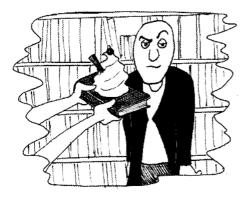
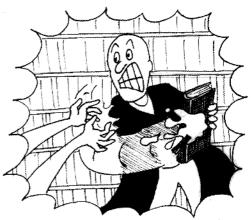


UNSWeetened acknowledges the Bedegal and Gadigal peoples of the Eora Nation, who are the traditional custodians of the land upon which UNSW was built. We pay our respects to the Elders both past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff in the UNSW community. We recognise this is and always will be Aboriginal land.









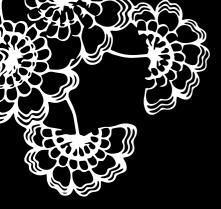


unsweetened.

Rob Thwaites

Twenty years ago, a group of students banded together to create a literary sensation for the UNSW community. At the time, it was the only journal of its kind, publishing works of poetry and prose written by university students under the heading UNSWeetened Literary Journal. Two decades later we are bubbling with nostalgia to share this particular comic with you. It was published in the very first edition of UNSWeetened and captures the spirit of creativity that has, and will continue to be, the bedrock of

our special journal.



edicated to my grandmother whose short stories about the fox, the crow and woodcutter continue to inspire me and to my other grandmother who made me the storyteller I am today.



FOREWORD

I grew up watching my grandmother scribbling away on her big writing desk. I later came to learn those scribbles and piles of messy papers were contents of her many books, a memory I cherish every time I sit across my own messy writing desk.

As readers, we indulge in our favourite books. We walk across Middle Earth with Frodo and Sam to destroy the One Ring or we remain in our reading spot going back and forth between the pages trying to understand what Ulysses is *really* about. Yet, in all our journeys we are confined by what the writers tell us, what they intend for us to know.

But, as writers, we explore the unknown much more. We create people, their histories, and their lives from nothing and in those moments of scribbling and scratching we feel invincible. When we write, we lay our souls bare in our bids to weave the perfect story and somewhere between ripped pages of frustration and countless scribbles we create some of our best literary works.

UNSWeetened has had a long 20-year journey, and in these years the journal has inspired many aspiring writers to create, to experiment and to present their work. Finishing a piece is cause for celebration, but seeing your name printed in the pages of a book is any writer's dream. UNSWeetened not only creates a platform for writers but also for its editors, to learn the art of editing, while developing their own creative skills. This edition has continued the tradition of keeping the content as diverse as humanly possible with riveting themes like migration, belonging, relationships, to celebrating languages spoken at UNSW.

As you turn this page and enter into a plethora of experiences I wish you a fantastic rollercoaster ride through *UNSWeetened* 2017.

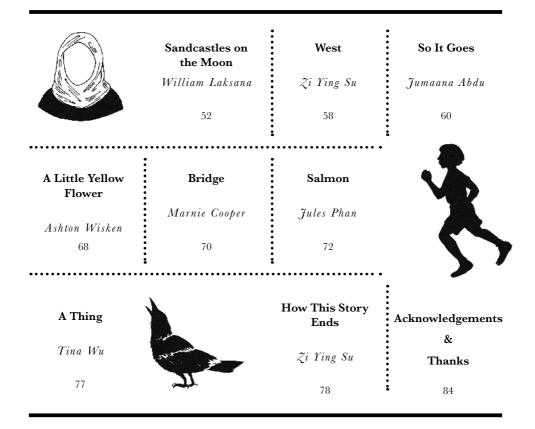
Haya Saboor UNSWeetened Coordinator



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GOING HOME

By Sarah MacDonald

There is a yellow beach in my mind. I know the damp tang of casuarina that hangs in the air there after rain; I have seen the water when it storms and the dunes are swallowed into the bruised belly of a winter sky. I collect shells along the water's edge – cowries and scallops, baby-pink in their folds – and wish that I could place them into the pocket of an anorak and later run my hand along their contours and maybe smell the salt on them still.

"Shouldn't be much longer now. Wish this rain'd piss off."

Streetlights drift over your face in swabs of sallow orange as we drive, pooling for a moment in the hollows there before the darkness catches up. A steady, warm rain sways in the headlamps and you hunch against it, both hands gripping the wheel.

"At least it's not so humid now."

You grunt. Your eyes stay forward and so I watch your profile from the passenger seat: a furrowed brow, a speckling of grey starting to show by your temples. I wonder how long I have missed that for. You glance to your left

and catch me, and I register my own flinch as you reach out and squeeze my thigh.

"Cheer up. You know how lucky we were to get this job."

How lucky you were, I think, but don't say it. In the real estate description: two beds, one bath, the opportunity for a garden. I wonder what I will grow here beneath this tepid rain; something fast flowering, so that we will see it bloom before we leave. Of course, you say that this time will be different. Like all the other times, this time, things will work out. Perhaps a row of lavender by the window – but no, they like a sandy soil.

An ambulance passes and in the backseat the baby stirs but does not wake. I dream of drying racks of lavender, running the stems through my fingertips and tucking sweet – smelling pouches between her little dresses; of shells washed up by storms lain in salty puddles on windowsills. I watch road signs disappear and between streetlights I catch my own reflection in the slick glass of the car window – a mess of hasty lines sketched out against the night and, lately, the ink seems smudged.

Sarah is studying a double media/law degree. She chose a creative writing elective on a whim last semester after a long-term but long-shelved interest in writing, and was excited to discover how much she still enjoyed the creative process. If she survives law school she would love to work in a field like anti-discrimination or family law – hopefully with time for a little writing somewhere on the side.

We drive inland.

"What do you remember most about being a child?"

"What kind of question is that?"

I shrug. Silence, and then: "Nothing much. You?"

I remember walking by a night – time shore to a fire on the sand. Fevered sparks that splintered away towards black water and blinked into nothing there on gentle waves; the weight of my father's jacket on my narrow shoulders and the smell that lingered in its folds, of Marlboro Reds and the split innards of fish. I remember my mother's hands in the garden, dirt beneath her nails and in the creases of her hardened palms as she teased weeds from between the swaying curls of sweet – peas; how her gentleness with those blushing petals stirred a curious ache in my chest.

"Nothing much."

In the backseat the baby mumbles something in her sleep, turns to the window so that honeyed light from industrial estates falls across her cheek and could almost pass for moonlight. Is this what she will remember? Will she whisper to someone she loves one day of sleeping with a suitcase at her feet; of late night voices raised through thin walls and heavy silences in the morning?

I close my eyes against the gentle thrum of the rain. There is a yellow beach in my mind, and I breathe in the sharp air that blows there from the south. A gannet is circling far out across the bay; I point, and a little girl stops to watch it hanging alone in the grey. From a great height the gannet drops like a sleek white stone. I think of the shock of the water as it hits, and then the cool blue softness and the quiet of the deep, and

I smile.



OCCURRENCES IN DUNPO

By James Sommerville

On Wednesday there was a homeless man sitting on the wall outside Luke's shop. If his dad had still owned the place, the man on the wall would have been given a forty-five minute grace period, but Luke was a little kinder and a lot lazier so he let the man be.

Mr. Mulligan with rheumatism came in at 11.

Hello, Doctor.

Not Doctor. Just a pharmacist.

Yes, Doctor. Very good. Got a script for ya.

Then Luke stood around and scratched at the lino on the counter until he felt it start to give and made himself stop.

At 1 was Mrs. McIntyre with the gammy leg. He'd got through six cm² of lino.

Mr. McDonald.

Mrs. McIntyre. How's the leg?

Legs are what legs are.

Mrs. McIntyre was full of wisdom today. Luke was bored. He'd been a pleasure to have in class. Now he was a pharmacist. That seemed fair.

He could see the hobo through the open doors. The man sat very seriously on the wall, like it was an occupation. He seemed to be sleeping, but several times through the day he would jerk, turn and gaze down the road eastward at the farms and hills, then turn back again and slump down.

At one point Luke wondered if the man was a burglar here casing his shop, like the time in twenty – twelve when a big bloke with a crowbar had ambled up, quite casually smashed the plate glass window, reached in and nicked four bottles of Panadol. The bloke never even looked at Luke, and it was a good ten minutes before he realised he should call the cops. That had made the Telegraph, actually. **VANDALIST TAKES HIS MEDECINE.** This guy didn't look like that, though, and he didn't seem particularly interested in the shop. He just sat on the wall, his shoulders pressed down low.

Luke locked up at a quarter to five. He had to pass in front of the guy on the way back to his car. He got a whiff of him, the stink of old sweat and mud and cowshit, as if he'd been trekking across the fields. Luke felt he ought to say something, just to reassure both of them that hey, this guy might be homeless but Luke still considered him a person and worth talking to. He tried to say it as he passed him by, making sure not to suggest that he was trying to initiate a conversation.

See ya, man.

The guy turned to him, slowly. One of his eyes was swollen shut and his hair was shiny with grease.

Hey, bud. Pharma. Do me a favour.

Now you've done it, Luke, ya dumbass.

The entire register in your back pocket and you've started a conversation with a hobo. Can't even pretend like you're all out of change. He turned back, trying to surreptitiously go through his back pocket and make sure he wasn't taking the precious little 2 dollar coins, because once your hand leaves the pocket that's a decision.

Yeah, mate.

Keep an eye on the mountain for me.

Luke didn't actually gape, but he came pretty close.

Huh?

The mountain, mate. If it moves. Tell me.

The hobo spoke reverently, as if he were unaware of what a fuckin weird thing that was to tell someone. He didn't have the gravelly, scratchy tone of the hobos he remembered from his childhood. His voice was soft and he paused a lot when he spoke, like he was thinking. A banker or a lawyer or a teacher, not a hobo.

The mountain?

If it moves.

Luke turned his head, scanning the horizon. In the distance to the southeast were the Snowies, and the little blue one to the far east that he didn't remember the name of.

Which one?

That one.

He pointed east.

Are you - you're going to stay here?

No, mate. Got things to do. Just keep an eye out for me. Ok?

Is it going to move?

The hobo shifted on the wall, turned and squinted so the little mountain was in his peripheral vision.

I don't know. We live in hope, eh?

topagraphical area map

Did you mean: topographical area map?

topographical area map

Hey, is there something up with Google?

Hmm?

His wife paused, turned to look out the kitchen window. Dish soap fizzled on the back of her hands.

That mountain there isn't showing up.

Are you sure? Maybe you're just using it wrong.

How do you use Google wrong? It's not there. It must be glitching out.

He went to stand by her. He had a vague sense that he had to do something here. A private

display of affection, just to make sure she remembered. Fuck it, she'd be right. He was tired.

Well, maybe it's not a mountain. More of a hill. I don't like the look of those clouds.

There isn't even any of those – what are they? The concentric circle things they use to show height.

Mmm. Think it'll rain?

Maybe. I've got work to do.

mountains moving impossible

Dan's Mountain Moving

Sponsored page

Got A BIG load of DIRT? Call DAN'S MOUNTAIN MOVING! We've got backhoes, dumptrucks, bobcats- we move that dirt... reasonable prices...

Faith That Moves Mountains: How To Do the Impossible

Google Books page

When I was a young man, I met a preacher in a church in Nebraska. He told me that through God, nothing was **impossible...**

18 reviews, average: 0.5 stars

The Blue Mountains Trek Trips and Guides

For many, camping up in the **mountains** is **impossible** – but with our impeccable guides, find yourself exploring the great unknown... eight days since our last accident... endorsed by the Macca's Get Out and Go Initiative!

No, no. Next page. This was getting too involved.

MOUNTAIN HUNTED ME? NOT CLICKBAIT!

https://youtube.com/watch?vr3214=1QAEFI

Mar 11, 2016 - Uploaded by TheConspiracyTheo

I met a girl the other day: HUNTED by a MOUNTAIN? I said, whaaaat? But listen up, Youtube, cos this is real...

Was it starting to spit?

MOUNTAIN HUNTED ME? NOT CLICKBAIT!

19 views. This looked trustworthy. TheConspiracyTheo had a brown turtleneck and he looked a little like he hadn't left his house in a few years. It was raining outside. He plugged in his earphones.

Hey, Youtube, what's up guys. So I'm just gonna get right into this, but first, it's Ominous Political News review time, as always...

Wait, they had washing on the line. Shit.

The hobo was still there on Thursday. That day Luke saw Mrs. McIntyre again. She was with Mrs. Carey and her kid.

Script?

Thank you.

She turned to talk to Mrs. Carey while he was filling the script. They didn't interest him much but he couldn't ask them to shut up.

You know there's a sheep thief in town?

Nooo, really?

Oh, yes. Sixteen sheep! Led them right out of old Jerry Powys' fields. He's pissed as hell.

Mrs. Carey made a face and looked at her son, but he was looking at the women's deodorants and probably didn't care very much.

Goodness. Do people still steal sheep?

Apparently. The police thought it was a dingo first because they kept finding bits of chewed up wool but now it's probably a guy trying to throw them off. Big bloody dingo for sixteen sheep.

Yes. Jimmy, don't open that, I'll have to pay for it.

Luke put Mrs. McIntyre's pills in a crackly little bag and stuck it closed with some tape. She thanked him. The door sealer thing scraped on the lino as they left. God, what a town this was. Who gave a shit about sheep?

The one good bit of that day was that the hobo left. Around 11 he got up, rapped on the window of the pharmacy, jerked his chin at the mountain in the distance and gave Luke a very significant look. Then he left, not in the half-shuffle he usually affected but quite quickly, as if he had somewhere to be. Luke put him out of his mind. He'd never gotten round to watching TheConspiracyTheo's video – he had better things to do, after all – and though he definitely didn't hope the hobo got lost out in the fields somewhere he wouldn't have been too broken up about it if he didn't show up outside the shop any more.

But he was there again on Monday, more dishevelled and looking a bit sick, though the swelling on his eye had gone down a bit. He ambled up as Luke locked up for the night, took up his same place on the wall and sat there with the mountain on his left, just in his peripheral vision.

Luke got his keys ready in his pocket. You had to move quickly, like you've got very important work to do, make Mr. Hobo feel like he mustn't bother the working man – but don't make it seem affected, because people can sense that –

Hey. How's it going?

Not so bad.

Luke paused, let the space drag, hoping the guy would take the hint.

The hobo grinned at him. His breath was awful but his teeth were perfect, not white like in toothbrush ads but very square and gapless.

Hrm. Did it move?

Closer?

Yeah, mate. You said you'd watch for me.

Um, no, it hasn't.



Luke turned and looked at the mountain, the sun still not properly sunk behind it. The hobo was waiting for him to say something more.

Well, there it is.

I know that! Just keep an eye on it. Sneaky bastard.

Right. Ok, mate - I've got to get home -

Oh, yeah, yeah. Don't let me keep you. Keep a weather eye. Eh?

Er. Yes.

Luke was several steps away, successfully avoided drawing the guy into a proper conversation, and then he turned back.

Where'd you go?

The hobo turned to him.

Hm?

If you don't mind my asking. What were you doing?

The hobo grinned. His teeth weren't perfect, actually, One canine had been chipped. It was probably recent cos he kept pressing his tongue through the hole, wriggling it like a red worm.

Settling my affairs. Got to be ready, eh?

Ready?

It's coming for me, mate.

He seemed to think for a moment, then spoke again.

Look, mate – I'd rather not bring this down on you – just, keep it to yourself, huh? I'll get out of your hair in a few days.

Luke rather wanted to shout at him, yell at him to just tell him what he was on about, but he thought if he interrupted the hobo would shut up. Maybe that'd be good, but he didn't know.

The hobo dropped his voice to a conspiratorial whisper, as though anyone less gullible than Luke would be willing to listen to him.

It prefers it when you run. And when you try to stop it.

He leant back on the brick wall, closed his eyes.

Nought more to do now, mate. Thanks all the same. I'll see you later.

•

He had to go into the shop that afternoon. They'd built it out a bit from town along the highway for travellers to stop at and it was always way too big for Dunpo, but normally on Monday there were more people there. There was a great field of parking spaces out in front and maybe four cars up near the entrance. Nice. He'd nearly got a job out here in school but his dad wouldn't let him.

Luke got the beer and the milk, the special ones with the pale blue stickers that were better for his wife. There was a poster on the pole for the big sunshade over the car-park, with the little tabs with phone numbers. The tape was all scrunched up around the pole.

LOST CAT

Answers to Mittens/Garbage Boy (rescue name) Calico coat, black spiked collar CALL STEVO IF U SEE HIM+ PLS DON'T SHOOT

The paper was thin where the picture of the cat was in the way that home printers did. Luke remembered Stevo, he'd been in school with him in the grade above. He moved out west to a farm in the hills. If his cat was where they were backburning he'd get torched.

His car struggled on the road back home. It was a steep bloody way and his car had mowed through four kangaroos in its lifetime, which was more than he'd like but less than lots of people. The mountain loomed in the sunset in the corner of his eye, flickering between the trees.

Was it getting bigger?

Nope.

The front door groaned as his wife pushed it open. She had her great big work bags in either hand and bits of her hair were standing on end.

.

Hey. I made coffee.

Lite milk?

Yeah, I went and got some specially.

She came into the kitchen. His mug was cool in his fingers and he set it down in the sink. It wasn't getting bigger. The flat light in the evening always messed with his eyes. There were dead bugs in the gap between the window and the screen. Bloody hobo. Bloody town. Eurgh.

Good day?

Not bad.

A red light flared over the east horizon. Luke blinked, shook his head. What was that? He opened the window. There was a tang of smoke on the air.

Shit, what is that?

Smells like a fire. I'll check the website.

She pulled out her phone and tapped at it. An ad jingled out of the tinny little speakers.

Do you have a fire escape plan? If they'd been prepared, ninety-nine per cent of people who were burned in last year's bushfires wouldn't have lost their homes.

She turned the phone so he could see over her shoulder. A woman and some kids stood in front of the shell of a house with the fire service's number flashing over their heads. The woman's arm was wrapped tight around the children and they were all looking at the camera and shrugging. The camera cut to a fireman shaking his head sadly.

Luke vaguely remembered the service sending around a form for them to fill in about what they'd do if there was a fire. He'd used it to light the stove. Heh.

She tapped her phone and the ad cut out.

Oh, here we go. First backburning this week.

Luke frowned.

Are you sure?

She sipped at her coffee. A bit of skim stuck to the rim of the cup.

What else would it be? What's with you?

He was gripping the edge of the sink, he realised. The pads of his fingers were shivery and white.

Are you sure it was this week?

She shrugged.

Says it here. Thanks for the coffee.

Yeah.

He stepped out onto the verandah, watching the fire. The sun had mostly set now and the mountain was black against the night sky, wreathed in the red light along the horizon. She followed him out.

Some of my kids weren't in school today.

Luke shifted his weight from one foot to the other. Shit-fuck-dick he didn't want to sit here watching it but there was nothing else to do. The fire made a bit of heat haze in the distance and the horizon wobbled.

They weren't the normal ones, though. Must be a bug going around.

The sun rose late on Tuesday and it was foggy and Luke had to use his hazard lights the whole way. The hobo was gone again. Luke had a fair bit of stock to fill and he wasn't expecting any of his usual customers so he was out back in the storeroom for most of the morning.

Oi. Hello.

There was a guy at the counter. He had a big bushy beard and a backpack and there was a blue car parked out front. Luke didn't know him.

Hey, mate. What can I get for you?

Kids headache stuff?

You want Nurofen. Back there.

The guy took some time picking out the bottle. Luke scratched at the lino some more.

What's with the guy out front?

What guy?

That one. See?

Luke peered out through his shop windows. The hobo was back, standing on his cardboard boxes. He was facing down the street.

Oh, he's back. We know him. He's been here a few days.

He told me something weird.

Yeah?

I mean, he asked me for a ride. Says he needs to get out of town.

Luke looked up, frowning.

You want me to have a word with him?

The guy gave him his money, half – turned so he could see the hobo. Luke saw a little girl inside the man's car, her nose pressed up against the window.

Ah, it's ok. He just seems scared.

The guy thanked him and took his Nurofen and went out of the shop. Luke saw him go over to the car and bleep his keys at it. The hobo turned when he heard the door of the car and Luke heard the guy say something to him. He went out to listen at the open door.

Look, I'm really sorry - I've got my daughter in the car, we can't take any hitchhikers.

The hobo had moved into the middle of the road. There was blood on his face from a long cut and he was shifting his weight from foot to foot and shaking his hands.

Please, mate - I just need a ride - nothing is working -

The guy shook his head and looked at Luke helplessly. Luke shrugged at him.

The car pulled out from the kerb and flashed its lights at the hobo and he didn't move for a moment but then he threw up his hands and swore and got off the road. The car over – revved as it pulled out of town.

Luke stood behind his counter for a long moment. Then he went and got one of the boxes of band-aids from the rack in the corner. He was reluctant cos it wasn't like he could ask the hobo to pay him back but he felt a bit bad for him.

Hey. Mate. You all right?

The hobo turned to him. The gash on his forehead was deep but he barely seemed to notice it.

Uh. Hey, Pharma. Not really.

Luke held up the box of band - aids.

You're bleeding.

The hobo reached out one dirty hand and took the box. Luke hung back a bit. The hobo stank. He opened the box and the little tab on the top tore off.

The hobo stopped and looked at Luke.

Thanks. You're not a bad guy, you know that?

Luke waved his hand awkwardly.

Yeah, ok. How's the mountain thing going?

He couldn't help a little sarcasm from creeping into his voice but the hobo didn't seem to notice. He took three band-aids out and held them between his fingers.

I can't figure it out. There's no bloody rules with this shit!

Right.

It's just, -

The man was breathing heavily and sat down on the kerb and put his head in his hands.

I don't get it. It's not working.

The guy was really getting emotional. Luke wasn't sure what to do.

I mean. Look. I've done everything. Went out and made it easy. And now it won't take me! You know how many things I've tried? And the things it does to stop me? You see the fire last night?

The backburning?

Heh! Yeah. The backburning It does that when someone gets too close. Covers its tracks. Sneaky bastard.

The hobo wiped his nose with one dirty sleeve and opened up his band-aids. He probably needed a real bandage but Luke only had six in stock and they were \$14.99/- each.

I didn't want it to hurt anyone else, you know. I thought if I stopped running, maybe it'd just end things. And I was ready. I really thought I could take it.

Yeah. Don't we all, huh?

Luke didn't really know what he was on about, but it was a platitude.

Then I just wanted a ride out of this shit town. You know? Make it work for it. But that's not happening. There's no running from this.

He sat heavily on the kerb and started putting on the band - aids, swearing under his breath.

But it won't take me! Gave me a whack with a rock on my way back, but that's all. What am I, not good enough? Bastard.

He finished with the band-aids and stood again, glaring out down the road. It was still misty even though it was nearly 11.

You know what? I'm going out to the fucker. I'm gonna -

He stopped, thinking.

I'm gonna piss on it.

Luke frowned. Ew.

On the mountain?

Yeah. No way it takes that.

Huh. Think that'll work?

The hobo shrugged.

Nothing's gonna work. So it's as good as anything.

He turned to start walking down the street and Luke's curiosity got the better of him.

This isn't like, a thing, is it? Mountains don't - they don't move. This is just in your head. Right?

The hobo looked at him for a long moment.

Shit. Wish someone had told me that three years ago.

Wait, really?

No! Idiot.



A FIRST-GENERATION KID'S SEARCH FOR THE HOMELAND. Entrapped in the harvest moon Cocooned in false silk Reflected upon a foreign land with False memories of a past unlived I am alone where No ancestor has ever been

The harvest moon whispers – Silver edges flashing a snow-capped abyss Reflections of fire like desert dunes: my soul is hers ensnared and afraid eternally cast in a reflection on an ocean of a foreign island unable to return to the heavenly mountains and Tocharian plains; No howling wolves run by no wild horses With the screech of a hunting hawk Silhouetted against that same moon I am alone

She says:

Remember the caravans, the swirling spirits? Remember the sweetness of honey melons And crystal sugar tea? Remember me? As we drank etken chai and I sang you to sleep While your parents in Ili Spilled blood for freedom still just out of reach?

But she speaks to A past life, With knee length braids and The breath of the Taklimakan. I am but a shadow cast Over seas, escaping the imprisonment back home yet ensnared by the moon Ś,

omnipresent she tells me I am not yet done until I remember what has not yet begun. But I cannot return 'til that home is free, from the grips of her calamity; when I can emerge from the false silk riches of my foster home and fly to where my spirit keeps watch above the Central Asian river valleys trapped and protected in the harvest moon - Munawwar Abdulla

Munawwar is studying a Master of Science in pain, which is oddly descriptive of the postgraduate experience. In her free time she advocates for Uyghur rights, watches too many TV shows, then blogs about how no one knows about Uyghurs. She is the quiet grandma friend who is always tired but will tell you to eat properly, drink water, sleep on time and have fun!

MY BEAUTIFUL GIRL

By Julia Dankberg

Bernice is a beautiful young lady. She looks just like her mother, with blonde hair that curls at her shoulders. Her cheeks look like Renoir came into the room with his paintbrush of rose and peach hues and brushed them with the color himself. Her eyes are the blue of the Seine: clear, cold, and brilliant. Her skin is pure, innocent, and untouched. I see Bernice every day right before she leaves home for school. She looks behind me at the mirror and carefully clasps the pearl necklace around her slender neck. She clips the matching earrings on her lobes. She stares, but I don't quite know where, for there are no imperfections on her face. I turn to the left and sometimes I miss a blink or a pucker. I quickly see her action in the mirror, but still, I see the same face and I feel the same way. When I make a complete, slow circle with my toes, I wonder why she seems so unhappy these days. I wonder what she is thinking when she glares at the mirror, speckled with dust. She is framed by velvet and mahogany: the roof of my home. I've known Bernice since she was five and I will never stop thinking, what a beautiful girl.

It is dark. Bernice opens the gold clasp on my box. I promptly stand up, the springs at my pointe shoe propping me up. I begin to slowly twirl. It is morning and there is a yellowed light splashing onto the wood floors of Bernice's bedroom. Her white, Victorian cast iron bed crowned with ruffled pillows is directly in front of me. Her two mahogany nightstands are the ground of identical, gold lamps with pink, frilled shades. The walls are dressed in a pale pink damask paper, soaking in the heat from the golden sun. Her dresser is on the wall to the left of her bed, containing eight drawers with gold, clanking handles. She has French vases of mint and rose – colored glaze, covered with Rococo roses, crystal dishes, and a set of white pillar candles. I dance on her vanity, which houses her perfume bottles, lip color, and rouge, me placed to the side of her favourite nail color that her mother and father brought back from Paris. Bernice's friend Margaret is standing beside her dresser. Margaret has been Bernice's friend since she was young.

-

"Margaret. What in the world are you doing?"

Margaret paces toward me, reaching her hand to touch my ceramic bodice and solid tulle skirt. Her finger, warm and soft, slows my pace as I begin to face the mirror. Bernice is behind her trying on her Hobble skirt and crème turtleneck blouse.

"Just looking, that's all."

There is a pause and Margaret sits on the stool to look in the mirror. She pinches her cheeks and fusses with her hair.

"You know, Bernice, we are going to be late. Robert and James should be here any minute."

"I know, Marge," Bernice mumbles while fumbling with her zipper. "Here - zip me up, will you?"

Margaret rushes to Bernice's side while she inhales a big breath of air.

"Are you sure this is going to be all right? You know what could happen to us... we ought to think about this a little more thoroughly..."

Margaret looks down at her ivory leather flats. She looks up to meet my Bernice's soft expression.

"Margaret." She grasps her hands. "It is going to be okay," she says. "We will have Robert and James to keep us safe. Besides, as long as everything is hushed, my parents will never find out."

She gives Margaret a sweet smile and then promptly looks at the porcelain clock to my left, scurrying toward me. She jumbles my pedestal a bit, reaching for her signature pearls. She plucks her beaded clutch from a drawer in the vanity and slams me shut. My head thrown on the red velvet pillow and I lay there – stuck – wondering where she was going. I hope the men do not betray her. She is such a beautiful girl.

I hear loud laughter bellowing from the doorway. A loud thump vibrates the walls.

"Robert you are such a tease!"

Is that Bernice? Sound carries terribly in here. Everything sounds muffled and muted.

"Are your parents home?"

Robert belches and I hear more stumbling. It feels like someone is sliding the dresser across the wood. Her vases and porcelain boxes clink.

"No, they are in Paris for the second time this month - Robert! Be careful!"

Silence.

"I am baby, don't you worry."

The footsteps grow louder before my box bangs against the wall. I wish whoever was on the other side would open it. I need to see what this commotion is all about.

Bernice suddenly appears as my box opens. I spring upward and begin to twirl. Bernice has changed clothes since she left the room. She is wearing a white, silk brassiere. I notice her former ensemble strewn across the floor. Bernice starts to take off her earrings and necklace, plunking them at the bottom of my stage. Her eyes seem red and I smell cigarette smoke as her hair sways in my direction. I am jostled. I sway back and forth while continuing my routine. In the mirror's reflection, I see Robert sitting on my Bernice's bed in only his trousers.

Robert is a handsome young man. He is broad – shouldered, toned, and has dark blond hair. He has a kind face, but with defined features. The room is dark with the exception for the subtle light glowing from her bedside table. Their silhouettes are shadows on the dark wood. Bernice stumbles onto the bed and then on top of Robert. I twist toward the doorway. Bernice, what are you doing? I watch as they lay on the bed, bodies intertwined and kissing. Bernice, please do not do this to me. I watch as he unclasps and she unbuttons. She giggles. He coughs. I face the other wall.

"Oh! I forgot."

Bernice turns off the light. The room is a mess, and I am still dancing.

The sun slowly starts to rise and fill the room with white light. The windowpanes cast shadows on the floor and the furniture. The room is askew. I spin to the left. I hear the sheets ruffle. Robert is gone and in the bed lies my sweet Bernice. She sits up and looks across the room at her clock. I hear the ticking keeping a steady pace with my routine.

"Oh no! It's 10:30! I'm going to be late!"

Bernice jumps out of bed, sheets wrapped around her thin frame, and she slams me shut. I hear her run out the door. The water starts to run. I am alone again.



I stare up at the mirror in my dark home, barely seeing myself in the reflection. Not much light is able to pass through in here. I hear the water stop and my box furiously opens when I least expect it. My Bernice ravages through my audience: her collection of diamonds, emeralds, rubies and all things gold and shiny, not forgetting her prized pearls.

"Where are my gold diamond studs?"

She shuffles through the clasps and strands of magnificent jewelry. She finds her pair of earrings and quickly clips them. I turn to face the mirror and her eyes meet mine. She lifts her eyelids and brows before swiping a shade of pink on her lips. She reaches her hand out and strokes the bun perched on top of my head. She looks down on me with admiration, and then continues to shut the box. My head hits the mirror. The light from outside streams through the opening edge – Bernice forgot to close me completely. The light bounces around the pieces of jewelry and reflect prisms along the mirror behind me. It is a beautiful sight, just like my dear Bernice.

Later that night, she comes home, and I hear her walk into the room. She opens the box and places her pieces inside. Her eyes glimmer from her lamp's soft light. They are the color of eggshells and her hair smells like violets. Just as I make my rotation to the right I see her hand clamp downward.

Time has passed and I wonder when I would be opened again. She hasn't worn jewelry in a while. She wears her jewelry every day. I feel like it is monotonous sometimes – dancing the same routine for as long as she opens the lid – but I like watching her. My Bernice is so graceful. She glides across the room with such incomprehensible grace for an eighteen-year-old girl. Her poise is the epitome of beauty. My Bernice had dreams to become a teacher, but her mother and father decided she would become a housewife and marry an Arnault. She wants more for herself. I wanted to tell her that she would not be a trophy wife. She would always be my beautiful girl.

I hear a slam, I hear a click, and I hear a revolving turn, and then follows a few more of those exact same sounds. I smell Bernice's perfume. She must be close now.

"Hello Mrs. Pattington, it's me, Bernice. Is Margaret there?"

A pause.

"Oh that's all right I'll wait right here."

Bernice must be calling Margaret about something.

"Hi Margaret," she laughs, "yes, your mother said you were washing your hands.

Well, that is what I wanted to talk to you about because it is Friday night.

Did James call you?

Ah yes, he didn't, but I saw him a few hours ago while at the store.

He said he had to see a man about a dog and that he'd see us tonight.

I told you! We didn't get caught. Lovely place isn't it?

I know. It's a little smoky for me, too.

Well darling, shake a leg and come over here!

Mother and father are still gone, yes.

All right dear, see you soon."

Suddenly, I see light flood into my box when Bernice opens it. I pirouette while she wanders to the far corner of her room. She has her white robe on, and her blond hair is in a bun at the nape

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of her neck. She opens the curtains and lets light splash into her room. With a swift pace she walks toward me, and sits down on her stool. Her delicate fingers rest on the dark wood of the vanity. She raises her eyebrows and then relaxes them.

"What am I doing!" she moans.

I see the Bernice I always see and then I see the Bernice who she feels she sees. Bernice is beautiful, and I can't tell her and I can't help her understand.

It is dark again.

Time is passing. The house is solemn. I hear nothing. I see nothing. I feel nothing. I am suffocating, and there is no light. I've gotten colder from all her silver and her gold, and oh, I am so, so still. I remember how it used to be – every day, twice a day: once to take out her jewels, and another to put them away. For the short while when I am dancing, I am happy. I love looking at that beautiful girl.

.

"Why won't this thing work?"

It is my Bernice, but her voice... it is strained. She coughs and I hear segments of conversation.

"Oh Ellery! I-"

I hear an old man's deep voice chime from the distance.

I hear the sound of something turning and it slightly wheezes as it rotates.

"And then I took my gun and I -"

And then I hear a younger man's higher voice.

Bernice lets out a sigh.

"You see, uh, President Roosevelt is said to do many great things this year, Charles." A masculine, nasal voice speaks.

"Oh yes, and what is that?" A deeper voice cackles.

"He promises to end Prohibition and I think he very well might do just that!"

"It will be a ring-a-ding-ding day in the US of A if that ever happens, let me tell you. I remember when my father –"

"Ok Charles, no need for the narrative, this is a news show, not a Dr. Christian episode!"

"Well, well I was just saying. Tune in next time folks, when we -"

I hear footsteps leave the room.

It is late afternoon when my box is opened. The hazy yellow light streams in from the windows. I pop up and look for the reflection of Bernice's in my mirror. Bernice is not in sight. Her room is a mess. Her bed is unmade and her shoes and clothes are strewn across the floor. This doesn't seem like my Bernice. I hear her footsteps. She slowly looks at me and walks toward me. I turn right and I see a giant, black box. It has a few, small silver knobs and a giant antenna that stood on the top left. This must be what I was hearing the men from last night. Bernice picks up another large object and returns to her bed. She picks up the thing on top of it and places it between her

.

shoulder and her ear. She looks down at the base, and clicks a key and lets the circle turn.

There is a pause and she looks up at the ceiling.

"Yes, hello, I need a taxi."

She stutters as she speaks and gently closes her eyes.

"Immediately.

Two hours?

Okay. Thank you sir."

She slams it down and reaches for it again and dials as she did before. I don't quite see what she presses because I am facing the opposite wall.

"Hello, Mr. Potts, it's me, Bernice. Is Robert home?

Why yes, certainly, I can wait.

I can't stay Robert, not even for you.

I love you.

I can't.

I'm taking most of my things, though I can't afford any more.

I have to sell it."

My beautiful girl, my darling, what are you selling?

"After we go to The Back Room, I am getting on a train to Philadelphia."

Bernice, what are you selling?

"I might be happy there, I am not sure.

You cannot come, darling."

Darling.

"I must go alone.

I will see you tonight.

I love you."

I smell smoke, poignant and familiar. It smells more flagrant than the smell on my Bernice's hair. It suffocates me. I feel it choke my cold exterior. I am set on top of a something. I hear music: trombones and saxophones. It sounds like music from the radio shows my Bernice listens to every Tuesday afternoon.

And I am dancing again, in the dark.

Red wallpaper covers the walls with a contrasting design. There is a dark wooded chair rail dividing the wall in half. Tables and chairs are scattered about. I see dark velvet sofas on the other side of the room. People are everywhere – left and right – when I look in the mirror as I make my first turn I see a grand chandelier dangling from the ceiling, not reflecting light, but swallowing it up in the most elegant fashion. People are bustling about, clinking glasses, spilling glasses.

I finally see Bernice.

Her hair is ruffled and her dress is crinkled. Dark bags hang beneath her eyes, like a stain on my beautiful girl. Robert walks up beside her, kissing her on the lips, before handing her a glass.

"You always know what I like," she whispers into his ear and leans backward.

"It's because I love you, baby."

Robert glances at me, hypnotized, before jamming me into the mirror. It is cold. I breathe a shattered rhythm.

"Robert! You broke her!"

Bernice reaches into my box and pulls out porcelain pieces from my tutu. They are painted white with blue accents around the edges. I knew what I looked like in the mirror behind me, but I've never seen a part of me so dimensional before.

"I'm sorry," Robert says.

Bernice looks down.

"Can I pay you to stay?"

Bernice shakes her head and pulls her jewels from my box. She stuffs them in her bag. I notice she is wearing her favorite pearls. She looks down at the floor and zips up her bag. I turn the corner and I look at the reflection on the mirror, even though it is hard to see anything in this room. Bernice takes a step forward and sternly looks at my dance. As I twirl I want to tell her how much I love her. I want to tell her even though I am broken; I am still the same ballerina I used to be. I am hers. She looks at me as I round about to meet her face. But I barely catch it.

The darkness floods in again before I hear her beautiful voice one last time.

"Anyone want this...box?"

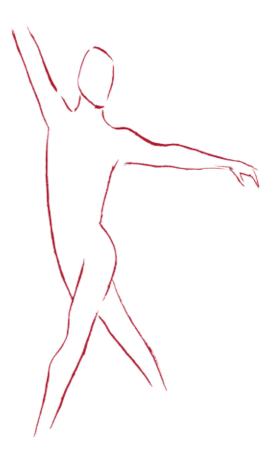
It is just a box.

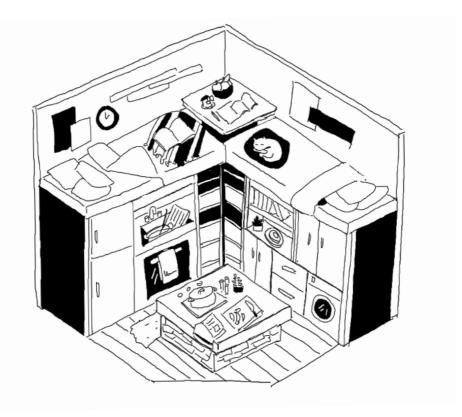
"It is broken."

I am broken.

"And I have no use for it anymore."

Julia is an artist, designer and doodler in her last semester of her Master of Design. She previously graduated from New York University with a Bachelor of Arts in Art History with a double minor in Creative Writing and Italian Studies. Her favorite things are flowers, daydreaming and vanilla cake (in no particular order).





Down the dark page glimmers the city's ink Railway tracks of rain across river plains. Stars watch the shell of weathered clouds retreat Lamplight drowns even the deep midnight moon. Floodwater creeps into parks, for a boat To stand sheepish on few feet past a fence.

Splintered marshes run onto backyard slopes Roadside blossoms forget and, drifting, sink. They lay their heads back down and close their eyes In the late sun off the back of a bus. Their rooms aglow become orbs of that light Below their beds staff busy the kitchen.

- Hrishikesh Srinivas

CAMILLE

By Alex Rose

"I know how to do it; what no one has ever done before. I know how to write a perfectly temporally accurate narrative: no description, no authorial comments, just pure dialogue."

"What if someone moves?"

"No one will move. All they do is talk. It's so literal, so true to life, that there's no room for interpretation."

"It's not possible to avoid interpretation."

"Well, let's say there's a margin of error – a confidence interval. If you write pure dialogue, you can be sure that it will almost always be interpreted correctly ninety – five percent of the time."

Herzog sighed and dropped his glass of wine down with a heavy chink on the cheap, sticky pine of the bar.

"Who cares about temporality?" He asked rhetorically. "Nobody. You know what people care about? Plot, people – feeling!"

He gestured wildly with his hands.

"Just write something interesting," Herzog continued, as if Camille were capable of this. "Use an emotionally manipulative character – perhaps a pregnant woman. Describe her to the reader, describe the people she loves and the people who love her, explore her dark past, perhaps make her fall in love, and then use her to express what you believe in."

"What I believe in?"

"Yes. By the end of the story she should be sufficiently dramatized, so that you are able to express your truth."

"Of narrative time?"

"Of x, y, z, war is bad, true love prevails, art for art's sake, whatever you want."

The wine wavers precariously in his glass.

A description now of Camille. Camille has a beer – no, a glass of wine. Yes, that suits her better. And although her name is French, like Herzog her accent is German.

"So what is your truth?" Herzog asks, leans back, and drinks deeply from his glass.

Camille considers the question.

"I want to portray time that is true to how we experience it through the human condition."

He raises an eyebrow.

"You think we experience time accurately?" He asks. "Moment by moment?"

"Yes."

"You never think about the future or the past? You never think 'what if' or 'I should have' and 'why don't I'?"

"Thinking isn't living."

"No?"

"Trees live without thinking."

He shakes his head and smiles.

"Not as far as you know."



"If you're willing to base your argument on that, then you may as well start believing in a god too, because you can't prove that either," she argues.

"I've never said I don't believe in a god," he says, smiling, "if I don't know something then I simply don't know. There can be no belief beyond that."

"You're a filthy liar," she claims. He laughs and pushes her.

Usually on Friday evenings Camille tires of Herzog and leaves the bar. She might catch a taxi home or risk the bus, depending on her state of intoxication. Camille's temporary home is forty kilometres away. Three hundred kilometres away, in her true home, her family are watching their Friday night film. Pay attention to these numbers. They are important.

Most nights Camille stays up with her cat, Mistletoe, entertaining her with a piece of string. Other nights Camille might call her old lover, who knows which one, and invite them to take part in the destruction of her body. In one version of events Camille stays home and avoids where the alcohol will lead her. In another Camille sits beside Herzog and regrets the glass of wine, or beer, or whisky she has bought. In any case, she only pretends to drink.

However, in every version of that night, at precisely three hundred and two meters away, as minute hands obliviously tick past eightfifteen and Camille sits reconsidering the importance of time, in a few seconds a bomb will fall. A glass of wine will spill. This is how it happens and how it will always happen:

Just beforehand Camille will mishandle her glass of wine somehow and spill it on her clothes.

When the bomb lands it will interrupt Camille's contemplation of narrative temporality. It will interrupt, it has interrupted, it interrupts the temporality of Camille's own body. Camille separates – and was always destined to separate – into many different pieces, some larger, or more significant than others.

As diviners of meaning, most people are adamant that certain parts of certain things hold more importance than others. People are under the impression that because something is recognizable, like Camille's very human hand, that it is somehow imbued with abstract ideas. This is only relatively true. Camille's left hand held no more meaning or significance than the obscure piece of subcutaneous tissue, adipose and smooth muscle of the intestine that will become one of the pieces.

At only three – hundred – and – two meters from the hypocentre Camille is subsequently vaporized so few microseconds after being blown apart that it is essentially simultaneous. She exists as the singular Camille, then the new pieces of Camille, then the billions of individual atoms that reform into radioactive, black raindrops.

Now I am Camille. I feel as she feels. That is the funny thing. The transformation of atoms into heat is so instantaneous, that I feel nothing. It is faster than the electro-chemical impulse of my nerves. I die before I experience the imminence of my own death. Not even a flash of light reaches my optic nerves.

In death I no longer experience time as a moment; I experience everything simultaneously. I am the singular Camille, I am the multiple separate pieces of Camille, I the atomic Camille, the potential Camille. To you, depending on where and what you are temporally, one Camille exists in the present, another in the past, some in the future, others in fiction.

In one version of events, Herzog never goes to the bar. He goes on to direct another relatively renowned documentary, Camille, in honour of his late friend. His protagonist, Camille, goes on to do the usual things - eventually give in to surrounding pressures of her social group to get married and have two kids, leading inevitably to an unsurprisingly messy divorce and one spoilt grandchild. She finds true love at the age of seventy-nine with a woman who has no one else, and dies ten years later, peacefully, in her sleep.

Camille's mother tried to imagine all kinds of different versions of that night. If only she'd

left the bar earlier, if only she'd stayed home, if only she had come home to them, if only. In one fabricated future, the one in which she stays at her temporary home that night, she is at her greatest possible distance from the hypocentre of the blast: forty kilometres.

She is looking out the window at the time. She has decided not to go out with Herzog after seeing the two red lines on her HCG test. Her contact list is open and abandoned on her phone. She is debating who to call first; her mother, the doctor, her lover, when she sees a flash of purple light. She doesn't remember the blast.

She wakes up and finds her skin stuck to the carpet. She has begun to divide into twenty-eight pieces of melted flesh. This is not what kills her. When she stumbles from what was once a house into what some will describe as the fires of hell, a radioactive particle of Herzog, united with other radioactive particles, will descend upon forty-kilometre-Camille in the form of black rain. It will change the structure of her proteins so irreversibly that she dies a few months on. They will exhibit her miscarried foetus and the melted tips of her fingers in the glass case of a museum, preserved indefinitely in formalin.

This was the only imagined narrative that was possible. In all the variant narratives that

.

Camille's mother constructs of that night, all are true, but all are fictional. She is incorrectly under the impression that because something is infinite, it does not have limits. Camille will never watch the Friday night film with them. Her older brother knows all the lines. Even though he's twenty-three he still sings the theme song with her as he did when he was eight. She will never eat the homemade chicken and leek pie her mother bakes for her that night. She even kneads the pastry. Camille has pretended since she was little that she likes her mother's cooking. Afterwards she has to pick bits of grizzle out of her teeth but doesn't say anything about it. Her father ducks out for a cigarette halfway through the film. He says it's his last cigarette. Camille's mother imagines that in this version of events it really is his last cigarette. At three-hundred kilometres the blast does not touch them.

In all of Camille's infinite futures, forty kilometres is her limit. Sometimes, on nights which are not that Friday, she stays with her family. Sometimes her mother cooks, other times her father. They watch a film, either one they've seen before or haven't. But on that Friday night Camille is, and will always be, in the bar with Herzog.

She mishandles her glass of wine and spills it on her clothes.



Alex Rose is currently studying 'Creative Writing' and works in the respite ward of a hospital. Her mother recently read her essay on unreliable narration in 'Lolita', a highly contested topic in the study of 'Narratology', and told her that this is not what she wants her to do with her life. This plunged her deep into her third existential crisis of the year. She has since recovered, thanks to the help of cigarettes, Bob Ross, and her cat, Paul Pawson.

I

A golden handshake

The last time our hands met

your grip loosened first.

My mind was pulled into a tunnel

of the first time our fingers touched

of that spark of delight, of curiosity

of excitement

of your clean trimmed nails

smelling faintly of soap and antiseptic

and of that smile that you wore

as casually as the grey sweaters that hung from your angular frame.

I remembered the rough callouses, the wrinkles

and what it felt like when our lines of destiny started to diverge.

I remember how your hands would gently cradle a steaming cup of tea

with the softness of cradled a newborn

I wish that the last time our hands had met

in that gentle embrace

that I let go first

only because that memory will linger

when all others have disappeared.

INFLECTION

A windowless pane

Π

Capture us in the light of the dark When the cold night beckons and the moon shines With an otherworldly lustre One night can shine a thousand lights Yet in the day, our dreams drag on listlessly Along the pavement of dreams long torn Under the relentless toil of that circumspect and wary way in which we find ourselves The moon can wax and wane And the sea can rise and fall But in those one thousand nights our thoughts unfurl unbidden and unwanted into a tortuous infinity.

So heavily we trod down that untrammelled path to quench our thirst On the rippling pool of knowledge But instead we surrender to the frothy, torrid currents Against which we flail Unheeded Unburdened Alone to the very end

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III

Sea of Laundry

I wish I could find you in my sea of stuff.

I was buried under my furniture, your sheets and our cutlery

so I

reached for you through the pile of clothes

that draped over your fraying persona.

I wanted to dust away the drudgery

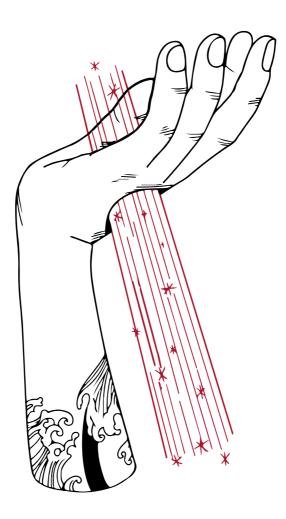
that clung to you like stubborn pieces of lint

And dreamed of ironing the crevices

of us

so that we could fold, neatly, into each other's lives. when all others have disappeared.

- Othilia Nguyen-le



Othilia is a 5th year Commerce/Law student who is prone to spending unnecessarily long amounts of time choosing between different brands of tomato cans at the local supermarket. She hopes to one day change the world but in the meantime she will settle for changing her desktop background.

SANS FRONTIÈRES

By Binak Versailles

2071, Sydney, Australis Union.

The air had chosen to refrain from its nightly dance across Botany Bay, providing an aural clarity. The water sat still, a dense, dark carpet supporting a collection of motionless freighters enjoying a final statuesque slumber beneath the Moon's gentle rays. By morning the vessels littering the Bay would venture eastwards towards the Union's 'satellite' territories in Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, making way for the ships completing the return leg.

From one of the resting ships, Katherine looked out towards Brighton, her eyes met only by imprecise reflections; masses of black, grey, and a hint of cream that the sand bounced back to her. Anti-aircraft towers formed a picket fence, watching over the Bay and the Airport, preventing the Union's capital from fully exposing its brilliance outwards. She tilted her head side –to –side for her eyes to catch a pinch of light here and there. A slender young woman with smooth brown skin and a face yet to be tested by age, Katherine watched quietly as the hidden city flickered against her dark eyes. She had a wide nose and full lips that sat beneath fine waves of black hair, threatening to touch her shoulders without ever doing so. Holding her breath, Katherine heard a faint sub-bass rumble escaping the cluttered streets and huddled concrete blocks of the city.

Hunched to her left, was Linda, a short, stocky dark – haired woman of Chinese heritage. She had a tight ponytail tied behind her head and her fair face stood out atop her black wet-suit. Her eyes were black marbles that moved in swift bursts. The way she carried herself mimicked her talent – precise, efficient, fluid. With Linda was David, just beyond his teen years. His broad shoulders, sharp blue eyes and big, sharp-edged nose gave him an air of strength and control. His fingers told another story, trembling as he looked to Linda for guidance - both were fastening synthetic rubber to their feet, tightening small oxygen packs to their backs.

"Kath, get your fucking gear on," Linda whispered, but her voice felt harsh in the silence.

"Shit, sorry," Katherine jumped, before sitting down to get ready "I just didn't expect the Static Zone to be so...."

"Stay focused," Linda retorted quickly. "We're in the water in two."

It never got cold enough in Sydney, even in the winter, for the ocean to deter swimmers but fear took the temperature's place for Katherine, it chipped away at her muscles, keeping them tense. She put her diving attire on with a clenched jaw, teeth clawing at one another, kinetic energy bubbling under her skin. As she pulled on the straps around her ankles, three braided bracelets – black, yellow and red – danced on her wrist, they caught Katherine's eye.

She focused on Linda's key rule: Be silent, be safe. Be silent, be safe. Be silent, be safe, a toneless repetition, a mental metronome. As this mantra looped, Katherine pictured a soft, round, kind face, the one she was moulded from. She remembered holding a sweaty, trembling hand. She replayed the moment she first put her bracelets on, as she caressed that soft, round, kind, but pained face. She remembered looking at the body that birthed her, missing an arm and a leg. She thought back to an agony furious enough to incapacitate, to make a mother fail to recognise her daughter's face. This sadness travelled with her from home, pouring itself through Katherine,

down her spine, within her heart, filling her hands. This sadness gave Katherine no choice, but gave her purpose.

Linda stood up, shoulders spread; she commanded more space than her body could fill. She had perfected many roles over the years: whip, enforcer, teacher, leader, spy, humanitarian, thief. Tonight she filled the role of smuggler, guiding two valuable resources. She looked at the novices and remembered the countless others she had trained and guided into the capital. Some from Samoa, whose ancestors had lived there for millennia, historically pillaged by Europeans, now encompassed within the Australis Union. Some from Tonga, whose parents had been transferred from prisons in Sydney, Melbourne, Christchurch and Wellington to work in component factories for 'a wage': the Australis Union was efficient. The Satellite Citizens' Organisation was built to help people like Katherine and David, and their families; people left behind by the state. This help was not free.

"Listen," she said, standing still, head turning smoothly from Katherine to David every few seconds, 'it's 01:23; we disembark at 01:25. The Curators change shifts at 2:00, but they come through Gate 39 at 01:50. That's 25 minutes. We land at Brighton by 01:35. Gear off, into the bags. If we don't land together, look for the laser' she said, pulling out a crayon-sized black cylinder from her zipped hip pocket.

"Three blinks," David reiterated, "right?"

"Yes," Linda replied. "Stay as low as you can until you reach me, just like we trained. Once we are together we won't have long."

"And if we..." Katherine started.

"There are no contingencies, Katherine," Linda responded quickly as she climbed onto the edge of the freighter, preparing for her pin – drop dive, 'we know they focus on the Airport and the Port; the convoy will head directly to the Airport. We get to the gate before they enter and we slip through before they begin to shut it.'

"Alright," Katherine replied quickly, taking a breath before getting onto the edge of the vessel.

Linda checked her wrist, "it's time." She was very still for a moment, to deliver a final message, "you are both important to us; we need you just as much as you need us. Be silent, stay close, and we'll get to the city safely."

Together, they leapt off the vessel, feet first and bodies tense.

Stationed at Brighton Beach, the centre of the Static Zone's arc, John and Sash had the sleeping freighters occupying their focal point. Like trees at the edge of a forest, the pair stood anchored to the eroded footpath overlooking the Bay, a metre above the sand. They both wore a thick, synthetic-material anorak drenched in a dark, almost black navy; on their right shoulders they each bore three thin pastel-red strips, sewn into their coats. Beneath each jacket, a marble-white shirt, buttoned up to the neck. Only their heads moved, occasionally panning from the silent Airport to the left, the napping vessels directly ahead, and the manufacturing hub at Kurnell to the right.

John had skin as pale as milk. He carried an austere face, his flesh tight against his cheekbones. Short, sharp black hair, a long, thin nose, sky – blue beads within the eye – sockets and a small mouth matched his almost spectral physique. Beside him, Sash carried a clear, olive complexion, a solid, pointed nose and a slightly chubby face that did no justice to the well – oiled machine of tendon and sinew concealed by her uniform. Her eyes were a vibrant green, always absorbing as she rarely blinked. At five feet and seven inches, she was shorter than John but her stance communicated leadership. In the quiet, with rifles cradled in their arms, the metal cooling their fingers, John began.

"Sash," John turned to his partner, "I don't know about this..."

"You're not convinced?" Sash replied, eyes still directed towards the Bay.

"The brief is a bit... farfetched, isn't it?"

Sash, checked her rifle, 'it's come straight from the Department."

"I know, but," John turned to the beach, "I just don't see the point."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," John explained, "how many have they got operating in the city...40, 50 maybe?"

"About that..."

"So if this intelligence is right – and by the way, I'm not convinced by that either; if you wanted to smuggle yourself into Sydney, would you go through the Static Zone?"

"Surveillance is largely automated now," Sash countered, "the Curators are concentrated at the Airport and Port Botany. If you don't emit anything picked up by RADAR, it's effectively a blind spot. Look around, we're the only ones here."

"...in any case, assuming the intel is valid, why not just reinforce the Zone with Curators? Shut this avenue down and focus on the raids in the city," John's wrist bleeped, "it's 01:30."

"They'd find another way," Sash responded, "and we'd get no further than we are."

"It's less risky, though" John countered, "it'd slow them down at least."

"The CEO, Hugo; did you listen to his first speech?" Sash started after a small pause.

John frowned, "yeah, he went on about his time at the Timor Gap."

"He also talked about the need for us to adopt a longer – term strategy to deal with this,' Sash continued, 'the perpetrators of the raids give us nothing, we've caught dozens. The way they organise their people is too effective: their leaders are insulated. We need someone on our side."

"Look, these people are thieves, criminals..."

"You'd be too, in their position," Sash interrupted.

"I wouldn't," he replied pointedly. "They're selfish and dangerous... they'll disappear in the city."

"The Department has given us such a specific target, they must have done the work on this," Sash saw John's shoulders relax as she reassured him. "If we execute this correctly, we can get closer to... think about it, what if we could publicly link the raids to S.C.O?"

"It would be a result."

"Best result for years. So, relay it back to me again, let's make sure."

"Three will be landing at Brighton, right in front of us," John recounted the briefing paper for the assignment, "Asian female, Black female (the target), Cauc..."

Sash turned as her eyes caught a glint of red light. She quickly brought her rifle's scope before her eyes, looking down at the water, she saw movement.

John did the same. "I see them ... can you pick out the target?"

"No," said, Sash walking backwards steadily towards the nearest A - A tower, "tay out of sight. They have to wait for the gate to open, once the convoy passes through, we execute," Sash was now knelt behind a concrete barricade, rifle still focused on the three black figures on the sand.

"OK."

"Make sure you're silenced, we can't disturb the convoy" Sash began whispering. "You've got the target, remember the neck is the most effective area to hit, it'll drop her quickly."

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Katherine crawled out of the water slowly, keeping low. The gear augmenting her suit had made the swim straight-forward. Calmly, she took a panoramic view of the beach, catching Linda's laser to her left; she could just make out the diminutive frame. After removing her flippers and oxygen mask, she took soft, measured steps towards Linda. The Static Zone was virtually a vacuum and Katherine was conscious of the crunch her feet made in the sand. David had landed slightly further afield, he was making his way too. The new recruits were either side of Linda as she checked her wrist again, showing an analogue clock that read 01:37.

"Stay behind me; single-file," she spoke softly.

With still heads and bent knees the group made their way up the beach. As they moved, a battered Grand Parade emerged before them; store fronts were painted over in thick bitumen. Taking the old Novotel's place was an A A tower housing only computers and missiles. By its side lay a hulking door, made from 4 large bullet – proof panels, though when it was shut, as it was when Katherine looked up at it, it was a flat black wall. Across the gate's face were two large, dull-white digits: 39. The group stopped, crouching behind the old store-fronts across from the A – A tower.

"Doing well," Linda whispered quickly. "Stay calm, mimic me. When the door opens, the convoy will pass through and turn left, towards the Airport. We move when the door begins to shut again."

Sash's scope focused in on the youngsters nodding.

"John, have you clocked her?"

"Yep."

Against the silence, the mechanical roar of the gate filled Katherine's ears.

It was an elongated, rush of caustic noise, a stinging metallic drone that scythed at Katherine's ear – drums.

She felt the rumble in her chest too, as the thick black wall folded up into the roof of Gate 39. First the top panel dislodged upwards, breaking the flat surface, then the second – top and so on. It began to create a large rectangular window into the city.

Linda flattened her palm, facing it downwards beside her: a signal to calm David behind her who was shuffling his feet. Katherine was very still as she stooped behind them. As the door slowly raised itself, she could only squint as the headlights of two double – decked black armoured buses shone through. The convoy, with engines growling, was stationary as the gate completed its sequence. Unmoving, Katherine's breathing became shorter and shorter as she stared upon the

might of the Union Guard. Adrenalin swam through her chest, arms and legs, as she thought of the hundred-odd Curators housed within the convoy; she felt her heart throbbing through her throat.

Then, Katherine felt something punch into the right side of her neck. Instantly, her shoulder twitched upwards trying in vain to protect her head as her face contorted. The projectile sunk its teeth into her flesh, as the hot tranquilizer fluid darted its way through her blood. While her peripheral vision faded, her knees buckled, dropping her onto hands and knees. Katherine saw Linda and David fall into a heap in front of her before she collapsed face- – irst into the weathered grey footpath.

The convoy set off, disturbing the still air as it made its way along the Bay, dropping off sets of Curators at key points: The Lighthouse, the Airport, Port Botany. As the noise of engines faded, and the gate closed its mouth, Sash and John made their way over to the bodies.

"John," Sash started, "perfect mate. Well done."

"Now?"

"The bodies," Sash instructed, pointing to Linda and David, "straight to the morgue at St George. Don't talk to anyone, just scan your finger, and get them to the incinerator."

"OK."

"The Department has given us special clearance," Sash continued, "none of this is on the record; keep that in mind for tomorrow."

"Yep," John nodded, "we were both at home."

"Exactly."

"Her?" John tilted his head towards Katherine, who was still faced - down.

"There's a specific address," Sash explained "somewhere in Marrickville... one of the high – rises."

"You sure we have to do this separately?"

"100 percent," Sash declared, looking at her wrist as she spoke, "this is time sensitive. Call your car now," she added as she pulled out a thin black – steel touch – console from her jacket's inner pocket.

John did the same, "30 seconds," he concluded.

"Good."

Sash moved towards Katherine, kneeling beside her. Grabbing Katherine's numb limbs, she fastened pastel – red synthetic cuffs onto her wrist, binding them together.

She did the same to the ankles. John knelt beside the departed, searching their pockets and bags before preparing the bodies for removal. Sash then faced the gate with her console in hand before it screeched to life again. The dormant bodies were lit by the ambience of the city.

Katherine, still unconscious, sat motionless in a light – brown, sofa – chair. Her arms were rested along the chair's arms and her head lay against its backrest. She was placed at one end of a tight, but long, rectangular room with walls painted a soft, warm cream. To Katherine's right were three very wide floor – to – ceiling windows – the streets, twenty – five storeys below, were quiet but the



ever – brilliant towers and buildings adorning the skyline made elegant noise with their colours and shapes. Immediately facing Katherine was an identical chair, just beyond a shallow square table occupying the space in between.

Sat across from Katherine was a thin man, with tanned skin. His right iris was a bright grey, almost white. His left iris mirrored the strands of brown hair that were pulled neatly to one side of his head – his hair was combed so that it imitated a small wave just above his forehead. He wore a dark, blood – red coat and on his right shoulder, one thin purple line was sewn.

He sat still, staring at Katherine, who was breathing slowly. Then, he lifted his hands and clapped. The sound slapped tightly against the walls.

Katherine jumped where she sat, almost falling out of the seat. Her eyes opened sharply, and, in the proximity, made immediate eye contact with the man.

Fuck, she thought. Her heart was banging against her throat again, but she sat still.

"Katherine," the man addressed her, keeping his head still and his eyes fixed on hers, "Katherine Brown, yes?"

She didn't blink. She thought back to her pact with S.C.O, the collateral. She stayed still, looked to the window.

"It's very thick glass," the man responded to her gaze, "I wouldn't try it." He leant back in his seat, crossed his legs and slid his fingers between one another, resting his hands on his lap, "I do understand though, and I don't blame you. But give me a moment, and you'll realise it's not necessary. I understand that you, your family, you've gone through a terrible tragedy; an accident in one of the Union's factories."

As the man talked, Katherine was bombarded not only by the realisation of her precarious position, but by the physical toll of the tranquiliser. She remembered being shot, seeing Linda and David. Her jaw tightened, her pores released, trying to cool her down. She thought back to Linda's words, at once both a warning and a threat: Be silent. Be safe. She thought of the soft, kind, warm face. She remembered the S.C.O doctors – volunteers from the core cities – repairing a broken body, giving comfort. She recalled holding a soft hand, with warm tears falling, and jokes about being able to retire. This sadness travelled with her always, and gave her strength.

"My name is Hugo Roux," he continued.

Be silent, be safe.

"I need your help."

Be silent.

"If you work with me, I will help your mother, get her away from S.C.O."

Katherine's lungs paused, for a moment.

"Here, in our hospitals, she can be given her life back," his eyes stayed locked on Katherine's, seeing her mind move.

Stay silent.

"Unfortunately, there is no time," Hugo sat up straight, planted both his feet flat against the floor. His right hand slid into the left side of his jacket, and slid back out with a white pistol, pointed at Katherine's chest. "I'll put this simply: if you help me, you help yourself and your family. If you refuse, your body will be burned before sunrise, and your mother will follow you into heaven."

Katherine thought of her mother, "I can't."

Hugo smiled, and exhaled. It surprised Katherine, because he let his shoulders down slightly, and lent back into his chair, resting the gun in his lap.

"Where were you meant to go once you made it into the city?"

"I can't," Katherine replied softly, her adrenalin was beginning to subside, and she felt the bruising on her neck just talking, "tell you."

"You'll have to get there on your own."

Katherine said nothing.

"Take this," Hugo threw over a hard, blue rectangular piece of plastic; it was small enough to fit in the palm of a hand. It had physical buttons with tiny white digits, an even smaller alphabet, and a miniscule screen the size of a matchbox. "It's old technology, it uses frequencies that have been retired, you will receive instructions."

Katherine studied the object briefly before looking back up at Hugo.

"Just get to your safe house as you were meant to," he continued, "send the signal that you made it perfectly."

"If we don't all report..."

"I know," he interrupted. "On the table; the consoles," he nodded down to the coffee table at two thin black screens,"they've been reprogrammed to respond to your fingerprints."

"Are they..."

"Yes," Hugo replied sharply, "they're beyond your help now." Seeing her sore, tired face sink, "you're of no use to me if you don't trust me. I said I will help your family, and I will. Get to your safe house, continue as you were, and make no noise to suggest anything is wrong. In two days, I will send you proof of your family's well – being, and then your work will begin."

Jesus, Katherine felt as though blood was evaporating from her brain. "OK," she said simply.

"OK," Hugo concluded. He then raised his gun, aimed for Katherine's chest and squeezed the trigger calmly: another tranquiliser dart punched into her, breaking through the skin. In seconds, she was slumped in her chair again. Getting up smoothly, Hugo collected the old cell – phone, a charger and the two S.C.O consoles, placing them in a backpack which he fastened to Katherine's numb body.

Opposite the city – view was a thin white door. Hugo walked to it, opened it and whispered to Sash, who had been stood, at – ease, outside, "near a station... Kogarah. Stay close until she wakes, and then keep your distance."

"Yes Boss."

"Also, get John prepared," with a pointed index, Hugo declared "I need you both in Fiji within the week. We've passed the first hurdle."

A dreamer, Binak Versailles creates music, prose and other artistic works. As with 'Sans Frontiers' these works are products of self-reflection and aim to communicate feelings of unease and fear, but also love and hope.

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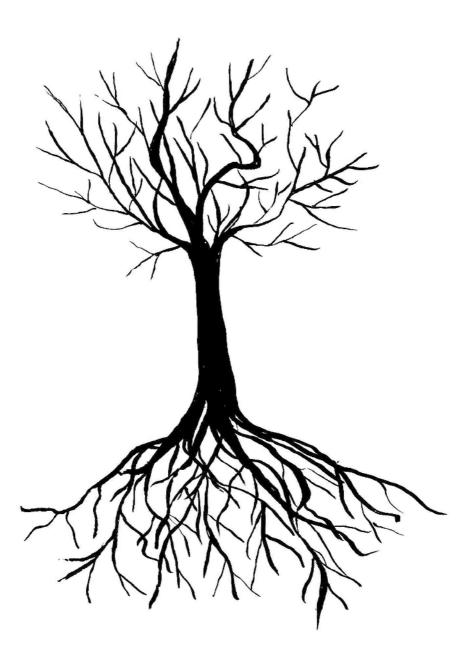
You cannot force my mouth into unfamiliar shapes Nor strip away the cadences of a warm afternoon Of rice, fish and unalloyed nostalgia From the music of my words You cannot shame my "imperfect" use of your enforced tongue Nor my love of slipping In and out Of my father's mother-tongue The rhythm of ancient dance and temple rituals Pulses through me Unbelieving though I am

> I have my home in all worlds And my roots in none

> > •

BELONGING

– Kalyani



Kalyani is a Linguistics student at UNSW and an enthusiastic fan of code – switching. She likes short stories, blueberry pancakes and dancing by herself in public.

SANDCASTLES ON THE MOON

By William Laksana

Blackbird singing in the dead of night Take these broken wings and learn to fly All your life You were only waiting for this moment to arise

When I awoke, I found myself curled in the corner, recollecting only a disarranged sequence of memories, a sliver of broken time, wakeful remnants of some interrupted dream, scuttled like the crumpled archipelago of coat-jackets and scarves on the floor. Meanwhile, on the wall, the clock, a semaphore conductor, swept its needlethin – arms across an expressionless face.

As she lay there, her soft breathing was betrayed only by the gentle rise and fall of her vague outline; what uncertain, silent, stillness hangs in such empty spaces – such are the places we go when we're asleep. For a long while, I watched the incandescent glow through gauze curtains dance on the upturned valleys and creased hollows of the sheets.

An old tree stood outside, turning reluctantly in the low wind as if it were disturbed from some deep meditation. Sometimes, I would wonder if a tree in winter was any less a tree. Now that its leaves had long since fallen and withered into muddy pools that gathered on the narrow bends of streets, when the songbirds had made their way to somewhere in the deep south, only stark and twisted contortions remained – fingers of spilt ink against a scrawling sky – drawing long shadows on the frost-painted grass.

I mean, what would you expect if you asked anyone to picture a tree or draw one? It'd definitely at least have leaves. In a sense, the greenery is a distraction, hiding what's been underneath the whole time, a part of something that you know is there but you just can't put your finger on.

You mean like your nose? You can put your finger on that though.

I was thinking along the lines of repressed memories or -

Or eyebrows?

2nd PLACE

I suppose that works too. No one notices them by accident.

You could probably write a book about it, she said, no one would read it though.

Not even you?

Well, maybe if I had nothing else to do, I definitely wouldn't go out of my way to read about the psychology of trees.

And here I was, thinking that you were an ardent reader.

She took another sip of whisky; the glass leaving a ring of droplets, barely visible in the

all-too-often dim lighting of places like these – something to be taken as a given I suppose, like how the university folk quartet would always play the same sentimental ballads on Mondays, or the bitter taste of cigarette smoke that swirled about the ceiling.

I'd rather read a book on clouds to be honest.

Clouds?

They're pretty interesting, I think.

Mm, I suppose.

No two clouds ever look the same, and they never stay in the same place. Keeps things original. If anything, I'd prefer my weather slightly overcast just to look at flocks of water vapour.

You know, most people look forward to sunny days. I think it's always refreshing to see clear skies, simple, things are complicated enough on the ground.

Well, now that is some derivative, blue - sky thinking right there. What's so interesting about that? Seriously, you might as well stare at a blue wall all day. I don't know about you, but if that's what most people look forward to, no wonder we're all so disappointed.

Disappointed?

Expecting a clear day is like wishing that everything goes according to plan and nothing goes wrong, and there are an infinite number of ways a sunny day can go wrong, if you think about it.

Surely hoping for miserable weather is just as unhelpful, with that point of view you're just waiting for everything to go wrong and fall apart.

But knowing things go wrong and fall apart is the whole point. Happiness is just the difference between reality and expectation, isn't it; simple math really: what else can the burdens of a shitty world minus some high – flying naïve optimism equal to if not crippling regret and anxiety?

So the point's to not have expectations then?

No, of course not, having no expectations is just as bad. I mean, if you had no expectations about anything and I told you to step out in front onto an expressway blindfolded, you wouldn't give it a second thought, and I think we can both agree that that wouldn't end very well -

She paused briefly, and looked straight at me, with a gaze that may as well have been an eighteen – wheeler hurtling at some speed down an expressway.

I guess the way around it all is to have negative expectations, the worse the better. When you expect rain and it rains, you're not going to beat yourself up over it, are you? And when you expect rain and it's sunny, you'd be pleasantly surprised, ergo happy.

Well, if being happy comes from being a pleasantly surprised, perennial pessimist, don't you think that's a little delusional?

Yeah, well, maybe happiness is a delusion. It's a lot like wishing for sandcastles to not be washed away when morning comes around, or for the world to not end.

Oh boy.

It was probably at about four when the lamplights went out. I couldn't really tell, but I was pretty sure the walls I'd been staring at were blue. That said, you don't tend to expect much when you're half-awake and barely able to think straight past that hissing noise in your ears when everything's quiet, so I suppose it wasn't that disappointing.

Aside from the laughing echoes of late night - come - early morning revellers, ambling their way home, voices dissolving into the unwavering dark, the only other sound was the every - now - and - then groaning of the heater as the gas switched off and on again, like a broken violin dragged slowly across a brick wall.

I pulled myself out of my corner, like a hermit crab from its stolen shell, across the floor and hoisted myself onto the chair on the other side of the bed. I stared blankly for a moment, until the outlined forms of things began to reappear.

On the table, two used train tickets stuck out from a diary, dog-eared tags, with holes crudely punched, leaving tooth-like chad hanging on their side. An ordered cairn of notebooks and loose pages scribbled found companions in a single woollen glove, and an errant paperclip that had strayed far from its deserted post. Beneath an eleventh volume of the Anglo-American, and an abridged history of Constantinople, lay an old, yellow – spotted paperback that caught my eye.

Its cover was worn, but not tattered, its title barely visible, as though scrubbed off, wishing itself to be discreet: «The collected works of -----». Thumbing through its tired pages, careful annotations lined its margins, in small marks I couldn't entirely decipher nor tell apart from the misaligned printing of faded letters:

•

A long time ago, when the earth was young, the moon was a lot closer than it is today. It hovered above the same spot on the ground, day and night, and was so close that if you jumped high enough, halfway through, you'd begin to fall upwards toward the moon.

Of course, no one called it 'the moon' back then; in fact, they didn't really have a word for the floating silver orb that hung above them. People used to go back and forth so often that they saw it as just some other place – that place on the other side of the horizon, a companion locked in a gravitational embrace - what was the point of giving something so close by a name?

Over time, for reasons no one quite understood, the moon (they had to come up with a name eventually) began to drift further and further away. Those who wanted to visit had to start using ladders or to jump from a tall hill.

Eventually, the distance became so great that the townspeople who lived under the moon had to tie the two sides together with a long rope for the occasional traveller who wanted to cross the sky.

About this time, there lived a weaver in that town below the moon. One day, when the weaver was outside, her needle, reflecting the sunlight, caught the attention of a passing crow, one whose wings were so wide that it cast a large shadow whenever it flew overhead.

Thinking that a storm was approaching, the weaver looked up and saw a sweep of black wings as the crow grabbed the curved needle in its talons.

The weaver chased after the bird as it flew ever higher, pushing gusts of twisting wind with every flap of its wings, crossing to the other side of the sky. Without a second thought, she ran to the tall hill outside the town, where the rope was tied to the ground, and began climbing after it.

On the other side, it circled a few times before landing on the shoulder of a figure that sat on a crater's edge. Coming closer, the weaver noticed that he wore a silver cloak that seemed to take on

a shape you couldn't quite trace.

He turned as he noticed the weaver, "I'm terribly sorry, is this yours?" holding up the needle to return it, "my feathered friend can get quite zealous sometimes. You're from the town, aren't you?"

"I am," the weaver replied, somewhat puzzled, "I've never seen you before, are you visiting the moon? Come to think of it, no one's come up here in a long time."

"You could say that, a long-term visit," he said, "I live in a palace on the other side of that ridge," pointing beyond where the sunlight ended.

"A palace? What are you, a prince of the moon?"

"I suppose you could say that."

"I didn't know anyone lived up here, or that the moon had a prince."

The prince laughed – the weaver thought it was an odd, but familiar, sort of laugh, like the sound of an old drum – as his crow set off again, gliding effortlessly across the crater's edge, "yes, we've been here a while, a prince and his crow."

"So, what are you doing?"

"Watching the sea," he replied, "it's a nice view, there's not much of that on the far side where I live." His eyes followed the crow's flight. By now, it was so far off that it was hard to spot it against the dark of open space.

"What sea?" the weaver asked, "there's nothing here but dust. Look there, that deep blue water, that's a sea."

The prince laughed, "why that's just a matter of perspective. You may have water for your seas, but if you ask me, dust is just as great, you're missing out."

Noticing the sun begin to set, the weaver politely backed away, "It's really been nice talking to you but I have to go now. You know what, keep the needle and thread, you could use it for fishing. Staring at the sea all day must be boring."

"That's fine, if you ever decide to come visit again, I'll be right here," he said, adding, just as the weaver was about to climb back down, "and I'll tell you if I've caught anything!"

The next week, she visited again; the prince hadn't caught anything.

"Everything is so small and far away from up here, like the town, even the stars look different."

"I suppose they must be," the prince replied, "but I wish I knew what the stars looked like from down there on earth."

The weaver wondered how long he had been on the moon, though her curiosity was interrupted as the prince's crow returned, kicking up a cloud of silver specks as it landed.

"I never asked, what's his name?"

"Whose?"

"Your crow."

The prince paused for a moment, "You know, I've never thought about giving him a name."

"How about Franz?"

"That sounds like a good name."

And so, at the end of every week, they would meet on that crater. For hours, the weaver would tell him about the town, and the prince about living on the moon, as they watched Franz circling the crater, disappearing into the far-off mountains among the stars or diving into the clouds below, always returning with some errant trinket. Every time the weaver had to return, she would invite the prince to visit, but he would always politely decline, wishing instead to continue watching that dusty sea.

They would talk about so many things the weaver would always forget about that interrupted curiosity and the unasked questions she had.

One day, she noticed that the prince was in a particularly sullen mood, "when I was younger, the earth was so much closer, and every week now, I can sense the distance growing further and further."

"How can you know that? It looks just as far away as it's always been."

"If you keep visiting me," he continued, "one day you might not be able to get back home."

"Then why don't you come visit me on earth?" the weaver asked.

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I lied to you, I'm not a prince of anything," he said, "I was banished here a long time ago. So long ago that no one, not even me, remembers why, or when. I don't even remember my name."

He looked out at the earth, to the town under the moon, with a blank, hollow, expression, "you see, I've been here so long that I can't go back anymore."

He held out his hand from underneath his cloak, and in the sunlight, the weaver saw that it was made of the same silvery dust as the moon, "everything up here lasts so long, that it turns into dust. If I went with you, I'd blow away in the slightest breeze."

"Then I'll live up here with you."

"No. You can't do that. You belong down there with the townspeople, on your world."

"I can forget about them. I can forget about the world."

"If you stay here you'll turn to dust like me, and forget who you are. You can visit one last time next week, but after that, promise me you'll forget about me and never come back," he said, before dissolving away into the moon.

No one knew it then but every time someone travelled between the earth and the moon, pushing themselves onto that rope, their weight pushed the two worlds ever so slightly apart, a difference that almost no one noticed.

The weaver glanced back at the empty patch of dust before making her way back down. She was halfway down when the moon started to pull at the tether; the distance had finally grown so much that the moon began to break free, its weight forcing the strands apart as it slid across the sky. When the people below saw what was happening, they rushed to the hill and tried to rein in the runaway moon, grabbing the rope, calling for the weaver to come down. Seeing how far up she was, she realised that she wouldn't be able to make it in time. From above, she could hear the prince call out for her to reach out, as a darting shadow dived towards her. She reached out.

The last strand broke, the weaver slipped, and fell back towards the earth, followed by the prince's

crow, ensnared, tumbling down with broken wings, both plunging into the deep blue water with a thunderous crash.

It has been a long time since then, but to this day, every night, when the moon crosses overhead, it pulls intently at the tides as if to find something lost, and from a certain crater, when all is quiet and the skies are clear, you can hear the silent shifting of dust and see the sun reflecting off an old fishhook it has kept for as long as it can remember.

If I'm the conscious part of me that's communicating with, what I'm assuming to be, the conscious part of you, what if there's some unconscious part of ourselves, deep down, that's awake when we're asleep?

How do you know you're not dreaming right now? After all – reality is a dream you dream with other people. Lennon said that, I think.

The communist?

No, the Beatle. Well -

In that case, what would happen if everyone fell asleep.

What do you mean?

If reality's a dream that everyone remembers they're in when they wake up, if everyone fell asleep, who'll be doing the dreaming then? I mean, the only reason that you forget your dreams is because you're no longer in it, right -

So if everyone falls asleep and forgets about reality at the same time, it'll stop existing?

It's a working hypothesis. On the upside, they'd at least be able to finally finish writing history: "and so the world ended and it was all just a dream."

That's a pretty unsatisfying and forgettable ending.

Is it though? What's the point of things that last forever? Maybe the only worthwhile things are those that end and you eventually forget about.

Just like this whisky.

When she left at dawn, I walked to the top of the tall hill from which the old town's dreaming spires lay sprawled. On the far shore, the grazing December sun pierced the harbour mist, tracing phantom outlines of silent warehouses, and the scudding smoke of red – grey trawlers returning from the sea. I drew my coat closer, and retreated within, as if to occupy a hole in the morning air, upon which, in tremulous white, a faint moon hung expectantly.

We sat there for a while, the moon and I, without a word,]watching the pebbles of ice as they melted, listening as the quartet played on.

Will is in his fifth year of a Commerce/Law degree. Aside from taking pictures of pigeons when travelling and trying to read Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting out loud, he continues to pursue completely ordinary interests.

WEST.

shining sapphire/ blue azure/ waterfall backdrop/ for the enamel boat

on the shimmering silver stream/ across the galaxies

and a sweet olive/ reaching towards the heavens/ firmly rooted

in eternity/ the home to a warren of cotton-tails

and a little girl in pigtails

copper coins/ seafoam green/ garden backdrop/ for the compass

on the ivory vessel/ across the distance to tomorrow

where the dawn star/ points towards forever/ firmly grounded

in the firmaments/ the home to rainbow beacons

and your personal Beatrice

in the space/ between here/ and now

the boat floats/ oarless

in the pause/ between inhale/ and exhale

the boat flows/ without sails

and bleeds into the evening

my dear/ when you left/ I looked west

-Zi Ying Su



West is an open interpretation of a Korean children's song that is very popular in Chinese households. Commonly known as The Little White Boat. With its many different versions, the poet has chosen the one by Xiao Bai Chuan.

SO IT GOES

By Jumaana Abdu

TW: Depicts domestic violence and sexual assault.

have a clear answer to this before endeavouring to write anything of note. To clarify, I don't mean the precise time, I mean the general time. I have a wristwatch to tell me the exact time. It's 9:44pm as I write this. I already know my first line: 'It's the same old greeting'. And it will probably be many, many hours and days later when I write the last line, which will be this: 'So it goes'.

But what I need to know before I fill in the middle is what time it is. Perhaps the better question is; *what are the times*?

I come up blank. Just blank. So my answer is technically The Age of Nothing At All, Really. I hate that answer. Better times are coming, they say. I believe them, and I want the 'better times'. God, do I want them. It's just... better than what?

"So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

It's the same old greeting. The children rush to kiss him. He stoops down and gives them a smile which I know is out of guilt. Then he turns to our eldest, gives her a one – sided hug and a one sided 'I love you' and then there's a mutual breath of relief as the two part ways and enter the car on opposite sides.

And then the lot of them are gone. It's my weekend with myself. I can't remember the last weekend we had with each other. But then again my memory is a bit fuzzy around all those 'lasts'. Myself, well, I go from the window to the lounge. Sit. Pat down my skirt. And my hair. Still eight hours until my late shift. I check my watch, which, as always, seems to tick with lethargy, with the pace of my patients in the surgical ward when they wrench themselves from bed so that I might shower them. Still eight hours.

It occurs to me that the living room could do with some rearranging. I start with the bookshelf. Colour order. As I am putting together the shelf of yellows and oranges, I come across a vintage edition of The Great Gatsby. A long-time favourite of mine. The spine is wrinkled as I remember it, dog – eared and bound in fading yellow-gold material.

After admiring its dusted hardcover I sink to the ground, back against the shelf, and open to the first page. I see where I left a note for myself in pencil beside the first line: 'Pretentious, much?' I breathe a short laugh. I wonder if you, the readers, might similarly annotate on this story... If so, be kind.

I sit and read for a long while it seems, for when I next check my watch it tells me an hour has passed. I would continue reading but the dishwasher in the other room has burst into a bout of urgent beeping, like a morning alarm interrupting an intriguing dream. I return the book to its shelf and attend to the machine. What does it have to be upset about? Not terrorism, the impending environmental apocalypse or, worse yet, ex-husbands.

Where usually there is a green light, the small LED above the dishwasher's power button

flashes red. Not a mechanic, I begin unpacking it, resolving to wash the load by hand.

My mind wanders, as it does. Soon enough the cleaning motion becomes subconscious. The only sound is that of glasses clinking in the sink, a sound that inexplicably reminds me of dinner parties that bubble and sparkle like champagne. Huh. When's the last time I had one of those? Divorce, second to the plague, is the most efficient repellent of company for fear of contagion it would seem.

There was music from my neighbour's house through the summer nights.

No music from my house.

Screw that. I turn on the radio as I wash the dishes. Slow, teasing jazz music creeps with a sultry step through the kitchen, the symphony of an orchestra wafting through the air like a young couple in an intimate swaying sort of dance.

In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars.

Yes... Slowly the music picks up tempo, hopping and stepping, a wonderfully mischievous tune reminiscent of women sporting French bobs and pearl necklaces and rag-time attire. The clinking of mugs as I rinse them becomes the clinking of champagne glasses and silver cutlery against fancy crockery.

Yes. The music livens until it breaks through the very walls of the kitchen and surrounds me, bringing with it a mansion's splendours and men and women all dressed in faded silks of gold and yellow, bouncing to the roaring tune. All of it engulfs me in a sort of breathless swoop.

Yes! Yes, I see it! I am with them. I am with them, glowing with the joys of endless company. I am dancing and mingling, laughing with the people who have everything in the world and chat about nothing at all.

But then, compelled by some pervasive force determined to bar me from all satisfaction. I find myself wandering from the crowd. The chatter of beautiful women and the bubbling of casual affection fades to a murmur, as distant as the winking stars in the night sky I now find myself walking beneath. My feet lead me further and further from the party, towards a glittering bay upon which the host's mansion stands. I walk out onto the jetty, and look across the water. It shines like the world's largest inkwell under the illumination of the muffled festivities behind me. Across the bay, glowing with a light that pulsates ever so tantalisingly, like a treat that swings to and fro, sometimes towards you but never close enough to grasp, is a single green light, minute and far away. Mesmerised, I stretch my hands out towards it as though if I could only reach that light -

I could be inside, drowning my sorrows in the overflowing laughter of rich men. Instead I am out here, alone, wishing. Fruitlessly and masochistically but wishing all the same. Gatsby appears beside me, glowing a pale gold under the stars.



...he stretched out his arms towards the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling.

I know the trembling of that hand. He turns to me and, despairing, explains, "it's all for her, you know." He gestures to the green light across the bay but I know intuitively the woman to whom he is referring. She is his goal, as real and definable as that very light towards which he reaches. Then he asks, "What is it you want then, old sport?"

I open my mouth to reply, but find myself dumb.

What is it I want?

Suddenly the green light flashes and beeps. I frown, disoriented. It is the dishwasher. It has fixed itself. Well then.

I check my watch. Just under seven hours to go until my shift. I clear my throat and migrate back to the living room, inspecting it before my gaze settles on a faux marble bust in the room's corner. It doesn't really need polishing. I do it anyway. It's of some anonymous gentleman. I've always fancied that it rather resembles my ex-husband – same expression, or lack thereof. Same stony eyes. Cold, perfect.

He was quite perfect. Thinking of it makes me wish I'd tried harder to – well, it's too late. But he'd been a fantastic cook and wonderful at sketching, though he hardly ever practised either hobby. What he'd preferred was driving. Anywhere really, so long as it was *away*.

I'm going for a drive.

He'd go. I'd wait up – for a phone call saying he'd fallen asleep at the wheel.

But he was perfect. Sure, we fought. Who doesn't? He was always so calm though, an ice barge, a hulking hollow vessel traversing the arctic. I was the screaming steam train.

Sure, he lost his temper once or twice. Who doesn't? I did. And sure, he made a few idle threats; it's wrong I know, trust me I know, but it was always so quietly. He never yelled, never involved the children, never woke them. *Let's take this conversation into the garage; I don't want to upset the kids.* That's what he'd say. *I don't want them to hear.*

Oh but once I do recall him waking our eldest over some ordeal with a knife. Or was it me who'd woken her by calling out for help? Those moments aren't my clearest. I remember though it was only a kitchen knife, an ordinary utensil. And he put it right back – once our daughter called out. *Is everything alright? Yes* go back to sleep. And he put it right back.

Only idle threats. He wasn't a violent man although towards the end I'm sure I tempted him; I wasn't myself. It's true. I pushed him too far, I should've just- What happened?! God, I remember the early years, like flashes, warmly – lit and silent. Smiling memories. I remember when we met – I threw a pillow at him and he caught it and smiled softly at me, curious. I keep picturing that smile. Why did I visit his family that day? Why the pillow fight? It's a blur; a blur amidst which there are memories of a surprise birthday party, laughing to tears at sit-coms, family barbeques, city night – walks, first dates. He was older, quieter, serious at times – I liked that.

I do remember one afternoon on our honeymoon, I kept beating him at chess. I'd never played before, he was infuriated. It was hilarious though, the look on his face each time I won; he couldn't help but see it too and somehow we ended up in a fit of laughter. He laughed so hard the soda he was sipping came out of his nose, I'd never seen him so animated. After that, chess was abandoned for the day and we fell into each other, drowsy with love and laughter, lazing dreamily on the hotel bed.

What changed? Having children? His father? The depression? It seems obvious to say yes... but none of it feels insurmountable. *I could've done something*, been more patient or *God* I don't know. I could have just put up with it.

Although he did break my nose once. I had been going off about something or another and he just- But I apologised the next day and he forgave me, so all was good.

Except... why *did* I apologise? It must have been the confused state of things at the time. I'm better now though I'm glad to report. Yes better now – now that he's gone.

And now I remember actually that my nose hurt. That it bled. And when I forget like I almost did presently and like I sometimes do when I'm feeling sentimental enough to remember a more forgivable past, I always have the slight crookedness of my once shapely nose as a perfect reminder.

"Why don't you remarry?" is the favourite

question. I tell them, why, the answer is as clear as the nose on my face. The hilarity of my pun is always lost on the receiver but it amuses me to no end.

But oh the past is wonderful that way – you can remember it any way you want and who's to say you're wrong? If only everyone could live in the past they remember. I don't mean to say you can't repeat the past. Can't repeat the past? Why, of course you can! The trick is to just repeat it without all the parts you don't like. Practice makes perfect. Then again though, I remember perfect. My perfect, statuesque husband.

Still...

I check my watch. I've been polishing this statue for precisely zero seconds longer than when I checked my watch five minutes ago apparently.

The watch has stopped.

The symbolism in it is thinly veiled but inanimate objects pay no mind to literary subtlety, I've noticed. And so it's stopped, quite decidedly. How appropriate.

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"It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch our arms out farther ... And one fine morning –"

This is 99.3 and you're with Will and Debbo! We've got some great news –

Next.

...the charity group has been working towards helping –

Next.

...warning mothers in South America of Zika virus symptoms –

I leave it on. Bad news crackles through the speakers. The next story is about sport so I switch channels a final time. A pining and remorseful, bluesy tune plays through the car, going:

Something's got to shape us. Boredom's going to shape us. Something's got to shake us! How can they save you, If they can't help themselves?*

It's a fair question. But how can we help ourselves if we don't know what shapes us? What if nothing shapes us? But we already discussed this at the beginning of the story and it's not wise to let your narrative become repetitive.

I check my watch. Thirty minutes until my shift. I'd say time flies, but that's not strictly true. Time does exactly what you don't want it to. It alternates between flying, crawling and standing still all with the sole purpose of being un-cooperative. It's to be expected; Father Time is male after all.

I arrive at the hospital, make my way to the surgical ward and take over Nurse Tanner's shift with rehearsed efficiency. I am assigned a shared room – a young woman recovering from an unsuccessful tumour removal, the unconscious sole survivor of a car crash, a woman who just had her stomach pumped of sleeping pills and an old man recovering from bypass surgery. I question Nurse Tanner, before she leaves, about the presence of the old man. We've run out of spots in the men's rooms apparently. It's better than no public healthcare system at all, I suppose.

I make the rounds, fixing blankets, replacing IVs, changing bandages and catheters; the usual. I get lost in it. I don't want names or stories. That's not my job. My job is to take the old man to the shower, to stop the sleeping-pill lady from smoking in the bathroom, to check if the car-crash woman has woken up or if she ever will and to keep a steady flow of tissues for the crying tumour woman. If I let myself care about every single tragedy of a human being that came through here it'd kill me.

The old man, however, insists on peppering me with unwanted questions; how long have I worked here? Am I sure that's the right dose? Am I really? Yes, I'm sure and I find some excuse to leave.

Soon, everyone sleeps but the old man and the young tumour woman who weeps quietly in the back corner. I am about to check if the storeroom needs tidying when the old man calls to me across the unlit hospital room.

"Don't you have kids to look after?" He sounds unwillingly accusatory, unsure how to be polite. I tell him my children are with their father.

"He's lucky," he tells me. "My kids won't see

me. For now, anyway." He lets this sink in but I am not sure what to say. To be honest, I'd rather not be having this conversation.

"That's a shame."

"Who knows why," he continues. I don't say anything. He is very old. "I was a little harsh but fathers are. They'll understand."

My hand goes absentmindedly to my ever so slightly crooked nose. It nags with phantom pain, like a warning. I know who this man is. He is my ex – husband, he is Tom Buchanan. I know him.

I swallow hard and turn to leave. Before I can go, the old man asks me to turn on his side lamp. Rigidly, I comply. Dim yellow light spills into his little corner, illuminating a worn, tired face. Is he crying? If he is, he doesn't appear to notice.

"They'll come around," he tells me. He says it as though he has years left to wait. Judging by the number of tubes running into him, he doesn't.

He is Tom and my husband but he is also Gatsby, laid to rest at an almost empty funeral. This is that hopeful man who unfailingly believes in that oh so real tomorrow where at long last we are satisfied.

So do I. And I am Gatsby too, with my empty house once full of all the carelessly festive, fairweather friends too eager to forget me. I am Gatsby all alone in the end, with only my soured dreams and the hope that tomorrow will be better. I am Gatsby with my naïve disappointment when tomorrow comes and I am still all alone, and even my husband's family, after almost twenty years of friendly affectations and seemingly willing visitations, has still not sent a phone call nor a kind word.

They were careless people...they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated into their money or their vast carelessness.

That's not me. I am not careless. Try as I might, I can't be. I am Gatsby, who cared until it killed him.

So I take a seat beside that pitiful, unlikeable old man and offer silent company into the late hours of the night. We are all alone, but we are all alone together.

He says nothing except, "That's a nice watch."

"It was a gift," I tell him, barely there. "My husband picked it."

It ticks on with steady certainty – all night long into an endless tomorrow.

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If this were the perfect ending, I'd have a more satisfying resolution. The old man would coincidentally have the exact words of wisdom needed at this point in my life as all old characters in stories should do. But this is not the perfect ending because it is real. I'm telling you the truth, mostly.

The only satisfaction I can offer is hope. For what? I'm not sure. Gatsby hoped. Yes, perhaps for something unattainable. But (obsessiveness, insatiable ambition and criminality aside) wasn't that what made him 'great'?

His unparalleled propensity for hopeless hope?

Perhaps we are not the Age of Nothing. I think the closest we can get to defining ourselves is The Age of Some More Regular People. Because, I suppose, the one thing that connects us all, every single one of us – me, you, my ex– husband, Gatsby, the Buchanans and the girl with the stubborn tumour – is that we are stuck with our lives and our petty, yet consuming, problems. We are stuck with them as much as characters in a story are trapped eternally by authorial decree. We are stuck with them and we hope, rather ambiguously, for them to get better. And then we join Gatsby in the bottom of our pools, or in the ground.

It's not sad though. I always thought the end of the novel was sad because all of Gatsby's great ambitions came to nothing. They didn't though because in the end he and Daisy would end up together in a way that's as certain as taxes, so they say. In the end we all end up together. That's just life, fictional or not. So it goes.

Reference

*Corby, Matt. "Empires Attraction." Telluric. Atlantic Records. 2016.

Jumaana is an 1st year Med student whose dreams are made of hot chocolate, world peace and good books/ TV. Dislikes fake pockets and when conversations don't go how she planned them. She recently discovered that obscure pop culture references are sadly not cool, cool cool cool. Also she would gladly break all 6 of her piggy banks to buy Jamie Oliver's veggie garden.



A LITTLE, YELLOW FLOWER

By Ashton Wisken

One day I spied a yellow flower Humble pretty as I was dour; With its petals bright as bliss Light as the sweetness of a kiss. It stole from me a smile, Of a half lopsided style, And yet... I left that little flower, In the soil beneath the shower, Soaked that dreary morning hour.

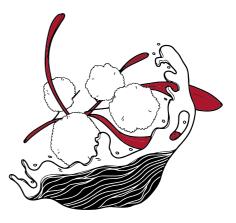
It was a speck beneath the sky: Workaday moment hazily there Or lonesome colourful passer-by Beside the turgid thoroughfare. Besieged by ruin and hours That turn machines of life, Churning 'cross such things as flowers, Leaving them crushed by strife. Unhappy day! Tolling the death-knell Of the love of my love; our union To bile and coda fell And betwixt us now – a canyon Vast with depths, perilous sudden, Drowned in a sea of shadow Beneath the looming of heartache hidden, The quiet of hearts lain fallow.

That flower, a flower, and nothing more At least by the telling of the guise it wore, And upon my sad return I spied, The little, yellow flower had died So it seemed now a secret sign A lesson of arcane design, Whose teaching was all Greek to me, Greek for all I could foresee Within the shadow of the sea. Wrath cast the flower to the waves, To stray in spaces where dragons were. Now: chained by sense in mythic graves, And sealed with a cynical slur, Amidst eroding hidden places Where magic blooms beyond the borders Of the mind's few cogent graces – Burning through their pained disorders.

The land was parched for lack of tears, Beside the sea of roiling fears, And I spent my life in dirt and dust Keeping faith with my mistrust. But when ire faded to regret O'er a solemn sea, I cast a wizened net. I trawled the depths of fear and wonder, Amidst stirring rain and artful thunder,

And I retrieved a humble plunder.

Now I keep that flower gently pressed, In fondly dog-eared pages, Of that tome named memory, dressed In vestments of forgotten ages; To tell of the tale and the teaching After the ebbing of the deep And the moaning and the screeching Had slunk away to sleep.



Ashton is undertaking a Bachelor of Psychological Science, with a second major in philosophy. He didn't want to write this, but he was told that he'd have to, so, if you really have to know, he enjoys knitting. There; happy?

BRIDGE

By Marnie Cooper

The number on the cake was eaten first. If not,

You'd remember how old you turned.

A grandchild picks at the icing,

A sticky sodden smile.

You hold

Your hands out in the lamplight against the chatter of the living room.

You like your old hands better than when they were young.

The baby thinks you're holding your hands out for a hug and holds his out, too.

You pick him up.

Tickle his feet,

Neck,

His sticky sodden smile.

He's just worked out that he has feet, and hands,

And a face

And likes them all.

As a kid these family things were boring. You wish your grandma had met this kid. Younger, you travelled and collected friends who would never meet each other.

Like a bridge

Between

Two banks.

Your mum will never meet this kid,

or his sister

who loves drawing frogs and lizards. Having loved time travel books your whole life, you imagine sliding through it,

grabbing your mother by the back of the shirt and dragging her back to meet the baby.

She'd call him 'possum' and always be kind.

And you feel like a bridge again. Not across worlds but through time. Again, a warm zephyr rises through your ribs, into your throat.

They'll never meet; it's cruel.

You wonder what kind of people are on the other side of this kid. When he's the old one and you're the dead one.

This little bridge.

You wonder who he'll grow up to wish you could meet. Patterns and echoes, you suppose.

He puts his foot into his mouth and chews it. One of his cousins approaches. She looks a lot like your sister.

They'll never meet, but already speak a subtle, atomic language of their own.

Her body remembers your sister well enough to grow

A nose

And smile

Just like hers.

Never will you remember your sister so completely.

It's like they're talking in secret across time and you're the one who's now left out of the conversation.

You're a bridge. They're the river.

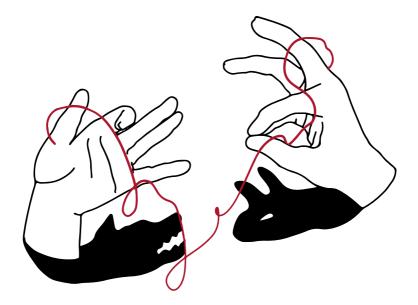
Small talk has always been dull, but there's another kind of dialogue,

you've been speaking for a long time and it will never stop.

You pet the baby and look into his eyes to work out who's hiding on the other side.

He gives nothing away.

Clever baby.



Marnie is a love-lover. rule-hater. trying to become one with the storytelling animal.



SALMON

By Jules Phan TW: Depicts suicide.

almon spend all their life under the ocean just to swim their way upwards to the streams where they were born. There, they spawn and die.

The terminal was flooded with people. My luggage decided to have its first major breakdown: a swift 'crack' at the gripping handle was a telltale sign that I would have to discard it soon. The arrivals were already moving seamlessly through the check – in gate, like a school of fish wading their way through a river stream. I stood still, unnerved by the constant flow of people moving forwards as if following the same rhythm. A slight chill went down my spine as the scenery hit me. How long had it had been since I'd left?

Just a few more steps.

The airport glass door opened without warning, revealing brilliant sunlight, temporarily blinding me. As I walked out of the airport, I took a last glance at the familiar sight of the automated door. It gave me a sense of relief: all airport doors, no matter where they are, all looked the same. I took a deep breath then made my way out of the crowd. Hailing a cab, I told the driver my destination.

"Could you please let me off at 107 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai? Just at the crossroads would be fine."

"You're not from this area, are you?" the driver ventured, briefly glancing at the rear view mirror.

"No, I'm not. How do you know?"

"Your accent...it seems a bit off. How d'you find the weather here? You like it?"

"To be frank, I feel like there has been a

sticky layer of water on my skin since I left the airport," I admitted.

"You came back from a country with a dry climate then. It's alright, you'll get used to it," the driver said, his voice riddled with sympathy.

I muttered some filler words, gazing at the scenery outside the stained car window. Clots of grey clouds were hovering dangerously at the edge of the horizon. Motorbikes and cars deftly sped past each other, blasting out their horns, swear words, and smoke – this was the Vietnam I remembered.

A sudden swerve of the taxi followed by a loud "skirrt" of rubber wheels dragging on the road pulled me out of my thoughts.

"Fucktard! Watch where you're going!" the driver shouted, face heated with anger.

Something intangible coiled inside my stomach. I swallowed, trying to get rid of the jumpy feeling and the sour taste at the base of my throat – it was like rotten milk. I pressed myself deeper inside the passenger seat, recoiling from his anger, recoiling from the sudden guilt that flashed my mind.

It doesn't matter. Nothing matters.

The edge of my seat was a bit damp – the last customer probably had rested their umbrella there. The layer of water on my skin was half dry since I got on the cab – work of the air conditioner. I closed my eyes. The remnants of what I've just seen became briefly ingrained in my consciousness, an overflow of images, sounds, and sensations.

With no precautions, they all disappeared from my mind, leaving a silence loud enough to echo off the walls of the empty, hollowed space. The taxi stopped abruptly before a three storey house, not spacey but enough for a small family to make do. I paid the driver, then dragged the old suitcase to the front gate, twisted the key into the padlock, and opened it. I hadn't used the key for quite a long time. Inside, the house was surprisingly neat. Everything - tables, cupboards, chairs, the old-fashioned TV - though outdated, was all in their place. I put my suitcase in the nearest bedroom, discovering that it had no window. It felt like I had violated a sacred place, where time hadn't been able to reach. The electricity and water seemed to work fine, though the toilet needed some tinkering. I went into the kitchen, found some dehydrated soup, poured some boiled water over it, and devoured it quickly. It had been a long day.

That night, sleeping on a rather unfamiliar bed – one I hadn't used in years – I had a dream. It was about a large school of salmon, swimming in circles, head bumping into each other. They were performing some kind of ritual, to find the strongest salmon left in the bunch. In the end, there was only one left: the strongest salmon, waddling in victory, arose from depths of crimson. I gave out a gasp as I woke up, sweat emancipating from my back, neck and armpits – like a sizzled champagne bottle unloaded by a single twist of a corkscrew.

Early morning, I was ready. Taking the time to brush my teeth and comb my hair, I made myself a decent breakfast out of the leftover soup, a can of tuna, and cooked rice. Getting the keys and cash, I headed out to Tan Dinh, a market nearby.

The market was just the way I remembered: people hustling to – and – fro, making bargains in blatant voices, then uttering in disbelief when the sellers insisted on keeping the original prices. Merchants tried to holler over each other's voice in order to attract the most customers, offering goods in a tone that could almost resemble the taste of saccharine. The scene was tumultuous enough to scare away a tourist visiting the country. Fortunately, I knew the place well enough. Taking fast strides and avoiding eye contact from merchants on both sides of the road, I hurried to the raw food section.

"Could I get a piece of the white cod fillet over there, please?" I said.

"Sure thing darling. Anything else?" the seller, a tiny woman, shouted her question to reach me.

"No thanks," I answered, the tips of my mouth mechanically curled up into a smile.

Paying for the fish, I replayed all of the items in the mental to-buy list in my head. *All good; I still have time.* The picture popped up inside my mind, like clockwork. I passed aisles after aisles, on the hunt for the things I needed.

The house was still there when I returned, windows opened invitingly as I'd forgotten to shut them in the morning. I plopped on the couch, all of the things I'd bought scattered on the floor, worn out by the exertion from the sudden adrenaline rush.



73

It had been a while since I actually felt anything good. The excitement was visible in my veins – my cheeks were flushed, eyes wide opened – but drained as soon as I left the market. The living room was empty and dark – I didn't bother turning on the light. In a split second, fatigue took over my body like a carnivorous beast swallowing its prey whole.

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I was sitting in a glass box. The box was transparent, but its weight felt concrete. Everyone else could see me and I could see them. The box was sealed. People would be able to talk to me and I to them, and I could see the world outside – what was happening – but no one could come inside the box and sit with me.

I thought about breaking out of it, but there was no way. I pictured myself out of the box, looking at myself trapped inside pitifully like a caged animal. I thought about holding my breath, which would ultimately free myself from the box. But I ended up doing nothing.

The tip of the felt couch's armrest softly gazed my elbow as I struggled to get up. Hunger washed over me like a wave all at once, having slept for what seemed like a century. Stumbling to pick up all my recent purchases, I headed to the kitchen to make some food - despite my growling stomach; I wanted to have a proper meal. I marinated the white cod fillet with cooking white wine, shallots and a squeeze of lemon juice, while heating a large skillet over medium - high heat. Slicing up the rest of the lemon, I placed them in the skillet and arranged the cod fillet neatly in the pan. I sprinkled parsley and thyme onto the fillet, and let it simmer as I poured myself a glass of the more expensive white wine - a Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. Chuckling quietly, I gave myself a silent toast. Everything was falling into place.

After the fish was cooked, I set the table in the warm light of the late afternoon. Rummaging through my groceries bag, I took out two slices of bread, toasted them, and smeared them generously with butter, covering the entire slice. I slowly ate my late lunch whilst rereading my journal. The latest entry only consisted of a short paragraph about salmon, the very species that appeared in my dream the other night. After waking up from that unexpected, bloody dream, I resolved not to sleep again – but did some research online instead.

Salmon are by far the most interesting creature that dies after their birthing process, also referred to as spawning, is complete. Every year, salmon return to the spot where they are born to lay and to fertilize their own eggs. After making a journey of as many as 2,000 miles, the male salmon may spawn with several females if they are strong but females usually just spawn with one male. After spawning the salmon die.

I finished my meal, cleaned the table, poured the remaining sauce over the drain and washed the dishes. I spared the wine glass, thinking I would use it later. It was already evening. The sun was hastily dipping down beneath the skyline, illuminating it with a weak light, stark yellow against the approaching darkness. There was no time to waste.

I took out the charcoal grill I'd bought this morning at the market and brought it inside the bedroom. Its black exterior glistened in the white ceiling light, cold yet irresistibly appealing. The charcoals were brought inside next – I had bought more than I needed, just in case. I twisted open the vents at the base of the grill in a brisk motion. Like a skilled builder doing his usual work, I placed the charcoal briquettes in a pyramid at the bottom, slowly piling it up into a non-identifiable shape. Then, I slowly added the lighter fluid, covering the pitch – black pile in a slightly shiny gloss. My mouth curled into a smile as I finished setting it up. The charcoals should be more than enough.

I went back to the kitchen, poured myself three more glasses of wine, and knocked them down quickly. The slightly burning aftertaste lingered at the base of my throat, then dissipated. I took out my phone, which I'd set up inside the airport, and texted a number.

Could you be here in 30 minutes? I sent.

Yes. Have the remaining cash ready, it replied.

I went inside the bedroom, closed the door, took out a lighter and lit up the charcoal in the grill. In a few minutes, they should be covered in ash and glow red.

With nothing left to do but wait for the man to come, I sat down on the corner of the bed and played music on my phone – shuffle mode. The slow, deep, haunting piano keys came up, the tempo jagged, quietly transforming the ambience in the room. I lay down on the bed, feeling bare all of a sudden. Clemens Rehbeins' raspy voice filled the air with floating, unanswered questions.

Have you ever seen, how far it is To the place where we oughta dream Can you better hear the storming folks Whispering in fear, roars the most

There was a knock on the door. The handle turned sharply and the door opened; the man had arrived.

How did he get in? It doesn't matter. I'd probably given him the spare keys and then forgotten. He'd brought his equipment like I'd asked: an oxygen tank with a attached mask, for himself.

"The money's in the bottom drawer," I said. "Alright. I trust you," he simply replied. He sat down on the bed and we kissed, systematically, a necessary start for the ritual. My hand went up and down, wrapping his rock hard penis, as the song pierced through my head like a chance.

> I want you to sit me down Let it go, just wasting come I was listening to the crooked sound Of a life that was way too loud

Everything became hazier after that. Between each of the man's sharp thrusts, I could feel the carbon monoxide entering my viscerals, the wine exaggerating it. The ceiling light was spinning, and my head felt light. I saw spots dancing at the edge of the bed, on his hair, but we didn't stop. My breath was caught in my throat. Nausea rolled through me as we continued the contracted ritual. Back and forth – just like the words of the song – they were all jumbled up now, all somewhere inside the increasing banging in my mind.

My brain was screaming for fresh air – the pain in my chest transformed into quick, deep punches in my ribs as the man continued to rock his body inside me. My eyes blurred as the image of him climaxing melted away. He took the oxygen mask, the money, went out, and closed the door behind him. The ritual is complete. I may die in peace.

"Mom, dad, look at all the lights! They're so bright!"

"Darling, slow down. It's just rained. Yes honey, those lights are indeed beautiful."

"Dad, when are we going to get there?"

"We're almost there honey."

Then there was nothing but brilliant bright light. My parents never survived the crash, work of a drunk driver who happened to be on the same road as us that day. Our house became mine – and I became an empty shell, all the time wondering why it was me who lived and them who died. It was the same salmon that I saw in the dream – just *there*, staring at me. It should have been dead by now. Instead, its bulbous, unblinking eyes were focused on me.

"Am I dead? I should be dead. I shouldn't have been alive in the first place," I said.

"You weren't at fault for your parents' death. People are drawn deeper into tragedy, not by our defects, but by our virtues," it said.

"But I didn't feel like I was *living* after that!" I shouted, recalling all the moments after the tragedy, how my relatives had shunned me, thinking I was at fault, how the house was abandoned and I was sent abroad.

"Everyone of us loses something precious along the way sooner or later – people, lost opportunities, possibilities, feelings we can never get back. That's a part of what it means to be alive. You have to overcome the anger and self-loathing inside you," it said.

"It's already too late," I said, tears streaming down my face, finally letting it all out after 19 years of being alone, pretending and denying to cope with the trauma. I'd shut out all the memories of my parents, thinking I didn't deserve to remember them. Until now – the memories, opened from a sealed box, overwhelmed me and I sobbed, letting waves of hot, painful memories course through me.

"It's not too late. The ritual is not fulfilled. You passed out and never opened the door for the man. You never had sex with him. There's still time. To live," the salmon said.

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I opened my eyes and jolted upwards, heaving hard. My lungs were burning. Tears wet my shirt as I struggled to crawl out of the suffocating room, taking my phone on the bed. The song had stopped for some reason. I made it to the kitchen, still on the floor, pressed the emergency number, uttered some words and my address. I craned my neck to see the window – the first morning light was appearing. Then I passed out.

You may think you want to die when all you really want is to start living.

Jules is in her second year of doing a Media degree. She has an obsession with puns, and is unofficially diagnosed with RBF (resting b*tch face) syndrome. She's easily amused though, and is always down for new experiences and pushing limits. Try to keep up with her because she walks fast.

A THING

You gave me a thing Pulsating, red, warm Vena cava aorta still attached What am I to do with it? I am a girl An employee's first day A surgeon's first op Shall I throw it in the fiery pot? Shall I lay it in the dissection tray Watch it burn or watch it cut What am I to do with it? Nothing because nothing I don't feel anything I'm sorry You may take it back Back, with the ribbon still attached I cannot accept a thing Because I cannot give mine back.

- Tina Wu

Tina is studying an International Studies/Media degree and is looking forward to the prospect of being at university for the next 5 years. Being a writer has always been her number one dream job, but being a professional ice-cream taster isn't far off either. She's an avid tea and coffee fan and she's currently trying to work up the courage to take the plunge from a cafe latte to a double shot espresso, black.

HOW THIS STORY ENDS

By Zi Ying Su

TW: Depicts domestic violence.

Will remember teaching you how to tell time at the dining table. Your brother and sister will be twelve and thirteen then; they will be completing their homework next to us. I will see their father in them – your sister will share his namesake, your brother will have his looks. I will still fear for them, five years after That Day in another timeline, because I know how this story ends.

Your dad is a philosophy major turned social worker, with a love for potatoes and martial arts. We met at a Krav Maga class one Friday night in the local gym, and we decided to have dinner together after a brutal session. You'll hear how we argued about life, God, family, and if potato salad tastes better with bacon. How your dad secured a second date by inviting me to his place for potato salad, with bacon, to see if he can change my mind. How, at our third date, he grudgingly agreed that I have the better recipe for potato salad, and I admitted that it could be improved with bacon.

Your brother and sister are five and six; I left them with my mother earlier that evening. When I return to her apartment that night, I clutch my keys to stop them from singing of my arrival, I kiss them on their foreheads.

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4a.m. on a Sunday morning, your sister will come skulking through the front door, the back of her strappy six –inch stilettos hanging from her fingers instead of her ankles. She will be perfumed sourly with alcohol and vomit, tottering like Bambi – it's from an old cartoon; you won't know it, that's way before your time.

"Do you need a hand?" I will struggle to keep my tone and body language neutral, to hold on to the calm and let it blot out the concern, anxiety, anger, disappointment.

"No, mom," she will sing to the tune of our doorbell and cackles, an ugly sound I have never heard. I will hush her quickly so she doesn't wake you.

"We'll talk about this in the morning."

When morning rolls around she will tell me not to worry, nothing happened, she only drank because she was bored and it was something to do; Amber was having fun and rightfully so because it was her birthday after all, so your sister had to entertain herself. She didn't drink as much as the boys but gosh did she get *drunker*, and so much *faster*. She will mumble all this whilst holding a cool glass of water to her forehead, a habit from her childhood; we will tell you she's not feeling well when you ask.

"You didn't have to stay up waiting for me," she will whine when I tell her how I worried when she missed curfew, "you were the same anyway."

I will decide not to answer, because I will see your brother (a gangly teenager now) in the kitchen deciding if he wants to know of his mother's youthful escapades. I will see you crouching on the couch, pretending to not listen, and I know you will lose respect for me. I will tell her when she's older, or at least when she's not hungover; but I know that's not going to happen – because I know how this story ends. This is the story of a girl who didn't know any better:

She met Jack at a party in her penultimate year of high school, having successfully charmed the bouncer into letting her in with promises that she couldn't/wouldn't keep. Jack had a chiselled jaw with deep blue eyes, and the veins on his forearms bulged each time he clenched his fists – and he will clench them often in the years she knew him. He had complimented her on her natural midnight hair, the same hair that she was so self-conscious about, and they struck up a conversation. He was majoring in English, an introvert, not really into the club scene; she was too young to be there. They left together just after midnight, his arm wrapped possessively around her waist.

His friends had a game of truth and dare going full swing when the pair walked into the house Jack shared with them. The ring of young drunks parted to make room for the newcomers whilst hasty introductions were made. Alcohol, weed, and other contraband were passed around the group as the game continued; she picked truth when it was her turn.

"Were the boys you've slept with any good?" Jack asked, and his friends hooted at his brilliance as her already red – with – alcohol face flushed harder.

Later that night, as they tore into a rotisserie chicken with bare hands to stave off the munchies, he offered her the wishbone and together, they pulled it apart. He received the larger half and feigned disappointment on her behalf.

When he dropped her off at home the next morning, clothes messy and hair dishevelled, she would admit that her wish did in fact come true –

She will, one day, wish she was making all this up.

I had a dream about you.

In my dream, I am carrying you; I know it is you because a mother *just knows*. I am holding you in my cupped hands, bringing you closer to my face to see yours better; but you disintegrate into a liquid mess and bleed down my front and down the drain and the floor gives way –

She clawed at the dead weight on her chest, eliciting a shout of pain and a stinging smack from the man who was, not ten seconds ago, sound asleep next to her.

"Sorry Jack, I had a bad dream," she apologized profusely, sitting up in bed. "I dreamt that I –"

"Shh." He moved his hand onto her head, gently but firmly pressing so that she was bent over him rather than upright. "Now that you woke me up, Lucy, why don't you use that mouth to make my time worthwhile?"

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You find yourself alone in an unfamiliar dark room and the terror grips you when the realisation that your mother – your mama – is nowhere to be found. This is not your first time in your mama's hometown, but it's the first time you remember waking up where you decidedly did not fall asleep. You patter through the dimly – lit warren of mama's childhood home, the deep thump of a bass drum and the clanging of cymbals reverberating through your chest.

You find the adults outside, congregating around two furry creatures, swaying in time to the beat. Mama urges you to pet the lions; they bring good luck – but someone sets off the big red firecrackers that stretch from floor to awning and you are overwhelmed by the sound of rapid-fire gunshots, the crescendo of percussion instruments, and the cacophony of adults cheering. Mama says, "don't be silly Lucy, they're only firecrackers, they keep monsters away" – but you are inconsolable; like you somehow already know at the tender age of four how this story ends.

A memory:

She wept in relief as her son finally settled into uneasy sleep, having spent the last hour bawling against her breast for indeterminable reasons. She doesn't remember being this haggard and run down since her days at university – which admittedly, weren't too long ago; she dropped out last year – only a year into her degree – when she discovered that she was pregnant with Johanna. Jack had insisted that she temporarily defer her studies to care for her daughter, as her family lived in a different state; his adamant refusal to take the necessary precautions then resulted in baby Joseph; her temporary deferment soon turned permanent.

Another memory:

I am snuggling under the covers between Hannah and Joey, a book in my lap.

"Once upon a time, there was a girl named Hannah –"

"No, mom, Goldilocks!" your sister giggles, "Goldilocks goes to the forest and sees the bears' house and eats all their porridge!"

"Oh yes, that's how it goes! And Goldilocks felt sorry so she made more porridge and then lived happily ever after with the three bears!"

"No, you're not telling the story right!" she protests, "Tell it properly!"

"But if you already know the story, why do I have to tell it?"

"We want to hear it from you, mom, from the start!"

"Okay, so this is how the story starts."

She struggled under his weight, beating him off with her hands, but all that did was enrage him further.

Stupid bitch. This is what I put up with you for. A blow to her head stunned her, and he

took the opportunity to wrench her arms up over her head, pinning her wrists in place with his left hand. Now stay still. With his right hand, he pulled her pyjama pants down to her knees and placed his right knee between her thighs, forcing them apart. Why are you crying? You could at least pretend to enjoy this for my sake. He stopped moving and slapped her again as she choked on her sobs. Shut up, shut up!

His right hand gripped her neck tighter.

"Mommy?" Fuck.

"Daddy, you're hurting mommy!" The little shit he spawned three years ago ran up to his side and tugged at his right arm. Go away, you son of a bitch! He flung his arm out to shake the boy off, but the child persisted. Go away! He grabbed the boy's arm, rose to his knee, and pushed the boy aside roughly. The boy tumbled, and with a sickening crack fell head - first onto the corner of the coffee table. Shit. Look what you made me do. He got up, wiped himself off, and kicked the weeping woman in her side. A man can't even get his needs met in this household. His son whimpered on the floor, having recovered from his shock. Get out of my sight, all of you. He strode out of his house and into the dark street.

When he returned two days later, bouquet of flowers in his hands and ready to renew his promise that this would never happen again, he found the house deserted, partner and kids gone –

When you are older, you will ask how Joey got his scar and we will pretend it's always been there. When you are older still, you will learn to ignore it; just as you will learn to not question why your sister changed her name to Hannah at school, just as you will learn to not mention their father. You will understand that I can only recount what's mine to tell, and that not all stories have a happy ending.

You try to perch on the edge of the couch, back ramrod straight, focusing on the woman

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talking to you. She asks how you're going since your last appointment, and if you've been gradually exposing yourself to situations you've avoided since That Day two years ago. She asks about your flashbacks and you start to answer but her pink blouse triggers something and you feel yourself slipping. You dig your palms into the armrests and try to haul yourself back to the edge of the couch, but the soft centre of the cushion engulfs you and the memories swallow you whole.

I'll kill you. I'll kill you all.

I am making your dad's favourite potato salad for his birthday. Your siblings are at the dining table – your sister in a pink blouse she got for her seventh birthday last year, your brother clumsily quartering the eggs with a butter knife. Your dad comes home early to roast the lamb, despite my protests that the birthday boy shouldn't be preparing his special meal. He laughs and wraps me in a hug, encouraging your siblings to do the same and suddenly three bodies and six hands are surrounding me, touching me, squishing us. I feel you stretch and kick rapidly in response – as if to say "get off", and I laugh – I have never felt happier in my life.

"Mom, where's the bacon?" your brother asks.

"Oh, I forgot!" I pick up my purse. "I'll just run to the shops and get some. I'll be back in thirty minutes, tops."

Your dad tells me not to worry about it, but I insist. He squeezes us one last time, and lets me go.

Your sister is five on her first day of school. She is clutching at me, begging me to not leave, accusing me of no longer wanting her like her father did. She will soon receive the therapy she needs – but right now, in this moment, my heart pains as I pry her fingers off me and walk away. She will never hear the story of how much I desire her. You push gently and the door reunites with its frame with a soft kiss; a quick flick of the wrist and a satisfying click, you are now secure in the tiled cocoon that is the bathroom in your doctor's office. You slip your purse on to the hook behind the door, its contents jostling to be heard, a wind chime ward against the unwanted – what is it that you wanted? You are only nineteen – do you desire your desires to be desired? You slide your hand into your purse and remove the specimen container she gave you earlier.

Moment of truth.

You gather your skirt around your waist, and holding the container in your left hand, you hook your right thumb under the elastic of your panties and peel them off to your knees. You lower yourself and slowly feel the cold embrace of porcelain creep up the back of your thighs –

My thighs ache as I heave myself out of the car; you are getting heavier, darling. I navigate the steps to our front door, keys in hand and bacon dangling in a plastic bag from my wrist. I wonder briefly why your siblings are so quiet, but shrug to myself and unlock the door, pulling it open to let myself in.

You are only nineteen, but you would know if you have the desire to be a mother, you are sure of it, yet you are uncertain if you wish to be pregnant right now. A wave of nausea sweeps through you at the thought of growing a human inside you when you are barely an adult yourself – but the alternative? To discover, perhaps, a miscarriage, an illness, or an inability to have children – you never know. You would say a quick prayer of intercession, but you don't know what to ask for, no more than you knew before you came in here.

You screw the top of the filled container shut, wipe it dry (just in case), and wash your hands

in the sink. You look at the girl in the mirror, with her wrinkled skirt and red – rimmed eyes, and subconsciously straighten your skirt. You make an unknown plea to your higher power; eyes closed, deep breaths – oh please, let it be –

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"Please Jack, please," I shield you with shaking arms, staring into the barrel of a handgun and a familiar angry face. I don't know where your father or siblings are. Two weeks from now, as I lie empty but fully medicated on the hospital bed I will learn that Hannah, always the quickest to act, had answered the door expecting my return. She was rewarded with a bullet to her head, killing her instantly. Your father, acting out of instinct, rushed at Jack in an attempt to disarm him and was the next one down on the floor. And Joey, my sweet gentle Joey; having managed to unbolt the kitchen door was found dead in our well-kept backyard. I will discover that Jack had saved the last bullet for himself, tasting the greasy metal before the final burst of gunpowder. His last words were apparently:

If I can't have you, no one can.

"Jack, please don't," I plead, backing away from him and towards the front door. I see his jaw clench in resolution, the muscles on his right forearm tighten; and I feel a numbing in my lower abdomen, then two, three, four – and then I register four radiating searing burns blotting out your frantic jerking within. He kneels over my fallen figure, not unlike the night I left him with two kids in tow, and curls his hands around my throat. I feel an insistent pressure over my windpipe, the edges of my vision darkening, an eerie apathy replacing our panic; and I become unstuck in time.

For support relating to sexual assault or domestic and family violence, please visit www.1800respect.org.au or call the domestic violence line on 1800 656 463. For support relating to suicide or suicide bereavement, please visit www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Zi Ying is in her fifth year of medicine and has nearly perfected the art of falling asleep on her feet and with her eyes open.

I had a bad dream

Man and two children found shot dead, wife in critical condition They're only firecrackers, they keep monsters away Should have left him earlier Do you, Lucy, take this man as your lawful wedded husband? Were the boys you slept with any good? Can you hear me? Open your eyes. What's your name? Shrug your shoulders. Bright girl, bright future, wrong boy Is there a chance you might be pregnant? I like Hannah, Johanna's too much like John I'm afraid you had a miscarriage. I'm sorry Terribly sad, lost all three kids just like that Can never have children again Sorry about the wait, please come with me to my office I'll be back in thirty minutes Always was a violent person, predatory, a little unstable We need to talk about your flashbacks You cannot continue pretending your family's still here, pretending it didn't happen

So tell me, what did you wish for?

Okay, so this is how the story starts

I promise that this will never happen again.

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An annual fixture of the UNSW literary community since 1998, UNSWeetened is a studentrun publication that celebrates the diversity of creative writing found on campus. It features poetry and prose from both undergraduate and postgraduate students. You can submit your works to UNSWeetened during the first semester – all pieces of work submitted before the end of Semester One, 2018 will be considered for publication, so start writing!

This project would not be made possible without the committed assistance of its volunteers, whose hard work and dedication have brought the publication to life.

To learn more about *UNSWeetened* or to get involved in next year's edition, visit: arc.unsw.edu.au/unsweetened



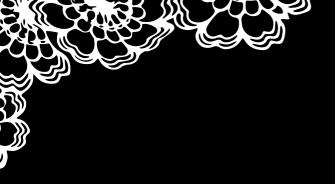
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