heart dressed in velvets?

Will I come to regret you as he did?

But, I would not spurn you,

You whose brass and tin whirrs in my hands

And oil drips down to stain them black.

Perhaps there is a spark in your eye,

Should I address you?

You whose entire world is my leaking attic,

Whose golden cheeks shine heavenly

In the shafts of light that flutter through the rotting boards.

Is it right to keep you here,

My magical beauty?

The world bays for your blood,

But are you yourself not distant?

A distant dream,

Bolted together from flights of fleeting fancy.

I will find more things to bring you,

More memories to weave you from,

Soon you will contain them all,

I will lie a dormant narcissus at your feet-

Oh, but then you will be beautiful.

Aspect

Prarthana Benjamin

2 a.m. Thursday, the 2nd of March

I unplugged myself from K.I.N.G, but its dim, blinking light looked back at me in a judgment that challenged my own mother's. I thought of my mother then, the way she would hold me whenever I'd bawl my eyes out. As I lay in the steel bathtub in Rook's basement that reeked of pure sadness, I felt this intense longing. Who knew for what? There is never a point in life where I felt like I knew what I was doing. That's why, when the opportunity presented itself, I had to. The alternative would have been worse. So much worse. I had to see how it would play out if I dedicated my energy to something useful.

1 p.m. Thursday, the 2nd of March

June-bug was on the bed texting her ex. I knew she was texting him, but fuck, I just wanted to know why she wanted to talk to that asshole when I was right here. He had always gaslit her into thinking that she was doing something wrong, all the time. Why were they still friends? What was he giving her that I wasn't? Maybe I was just in a bad mood. My watch buzzed. A little notification popped up on the screen saying, "Noon Shift." I groaned. June-bug looked at me as if she knew exactly what was running through my mind.

"Alex, if you keep up that mood, it is going to seep through these sheets right into my soul."

Her words burned through me. I didn't feel much these days, but that word she used. 'Soul.' I think the only remnants of whatever that was were being eaten away, broken off, like rubble. I couldn't even remember when I had touched a wall last. You know, when you are a kid, and you touch a wall outside, and it is chalky, and you get that white stuff that transfers onto your hand? I wanted to feel that again; I knew I could feel it, but I couldn't feel it.

"Alex, babe, come on, talk to me," June-bug said. Her eyes were beautiful. I have never seen eyes like that after my encounter with K.I.N.G. On people, they just look hollow. June's had this depth to them that felt like an ocean; it was deep, it was green, but murky with a brown tinge. Almost like algae that used to grow on the pond outside dad's house. Where was Dad again?

"Alex!" June shouted.

"Sorry, June-bug, I'm in my head again."

"When are you not?" she said. The room smelled sad again; it smelled like that fucking bathtub.

3 months ago

4 p.m. on Monday, the 22nd of June, after class

Rook looked at me like a little kid; he was high out of his mind, don't get me wrong. But he had this whimsical wonder about him that reminded me of Cile. She just turned six, but man, was she smart. She had also grown a whole foot taller than when I saw her last. Whenever I told her a fact of something scientific or historic, she'd look at me like I had blown her little mind. I wish Rook were that easy to impress.

"Come on, take a puff, it'll be wonderful. Absolutely. Wonderful," he said, handing me his bong. The water in that looked vile, stagnant. I bet something was truly growing in there.

"Fuck it," I said, taking a long puff. The water gurgled, and the smoke entered my lungs, burning them slightly, going right through to my head. I sat back and looked at the ceiling. It looked like a Van Gogh painting; It looked like what he painted a second before he went nuts and chopped off his ear. It looked absolutely wonderful. "You were right, you fucker," I told Rook.

"I always am," he said, chuckling, pulling the bong out of my grasp.

"You doing okay, bud?" he asked. His childlike face had turned dark, like shadows had crept up his body and settled onto the crook of his nose, dipping down his cupid's bow and drowning into his mouth.

"Why wouldn't I be?" I said, staring back at him. Trying to hide from that darkness that emanated from him.

"I don't know. Because you never talk about it? Because you never told me after it happened, and then you never took me or June to the funeral? You didn't take your own fucking girlfriend, Alex."

"He wouldn't have wanted her there," I said. "You know he was a raging homophobe."

"Who? Your old man?" Rook said sarcastically and then changed his tone of voice. "Of course I know that. But that's the thing about dead people, they don't have a say in your life once they are dead."

"Yeah, you're right, I guess I still am hiding behind that excuse. I just love you and June-bug, and I don't want to mix business with pleasure."

"I'm pleasure, am I?" Rook said, raising his brows.

"Of course, you are, you goober," I snatched the bong from him, taking another long puff. The walls went all starry night again.

4 a.m. Friday, the 3rd of March

K.I.N.G pinged me again. I don't know what it could want from me this time. My brain feels a little bit like mush, probably because June kissed me goodbye, and I felt heady and warm inside. I immediately threw up after because I couldn't even breathe when she kissed me, something she has done many times before. Her tongue felt different, her mouth weirdly shaped. I don't know how to describe it, but when my hands slide down her back, it felt like those hands aren't mine, like her body isn't really there. This was moments after I got pinged. But as I walked to Rook's place, the rain outside was really coming down. At least I would be wet before I got into the bath.

Usually, when I got in, it felt all sludgy and strange, and I questioned everything. But the wet feeling. God, I hate it, God, it felt like there was no god. The other week, Cile told me that humans can't feel wetness really, that it isn't really within our tactile perception at all. She said that we could only feel the temperature of something. Smart little shit. I remember the time when I used to tell her all the facts.

I walked past the weird-looking garden gnomes on Rook's mum's lawn, and they made me feel isolated. I don't even know why. Maybe because it felt like I was in a different place again. The grass was turning brown, just as the trees everywhere were. Even the weather was getting colder.

I rang his godawful doorbell; it made the same weird noise it always made, so grating and tinny, and I wanted to pull open the wiring and pluck the fucking thing out.

"Sup," Rook said when he opened the door. "Back so soon?"

"I don't know, bro," I said, taking my soaked jacket off. "The thing keeps pinging me."

"Well, who is to blame for that?" he said. I wanted to ball up my fists, swing a punch, and break his nose right there and then. But I shoved past him towards the basement.

"Alex," he said, clutching the back of my arm. "Be careful, please."

"I'm just trying to live." I shrugged him off and walked down his decrepit stairs into hell.

"Welcome back, Alex," K.I.N.G said. It stared at me through its avatar, a tall man in a top hat. He had this air about him that felt like he knew how to play ball. I think I had seen K.I.N.G enough times by now to know that it really couldn't care less about whether I came back to its dominion.

Pleasure as I have never felt before filled the void. I felt whole again.

"Good day," I said. I mean, I wanted to call it a motherfucker, but I couldn't because it was my choice to come back here. Every time I got into this sad, steel tub, it was my legs that walked to Rook's house and my arms that plugged K.I.N.G in.

"I think I should get right to it, to keep you from your friends and family," it said.

I snorted. What friends and family? All I had was June and Rook, and even that was hanging on by a thread.

"Sure," I spoke. Hit me with your best shot."

"Today, you will be version 502. You will go out into the world and see how beautiful everything is. See how tall the trees are, marvel at their old age. See the blue skies and think about the universe's magnificent creations. You will take in the world and its beauty. You will collect that Perspective for me."

I had collected 501 Perspectives for K.I.N.G so far. All of them had made me feel like the muscles and sinews were crawling out of my skin. Like my head was going to screw off my shoulders. And even though Perspective 502 seemed positive, I knew that it would feel just as bad. If not worse. But I would feel. So, there was that.

"Alright, will I remember it this time?" I asked it.

It laughed with a tone that was tinged with amusement. "Don't pretend that you have forgotten all those other times."

"I forget because my brain can't store the horrors you made me see," I told K.I.N.G. "I am saturated."

I feel a pain take over the pleasure. As long as Aspect flowed in my veins, I felt like a person. Fuck. It's why I kept coming back.

"Please," I said. "Give it back."

I felt the Aspect flow in. It felt cold and warm all at once. I was in my body, but I was also around it.

"You will collect Perspective for me," it said in the same monotone voice. "Whether you remember or not is not my concern. You agreed to this. I provide you with Aspect, and you bring me perceptions."

"Perspective," I said, reiterating.

"Is it not the same?" it asked me, in its lifeless voice.

"Of course not," I said. "Perception is how you feel things, and perspective is how you see things."

"What is the difference?" it asked me, blinking again.

"It doesn't matter," I said. "Just give me my next dose and get me out of here."

It nodded, turning to me with a face that felt like the crumbling bricks I saw outside. It looked at me ruinously. The feeling was replaced with pure ecstasy, as the Aspect trickled down my spine, diffusing into the thousand venules of my body.

5 a.m. Friday, the 3rd of March

I looked down at my naked body in the sad tub. It felt beautiful. I had never seen my body in this way. In fact, I was always bothered by how it looked. When I was in high school, and we were in lockers after gym class, I'd hold my hands up to my chest so the other girls couldn't see. But I looked at them and wondered why I had ever felt that way before. Was that how June-bug saw me? What a wonder, what a joy. Fuck! June-bug. I promised her I would drive her to her piano recital. She had been practising Liszt's La Campanella for weeks and was finally performing it with the other concert pianists at the School of Art.

God, June-bug was probably the prettiest person on the whole planet. She was one of the most talented people I had ever met, too. The way her fingers moved across the piano made me feel all gooey inside, like I had just drunk an expensive red wine at some Italian restaurant. I should have taken her out to a nice dinner before the concert. Or maybe made plans for after? Fuck, she was such a good partner. I needed to step up my game. Bigtime.

I could feel the Aspect pumping in, and I took one deep breath before pulling the plug out of the base of my spine. I winced. It never got any easier with time.

"Are you going to tell her?" Rook asked me from the corner of the room.

"You perv," I said back. "I'm fully naked, get the fuck out of here."

"I genuinely do not care if you are naked. I think the fact that I'm worried about your health takes precedence."

"Look," I said, smiling, and reaching out for the grubby towel that was resting on the back of a chair, "If I tell her now, it will fuck up her headspace. She has been practising so hard. She is literally accompanying a great violinist on his tour in the city, so this is a big opportunity for her. If I tell her, then I risk both her sanity and mine."

"She suspects something is wrong," Rook said. His brow was furrowed, and he looked like the shadows were coming back to crawl through his mouth, along his tongue, down his oesophagus. And then he was going to regurgitate it back up again. That darkness didn't belong in there; it needed to be replaced. Maybe with something warm like sunshine?

"No, No," I said. "It will all be okay; she will find out when she needs to."

He didn't look convinced. "You want some of my mum's leftover spaghetti bolognese?"

I felt my stomach growl as I put on my jeans. "Sure thing."

7 p.m., the same day

I don't think I had worn a dress or tights since I had been in high school. It was making me squirm. The hundreds of eyes around the room felt like they were glued on me, even though the steady timbre of violin strings hummed beautifully on the stage. I ignored the noise and focused on June-bug as she accompanied the orchestra; she looked so beautiful, her nose fixated on the sheet music in front of her.

My watch pinged.

No, not right now, I said to myself. My brain felt nice here. I was in love with my girlfriend; she was talented. I was here to support her; I didn't need anything else.

My watch pinged again. I looked at it with hesitation. The watch face read: "Night shift."

Clicked the button on the side to turn it off. No.

It pinged again.

I focused on the chorus of violas as they rose to a crescendo, as the sounds enveloped me. My breath quickened.

My eyes grew dark as words formed in front of my eyes, words that shouldn't have been there.

"Malfunction."

My body started to heave. My legs felt a thousand times heavier. My throat grew parched. The whole room went quiet as June-bug entered the section of the piece with her solo. All I heard were the quiet sounds of the C major chords as they ascended and descended the keys.

The big red letters thrust me into the present again. "Malfunction."

My body started to heave. My legs felt a thousand times heavier. My throat grew parched. The whole room went quiet as June-bug entered the section of the piece with her solo. All I heard were the quiet sounds of the C major chords as they ascended and descended the keys.

The big red letters thrust me into the present again. "Malfunction."

The steady controlled sounds of the piano were replaced by sirens, louds and engorging.

"Stop it!" I yelled. "Please stop it."

It got louder. My watch kept pinging.

I stood up, unable to take it. The piano stopped. And I think my heart did too. Everything went black.

9 a.m. Saturday, the 4th of March

Something was plugged into me, but it wasn't K.I.N.G. Ah, an I.V drip. If only that were enough. I heard Rook yelling. Why was the guy always yelling?

"You don't understand, she needs Aspect! This I.V shit isn't going to help at all. I've reset her, but she doesn't have much juice left. I have to get her back to my place, or something worse will happen, trust me."

"Sir, are you on any medications right now?" a woman's voice asked Rook in the corner of my eye.

"Yes, but that doesn't matter, look, June, tell her that I am a close friend, that I know what I am talking about."

Silence.

"I, er, can you please give us a minute?" June-bug's sweet voice said, shakingly. "I will get back to you in a moment. I just need to discuss with my friend here what the best option is."

I tried to speak, but I noticed a tube down my throat. So, I just listened.

"What the fuck is going on?" June-bug asked Rook.

"It's a long story, and I don't know if she wants me to tell you."

"What the is that supposed to mean?" June-bug said back. "She is literally in critical care getting treated for drug overdose, cardiac arrest, and whatever the fuck else. I need to know right now what Aspect or whatever the heck you said means. I need answers. Now."

I moved my hands, and the heart monitor started beeping. A sign of life! How wonderful. If only I could feel that.

"Oh, my word, she's woken up," Rook said. They both ran over, and June looked so disappointed. I wished I had died and never woken up to encounter this.

"Wait, let me get the nurse," June said.

"No, wait a sec, June. Alex, can I tell her?" Rook asked me, I realised.

I didn't know why he was suddenly being so respectful of my wishes, but I nodded my head as much as I could. I was fucked anyway. I had interrupted June's recital, and I was probably going to malfunction and overload if Rook didn't get me back home in time.

"How about I just show you?" Rook said. "I promise this isn't some drug overdose. Please let's get her out of here. Please?" he begged. He sounded so desperate that June gave in.

"Okay. But I trust you both, that's the only reason I am agreeing to take her out of this emergency room. You promise it will be fine."

"June," Rook said, as he took her hands into his, "We need to go now."

"Okay. Let me get the nurse," June said.

11 a.m. the same day

June was sobbing, tears rolled down her soft cheeks, onto her concert-black blouse.

I was in terrible pain because my body was decomposing without Aspect, but somehow looking at her that way made me feel. Happy? Was it finally relief that she knew my secret?

“So, what, that’s it?” June said between sobs, “Alex’s body isn’t hers anymore?”

“Well, it is, but it is only the body that is hers. The mind is separate; it’s this machine. K.I.N.G.”

“Why is it called K.I.N.G?” June asked

“I don’t know,” I said, settling into the tub, “thought it sounded all cyberpunk-y. It doesn’t stand for anything really.”

June looked like she was going to kill someone. It sucked that I was already dead.

“When I go into its dominion, I get Aspect, which keeps me alive and makes my body function. It makes my heartbeat, my brain keeps up the commands with the synapses, etcetera... But when I go in, I have to collect data for it. It calls it Perspective. It learns more and more how to be a person. And one day, I’ll be Alex again.”

“When did she die?” June said.

“Last year,” Rook said, “the weed we had was laced with fentanyl. She overdosed, and her heart stopped. I tried everything, and I panicked. So, I plugged her into it. I didn’t think it would be ready, but it was, and it brought her body back, but her mind is something else. Somewhere else.

“Oh, Alex,” June said.

“Oh, June-bug,” I said. “You’re so pretty.”

She pushed past Rook and reached down into the tub. I thought she would kiss me, but she slapped me across my face. The coldness of the water was a stark difference from the heat that was spreading on my cheek. I wish I could have felt the full pain of it, but it was just a light touch. I was losing sensation.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

June ignored me. She turned to Rook. “You made this? Both of you? How? Why?”

“It started as an experiment, then it turned into an obsession. Alex made this whole thing.”

Rook and June-bug stared at my beautiful creation. Wires dropped down from the ceiling like a spider’s web. It was a dire invention, looking like some poor insect had flown too far straight into a terrible fate. The wires were plugged into a wall of screens that lit up in their eyes. The neon glow of the room danced around my vision, and all I could feel was pure joy. They stared with my code running on the machines, Aspect in its pure form, learning, growing, teaching itself how to make the body be. The silence was occasionally interrupted by the sloshing of the bathtub water.

“It was all code at first, but as K.I.N.G. started to embody that code, it started to become obsessed with itself? Suddenly, I was a body, but not for myself. I’m trapped, June. It’s just a silly joke!”

June’s tears didn’t stop. I could only laugh. Why was everything so magnificent? My two best friends were in this room; they understood me, understood what I had to do. This was my favourite Perspective, I had never felt so.... free.

I started feeling a surge of that pain again, and my vision started to go blurry once more. The reset only lasted a few hours. I needed more Aspect, or I would be lost forever.

I looked at June, her face was pale, it looked concerned but also shocked. It looked more beautiful than it had ever looked before. I reached behind my head for the main wire. I looked up at the ceiling. The wires all curled to look like Van Gogh’s Almond Blossom painting. It’s flowers, performing a delicate song.

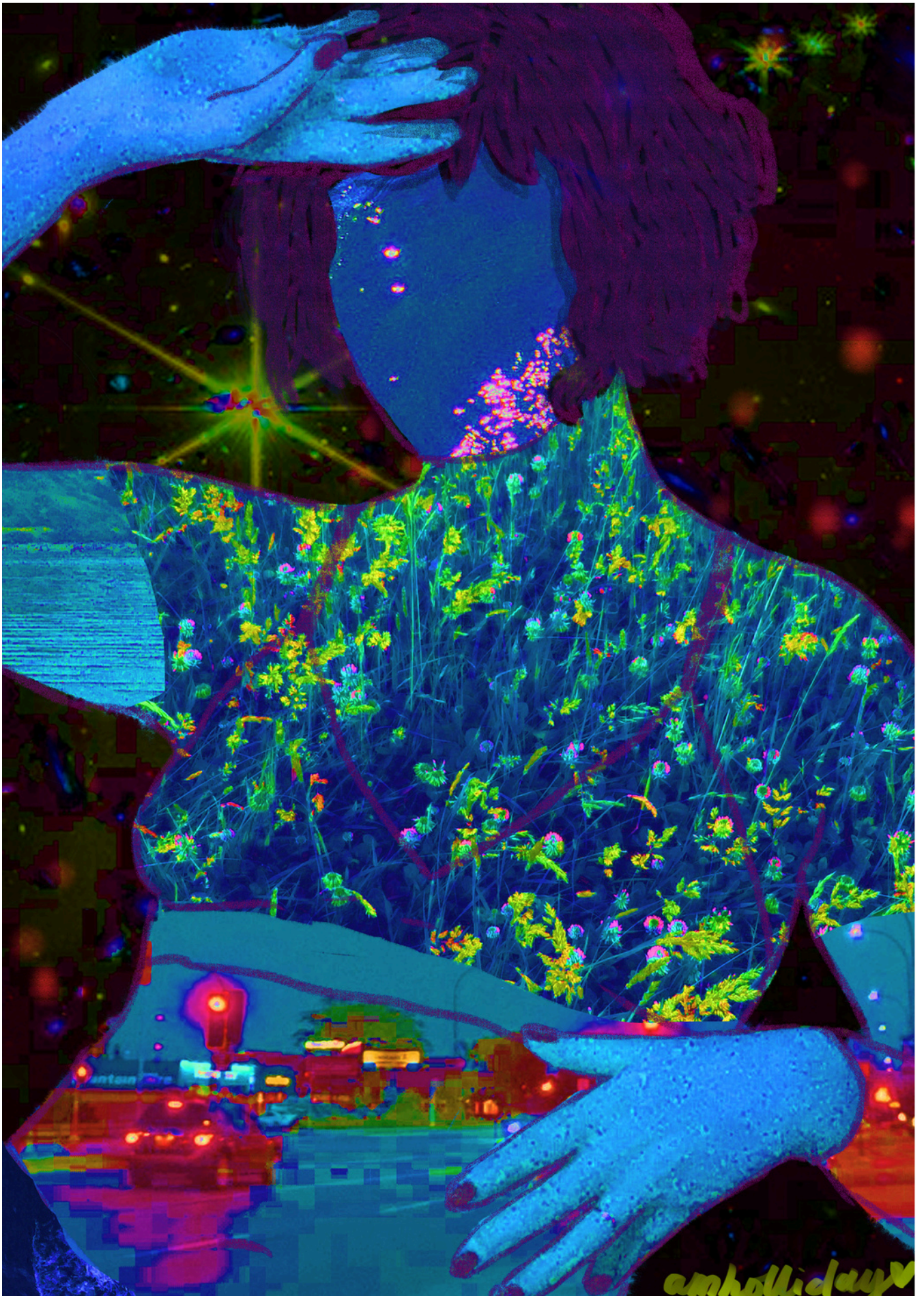
I plugged it into myself.

I was alive again.

now/and then/and now

Ellie Ballantine

now / and then
grey sun breaks meekly
over the hills from my bed
pulse low, I strive
the uncanny length
of my body
upright
to see
when it is over
I will run
holding
the thick stuff
of the outside air
in my hand
closed tight around
time lived-lightly



like a body by Alison Holliday

Billy

Gerard Campbell

When Billy arrived for his haircut, the children got excited, as if something dangerous was about to happen. Their father, James, had told them stories about Billy, but he wasn't concerned, he knew how to handle him. He went to the wooden box, marked in felt tip "Billy's Clippers", on his shelf in the wee back room off the scullery.

He lifted an old Derry Journal and spread it out on the lino in front of the range, a creamy yellow Stanley No. 8. There was a spit and a hiss, as the kettle was moved along its polished black top onto the heat for Billy's shave. Then he placed a wooden chair in the middle of the papers he'd just spread.

"Right, Billy, I'll cut your hair first, and then I'll shave you."

"Grand, James. Where do you want me?"

"Just here will do, Billy." James placed his hand on the back of the chair he'd just set in the middle of the floor.

Billy swallowed the last of his tea and rose slowly to his feet from the chair beside the range. The scone-bread and butter lay uneaten. As he stood, his trousers flapped around his matchstick legs, a binding cord holding them up around a narrow waist. His oversized coat hung from bony shoulders. As he straightened, a whiff of whiskey drifted off him, sweet like rich Christmas cake. He grappled in his pocket to find his Silvermints; he was never without a packet.

"Would the weans take a mint, James?" he asked, his frail fingers with coarse nails tugging back the blue-and-silver wrapping.

"No, they're grand, Billy. Sure, they're going to get their dinner soon."

And to distract him further:

"Where have you been today, Billy?"

"I was at the doctor's."

"Aye? And what did you want at the doctors?"

"To get him to look at my throat."

"And did he?"

"He did, but he's no damned use," Billy sparked.

"How's that?"

“He said he could see nothing.”

“And?”

“I told him that was strange, and he asked me why that was! So I just told him: ‘Look, Doctor, there’s a farm of land and two Massey Ferguson tractors down that throat, and you can see nothing. That’s hellish strange, don’t you think?’”

“Jeepers, Billy. He wouldn’t like that”, glaring at the children who had started to giggle.

At that, Billy opened his brown overcoat, glazed with age, and pulled out a half-bottle of Jameson’s. He undid the cork and took a quick swig. He offered it to James, who took it off him for a moment and then handed it back untouched.

“You’re some man, Billy. What are we going to do with you?”

There was a pause as Billy considered this, and then his reply:

“Just bury me clean, James. Bury me clean.”

James frowned at this. In all the years he’d dealt with Billy, he hadn’t heard him talk like that.

He finished Billy’s haircut and then shaved his grey grizzle of a beard, revealing the ruddy, veined cheeks beneath. He put Billy back on the chair beside the range, gave him more tea, and urged him to eat some scone.

He folded the papers around the clippings of Billy’s dirty grey hair on the floor, lifted the lid on the range, and pushed the papers down into the flames. He shut the front of the range to lessen the acrid, sulphurous smell of the burning hair.

James wrapped a couple of pieces of scone bread and butter in a loaf paper. Billy put it into the big pocket of his coat and went on his way, down to his wee house, the remains of the farm he had once owned.

He would visit James for one more haircut and shave before winter set in, a winter he wouldn’t weather. His funeral was attended by neighbours, good, kind neighbours. James stood by his grave and wondered about the visit to the doctor.

He remembered Billy’s voice as he cut his hair that day.

“Just bury me clean, James. Bury me clean.”

Moved in Death

Nafsika Iadas

Crawl, squelch, squeal,
Mud, death, peal.
Noise upon noise, corpse upon sod.
Worms crawl in and out and on,
Between the skin and through the eye.
Dying breath, dust to ash,
Muscles still convulse and thrash,
Through the coffin, through the clothes,

Food for mice, and things that swarm,
Squirm, squelch, crawl, and squeeze,
My bones below the earth will freeze.
Leave a dying woman be:
Do not linger, do not bow,
Do not sit and wonder how.

Ailsa Craig's Elect

Tom Rae

(Inspired by, The Curlers (1835) by Sir George Hervey - National Gallery of Scotland)

Sixty million years on and polished granite
tingles, senses again molten creation through the rime,
in the bloodless palm, the chilled caress, of
an old man, hunkering, to
send his stone spinning across an icy loch.
Eyes glinting like blue-hone granitoids,
he prays for the swishing twigs
sure-footed grandsons use to scourge the ice.

Rock remembers the slow ardour of lava,
flows towards the corybantic huddle
of tousled toories, knee-creaks and backs bent
in an ecstasy of parish bonspiel,
blind to the status of a neighbour's shoes.

It takes ice to thaw these plutonic folk
Jock Tamson's Bairns, the Scots at play, at last,
lost in skirling feet, un-balletic lurches
of faith, 'til work and Sabbaths soon return,
sure as Hell waits to melt this ice, below.

Long after Bruegel's hunters in the snow
abandoned shivery, ice-pond games of quoits
we have kept our Covenant with stone and ice,
loving the touch of Ailsa Craig's Elect,
smooth, fissure-less, mocking of frost or chip.
Sure against biters, hack-weight takeouts, guards,
God's wintry eye will see them home.
Besomed over oceans, they'll migrate,
these rocks now cold that once were molten stone.

Of lowest frequency

Leilani Taneus-Miller

It might be said on radio
five people died
after the hurricane in the land slide

A little boy
a girl unnamed dead
pulled into the water with the coconut trees

It might be said on radio
their mother died
days before the storm

Eating dirt to save the goat bones
for the same children
suckled by the tempest's eye

It might be said on radio
they swirled with the lumber
the rusted roof and the goat with licked neck.

Entomologia Proceedings.
Vol. 22, No. 2. April 24th, 1864.

The Cryptic Nest of *Bombus hypnorum* and *Bombus cryptofatum*.
EDITH WHITBY.

My submission to the *Entomologia Proceedings* is a matter of urgent scientific necessity. I recorded the landing activities of white-tailed humblebees on *Anemone coronaria* (common name poppy anemones), with a particular focus on colour preference. I identified six primarily active species: the *Bombus terrestris*, the *Bombus lucorum*, the *Bombus ruderals*, the *Bombus hortorum*, the *Bombus hypnorum*, and one species with which I am still grappling.

I was markedly interested in the hyper-activity of the *Bombus hypnorum*, which can be delineated by its lack of stripes and high propensity for melanism, and in the speciation of the unfamiliar bee. I have consulted colleagues (namely, Mr. Becker and Mr. Quincy of London's Naturalist Institute), who are convinced this is a matter of my own unrefined species identification. I had found their opinion satisfactory, until I happened upon a cryptic nest of *Bombus hypnorum*, found, as their common name (Tree humblebee) suggests, in a minor hollow of an ash tree on my property. I first spent six fortnights observing their behaviour within my garden, and then, over a single fortnight, I displaced the hive from the ash—attempting to preserve the nest in which I found them—and moved them into the Institute's greenhouse (despite certain protestations from esteemed colleagues). The ease of close observation and comparison within the greenhouse enabled me to discover a clear distinction between

Bombus hypnorum and an undoubtably separate species. While it shares some characteristics of *Bombus hypnorum*—melanistic, with a fluffy yellow abdomen—it has fabulous green eyes reminiscent of the *Anthophora bimaculata*. Unlike the standard yellow pollen sacs, the green-eyed species' sacs are dichromatic red; their wings are not rotated and twisted, like the substantial majority of the Apidae family, but are disproportionately long and elegant, reminiscent of those of a dragonfly. They reminded me remarkably of the faeries found in Richard Dadd's extraordinary paintings: so minute, so hybridized. Upon this observation, my esteemed colleagues, subscribing to the frequent (and, I believe, unfair) judgement of Dadd as a madman, rejected my comparison outright. And yet, I was unable to separate Dadd's proclivities towards the dark, the subversive, and the supernatural from my view of this particular humblebee(s). For these features, I am suggesting the species name *Bombus cryptofatum*, belonging to the genus *Bombus*, and derivative of their cryptic behaviors and faery-like appearance.

Undoubtedly, phenotypical similarities alone would not warrant the demarcation of a new species. However, considering these traits alongside the unique behaviour of the *Bombus cryptofatum* (as I will refer to them henceforth) justify continued research.

The organization of the hybridized hive is unlike any I have personally observed. An individual of the *Bombus cryptofatum* species seems to be occupying the queen capacity, with *Bombus hypnorum* sequestered to working and drone roles. The capacities of working and drone humblebees in this hive appear consistent with the greater *Bombus* genus. Upon observing the comb, drone caps appear rounded and individualized, whereas worker caps are small, flat, and expand to neighboring comb. Conversely, the buzz of pollination, which I have grown to see as a great comfort and accompaniment to my garden, was, at first, scarcely present. The working *Bombus hypnorum* population moved whisper-quiet from poppy to hive. How unnerving; for the presence of the *Bombus hypnorum* has so substantially increased (see Table 1), superseding all other bee activity at the field site, and yet, especially upon their removal, my garden felt less alive than I can ever recall! It is only when the queen *Bombus cryptofatum* is present (which, as Table 1 illustrates, is rare) that I can hear their rattling, and only so when they are in the heart of the *Anemone coronaria*. It is unclear to me, at this stage, how reproduction within the hive will be affected by the proximity of the two species.

However, the presence of worker and drone bees during the queen's mating traverses is divergent and substantiates the critical need for research. As the data presented in the forthcoming article will indicate, *Bombus hypnorum* activity at my field site starkly increased.

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Alongside the emerging discovery of the *Bombus cryptofatum*—and their new home within the Institute's greenhouse—there are grounds to investigate the potential relationship between these species; a relationship which might profoundly impact the field of entomology. What might we—as scientists, and those concerned with the generationally imperative existence of humblebee colonies—make of this species' invasion, and its parasitic domination of one of the most populated species of humblebees in the United Kingdom?

Table 1. Weekly, for twelve weeks, I counted the number of bee landings across six different species and averaged their landing values. I posit that a minority of all sightings, of melanistic white-tailed humblebees specifically, were *Bombus cryptofatum*. The success of their species is dependent on their discretion and on the subjugation of other species. Based on the preliminary data, I hypothesize that *Bombus cryptofatum* has a parasitic relationship with *Bombus hypnorum*.

	Blue	White	Red	Purple	Total Landings
<i>Bombus terrestris</i>	72	21	0	17	110
<i>Bombus lucorum</i>	32	64	2	16	114
<i>Bombus hypnorum</i>	8	11	95	53	167
<i>Bombus hortorum</i>	36	44	5	36	121
<i>Bombus ruderatus</i>	50	37	0	4	91
<i>Bombus cryptofatum</i>	2	2	11	3	18

As found in Whitby's field journal, a year prior to her publication in *Entomologia Proceedings*.
May 19th, 1863.

I spent another six hours in my garden observing humblebee activity around the *Anemone coronaria*. I am lucky enough to enjoy a spectrum of poppy colours in my garden, which has only benefitted my research and my mental clarity. I have reflected many times upon my preference of the red buds; I often wonder if, were it not for this proclivity, I would not have observed the apparentia of the green-eyed bee. Today, I once again encountered the green-eyed bee lingering around one of the red buds. I am quite certain that it is not the *Anthophora bimaculate*, as it does not have the tell-tale yellow stripes of the quintessential British humblebee. I still struggle to delineate the *Bombus hypnorum* and the green-eyed bee; were it not for its eyes, and its peculiar wings, I am not sure I would be able to somatically distinguish the two at all. I cannot even conclusively state if the green-eyed bee is an individual or one of a few *Bombus hypnorum* with an atypical phenotype.

Beginning tomorrow, I aim to observe the phenotypes of the *Bombus hypnorum* and the green-eyed bee, alongside a few control species in the *Bombus* genus. Yesterday, while conducting maintenance on the garden, I found the decapitated head of a *Bombus hypnorum*; it looked like the specimens that I observed within the Institute. Mr. Becker explained during that they occasionally decapitated the heads of pollinators in their care to ensure scientifically accurate illustrations for publishing. I wish sorely that the Institute had agreed to further assist in my research. The gentlemen were extremely dissuasive, and I have thus sworn off collaborators at this juncture.

¹I believe that the queen *Bombus cryptofatum* only leaves the hive during her nuptial flights, inspiring questions about the *Bombus hypnorum*'s proximity during mating periods.

However, this methodology—of stilling humblebees long enough to accurately observe the intricacies of its phenotype—might prove most useful in differentiating the *Bombus hypnorum* and the green-eyed bee. It will be a matter of getting close enough to catch it; I will need to carry my net more consistently, as such. This week, I shall:

- Record a list of all *Bombus* species that visit the *Anemone coronaria* to set control groups;
- Institute a daily survey for other decapitated heads;
- Illustrate the *Bombus hypnorum* specimen according to the Institute's guidelines; and
- Catch and behead (?) the green-eyed bee.

As found in Whitby's field journal, shortly before publication in *Entomologia Proceedings*.

March 20th, 1864.

I have successfully relocated the cryptic nest into the Institute's greenhouse. Mr. Becker gawked, could hardly speak, and spent the evening huffing and puffing about the place; Mr. Quincy alluded to presenting a complaint to the Governing Board in an effort to have my membership revoked. I feel that I am left with no other choice to attempt to publish my work preliminarily—perhaps if my work is considered by a separately accredited body, it might be considered credible enough to continue my research. I am quite assured in my methodology and believe that my research thus far will prove viable for publication.

I now long for the moments of silence, wherein the *Bombus hypnorum* silently flitted between the *Anemone coronaria*. Since their displacement, the humblebees have caused a true ruckus, unable to acclimate into their new housing. I have aimed to simulate their natural environment: I planted ten beds of red and purple poppies each, attempt to control the greenhouse's rampant humidity, and pull dark curtains over their observation cave during the evening hours. The poppies, similarly, have not fared well in the greenhouse (especially the red!). When I entered this morning, I could smell the root rot—I will need to refurbish their beds quickly. I am yet to settle on how to moderate the humidity enough to sustain weeks of experimentation. By now, I would have consulted Mr. Quincy—as I believe him to be the most skilled botanist of the Institute—but he made it quite clear that he would have nothing to do with this experiment.

I have managed to secure a pinning kit for the queen *Bombus cryptofatum*, though it involved a fair bit of sneaking, far more than I typically feel comfortable doing. However, I know no other way forward. I am going to spend the next two fortnights (if I can bare the buzzing) observing the hive's current behaviour; then, I will isolate the queen and observe for another two; and finally, I will behead the queen to observe her under the Institute's newest microscope. Until then, I shall:

- Contact a botanist (external to the Institute) for guidance on the *Anemone coronaria*;
- Re-illustrate the *Bombus hypnorum* after one week's time;
- Attempt to quantify the novel, unrelenting buzz of the hive; and
- Closely monitor the queen's activities, pending her eventual dissection.

The Motherland is Foreign

Gabriela Ananias de Oliveira

The empire we built is crumbling in your arms,
Mother, you cannot be our own Prometheus
Fire stolen will never be ours.
Mother, now that it's gone away
Now there's borders between
Do you still now when I am ill?
Can you still braid the hair you gave me?
Mother, has the night always been this dark,
Have the stars always been this lonely?
Mother, I found the beginning in the end
Must the dreaming follow me here too?
Our fire has grown so tender now
I fear to go.

M'body

Glafira Soldatova

once there was integrity
and a snail shell
we decided to carry our homes with us
french-braiding our hair at the airport
think of dolls
and their unchangeability
and how you're still waiting for their hair to grow
there is always something that appeared long before us
this song is so good, I didn't know it was a cover
what do you mean when you say, "I feel like a woman"?
I feel like moss
or this dust
this rust
of merry-go-rounds
the mucin resembled the moonglade
and I left the garden



Global South Urbanisms by David Kerr

The Last of Humanity

Sam Rowe

“Quit yer greetin, we're going out.”

That was all I needed to hear. After a week of feeling sorry for myself, I needed someone to throw a bucket of water on my head. Suzy was always on hand to give me a good drench.

“Fine. Where we going?”

“You leave that to me. Come to mine first. I've got juice.”

Suzy was already stood in the doorway when I arrived, all five foot one of her, arm leant on the frame, her hair half done, a cherry vape hanging from her mouth. Upon the sight of me, her neck recoiled.

“Fuckin' hell Becky, you trying out for the convent? You're not going out like that. 'Mon, I've got a dress you can borrow.”

“You mean the dress I lent you?”

“Even better. Might actually fit you then.”

I headed to the kitchen while Suzy plunged into her clothes pile.

The shots were already lined up on the counter. Each one a more lurid shade of green. If you dropped one on the floor it would burn a hole in the vinyl. I couldn't believe she'd talked me into this.

Suzy returned, dress in hand, with that look she has in her eye when she's proud of herself.

“Suzy! What the actual fuck?”

“I made it better! It was too long anyway and the sleeves were ruining it. Try it on at least?”

She looked up at me, eyes wide. I could never say no to Suzy. And once I tried it on, it was actually not half bad. Suzy's quite talented with the fabric scissors. And the attempt at tie-dye was something to be admired.

Suzy herself was adorned in her go-to: a white vest top, jean shorts, black, eight hole Doc Martens.

Then, down to business. We were three shots in. Suzy wanted to mete out justice before the trip out.

“Why are you not raging? You need to stop letting them mess you about!”

“No, that's not fair, he didn't mess me about! Sometimes life just happens...”

“He didnae think it was worth mentioning that he was moving to Australia!”

“It's no like that! We didnae know it was gonna get serious!”

“And now he's just fucked off! He pulled a number on you!”

“We're still gonna stay pals!”

Suzy raised her eyebrows and stared directly into my soul. The look on her face twisted the knife just a wee bit more. I downed my fourth shot.

We slammed into the taxi.

“Where youse going then?”

“Duchess.”

My body tensed. My heart dropped.

“Suzy, no...”

She grinned.

To say Duchess was scuzzy would be to cheapen the good name of scuzz. The horror stories were too long to mention. Fran at work had said they had to stop serving their £5 deathbomb cocktails following a plea from the local A&E.

Even worse, it had tried to clean up its act. When the club faced dwindling crowds, the owner decided to bring in AI generated punters to make the place look popular, downloading basic personalities and inputting them into humanoid-like structures.

And people loved it. Apparently, folk enjoy AI boys more than the regular, sweaty, fleshy kind. I did not get the appeal at all.

“I kinda like it.” Suzy began the defence in the taxi, gazing out the window. “They're polite. Once you start chatting to them you can barely tell the difference.”

“Oh, you can so. Chat enough and they end up just repeating the same phrases. And if you ask them what they're passionate about, they just start listing stuff.”

“Aye, as I said, you can't tell the difference. They're safer too. No messiness. No... unpleasantness.”

I paused to take in what Suzy was implying. “Wait...you've bought one home with you before?”

“Aye, once or twice. They clean up after themselves and everything. Even better,” she smiled, her eyes met mine, “they don't fuck off to Australia afterwards.”

We joined the queue. From the outside, you could almost be fooled that this was a respectable establishment. The club sat underneath a Georgian house which, underneath the ivy and moss reaching up the walls, still retained a semblance of its original elegance.

The cracks in the foundations had now become visible even from the outside. There was no attempt to hide them. The chance of the whole structure falling on top of all of us while we were dancing was part of the appeal.

In the queue, they were everywhere, chatting away. Jeans, shirt, vacant eyes, the outfit of unreal men. They were yapping away to the punters.

“Yea I live for adrenaline rushes! Bungee jumping, white water rapids, jumping off cliff towers...

“Hey how's everybody doing! You all look great! Let's keep the good vibes going!”

“...shark swimming, mole hunting, aero dropping...”

“Woah, those shoes! Those shoes are made for dancing, yea? Let's keep the good vibes going!”

And on and on and on it went. The dead giveaway was the haircuts. The AI men all had Lego hair, the type that looked like you could pop it off if you found the join. Not for me. Give me blood and guts every time.

We got in and clambered down the stairs, dodging the cracks so the steps wouldn't collapse underneath our feet. The bar glowed in front of us upon entry, while off to the right the dancefloor hummed. The ceiling was low enough that even me and Suzy would have struggled to stand upright on each other's shoulders. Every surface was like treacle. Black and sticky.

I immediately lost Suzy. She always ran off for her own adventure, in a puff of cherry scented smoke. I made for the bar but the place was rammed. The pressure of the bodies in the crowd squeezed me to the dancefloor. The throb of the bass wobbled my ribs.

“Yea I love to travel! My dream destinations are Corfu, Morocco, Rio, Johannesburg...”

“Let's keep the good vibes going!”

It was a bit much. They started playing that song, the one that was everywhere that summer with the piano bit and the woman over the top of it being like SET ME FREE TAKE ALL OF ME BE MY UNKNOWN ECSTASY and folk were dancing but the same dance so everybody was doing fingers in the air and bobbing their head and even the real lads saw it and tried to join in and oh wait was that Suzy and who was that she was with and where did she even get that and wait why was the floor sticky and and and—

There he was. Right at the front. Dancing all on his own.

Teeth gritted. Eyes locked with the DJ. Sweat coming out of all his pores. Arms and legs too big for his frame. Blonde bob bobbing away. He was fixated on the music thumping from the speakers. It pulled him in all directions. It was as if it was speaking directly to him and he was trying desperately to communicate back, but his body was betraying him. Feet planted firmly in position, his hips threw him down then up then down then up, his arms reaching out to try and grab the vibrations. To watch him dance was to watch a struggle. Like he was wrestling a ghost.

Perfect. No computer would ever program anything to dance in this way. No data you could input would conjure up whatever this was in front of me. His dancing was so shite, he just had to be human.

I got in front of him. First I tried to mimic his movements but it proved to be impossible. I tried to get his attention but his eyes had squeezed shut, in deep concentration, like he was exorcising a demon. I grabbed his hand. He paused. Looked up. His eyes. His eyes never stopped. Under the strobe, his sweat glistened. I led him into a corner.

We came up for air in the smoking area. The hip-height steel rail separated us from the real world.

“What's your name then?”

“W'ha?”

“Yer name?”

“Oh... Dan.”

“Alright Dan, you here on your own like?”

“Aye, naibdy else fancied it.

Okay... there was a long pause as he looked right through me.

“So why'd you come out then?”

“Dunno, I guess I just like dancing but.”

Incredible. No prompt into a machine could generate chat this dire. I wanted to know everything about him.

We danced and danced and snogged and danced. The last of humanity.

Outside after lights up. Suzy took my hand.

“You alright?”

“Aye.”

“Need me to come back wi ye?”

“I'm okay.”

“You text me when you get back aright?”

“Promise.”

Suzy looks over at Dan, then gives me a wink, a smile and a nod. I turn to my new pal.

“So... you wanna come back to mine?”

“Aye... let's keep the good vibes going.”

Leonardo's Studies of the Foetus in the Womb

Nick Boreham

In the mortuary, the blood-soaked sheets
are turning black. The master takes a blade
to cut the pallid skin
then separates the muscle from the bone.
He takes a bodkin, pushes through,
grips harder, rips a sac away
and something wonderful is found:
a heart still beating in a corpse.
Perhaps it's just as well we cannot hear
the cries the mother must have uttered
as she lay there bleeding and in pain,
nor see her reaching out to kiss the cross
before she died, compliant in her weakness,
incapable of rage.
For this is how our knowledge is acquired.
This is how you must regard it now.
Light where there was ignorance.
The crimson wound of progress.
Go now. On to the millennium. Go.

White Dress (Solaris, 1968)

Mizzy Hussain

The shuttle awaits:
a metallic hunger
in the Station's sterile gleam.
She stood briefly in my chamber,
an impossible bride
dressed in a phantom garment,

born of memory
without seam or clasp.
My hands fumbled,
seeking purchase.
'Hari, is this the only dress you have?'
Wide pools of blue reflecting only me.
'Why would I have another, my dear?'

The truth descended:
a cold blade.
'Would you-could you take off
your dress, *malishka*?'
Her fingers fluttered like wings of moths.
'I-I need some help, *solnyshko*.'

I found the scalpel,
a flash of silver, sharp and true,
and tore through fabric
down her back,
a line like bleeding.

I dressed her then in a suit of space,
a new skin, cold and unforgiving.
Gently, guiding her towards the shuttle,
against all instinct into the capsule,
towards orbit and the void;
while the Ocean watches,

indifferent.

ritual ascent

William J. Knox

ritual ascent

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strand – strung – storing –

no argument of falling

inside the lattice

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dormancy refuge

Ellie Ballantine

hawthorn
must wait out
the rounding
of the year
twice
stratified
laying coupled
between two winters
discoursing with loam

juniper
cold then heat
dormancy brings refuge
if not nearness to life
slow and sporadic
a cone not a berry
always mislabelled
tenderly grasping
its own time

contributors

Adrien Minsan (any/all) writes short fiction mostly, but sometimes other things like plays and video games. Minsan's stories have appeared in *The New Absurdist*, *Eclectica Magazine*, and others.

Alexandra Morrison (she/they) is a poet studying at the University of Glasgow. Brought up in Glasgow, Alexandra's work explores intimacy, queerness, identity and mental health through vivid imagery and visceral metaphors, dissecting and destabilising the embodied human experience.

Alexander Ambler (he/him) is a writer based in Glasgow. He writes about being queer and its ramifications on the idea of home. He has been featured in the *FLEET Creative Writing Magazine* and was short-listed for the *erbacce-press* poetry competition. When they aren't writing, they are usually in Kelvingrove Park eating or drawing.

Alison Holliday (she/her) is a poet who grew up in the Highlands of Scotland. her work has previously been published by *fernwood publishing* and *sheer spite press*. when not writing Alison can be found collecting beanie babies, kicking at the walls to let the light in, and trying her best.

Prarthana Benjamin (she/her) is a writer who is currently doing her Master's in Fantasy Literature at the University of Glasgow. She enjoys writing game narrative and poetry, and spends far too much time lost in her daydreams.

Chandra Grace Johner (she/her) is a Canadian writer who completed her MLitt in Creative Writing with the University of Glasgow. Her debut book, *Naked in Turkey*, was published earlier this year by *Ace of Swords Publishing* in Montréal. You can find more of her work in *FLEET*, *Sybil Journal*, *Livina Press*, *Midnight Ink*, *The Helix Literary Magazine*, *Feral: A Journal of Poetry and Art*, and on *Turney Talks*.

David Kerr (he/him) is an artist and illustrator from Glasgow, now based in Helsinki. His practice spans illustration, comic art, curatorial projects, and collaborative media. His work investigates the role of illustration in society beyond its conventional commercial applications, and he has a longstanding involvement with artist-run and independent media initiatives.

contributors

Ellie Ballantine (she/they) is a Scotland-based artist, researcher and writer whose work explores relationships between time and care, particularly in relation to the conservation of threatened habitats and through eco-feminist approaches to landscape and the body. She is interested in which accounts of time are amplified or relegated within socio-political structures and narratives, finding empathy for slower, cyclical, animal and plant temporalities through the fluctuating energy of chronic illness. She recently participated in Bioart Society's Field Notes residency and will return for an Ars Bioartica residency in 2026. Her writing on field listening and tree time was published in *Row of Trees* and her poems in *Elsewhere: A Journal of Place*.

Emily Davidson (she/her) is a Leòdhasach poet and artist. She recently completed a creative writing dissertation at the University of Glasgow.

Esraa Husain (any pronouns) is a creative writer, community organiser and researcher based in Glasgow. Their writings are published online and in print in *On the Other Side of Hope*, *SINK*, *Lumpen*, *The Skinny*, Scottish BPOC Writers Network, *Gutter*, *Somewhere for Us*, *The Bottle Imp* amongst others. Their PhD is in Black Scottish literary studies at the University of Glasgow. Esraa's work includes founding *U Belong Glasgow*, the *Curating Discomfort* intervention at the Hunterian Museum, *Just Active* project with LEAP Sports Scotland, *Building Solidarity and Kinship* programme at *The Refugee Festival Scotland* with the Scottish Refugee Council, *Migrants Participation* project with Human Rights Consortium Scotland, and most recently, the *MARSM Festival Scotland* with MARSM UK.

Gabriela Ananias de Oliveira (she/her) is a Glasgow-based poet currently studying at University of Glasgow for her third year.

Gerard Campbell (he/him) is a Glasgow-based writer who tells intimate, character-driven stories rooted in memory and place. Born and raised in Belfast, his pieces *Billy* and *Annie* are set in rural Ireland. Gerard started writing in 2023 and began Glasgow University's Creative Writing Courses in September 2025. He credits his tutors for the invaluable insight into craft and technique.

Glafira Soldatova (she/her) is a poet. She writes about language, spaces, girlhood, and care. She holds an International Master's degree in Children's Literature, Media and Culture from the University of Glasgow.

contributors

Grace Hussey (she/her) is a third year student studying English Literature and History and is currently beginning work on her creative writing dissertation. She has written for multiple Glasgow University publications, recently contributing both poetry and political pieces to the spring editions of Qmunicate and Glasgow University Magazine. Grace processes her life and the world around her through writing.

Hanna Louise (she/her) is currently studying for an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. Her writing has been published by Somewhere for Us, the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival and Leopard Arts. Before embarking on the MLitt, Hanna co-founded the Aberdeen-based performance night Hysteria and worked as a Creative Producer for Aberdeen Performing Arts, organising live performance events, workshops, and the city's inaugural Queer Arts Festival.

Imogen Dobson (she/her) is an English Literature PhD student at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests include contemporary literature, space, sex work, slave narratives, and intersectional feminism.

Jade Hughes (she/her) is a Glaswegian fiction writer whose work explores nostalgia, memory, and place through distinctive Scottish voices. Her story Museum ae The Morra won The Sunday Post Short Story Competition 2025, and she writes features for Westender magazine. She is currently pursuing an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow while working on her debut novel.

Jennifer McCormack (she/her) graduated from Glasgow Uni in 1993. She lives in Malmö now where she explores poetry, movement and attentive spaces.

Jules James (she/her) is a Scottish writer living in London. She holds an MLitt in English Literature from the University of Glasgow. Mostly she writes about desire.

Kate Glenn (she/her) is an interdisciplinary artist who explores vulnerability in her work through emotional and physical processes. She creates monuments to specific events in her life, focusing on emotions, taboos, and temporality. Mirrors, camera phones, and social media are all spaces for reflection on the present and past. The efforts to share are sincere and generous but are tainted by the nature of intimacy that is mediated by screens. The results are odes to curious exploration and expansiveness.

Keith Moore (he/him) studied Film & Television and English Literature at the University of Glasgow some time ago. He has only recently started writing fiction- as one friend pointed out, this is incorrect, given his 35-year career in marketing and public relations. A keen amateur photographer, he approaches his writing the same way he composes photos, always asking himself: 'what will it look like?'

contributors

Leilani J Taneus-Miller (she/her) is a multi-disciplinary Haitian-British artist who blends story, art and oral histories to preserve cultural memory, highlight fugitive voices and connect fragmented pasts. She has an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow. Her creative practice employs ekphrasis, afro-futurism, and critical fabulation to navigate the intersection of memory, displacement and entangled identities. Her writing and visual art have been featured internationally, in exhibitions, anthologies, journals and community projects. She is married with five children, currently residing in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Madhumaya A.K. (they/them) is a Singaporean writer studying literature and philosophy. They are invested in issues of coloniality, ecology, queerness, and liberation. Raptured by the literary's potential for estrangement and reconciliation, they are fond of exploring nonconforming embodiments, orientations, and imaginings in their reading and writing. They tend to get enveloped into orbits circling the same images, ideas, and words for a while, exploring them in different lights, until other orbits pick them up.

Madie Blackburn (she/her) has just completed her undergraduate English Literature degree at The University of Glasgow. Her creative works range from collage pieces to visual poetry, usually centred around the female grotesque.

Maya Price (she/her) is an undergraduate English Literature student at the University of Glasgow.

Mizzy Hussain (she/her) has an MSc (Distinction) in Creative Writing from the University of Edinburgh and studied education at the University of Glasgow. In 2021, she was awarded The Guardian's 'Poem of the Month'. As a Capricorn, she is ruled by Saturn.

Molly Mallinder (she/her) is a 24-year-old fiction writer from Fife, currently based in Glasgow. She has recently graduated from Newcastle University with a Master's in Creative Writing and has an undergraduate degree from the University of Glasgow in English Literature. Whilst working at the University of Glasgow, she spends her free time focusing on finding a home for her debut novella, 'The Funeral Tea'. Her fiction primarily explores complexed relationships, family drama and centers around unique and intricate protagonists. Her work features in publications including *Glyph:Friends&Lovers* (2025) and *Storytree in Conversation* (2026).

contributors

MV Brown (she/they) is a visual artist based in Glasgow. Brown's practice uses the human body and new technologies to explore tensions across embodied subjectivity, the body as spectacle and socio-techno constructs of gender and sexuality. Their practice builds upon questions around the (non) performance of daily life & identity in a post-internet context. Drawing on cyberfeminist, glitch-feminist and posthumanist approaches; they investigate avatars, prototypes, 'false-self'hoods and the fallacy of the 'IRL'. Their works are realised as live performance, performance to camera, text and sculpture. Brown holds an MA in Film & Television Studies and English Literature from the University of Glasgow, and an MLitt in Fine Art Practice from Glasgow School of Art.

Nafsika Iadas (she/her) is an undergraduate archaeology student who has always loved drawing inspiration from artefacts, history, and sci-fi in her creative works. She was recently published in the Glasgow University Poetry Society's Poetry Zine "Cycles".

Nick Boreham (he/him) graduated from the M.Litt. in Creative Writing at Glasgow University in 2009. Since then he has published poems, short stories and a novel, *Jurymen May Dine*. In 2019 he was longlisted for the National Poetry Prize. His current interest is authoring noir psychological thrillers in which relatable but flawed characters struggle against corruption and the darker side of their own ambitions.

Riley Lawless (she/her) is a lens-based artist, born in Leeds, now studying Fine Art Photography at the Glasgow School of Art. Her practice is grounded in thoughtful analogue processes, including the rich colours from photographic film, which have inspired the ambition to explore the tension between the spirit of personal photography and the gallery. Her work explores the archive, drawing inspiration from its information, objects, and faces. Authenticity is maintained throughout as she expands its form through ongoing experimentation in its materiality. Upon opening the album, she questions whether the archive becomes a simulacrum that replaces family as a collective body.

Robin Leiper (he/him) is a psychologist, psychotherapist and poet living between Galloway and Glasgow. His work has been published in various magazines and anthologies in Scotland and South Africa and won the Seahorse pamphlet competition of 2022 and the Wigtown Festival Fresh Voice award of 2023. @naeproblemo

Ross Crawford (he/him) Ross Crawford is a scribe/writer from Ayrshire now based in Stirling. His prose and poetry in Scots and English have been widely published in magazines and journals. In 2024, he was the recipient of the Scottish Book Trust's New Writers Award for Scots. He holds a PhD in Scottish History from the University of Glasgow.

contributors

Rowan Bland (she/her) studied Theatre and English literature at the University of Glasgow, and then went on to complete the Masters programme for Creative Writing. Her poetry explores the roles of the body, the romantic, the domestic and how these worlds intersect post her journey surviving leukaemia in 2025. She loves to investigate mental health in the capacity of 'in the home' - how do our environments shape our emotions, and how do our environments inform our bodies.

Samuel Rowe (he/him) is a writer based in Glasgow. He is working to perfect his lentil lasagne recipe.

Sophie Jemima O'Reilly (she/her) completed her B.A. in Folklore Studies and English Literature in 2024 at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. She is currently in the dissertation period of her master's degree in Fantasy Literature at the University of Glasgow. While her predominant research focus is fairy stories, she is also interested in book history, worldbuilding, museum and archival studies, punk studies, folklore, and ecology. In April, she began working on her dissertation, which focuses on ecopedagogy, environmental animacy, and fairies in children's literature, particularly pulling from the work of Beatrix Potter, Denys Watkins-Pitchford, and Charles van Sandwyk. She has a forthcoming publication on sonic worldbuilding-- with English punk band Crass as a case study-- and has recently presented papers on liminal transatlantic literature and Don't Hug Me, I'm Scared/monster theory at conferences.

Tara-Bee Stephenson (she/her) is a visual artist whose practice focuses on the transformation of private memory into mythology. She explores reimagined and personal representations of time and recollection, drawing from elements of childhood, memory, and storytelling. Recently, she has completed her BA (Hons) in Fine Art at the Glasgow School of Art.

Tom Rae (he/him) writes in Scots and English (and more recently, in Gaelic). His work has been published in various anthologies and magazines, including New Writing Scotland. This year he won the University of Glasgow Creative Writing Festival's Micro-fiction Prize, and his work was highly commended in the Federation of Writers (Scotland) 2026 Vernal Equinox Competition. He has an MLitt in Creative Writing from Glasgow University. Tom's work often merges his interest in Scotland's wild places (the natural ones!), its history, and the forgotten people who quietly shaped it. He currently lives and works in Glasgow.

William J. Knox (he/him) is a writer and journalist who has been published by Poetry Scotland and RTL.

editors

Kat Ryan

Kat Ryan is a graduate of the University of Glasgow's Fantasy MLitt programme (a Starling, for those in the know). She is a researcher for *Shoreline of Infinity's* SF Caledonia project, and her Master's thesis on tabletop roleplaying games as literature for processing grief is currently being considered for publication. Her work varies between prose and poetry, and has previously been published in *qmunicate* and *From Glasgow to Saturn*, with an upcoming piece in *Elsewhere*. She currently works as a civil servant, and this is her first year as an editor for FGTS.

Tara Jackson

Tara is a writer and filmmaker from Argyll & Bute. Her flash fiction piece won the Glasgow Women's Library *Bold Types Scottish Women's Creative Writing Competition 2024*. She writes and directs short fiction films to make alongside friends and has collaborated with non-profit community organisations, *Music Broth* (Glasgow) and *Lyra* (Edinburgh) through documentary filmmaking. This is her second year as an editor on *From Glasgow to Saturn*, a role which brings her connection and learning, and she currently works as a teacher.

Kayla Dougan

Kayla Dougan (alternatively, KM) is an editor and writer from Glasgow who enjoys unsettling literary fiction. KM has a postgrad degree in Publishing Studies from the University of Stirling, where they specialised in accessible publishing. They currently edit for FGTS and the speculative fiction micropress *Woodpig Press*. KM is currently writing a poetry collection concerning negative space in Scottish towns and cities. This is their second year as an editor for FGTS.

Katareeya MacKinnon

Kat is a writer from Bangkok, often found writing primarily speculative fiction rooted in exploring Southeast Asian folklore and all things macabre and mythic. She is a recent graduate of English Literature and Business & Management from the University of Glasgow.

Annie Bowles

Annie Bowles (she/her) is a poet, writer and editor from Bristol currently based in Glasgow. She completed her Creative Writing MLitt from the University of Glasgow with Distinction in 2022. During her time at UoG she co-founded *chewgulspsit*, a literary and arts zine with a focus on the body and the environment. Her own writing explores urban topographies, isolated spaces, nature and estrangement. Alongside her writing practice, her work as an editor focuses on emerging voices and investigating who listens, who speaks, who is heard.

Ailsa Morgan (Editorial Assistant)

Ailsa is a graduate of the University of Glasgow and holds a degree in English Literature and Gaelic. Currently she is undertaking an MLitt Publishing Studies at the University of Stirling, specialising in readership of translated fiction. She was previously Editor-in-Chief of *qmunicate* magazine.

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