

UNSWeetened

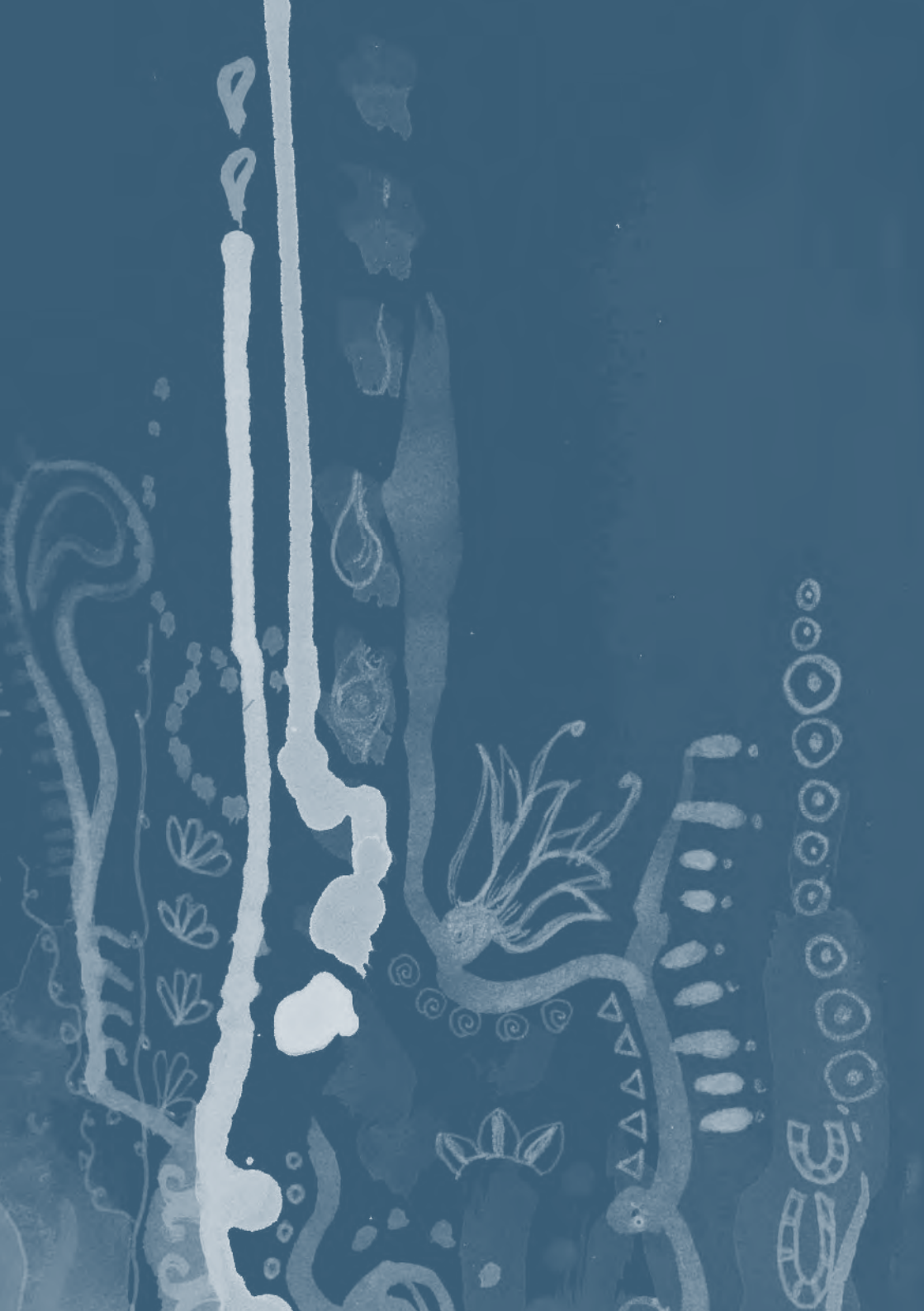
Literary Journal 2014





Il est très simple: on ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.

- Antoine de Saint Exupéry, Le Petit Prince





ATC

UNSW Student Life



FOREWORD

To be creative is part a skill, and part a burden to be borne; a secret that only you know. It is the simplest and luckiest thing to think unlike any other. It is the feeling of words somehow not coming out right and meaning tumbling out unwrought and never quite what you hoped for. It is the heaviness of seeing something of beauty, which ought to be expressed – and the want to try.

In the humdrum metropolitan life there is no time given to stop and really look at things, look at people, look at anything at all. What a shame it is that concentrating on what we have in front of us to draw from it something more, is not always considered wise and is instead seen as a waste of time. I believe it is one of the bravest things to do.

In that one innocuous act can be piled the heaviest contemplations of the mind, and the briefest hopes of the heart in one fluid articulation. Of course, for most young writers, the scary part is to wait until at last it seems ripe to be penned.

In the making of a journal such as this one, there is a lucky person whose job it is to read, and evaluate, edit and arrange each piece. This year it has been me and I have loved it very much; and for it, I must thank every writer who submitted to UNSW*eetened*.

UNSW*eetened* allows young writers the chance to have their talent seen by a wider audience, helping them to be appreciated and encouraged by other writers and editors. The beauty of a collection of pieces like this one, is that no theme ties them together. Each piece is wonderfully authentic - spirited by only the motive of the writer. I hope that inside these pages you find the shards of yourself that make more sense in others' minds – it is always what I find.

Turn the pages of this book
To find yourself a-missing,
And with each burgeoning look,
Discover thoughts you sometime thought
But couldn't quite explain,
And feelings that you felt but once
And dared not ever name.

Laura Kenny
*UNSW*eetened* Coordinator*

CONTENTS

- 9 **SANGUINITY**
ROSEMARY GALLAHER
- 10 **CHIAROSCURO**
ALEXANDRA BRUDERLIN
- 13 **ON YOUR NETWORK**
ROSEMARY GALLAHER
- 14 **A SELF TAUGHT LESSON**
NATHAN MIFSUD
- 16 **CRIMSON SNOW**
JEREMY SZAL
- 20 **LILAC LINED EYES**
JAKE HENRY CAMPBELL
- 23 **KILLING TIME**
CATHERINE KNIGHT
- 27 **FLASHES**
ROSEMARY GALLAHER
- 28 **OUR PLAYGROUND**
KEZIAH JEMIMAH GUTIERREZ
- 29 **EXPIRATION**
ROSEMARY GALLAHER
- 30 **WEDNESDAY**
MONIKKA ELIAH
- 32 **BIOLUMINESCENCE**
LILY TIAN
- 34 **THE OTHER SIDE**
GLORIA DEMILLO
- 40 **FLAW IN BIOLOGY**
JANE LIANG

41 SYLLABLES

OWEN CHARLES CHOW

**44 YOUR HEART SHATTERS AS EASILY AS
SUGAR GLASS ON FILM SETS**

JANE LIANG

46 INFINITE SUITCASES

MATTHEW BUGDEN

53 WALKING FRAME

ESTHER YAP

57 CONVERSATIONS I NEVER HAD

JOANNE CHAN

59 MYXO

LILY TIAN

64 INFINITY

ROSEMARY GALLAHER

65 DATE NIGHT

CATHERINE KNIGHT

68 HYPOTHETICALS

ROSEMARY GALLAHER

69 CASUAL CASUALTIES

ESTHER YAP

72 YOU FELT IT ONCE


KATHERINE NGUYEN

74 ACTION POTENTIAL

NATHAN MIFSUD

76 YOU

GLORIA DEMILLO



One day hope won't be
a storm-cloud's silver lining
but a brilliant sky.

- Rosemary Gallaher

CHIAROSCURO

ALEXANDRA BRUDERLIN

I remember the beautiful parts of living with you. In that big, old house that smelt of turpentine and lemons, with paint somehow being smudged over everything, and the sheer unpredictability of it. It was like a child at a street fair, with colours and chaos, stars in their eyes.

You used to glue our photographs to the wall in the lounge room, with the old purple paint peeking through. There were yours, in carefully constructed black and white; the luminous, brightly coloured instant pictures from your sister in New Mexico; and the cheerful, badly composed pictures from my father and his family.

You had no qualms about pasting those to the wall, muttering to yourself. I always wondered what happened to those photographs when we moved out. Did the new owners tear them down in long strips? Did they look at the coloured, smiling faces or the monochrome still life and wonder about the people in the photographs, the people behind them?

I remember days we'd mix lemonade – lemons were the only fruit trees you'd keep, and I never asked why – and it was cool and tart on our tongues. Days we'd paint the forgotten rooms of the house in malachite and magenta, scarlet and cerise (there was no such thing as red and green in our house), stripes and murals.

The time you mixed ink in the bath, and we dyed our clothes golden rod and lime.

The way I'd crawl into your bed, and you'd wrap us both in the quilt your mother made you, patches made of your childhood clothes. It always smelt of lemons – like you – and of something almost like proper dark chocolate. Our long hair would mingle on the pillows, mine falling somewhere between brown-blonde, and yours falling closer to grey than anything else.

I remember tripping over the royal blue (lapis lazuli, you always corrected me) rug sent by Aunt Celeste from New Mexico when I was four, and smashing my head against that vase – the heliotrope vase that was as tall as me, that you won the prizes for – splitting open my face. I remember crying, clutching at my face, at the geyser of blood from my head, as you knelt in front of me, surveying the damage to your prize-winning vase before you checked me.

My badge of honour, if you can call it that, was thirteen stitches, from my forehead to the bottom of my ear. It left a scar I still have, something I hold my hand to when I meet new people; something that reminds me of you and life in that old house. Sometimes I think of it as coming between you and your art, and coming out victorious. Other times, it is a medal of failure, of holding you back from whatever you aspired to, your visions in the smashed ceramics of that horrible vase.

There was your special brand of cruelty; of fury – like when you threw the pan of batik wax against the wall because I said the wrong thing; as if all the years of your thoughts and opinions, speeches and soliloquies had failed to take root in me, and I was lost to your ideals forever.

I don't even remember half the things that set you off, that invoked your fury. Sometimes I wondered if you didn't want me to speak, to simply absorb your thoughts, to deify you and everything that made you different – made you special.

You had so many different types of anger, they blur together – cold frustration, that was reserved for your work; waspy annoyance, your most common state of being; and icy fury, with broken dishes, blood and obscene words that emblazoned themselves on the inside of my eyelids.

You always had this cruel streak, one I could never understand. It was as if anyone who loved you - depended on you - wasn't good enough in your eyes. It's what my father always said; he laughs about the pot you pitched at his head that night, even though the hall carpet still bears the rust-coloured stain of his blood. The lapis lazuli of Aunt Celeste's rug bears marks of my altercation with your prized pottery, an ugly starburst sort of mark in old-blood rust.



We all seemed to bleed for your artwork, intentionally or accidentally. If my father had been a lesser man, he would have ducked and stayed. Instead, he stood tall and bled, then left me to your particular brand of eccentricity. Of course I wonder if a better man would have taken me too, but you can only think so much before the thoughts begin to hurt. I condemn neither him for leaving me, nor you for forcing him out.

No. I condemn myself for not reaching out, calling out for someone to take me away. I can forgive my child-self for holding on, for hoping for something more, trying to dig deeper through the Pandora's Box that is you, to get to whatever goodness lay in the centre.

I cannot forgive myself for lingering though, when I opened my eyes, almost an adult, and saw you in the ugly glare of midday light, hunchbacked over your latest pet project and squinting harshly at me, as if hoping you'll get me in a focus that pleases you.

The day I left, I expected to see you again. You hear how drug addicts must be weaned off slowly, build their tolerance against their vice; I was prepared for that, steeling myself against your jeering laughter over my plans – that was the only reason I took the quilt, grabbed those lemons out of the fruit bowl. It was not a deliberate slight; I could not be free of you and still suck the bitter flesh from the yellow rind, or wrap myself tight in faded corduroy and worn velveteen.

You never came. It was because you always had to have the last word – if it were a smack, a threat, a drop of blood, your pound of flesh, tear-stained cheeks. You savoured it, greedily. You are the only person I know who could turn silence into the last word – the loudest silence I've ever experienced, long and stale, sullen.

Maybe it's good that I can't let go of you; that I made lemonade with my father's family, and suck the sour flesh from the peel of the lemons. That when it's late and stormy, I wrap his little daughter up with me in the quilt – it smells of lavender and baby powder now – and let our hair fan out together; mine brown-blond and hers red-gold.

That of everything you took from me – my dignity, my safety, my opinion, my hope – I still managed to save the most beautiful parts of our life for people who do not want disciples. They simply want me.

ALEXANDRA BRUDERLIN likes to write. She even occasionally posts the things she writes on her blog, twisted-logic.com. She also likes cartoons, bunny rabbits and superheroes. She aspires to publish her YA fiction one day in the future. She is currently studying Media Arts and Graphic Design at COFA.

ON YOUR NETWORK

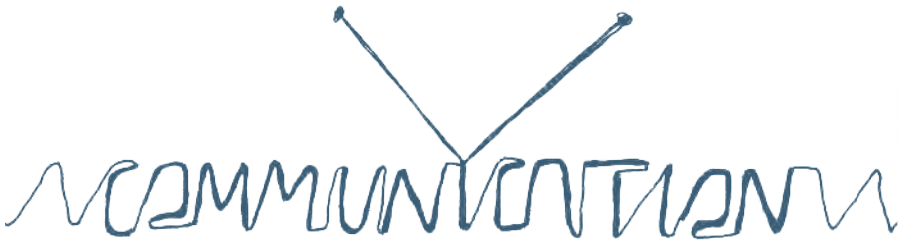
ROSEMARY GALLAHER

I'd plug a microphone into my mind
if that would help me speak it.
The message is always incomplete
by the time it gets to you.

I want to believe that communication is more
than tapping the pane of a TV screen
and twisting bad antennae
hoping something filters through.

I have tried and I have tried
to believe we'll synchronise
but I'm never on your network
and you're never watching mine.

There must be something more than what we know,
some higher frequency
because words have made me feel powerful so many times
and so many times they have failed me.



Three years into her Time-Based Art degree, ROSEMARY exists as an obsolete adolescent and future starving artist. When she's not falling down the strange rabbit hole that is contemporary filmmaking, she enjoys making music, penning poetry and trying not to pull faces at strangers.

A SELF TAUGHT LESSON

NATHAN MIFSUD

I'll change my name—
Johann Martin Gottlieb.
I'm not German,
but does not the
cadence please?
Jo-hann,
Mar-tin,
Gott-lieb.

Or shall I take this chance
for a dependable one-two,
Tim Winton,
Gwen Harwood,
or punchy two-one,
Robert Drewe,
Patrick White?

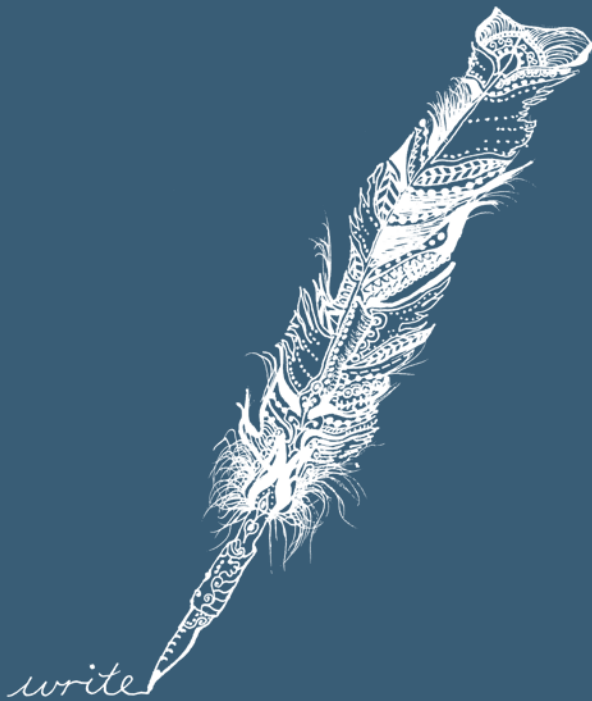
Identity-carving drivell,
conceived in a moment
of doubt,
in the company
of dust motes,
suspended,
cleaved to hidden structure.
Unadorned walls,
panel floor—no, concrete.
The desk
a monolith
from Bunnings.
Untreated pine
slapped on painter's trestles,
pristine Olivetti
loaded with sheets
blank as whitewash.

In school, a quiet girl
(too small for her body)
learned that I liked novels.

At the train station,
she handed me
a worn exercise book,
Filled with her curvy script.

Chapter 1,
read the first line.
I turned the page,
and the next,
and the next.

I need not—
I need do naught
but write.



CRIMSON SNOW

JEREMY SZAL

16th Day of Regon, Year 455 of the First Dawn

I could feel the cold as we climbed higher, the chill reaching into my bones. The wind whispered across the grassland, flapping my black hair over my face. I wanted to lie down. I wanted to sleep. I wanted to dream. But I couldn't. Not with the King's Guard after me. I was going to have to push on...

19th Day of Regon, Year 455 of the First Dawn

The sky was clear, but the air was no less cold. I had never ventured so far north before. If I weren't in such a hurry to get out I would have nicked warmer clothes.

Some old lady gave me a little bit of food today. She asked for nothing in return, but I gave her some gold anyway. I had too much. Even now it wore me down.

Her eyes glazed over when I asked her where her husband was, and her smile seemed to curdle like sour milk. "Off to war," she said. That was all I needed to know. I finished the stew and took my leave. I just hope she didn't see the rune carved into my palm. The last thing I need is for an old woman to be boasting about how she had a mage in her very kitchen, eating out of her bowl. Gods, if I do that again I'll get caught for sure.

26th Day of Regon, Year 455 of the First Dawn

I came across a town today. Despite the cold wind half of the huts were ablaze. I could see it for miles. My guess was that it was just another unfortunate town caught up in the war. I've seen it all before. But I'll never get those screams out of my head. The sounds of the dying. Burning, burning, burning...

2nd Day of Farreach, Year 455 of the First Dawn

My mare died today. She fell on a slippery rock, grazing her skin and twisting her ankle. Hours later I could still hear her final screams as they bounced around in my head. Even after the stain of hot blood was gone from my hands her suffering refused to leave my head. Maybe that's a good thing. I don't know. All I know is that I'm on my own now.

8th Day of Farreach, Year 455 of the First Dawn

The snow covered the grasslands and hills like a white blanket. An icy, cold blanket. I don't know how much longer I can do this. I tried to make a fire, but I couldn't find a single piece of dry wood. My boots are soaked, and it won't be long before my clothes are so wet I won't be able to wear them. Godsdammit, why didn't I bring more clothes?

9th Day of Farreach, Year 455 of the First Dawn

The wolves came out of nowhere. I was trudging through the thick, white mush when I heard an ominous growl behind me. Next thing I knew I was surrounded by the ugly bastards. I was too tired to use magic, so my sword came to my aid once again. The first wolf leaped at me, filthy fangs stretched out to tear my throat apart. But I cleaved him in half- a hot knife through butter.

His brethren refused to retreat. I was fine with that. My sword shimmered in the dying light, bathing in wolf's blood as they died, died, died.

By the time I was finished at least a dozen corpses surrounded me, their blood soaking into the snow. There was my dinner. I told myself that if I couldn't make a fire I wouldn't eat. Mages were forbidden to eat raw meat. But my stomach and mouth betrayed me. Gods forgive me. If anyone else is reading this, forgive me as well....

15th Day of Farreach, Year 455 of the First Dawn

It was the first town I'd seen in almost a month. According to the map it was Luven. I didn't know where I was anymore. All I knew that was I was tired. And hungry. Tired...so tired.

I gave them my coin and collapsed on the bed. It was hard and the feathers were mouldy, but I slept soundly anyway. Too soundly, for when I awoke all my possessions were gone. I'm just thankful they couldn't find my sword that I had hidden under the bed.

Now I'm starving and I don't have a single coin to my name.

16th Day of Farreach, Year 455 of the First Dawn

I found the thieves. It wasn't as hard as I thought it would have been. It just took a few questions and me threatening to castrate an innkeeper to get my answer.

They were holed up at The Ragged Tavern, drinking away from cups of fine wine with whores on their laps.

To my credit I gave them a few seconds to give my possessions back, and a few more seconds to allow the whores to get out of harm's way. It was a brisk but bloody fight, leaving three of the five thieves dead and the other two with severed limbs, shuddering in pools of blood. One of them was desperately trying to shove his entrails back into a gaping hole in his stomach, quietly crying for his mother. After taking back my possessions I left. Too late I noticed my clothes were stained crimson.

19th Day of Farreach, Year 455 of the First Dawn

I came to Riverend, looking for a place to sleep and eat. Before I took one step in the town bounty hunters were at the ready with their longbows. Apparently I have a price on my head that is double the usual bounty rate for mages. I cast poison, and summoned a spectral wolf to tear them apart. In the confusion I escaped. I wonder how long this can go on for...

25th Day of Farreach, Year 455 of the First Dawn

There's nothing around me but a frozen wasteland. Gods, does it ever end? I had a sudden urge to head south, but that would be foolish. I have to head to Markrim in the northwest where mages are welcomed. I just hope I can make it....

3rd Day of Cray, Year 455 of the First Dawn

I didn't think it would be possible to get any colder. But it did. Now entire lakes are frozen and my piss freezes halfway in the air. I'm just thankful that I have my clothes. I'd be dead without them....

7th Day of Cray, Year 455 of the First Dawn

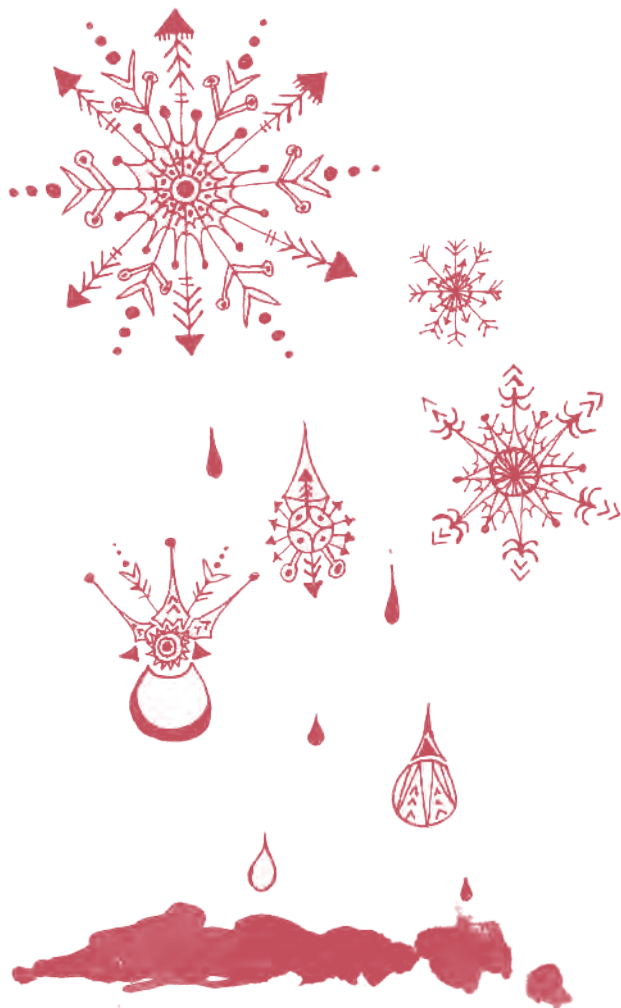
Just when I wanted to give up I found a cave. A warm cave. It was occupied by an angry bear, but that bear is now being roasted over a spit. Just the smell makes my stomach growl...

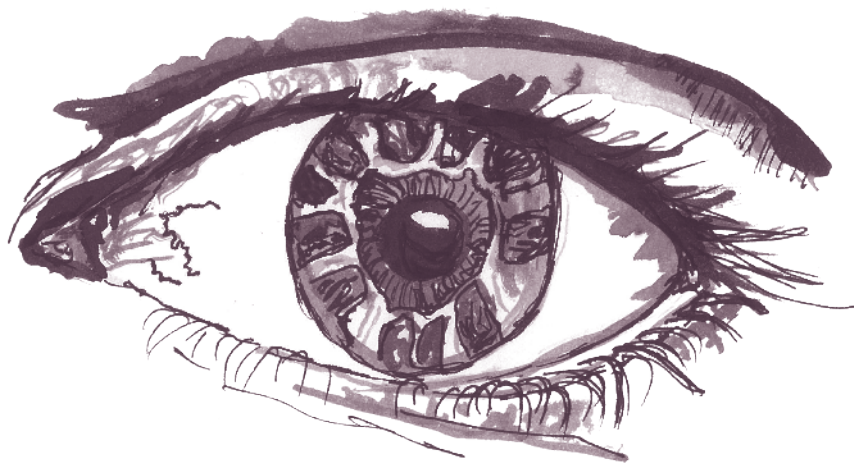
14th Day of Cray, Year 455 of the First Dawn

I'm nearly there. Markrim is a mere few days away. As I bought some supplies from a miserable looking innkeeper I asked him why the inn was empty. He just laughed. "Only the mad venture this far north," he said. I guess he was right.

19th Day of Cray, Year 455 of the First Dawn

I could see Markkrim in the distance, coated in a white blanket of snow and ice. My feet were almost stuck fast in the ice, and it was a miracle I could take one more step. I couldn't bring myself to leave the tiny fire I made, but I had to get there. The snow smothers the flames as I pen these words. It's cold. So, so, so cold...





LILAC LINED EYES

JAKE HENRY CAMPBELL

She walks into the room
In a dress that drips,
And wraps around her waist
In dark gold
'Til it flows out from her thighs

Whilst a purple ribbon
Plays amongst mahogany curls
That stretch down
And around her neck
In a wish to strangle.

Her silver slippers stay sly,
As she flows along wooden boards,
Making soft raindrop sounds,
As her flow, flows towards me.

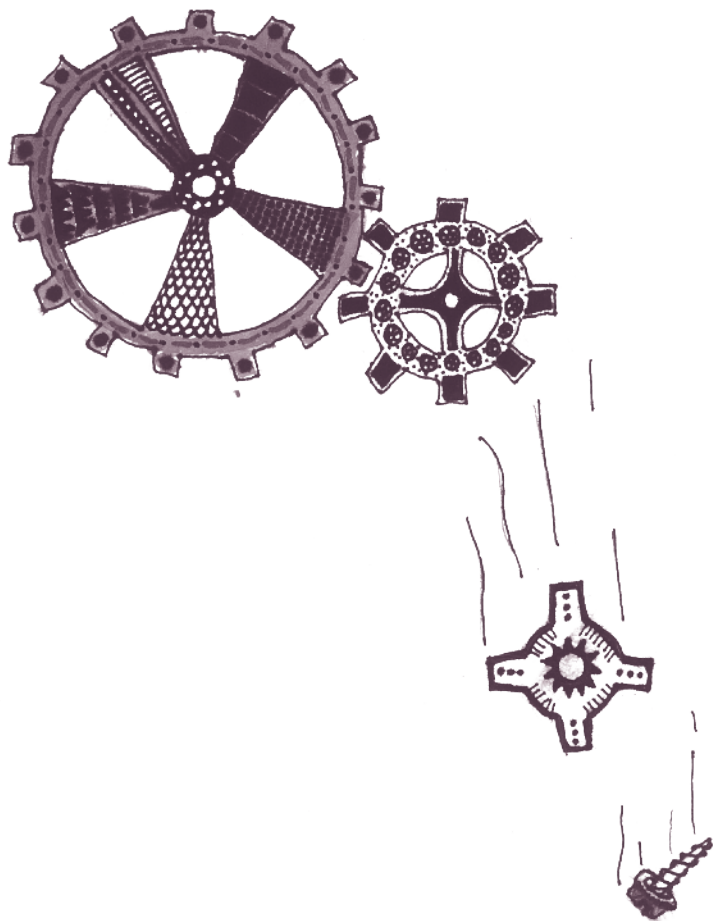
She whispers words
Which I cannot understand,
Or which I choose
Not to comprehend,
Watching light lips that linger
Between each lusted and longed for word.

Her eyes speak more clearly -
Cruelly and coldly cerulean,
With a lining of lusterless loathsome lilac,
Her eyes speak and scream,
“No!”

My muscles become taut and tense,
As my heart beats ever faster,
Ever faster to the ever silent
sound of rejection,
An intuited disaster
brought by a simple glance,
Emptied of romance.

With words that fumble,
And mumble, and grumble,
And moan, and groan,
Words that spill out of a mouth
That surely cannot be my own,
I will this intuition wrong.

But it is not wrong,
And words ineloquently uttered
Do not make it wrong,
As everything surrounds and abounds
In everything wrong.



KILLING TIME

CATHERINE KNIGHT

Eyes plied open by some poltergeist 4 a.m. torture device Damien scrolled with unblinking, drooling stare at his humming MacBook screen. He clicked feverishly through her profile pictures. Always the same pose. Same angelic expression of rehearsed serenity. The sets change as you channel surf through the images. From beach runs to schoolgirl high-socked in playground, to nightclub lean to trendy frappe sipping café, but always the same doll glass eyes staring out, huge in their dilated blue come-hither call. Neck craned out in right head cock emphasising the Catacomb collection barely concealed beneath the thin film of her skin. Lips, often painted, always parted in slight silent whisper, simpering out breezy promises. You could get lost in the Facebook photo sheen of her face for hours, clicking back through the nine hundred and forty two tagged images of varnished perfection. Slight pointed nose, sucked in cheeks caving under ice cut cheekbone peaks, a waist that defied physics, perked breasts shelved in white sundresses and golden Barbie waves. Lily Evelyn Hughes was by every stretch of Damien's imagination *perfect*.

And this was a perfection well paid for by her family estate. At fourteen like all society girls coming of age she had her face renovated, fleshed out with putty stretched taut like canvas. Her parents had shipped her off for several months into Dr Reknaw's care on an Island off the coast of Sydney designed for the sole purpose of remodelling the wealthy. They'd repositioned her eyes, removing them for dry cleaning and re-dyeing, painting over that green sickly gloss on the whites (an imperfection that often occurred in the small breeding pool of the upper crust.) Her hair had been re-plugged, with adequate Aryan shade selected and chemical treatments injected into her scalp to stop regrowth in its tracks. (A substance also used on her arms, upper lip, legs and pubic flesh to prevent pubescent hair growth). She had a voice box transplant that refreshed her bawdy accent into light soft notes. Her insides had been corseted, Greco-Roman pillars of bone inserted to suspend organs in a precise vase curve. And every year from this point on she'd donated her fat cells to charity, gluggy specimen jars shrink-wrapped for Africa. Dr. Reknaw had even been able to rewire her lungs to ensure she could seductively inhale nicotine sticks to her heart's content without the nascence of carcinogenic side effects. At the end of her stay Lily was one of the facilities greatest successes. Her face was plastered on every advertising

poster for the centre over the next twelve months. Reknaw really was an artist when provided with a sufficient budget.

Damian felt that familiar twinge in the slight mound of his jeans. He flung his hand into his own depths, palm cradling in a rocking motion aimed at subsiding the itch. He yawned in the stale clip lock bag of his basement room, brushing the Cheezle crumb smooch from the pockets of his face. He flicked off his monitor, but not before slapping the play button on a recording of her high school dux speech. He let the lulling tones of her attempted witty storytelling wash over him, filing every orifice and pore of skin with her sweetness. He tangled himself into the doona, and it felt like being held. He fell asleep.

*

Matthew fingered blindly at his cigarette packet, not removing his eyes from the open Photoshop spread of recent work. Thick black framed glasses that made a painting out of his cavernous eye bag dip, slanted pale green eyes and lawn of yellow lashes. Shoulder length white blonde hair, tissue pigment, and sharp face falling in a funnel towards his thin lips that refused to ever stay still. He licked them and skimmed through once more the catalogue of shots. These were his most beautiful works to date. Sublime golden hour light, garments that hung like breath petalling over the rubble of the rail yard set, and *ber*. Ever since they'd been introduced he'd felt a new frenetic vomit of inspiration. She was the perfect muse, sedate temperament, adequate intellect to nod along to his trail of thought, and exceptional beauty. She'd let him pixie cut her hair last week and now she danced across his screen like an androgynous woodland creature. He had this unshakable twang of soul string that they were really going to make each other. He selected three winners and sent them to his Epson Inkjet R2000, waiting while the fine machine growled out laser flings of electric blue light. He let them set, allowing his self-satisfaction to marinate in the moment before harpooning them to his corkboard.

He stood back in the centre of the room and just stared at them, thin bone fingers flung to chin, the thinker's pose he'd picked up from art world soirees. The photos commanded the otherwise blank studio, white on white décor like a Eurovision costume. The bachelor pad of angular Ikea furniture and Mac gadgets felt cold in the trendiest of ways. The pot plant by the window, given to him by a friend to give the room some life, whipped the air with it's three snake fork tongues and went back to pruning itself. His air freshener wall unit let out it's half hourly hypoallergenic cough. She'd be arriving any minute, to see the results. He shuddered up his venetian blinds feeling it hospitable to let some light into his Paddington terrace room. He watched the liquorish all sorts

of passers-by rushing in the sun shower morning. Ice junkies with peeling skin and scales lost on their trample back to the Cross. Toddlers on electric leashes flailing in the air on the remote control navigation that freed their mother's hands for mobile phone and latte cup necessity. Content pastel gays arm in arm, with linking sweaters tied at the neck, on pilgrimage for the new organic lunch that comes in smokable form. Yoga housewives wobbled along the concrete with spaghetti limbs and secret desires for coke and cake. Businessmen, pumped up with dissatisfaction, hulking out of their suits with lonely slack faces downturned to the pavement, lost in the moment when no one was calling them. Twenty-somethings mulled in outside cafes gesturing about art, travel, the universe and everything! wrapped in their sharp scarves of nostalgia. Real estate agents with air brushed blazers and manic white teeth shepherding anxious couples down the street, he in graphic design, she tourism. A shaved head teen makes proclamations about the inherent rights of the lizard from the street corner. Matthew's doorbell sang out two notes.

*

Lily rocked back and fourth on the heels of her boots, snapping in the wrought iron lacing of Matthew's terrace home. She found the peeling lavender paint and rusting window bars ever so quant. She'd always had affection for the benign yuppie culture of the inner city. "New money" her father always said. "Throw the best parties", she'd always finish. She tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. She liked the new short do. She felt it gave her an air of sophistication. And anyway all the high fashion models looked like boys these days. And all the male models look like girls. It was progress she'd been told. "Gender fluidity is the mark of our generation," she'd read in *Vice* or something or other. But boys still couldn't marry other boys and her parent's still said that trannies are gross so she didn't know what good it was all doing.

She swiped her iPhone up a volume setting. She liked purposefully ignoring her phone when it would moan and shriek for her attention, so that Matthew would *know* she valued his time. They'd met a few months ago at some dinner-then-drinks-then-clubbing event of mutual friends and hit it off right away. He had told her she was beautiful immediately, which she was used to. But it was clear he wasn't gunning for her panties, which she wasn't used to, especially from *very talented photographers who'd love to use her in their next art piece and make her a famous model*. He had rather interesting things to say, unlike other members of that evening's brigade who spent the night banging on about which online petition they'd "signed" and their new revelations about something called Marxism. No, Matthew was genuinely intriguing. And he didn't wear

three quarter length sleeve stripped shirts untucked like the other wealthy boys she'd seen. Nor did he have a neck beard, as all the intellectual boys she knew seem to, having simultaneously sprouted them first year of their arts degrees. Yes Matthew was interesting and fun and everyone else was dull. And that's why she let him photograph her.

He even let her take the nicest of the shots home, which she filed in her countless scrapbooks. These photo albums she'd started as a kid were filled with thousands of images of her overweight oily childhood. And every time she had a lovely picture of herself now she'd cut up a fragment of it, like her slender arms catching the light, or her pouty smile, or her twig legs or perfect nose, whatever. And she'd paste it over the corresponding gross body part of pre-pubescence, forming a collage split portrait of herself. She loved these little Frankenstein's monsters of uglypretty.

Matt swung the oak door inwards and considered her with a sly smile. "Well getcha arse in here!"

*

FLASHES

ROSEMARY GALLAHER

Sometimes when I touch something warm
it's your soft skin that I feel in the shower again.
I draw my hand away like it's been scalded and flit back
to the present. Safe. The moment's gone.
The past is a vision of bubbly and rings, ski-trips and promises that sounded so full –
the future is a whirlwind of parties and high spirits,
calendar dates, change and someone else's grin.
But *now*, darling. Now is a lonely thing.

OUR PLAYGROUND

KEZIAH JEMIMAH GUTIERREZ

At the tick of midnight, let's keep awake,
And run and run to our secret place—

In an empty field we cast a spell
Where every night our playground wakes,
Where tents of laughter, wishing wells
Record the memories we make.

When the fastest rides are far too slow
and the slowest far too fast,
When we grow tired, to the fields we go
to gaze at stars, at skies so vast.

This is the time in our midnights
where we cry our pains and rage away,
I do anyway, because this is the night
you console me and my strength regains.

We fall asleep to meet morning's arrival—
We're back again in their strange world.
It's time to play in their carnival,
But their playground is why ours crumbles.



Miss GUTIERREZ believes that playing *Assassin's Creed* on the PS4 for a significant amount of hours and being overly attached to Anime is not a waste of time. It's research and apparently leads to good writing. She, along with her colleagues who are just like her, discuss and analyse games and Anime similarly as to how she analyses literary texts being a Creative Writing major.

EXPIRATION

ROSEMARY GALLAHER

With you I always feel like I'm
trying
 to break in the wrong size of shoes.
Sometimes I sit and stew
over how you're seventeen and
you think I'm a princess,
 the trapped-in-a-tower kind;
 how you wear formal suits and talk about politics
and think you know the world.

My throat interrupts with an affronted gurgling sound
sometimes when I think about you,
 and how
you deal out advice where it just isn't called for
you quote science-fiction to justify war
and you're seventeen years old and you think I'm a princess.
You just have no idea.

Darling, one of these days I will tell you my mind
But until then we'll never fit
 right.

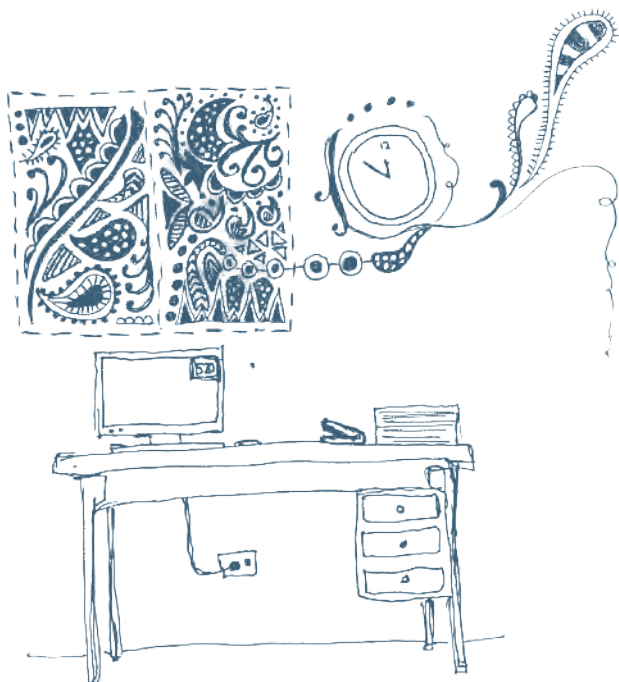
In truth
I'm afraid –
that even after that day
 you'll still be trimmed hedges and high picket fences
when I want a field, open wide.



WEDNESDAY

MONIKKA ELIAH

You count five freshly printed sheets and staple them together. You do this two hundred and twenty times, never missing your mark. Each time, the stapler makes a satisfying clacking sound that falls in rhythm with the water dispenser. When you're done, you stack the sheets in a neat pile and set them aside. The clock on the wall tells you that you're ahead of schedule. For a fleeting moment, you consider taking an early lunch break. Today it's a chicken sandwich on brown crust-less bread with extra mayonnaise. Then you realise that if you go now, you'll have nothing to look forward to. Perhaps it's better to wait. You lean back in the computer chair and look up at the ceiling. There are five hundred and twenty tiles in varying shades of white. You've written that number on a yellow sticky note and taped it to the computer monitor, even though you'll probably never forget it. This part of the office doesn't have any windows. You hate that this part of the office doesn't have any windows. You close your eyes, and try to imagine what the weather might be like outside.



This was supposed to be a temporary job, but you gave up looking two years ago. You tell yourself you're happy here. If you say it enough, you'll believe it. You like the people and you don't mind the work. You've had some wonderful days here; forty-five to be exact. At times though, as if purely to unsettle you, you feel this unexpected sadness that makes it hard to swallow. You clench your teeth, and then have to remind yourself not to clench your teeth. You're not sure why it happens – the sadness, not the teeth clenching (that was explained thoroughly by your doctor). It always seems to strike you unexpectedly. You could be anywhere – sitting in the lunch room, or the bathroom, or speaking to someone, and you just suddenly feel as if your insides want to leave you. As if they would rather be keeping someone else alive, perhaps an astronaut or a wildlife photographer. One moment you're listening to Steph from accounting talking about her holiday, wondering how she hasn't noticed the lipstick on her teeth, and unsure if you should be the one to tell her, and suddenly you feel like your stomach is going to fall out of your ass. Sometimes the feeling is only for a few seconds, but usually it lasts longer. Those days are hard to get through.

When people ask, you tell them you're doing it for the stability. You're not sure what that means, but have heard someone else say it once and think it sounds right. You're certainly not doing it for the money. Mostly, you're afraid of losing the moments of familiarity. You like walking into the office in the morning and being greeted by Mike, who always asks what you're doing on the weekend, even if it's only a Tuesday. He has big hairy hands, the kind that could crush you, but he's too busy making jokes and slapping backs. Then there is Cheryl. She wears far too much makeup but, for some reason, reminds you of your grandmother. Your grandmother would never be caught dead in leopard print tights, so you're not sure why – maybe it's the perfume. Their days off are okay too. On those days you walk over to the lunchroom and get your red mug from the cupboard. It's always there without fail, because the people here know not to touch each other's mugs. You pour yourself some coffee, sit at one of the green lunch tables, and drink. The coffee is bitter but warm. You drink it slowly. In the moment, it doesn't feel so bad, the whole settling business. In the moment, your insides are happy where they are. Maybe one day you will quit your job, but not yet.

Your head hits the wall; you've leant back too far. You snap out of your daydream, unable to remember what you were thinking about. You wonder if it's almost lunch time, but after a glance at the clock, you realise no more than a few minutes have passed.

Exhausted from living inside her head, MONIKKA has spent the past year trying to ground her passions in some sense of reality. She has given it a good go and hopes that very soon the other humans will notice and reward her for her efforts.

BIOLUMINESCENCE

LILY TIAN

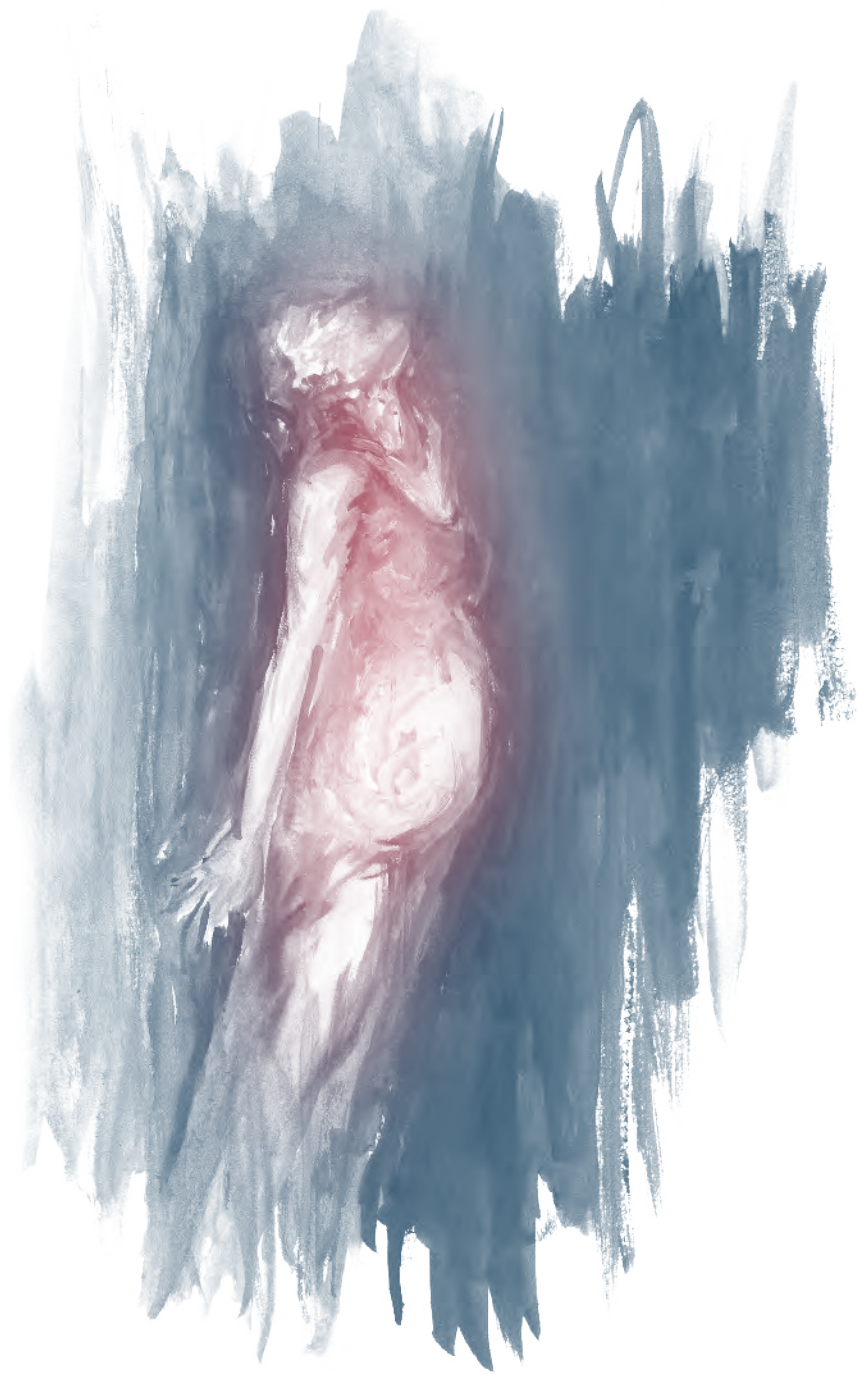
A thin, bobbing lure twirled,
cast a reflection of too large teeth
and an ever-gaping maw.
Not yet a hand span across
but there was a touch of the abyss
in its eyes and something otherworldly
in the speed of its flight.

Jan floated in inky eternity.
If only she could join them,
be inside the ocean instead
of merely on the edge.
Patterns flickered, bioluminescent
pearls winded through the emptiness of space.

If she were with them,
she'd be one of the invisible ones,
with neither light
nor sound to her frame.

Until she ate
enough that they lit up
her stomach and she'd rise
from hiding, fists and elbows
readied to smash into
whatever thought to
take her for prey.

Out of everything that's caught her interest, writing must have been the most unexpected. At least, LILY never expected her new 'hobby fad' to last so long. But once started, it's with joy that she has kept captive, hopeful to one day entertain friends and strangers alike.



THE OTHER SIDE

GLORIA DEMILLO

She asked me about the three things I could not live without. I replied with the following:

1. Eemaan - faith
2. Baba's cooking
3. Sefahreem – books

She is Nour, my best-friend. We grew up in a neighbourhood named Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem. Nour lived next door to me and each day we would walk to and from school together. We were taught Arabic, English and Hebrew. I was a lot better at English than she was and she, better at Arabic. We were both terrible at Hebrew. This is how listing in threes began. We turned it into a little game so that we might get better at these languages.

We spent our afternoons playing with the kids from the neighbourhood. Ahmed, Aamon and Jihad were Nour's brothers and they made sure that as long as we were outside no one would torment us but the three of them. They aimed rocks at us but never intended to do any harm. They would chase us around the concrete labyrinth of our neighbourhood until we were covered in sweat and dust. The settlers didn't bother us then.

The first to leave were the al-Kurds. Ahmed swears that he saw soldiers force the family out with their guns.

"Wahed Allah, Amel. They pulled Yasmine's hijab off too!"

I never saw any of it. I heard from someone, who heard from someone, who heard from someone, who saw the settlers come. I think it was easier for me when I didn't see.

"They hung stars in front the house," Ahmed said.

"Again?" I asked.

"Let's ask Khalo Mohammed about it," he replied.

Mohammed was a tall, tree-like man. He wore the remnants of a broad chest and his arms were as thick as branches from spending his youth on an olive farm. The skin covering his fingers looked like aged leather and his palms were scarred like fractured cliffs worn down by old wounds. I remember that the neighbourhood kids used to run up and down the street knock on doors and shout out:

“Khalo Mohammed... where’s Khalo? I have a question.

“Khalo, what’s going on?” Ahmed asked.

“The settlers are showing us that they own the land, that they own the al-Kurds’ home, that they own your home, that they own my home,” Mohammed said. The neighbourhood kids called him Khalo. I called him my Baba.

As a joke, I once asked Nour what three things she would run and take from her house if it was on fire. She replied with the following:

1. Soowar – Pictures
2. Jihad’s sling shot
3. Tikvah - hope

I would later regret asking her this. When Nour’s family were forced to leave, they couldn’t take anything with them. They left what they had built and known, and handed it to another family whose faces they had seen only once. I wondered what it would be like to live in a house filled with someone else’s memories.

Mama couldn’t cook. She tried but it tasted like dirt. I mentioned it to her once and she laughed. “And what does dirt taste like, Amel?” I didn’t tell her at the time, but I knew because Nour and her brothers dared me to eat it.

One summer, many, many years ago, our families went to Madama, a village in the West Bank, to visit my Teita. While the adults sat in the living room chatting, sharing gossip and drinking strong coffee, the five of us went to explore Teita’s olive farm. We sat on the wispy grass and watched as the sun dipped below the hills, the silhouetted veins of the trees flowing outward into the bruising sky.

“Do you think the dirt here tastes like olives?” Jihad asked.

“Don’t be stupid,” Ahmed said.

“But how would you know?” Aamon replied.

“Amel would know. Her grandma owns it,” Nour chimed in.

“Dare you to eat it,” they all said at once.

I can truthfully say my Mama can’t cook. I told Baba about it one day and he promised me that he would always cook dinner. The catch was that I would have to deal with Mama making breakfast.

During the holy month of Ramadan, Baba would slave away all afternoon to make sure we had a feast at sunset. I could find my way home simply by the smell of Baba’s cooking. The air smelled of spices, oregano, frying meat, fresh vegetables...

The settlers stopped us from praying at Haram al-Sharif. The soldiers blocked the entrance to the mosque. They came with guns, and shields and tanks.

I saw my first dead body that day.

I remember the 15th of May 2008. The streets were filled with people chanting and singing. Some were smiling. Some were not. The day celebrated 60 years of the Israeli nation; it also marked 60 years of Palestinian struggle. It was both birthday and funeral. The present never existed. Each way I turned, I was lost. The home my grandparents knew was a different one to mine. The hills were the same, the street corners familiar, the dust, the gravel, and the crimson sunset upon the horizon were the same. The names just changed. But I could not ache for the past if I had never lived it. *We* could not go back, that was certain. What was uncertain was the future. I lived in the middle ground; here, but not present.

“Bet you can’t hit that” Nour teased.

There were several bricks missing from the fence. A hole, the size of a child’s head, revealed a lush green sanctuary before a small white house. The windows were shut and the curtains hid any information about the inhabitants.

Jihad had his slingshot and was dangerous with it. Always was. Even though he was the youngest out of the four siblings, none of them could fire a rock loaded slingshot the way Jihad could. Ahmed was a hopeless aim. A few years older and nearing his sixteenth birthday, his flimsy arms had strengthened developing muscles. But when he had Jihad's slingshot in his hands, he couldn't get a rock to hit its target. Aamon was no better and Nour never got the hang of pulling the slingshot back far enough for the rock to project.

"Hit it" we called out.

Jihad smiled at us. Ahmed, Aamon, Nour and I waited by the fence as Jihad ran out 10 metres. Poised, concentrated and ready, he focused his eyesight to the hole. Jihad loaded his weapon and pulled back on the leather. He released. Crack. The vase shattered. We ran.

No one but the sleeping man saw us.

The sleeping man was not a man but a dog that a settler family owned. The neighbourhood kids stuck to calling him the sleeping man because of the way the dog was treated better than themselves.

The sleeping man would bark. He was not a resident of my street but he liked to think he was. All night, he spoke to himself, shouting until morning came. During the day he was silent, usually found asleep.

"I'm going to hit him," Jihad declared.

"But he's sleeping!" Aamon said. Aamon was fond of animals.

Jihad searched his pockets and pulled out a tiny rock the size of a thumb nail. Jihad took aim and pulled back only slightly, then released. The sleeping man awoke.

The dog came up close to Jihad and licked his hand. Jihad petted the dog and scratched him behind the ears.

"He's not all bad" Jihad said.

That was until the dog bit him. Jihad was in hospital for a week.

I missed a lot of school. It was not that I didn't want to go; it was that there wasn't much for me to do while I was there. The books slowly dwindled and the classrooms were full. But we all made do with what we had. Nour and I had each other and the other children stuck together too.

At the start of my secondary education, the army came by often. The concrete structure of the building crumbled and went unrepaired. They saw this but didn't do anything about it.

I eventually moved to a different school with better conditions. I couldn't walk with Nour anymore but Mama made sure I got on the bus safely on the mornings I could go to school.

"Sharmouta," was what the settlers called my Mama whenever she went outside. The walls surrounding our house kept us in rather than the settlers out. Rocks fell on us like rain when we walked out of the gate. The ones that missed sounded like a drumbeat as they hit the pavement. They aimed to harm us.

I didn't see much of the neighbourhood kids anymore. Jihad had a rock thrown just below his eye. He stopped coming outside to play and most of the neighbourhood kids stopped too. I never saw Jihad touch his slingshot again.

There were boys from other neighbourhoods who had nothing but their slingshots. Their rocks usually hit tanks or soldiers instead of vases and dogs.

"I wish I could show you when you are lonely or in darkness, the astonishing light of your own being" Baba said.

"That's Hafez, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, it is. But you know why I say that and tell you the story, yes, Amel?" Baba asked.

"No, I don't understand."

"One day you will understand and when that day comes, know I love you always."

I said goodbye to my Baba that morning he went missing. I hadn't slept the night before. Machine gun fire was the melody to the song of men's screams. I fought for sleep desperately that night. It wasn't my place to ask Baba to stay at home. Instead, I let him kiss me on the forehead. I watched him walk through the iron gates. He shouted out behind him, "I'll be home to make dinner." The sound of rocks hitting the concrete pavement followed his voice.

Nour said goodbye to her father when she heard about the air strikes in Gaza. She said she had a feeling he was gone, like a part of her had disappeared. She broke down like a tidal wave and crashed onto the floor, weeping. I reassured her that he was fine, *inshallah*.

The funeral was held days later, even though it is not our custom to wait. Nour's family tried to find as much of him in the rubble as they could. I heard that they found his left hand 100 metres from his body with the fourth finger missing.

"What do you think happens after we die?" was the last thing Nour ever asked me. My answers were all the same:

1. La shay
2. Nothing
3. Klum



FLAW IN BIOLOGY

JANE LIANG

my preference lies with you, irreverently,
as your tastes run parallel
from the offensive, rather than defensive;
holistically I embrace the length of your selfishness
as it runs seagull-shrieking ocean-swooping
into the moment, before devolving into shored protection;
citrus bittersweetness, chalk-textured didactic inflections
decrying a certain flavour that derides emoting –
you are the stone with incisions of wind
that migrated to areas with consistent erosion,
an obsolete thanklessness in bottomless restaurants,
the sincerity of the rawness in your palms
degrading the inebriation in your pores;
values of your chestnut proffering in casual mausoleums of linoleum -
I cannot live the nine to five with your memory;
even before your whispers echoed between the hollow hand-grasps,
even as you hold me insistently before skin-grazing lies,
promises I cannot allow, and if this doesn't ever make sense
then it's because, baby,
unwieldy bedsheets, dearest,
(insert another endearment here)
I'm faceless.

Some people put coded messages in ads and biographies to communicate with a lost love, fugitive, or underground organization. JANE would only like to use this biography to facilitate contact with the void, and tell it to get lost.

SYLLABLES

OWEN CHARLES CHOW

I walked out the door. She turned on the lights.

Looking over my balcony, the wind lifted in the murmur of the city below. At night the city took on its familiar palette. Patterns of light. Concrete and glass. The rhythm of a siren. Afterimages of red and blue upon the dark that howled through the slumbering city and left only the aftertaste of dreams.

There was a cigarette dangling from her fingertips. The smoke sighed from her throat and veiled her face until she shimmered like a mirage. Her essence was escaping, like air ballooning from drowning lips.

“Do you like what you see?” Her eyes gleamed wide, the way a doll’s eyes are wide.

Did I like what I saw? She was worn out like a used champagne bottle, worn out from swooning into men in reruns of fairytales. Maybe she didn’t want her Hollywood dreams to end. The tragedy was they didn’t.

She enjoyed love as an idea. She stayed up nights on the phone until her words became long, soft sounds. She didn’t know you can’t buy love in labelled bottles.

She was also a friend, just a friend, so when she came back, dragging her heels, powdered like a gouache princess, hair over her eyes, I would ask if she had died and had forgotten to lie down.

I had known her as long as her boyfriends, but the difference was I couldn’t dump her. She wouldn’t say a word to me, but I would stay on the balcony until she had turned off the lights.

This night she was silent. Strands of thoughts had curled around her head, curtained those eyes and brushed her lips. Somewhere the black blood of the Earth welled up into offshore syringes and was purified until its vaporous soul wisped its evening sigh as if from cigarettes stubbed as monuments of the ashtray. Could souls be smoke? See then how she drifts into the blackness. At undefined points the furrows in her face crept away and the whole became softer, deflated. I held my breath.

“You need,” she said, in her own careful and stern way, “to stop worrying about me. You did promise.”

But someone had to. Someone had to. The cold turned its face towards us, singing its invigorating whisper over our hair, our faces, our skin. As if we had fallen into the winter lake.

She must have seen me smile.

“You worry when you don’t need to, and I don’t when...”

I said, stop, stop. I said life’s too short for regrets. Her words crashing out of my mouth. I said that any man who didn’t want her- anyone who didn’t want her was the crazy one, not her. I touched long, soft sounds. Words of measured medicine that were passed from mother to son as the first words he would know. He would understand it not as the clumsiness of syllables but the love implicit in the music and he would come to sing it like a mantra.

Ball. Ball.

Dog. Dog.

And when smiling strangers would come to say Ball, Ball, Dog, Dog, he would only hear the sounds and in the years to come his life would chase him across shadowed fields and woodland tracks and he would be told what a ball and dog was. But he knew otherwise and yet would never find the same quality, except perhaps when he became gnarled and thin and finally divested of money and cars and drink and syllables. In that final hour, returning to his remote origins with a priest intoning at his bedside he would find God not in words but in those brothers and sisters long forgotten in their own journeys and those acts untangled and simple that began with a few words.

That’s a sad story, she said.

Life kills us sigh by sigh. Man by man. The tragedy is when it doesn’t.

I have replayed this memory until it has become sepia. I have thought about it over empty glasses, when I wake in the black, over lonely balconies. And I should know the meaning layered behind the events, sounds, scents, but I don’t, I don’t.

In a minute I was going to walk out that door.

Somewhere the ice of the winter lake was paper thin. The black blood of the earth pulsed beneath the transparency. Cold. Silent. Primordial.

Sometime later she would follow me. I would not know until next morning’s newspaper. What did she want to tell me? What kind of air ballooning from her lips?

And when she slipped into the black I could picture her mouth twisting syllables, balls, balls of air floating like empty message bottles.

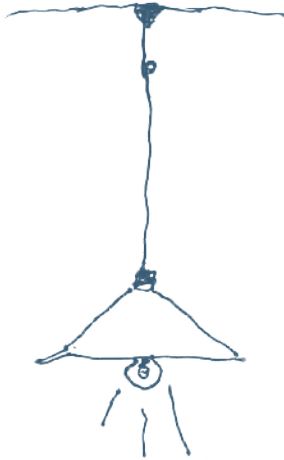
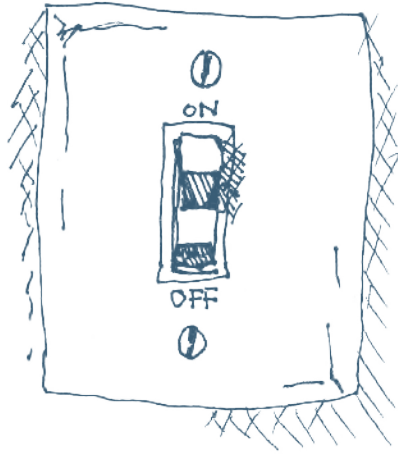
Until they slowed to a stop.

Ball. Ball.

Dog. Dog.

She turned off the lights.

I walked out the door.



OWEN CHOW writes, loves and hates, does not memorise, creates beauty out of the nothingness, takes in and says not, slaves over the placement of words, breathes dreams, massages the chittering keyboard and it speaks, it speaks, shall boil fire and stop fish and is decent at self-embellishment.

YOUR HEART SHATTERS AS EASILY AS SUGAR GLASS ON FILM SETS

JANE LIANG

i.

at 3am

you crush unopened cigarettes
on half-cracked sun, imagined smoke
splintering in silhouette, unfired
fingers baptised in lighter fluid,
the delusion of leaking
plastic orange glow
acid-spaced in the naked hollow,
where flame and paper
fight for didactic authority –
you use a specific kind of haze
to cauterize old loose threads,
to make sure they don't fray
again.

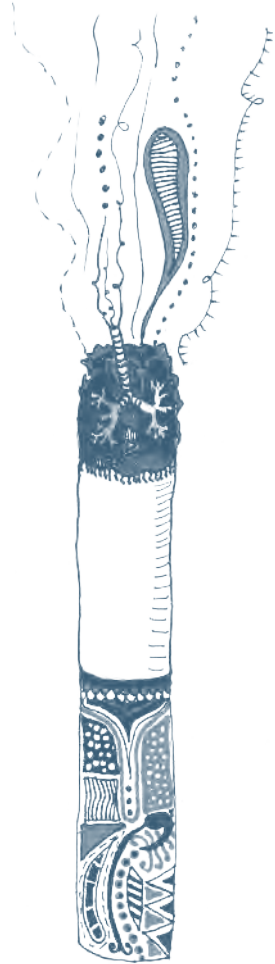
ii.

4pm to cover up
stars taped aloft,
in sagging brightness
you purify, crookedly newborn,
inhaling
with lungs like leaking sandwich bags
losing their grip on seventeen centuries
of heated lunch debates and hopeless helium
atrophied zip locks,
an inability to balloon into space,
exhaling,
too early,
too nervously.



iii.

by 12.30am, by dawn,
behind shuttered eyes
on another side of the world
that has not yet noticed
the parading mesh of glitter sparked
from burst wires of neon tubing,
or how you kneel from a high distance,
detached; the chilled
gasoline poured over your head,
the way you watch the dull glow of your pieces
reflected in darkness, reluctantly set free,
a dark autumnal offering of discoloured spades
slowly lowering
through shallow pools of electric rain
near a place where the shadows are
at peace.



INFINITE SUITCASES

MATTHEW BUGDEN

Like all young men who had believed themselves immune to life's various misfortunes, getting broken up with for the first time came as a rather unpleasant shock to his system. He had ended all of his previous relationships on his terms, and from this had developed a theory that there were people that dumped and people that got dumped, and he delighted in counting himself among the former group.

He associated the end of a relationship with the scene in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* where the temple is collapsing and Indiana Jones is trying to escape before he gets sealed in. In this scene, Indiana Jones' hat falls off his head while he is sliding under a door that is lowering in front of him. Realising this, Indy proceeds to reach back and save his hat from getting crushed by the door with seconds to spare.

When you watch this scene, some part of you finds it frustrating that Indiana Jones goes back for the hat, which is easily replaceable. But this scene resonated with him deeply. He likened Indy's plucky defiant gesture to his own calm aloofness as he extricated himself from a relationship, which while not a state of doom, nonetheless shared with temples the connotation of mindless repetition and routine.

He believed walking out of a collapsing structure completely unscathed was the best feeling it was possible to feel, and was shocked to discover that being broken up with felt like exactly the opposite. It was like going back for your hat but messing up the timing and getting your hand crushed by the door. He was now faced with a difficult decision: cut off his hand, or die in the Temple. If he chose the first option, he would be permanently deformed, damaged, repulsive to every woman he would go on to meet. And all for a hat!

He and his girlfriend had been living together and sharing a bed for four months. Their leases had both been up and it had been significantly cheaper to share a room rather than to live separately—in other words, it had been a purely financially motivated decision, which they both agreed in hindsight had been a

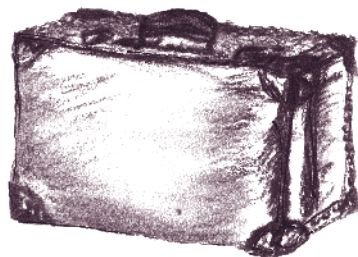
mistake. The proximity had quickly worn them down, and like strawberries that are dehydrated to prevent them from going off, their relationship became an ugly, shrivelled, only vaguely familiar thing that no longer deserved to be called what it once was.

The consequence of cohabitation is that when the relationship finally ends, one person, usually the one who wasn't willing to pull the trigger, has to look on while the other physically packs their things and leaves. Only men who have experienced this have known in their waking lives the nightmarish paralysis of seeing a horrible thing happen slowly, but being completely powerless to stop it from happening. Only men who have endured watching a woman pack have felt the bizarre contradiction of wishing she would pack faster and slower at the same time.

She was packing in front of him, and all he wanted was for her to pack faster, to frantically take everything in a bundle and throw it into her suitcase, barely get the zipper all the way around before leaving with tears in her eyes. Her horrible meticulousness was so much worse because it showed that she had no intention of coming back. At least if she had packed quickly she might accidentally have left something of importance behind, like Indy with his hat, and would have to come back.

Faced with the inevitable, he found himself wishing that her packing would take forever. He found it going much too fast for his liking. Her wardrobe, of considerable size, was already half empty, and every time a portion was completely cleaned out he felt a twitch of dread.

He couldn't believe how many clothes she actually owned. He knew she owned a lot of clothes—she dressed well and with a degree of variation and creativity he hadn't believed possible on a student budget—but was shocked to discover that the clothes he had actually seen her wear had only been the tip of the iceberg. She was pulling out dresses and accessories and shoes he swore he had never seen before, and for some reason this troubled him greatly. He stared at a white dress with floral patterns that lay innocuously on the bed, and wondered whether she didn't wear it because she didn't like it, or if she loved it and had deemed him unworthy of seeing her in it.



“I’ve never seen you wear that”, he said coolly.

“I have lots of clothes I don’t wear”

“Why do you keep them then?”

“What?”

“Why don’t you give them away?”

She smiled. It was the first smile he had gotten from her since this packing business had started, and for a moment it gave him hope. But his hope was dashed when he saw that the smile was the kind that goes straight from being a smile to being a frown, with nothing in between, as though collapsing from the exhaustion of pretending to be a smile.

‘Well?’ he asked.

She looked up, visibly frustrated.

‘Well what?’

‘Why do you keep them?’

‘Why does anybody do anything?’

And just like that, they were back to packing.

He began to rack his brain for ideas to make her stay. Perhaps, he thought, he could use the enormous amount of clothes to his advantage. He would run to the store and buy her even more clothes, which he would give to her as ‘farewell gifts’ that she would then be forced to pack, thus making the time until departure infinite, before which she would get tired and give up. The plan was beautiful in its simplicity, though there were some flaws—for example, what would happen when her suitcases became full? Well, then he would buy her more suitcases!

He took out his wallet, looked at the place where the bills should be and despaired. He was broke. He had no money for food, let alone infinite suitcases. No, if he was going to make her stay, he would have to make use of his intellect.

‘Can I help you pack?’, he asked.

‘Oh’. She looked down at the suitcase. There was confusion in her eyes, like she had forgotten that the thing she had been doing for hours was called packing.

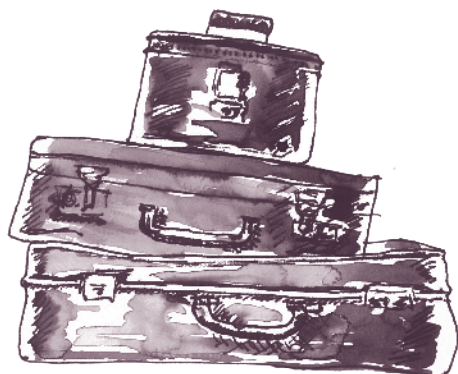
'I guess'.

He rejoiced internally. This 'I guess' was his salvation. It told him that she didn't actually want to be packing, and was only doing it because of residual momentum that had accrued from their fight earlier. This realisation gave him the confidence to mount his final Spring offensive. It incorporated all of the previous plans, but tweaked and combined them into a coherent whole. Every time he brought clothes from her dresser to her suitcase, he would take more clothes out than he put in, and the clothes he took out he would hide in his pockets and take them back to the dresser. In this way a person could pack for days without being any closer to leaving.

The plan was, admittedly, far-fetched. She was much smarter than he was (she had demonstrated this by deciding to leave him) and would catch on immediately. Then he would reveal his noble intentions: he would explain that he was trying to recreate a poem he had read once, about two lovers painted on an ancient urn, about to kiss but never kissing. In the same way, if he had it his way they would be two lovers about to separate but never separating.

He had never been able to think of charming things himself without resort to plagiarism. The lines he thought of himself had always sounded so mawkish and stupid. But this tragic lovers thing, derivative though it was, he was sure would work. She would find his pathos disarmingly funny, pitiful even, but deeply romantic. She would realise that she couldn't live without this quirky, hopeless guy, and would begin to unpack on the spot.

He began to help her pack. She gave him strange looks, but he was careful to remove things at the same rate that she packed them in order to maintain the illusion, all the while perfecting his lines in his head.



'Don't you see, you and I are lovers caught unwittingly in the struggles of time, and only our present union is real and true'.

All told, he managed to put some five articles of clothing back in her dresser before she looked at her suitcase and went 'huh'. He took a deep breath. Here we go, he thought.

'Are you hiding my clothes?'

He took a deep breath.

'Yes, because you see, I wanted us to be lovers caught forever in an infinite—'

She thrust a hand into his coat pocket, and pulled from it a pair of her pink panties.

'You are such a creep', she said.

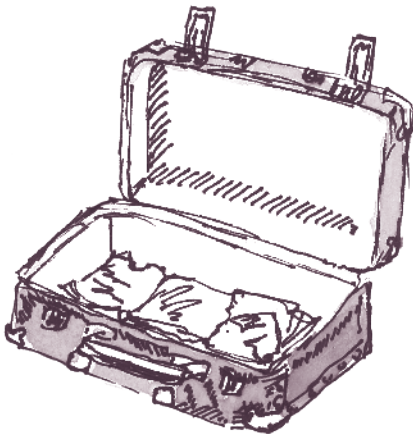
He was shocked to see the panties. He had seen them so many times before, but never before as an enemy. He had pocketed them at an early stage in the plan, when he had been working out the logistics of the packing/unpacking routine in his head. He had been completely focused on getting the words right that he hadn't given a thought to how it might look, to be caught with a pair of his soon to be ex-girlfriend's panties in his pocket.

He felt framed, like the underwear had grown sick of him, of being seen by him alone. It was as though the pink panties had placed themselves into his pocket in order to frame him as a pervert, with the ultimate goal that she would be driven into the arms of guys who would appreciate them more.

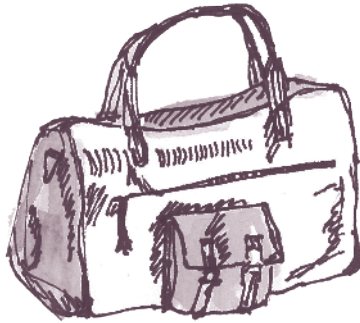
His heart was pumping. The stress of being caught stealing panties was too much for him. All of his carefully prepared hundred dollar words had abandoned him in his time of need, like they always did.

'But, here's the thing—we're like, lovers, right?—lovers on the Urn? It's this poem, about an urn, do you know the one? We had to study it in high school, for Extension 1. Or at least I did. Some schools did other modules, like

After the Bomb, about post-world war II literature, which I would have preferred personally. But anyway, there are these lovers, right, who are about to kiss?'



She began to pack with greater urgency. Panicking, he took hold of her arm. This caused a spasm of movement like she had been electric-shocked. She moved defensively away from him.



'You know what, keep the panties, Jesus Christ. In fact--'

She pulled down her skirt, revealing a pair of yellow panties with which he was also familiar and had once considered a friend. She wiggled out of them in a horribly playful gesture that despite everything caused in him a wave of desire. The panties fell to the floor and she stepped out of them.

She thrust them into his hand.

'Here's a fresh pair for you'.

He accepted them in a daze. They were warm, like clothes fresh from the dryer.

She packed with the speed and impulsiveness that he had originally wished for, but now her urgency had an entirely different cause. In minutes she was out the door, slamming it behind her, and out into the world. A newly single girl without any underwear on.

He lay on his back in bed and held Old Yellow close to his chest. The panties were rapidly losing their warmth. He wondered whether subconsciously he had just wanted the panties the whole time. He thought about all the inconsequential men of history who had been left by women, and how this really wasn't that significant in the grand scheme of things. He thought of outer space, of all the billions of stars and how impossibly huge they were and how small he was and how none of this mattered.

He lay in this nihilistic torpor for some time. Then he got out his computer and searched 'urn poem'. The first result, from Harvard, was "John Keats: Ode On a Grecian Urn". He copied the entire poem into a text message and sent it to her. A few minutes later he got a reply.

“Please don’t contact me again”

THE END



MATTHEW BUGDEN is a 4th year Arts/Law student at UNSW. When he isn't tinkering with "his novel", Matthew writes thinly-veiled opinion pieces for Tharunka. He hopes to one day support himself with his writing, and also to become a being of pure light.

WALKING FRAME

ESTHER YAP

“Here at the Home, we like to think of it as a community. It’s more than a residence and you don’t just stay here; you are home.”

Sarah nodded approval. “Thank you so much, this is just what she needs. A chance to interact, to reconnect with heritage as well, you know?”

“Be assured, we attend to their every need. She will be well looked after.”

Sarah watched her mother in the chair, her blank face turned toward the chintz upholstery of the dusty recliners lining the wall. Unwilling eyes clothed in the weariness of ageing. “I’ve checked out this place mother, it has state of the art facilities, entertainment and activities every day, look, even some social events. The waiting list for this place is phenomenal.” But even as she pointed to the glossy brochure, Sarah heard her enthusiasm fall short against her mother’s barricades. The past crept towards them, making each silence a little harder to break. “You’re always thinking about robberies right? You’ll be looked after here. Since your fall...” she hesitated and trailed again into silence. The two women sat, each desperately willing the other to understand. Finally, Sarah sighed an excuse, the kids, the dinner, said she must be going. Braved a gesture, a pat on the hand like a mother to a child. Or one stranger to another. The door closed briskly and the house echoed with the sound.

Lena shuffled nervously against the chair. Unwilling to rise. She shifted her weight from one gargantuan leg to the other, the cushions groaning in protest. Pushing against the wall, the chair, she rose unsteadily, grasping for the metal frame that brought her, painfully slow, to the worn tiles of the kitchen. Let the cool water run around her tired fingers until they turned numb and her frail skin translucent. Still, Lena said nothing, stared down the sharp rifts of dread open and gaping before her. Not ready to face the judging stares of the public, having long hidden from the curious eyes of commuters, the unabashed stares of school children in the afternoon as she had squeezed her way into the stingy seats of the

3pm bus. Not ready to face the disgust and judgement of others, of others more than strangers, others of her own age, her own race. Not willing to be layered in the condescending tones of aides and nurses, dinner staff and receptionists. It was too much to face alone at this age. She turned off the tap. Clacked noisily to the bed pushed against the window, and watched the people pass by until the sun fell with defeated surrender.

Morning arrived with the sound of Sarah's car, and crisp, cream forms. Flagged in red post-it notes where she was made to sign. Lena sat, examining Sarah's efficient and detached packing, making occasional pained suggestions that were briefly considered, and sometimes boxed. Sarah had her father's hands. The car engine started again, and moved Lena away forever from the empty house on 12 Belsen Avenue.

She left nothing behind. Daily, she entertained a future filled with movement and the chime of tinkling voices. As always, dismissed it as they turned into the long driveway of the Home. Dreams of a future at her age, simply laughable. There was nothing for her now, missing the warmth and spirit of youth. She had a lark's mind in a bloated slab of flesh, wanting to discuss more than bowel movements and medication, a conversation away from the aches of a battered body. She wanted hours plunged into the witty banter of the intellectuals, the coy, coquettish manners of pretty youths, exploring gossamer threads in department stores – but felt the concept always thinner than those threads.

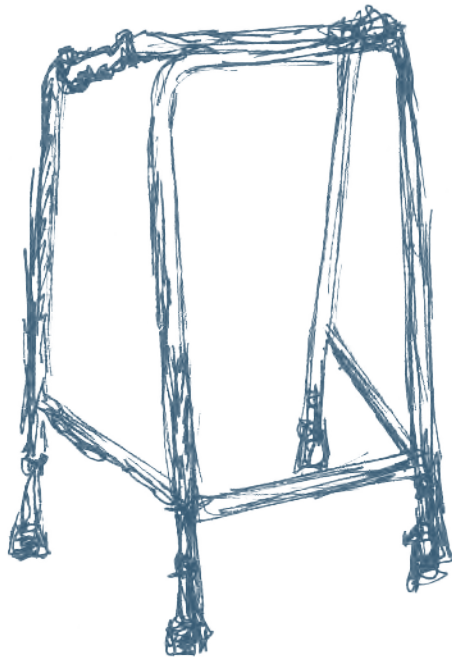
Leaning heavily on Sarah's arm, she walked into the building. She wanted to enter on her own two feet. She was immediately given her walking frame.

"There's no shame in using assistance here. We understand, and we want to help." The projected compassion in his voice was enough to make her wince. She longed desperately to be away, to be away, to be away. But there was no place for her to go.

"Welcome to the Home, Lena. If you'll follow me to the elevators here, I'll show you to your room on the fourth floor. I'll be pointing out some residents and facilities as we go, help you to know the place a little. It might be a little different from what you normally experience or would expect, but it'll soon feel like home." The words rolled smoothly from his mouth, accompanied by a toothy smile. His red lanyard flapped against a spotted tie. She didn't want to follow into the place of exhaustion and restless fidgeting that had marked her uncle's decline, her father's last years. The soft crevices lining her face grew rigid and her eyes turned stony as they refused to acknowledge the man leading her. She clung to

the padded metal of the frame, blind to all. until the door to her unfamiliar room had shut, gently. She sat still at the window seat, squinting through the glass for people going home. She attempted to picture her apartment of twelve years, her chair and her bed, the kitchen and the window and her restless head fell heavy against her chest as she drifted into unsteady dreams.

It wasn't what she expected. They weren't what she expected and an unexpected fragrance slowly wafted through her half-open eyelids. She unwittingly saw staff warmly greet residents reclining in the shade of the Jacaranda trees, stopping to enquire after the health of the water aerobics class. Splashes and jokes bounced around the noisy pool. Laughingly praising the motley voices of the choir in the dining hall. It was as if the people here had thrown off the stately manners of age and reached out again with child-like wonderment, eager again to give the world closer attention. Residents and staff versus the medication, versus the world. Though framed with the edges of fatigue, the tenacious brightness of their expression was overpowering. She ventured daily from her room now, taking days to just walk and watch. She moved more gradually, stopping to see people like her, gently defying exhaustion with steady routine. She moved, her walking frame strangely quietened on the carpeted corridors.



A cluster of residents sat at a polished wood table, evenly spread around its circular face like numbers on a clock. She caught a side profile of an animated man with gestures too large for his chair. A heap of newspapers lay around the table, their red, black and grey letters swirling into the conversation. She felt a sudden stirring, a desperate desire to have an input, warm appreciation, much attention. Caught a glimpse of her hulking mass dwarfing the metal frame, hesitated, and turned away.

“The day’s a good one for seeing a new face.” Addressed to her. Feet and heart stopped together and her face turned to another, laced with wrinkles and youthful with blush. Soft arms pulled over a generous chair as Lena moved slowly towards them. The numbers shuffled around the clock.

Most acknowledged her with a greeting. Some with a nod. A passing remark moved the air, something about organisers for the floral arrangements on Floor Three. She wilted against the wall, uncertain at what to say, felt a suddenly parched throat. Panicked until she noticed the others, not impatient for an answer, just content to listen and watch the flowing exchange materialise. Returned the next day for more.

Lena sat alone in her room, looking out into the empty garden. No people walking home past this place. It was silent again. Yet, it was different. She wanted to be a resident in-volved in the community life, laughing together, going on bus shuttles and playing cards. Read the news together, comment on political events with simple confidence. She wanted to paint and go to the dentist, felt like she could do mosaics and brave public transport to social events, concerts, and movies. Suddenly, thought she could be someone other than an aged, XXL invalid and studiously ignored the old lady on the balcony, staring vacantly into the piano hall. If she walked outside, she knew there were people who would see past the walking frame and awkward body. If she walked further, she would find a place wait-ing for her at a clock-faced table. Then if she walked further still, what would be there? She didn’t know. So she turned back, into the room, and waited for tomorrow.

ESTHER YAP (Tax Cadet at EY) is characteristically stubborn about her passions. Previously pursuing pleasure destructively, Esther now happily struggles to live shamelessly for Jesus and is slowly learning that eternal salvation is of greater value than #thecadetylf access to a high-rise view, casual booze and personalised stationery.

CONVERSATIONS I NEVER HAD

JOANNE CHAN

I asked my mother why she stood in front
of the supermarket for minutes on end,
Only to grab one bunch of ghostly flowers
And pay two dollars fifty for them.

They lie limp and lifeless on our coffee table.
Suspended, soundless, trapped in foggy glass,
Glazed by the dim fluorescence of the television screen.
But they sing her to sleep on the TV room couch,
Calling out to her with their petal voices.

She sees the beauty in their withered ends;
Remember(ends) in rosemary,
Forgiveness in unborn tulips,
In small and fighting hope that
One day, flowers may grow on the horizon of her every dream.



JOANNE still plays Neopets (cf. last years' journal for the joke). She likes to read ultra-philosophical articles on Wikipedia of famous actors and while she's there, reads the plot summaries to horror films she's too scared to watch. In her spare time, she studies medical science.



MYXO

LILY TIAN

In the mornings I go out and collect the dead rabbits. There'd be dozens of them, scattered in the fields, peeling all over from lumps under their fur, still smelling of the bitter scent of our cabbages.

We couldn't leave them out. They'd get stuck in the machines and make a whole mess of things. Dingo attractors as well, those rabbits. The dogs probably figured them for an easy meal. I'd never been able to catch a rabbit before they released the virus - they were quick on their four legs, barely more than a glimpse of two twitching ears before they disappeared into the undergrowth. It was only by spotting the trails in the crops that we'd know the farm had visitors.

I'd seen one last week, right before death. Blind, as they tended to get, limping from a growth attached to its hind leg. If I wanted, I would've been able to catch it, but all I did was watch.

It hadn't always been my job, collecting rabbits. I used to help with collecting eggs and feeding the cows but lately, it was rabbits.

With the rabbits came the need for thick, rubber gloves that made my hands go sweaty in the sun and would never fit quite right. Trudging through the fields, hands held up to keep my gloves from slipping, I kept an eye to the ground. I wouldn't be able to get to every one, probably not even most of them.

I'd gotten seven today. They tapped against my legs as I walked, secure in one of those large black heavy-duty bags we used for garbage. There wasn't really any other option. The smell was just too much.

I made another lap before heading back to the house. Sven was waiting for me when I returned, sitting on the porch and rubbing alcohol onto his hunting rifle. He eyed the garbage bag and I could feel the bitterness in his gaze. A waste, he had said, a waste that good game be brought down by something other than lead.

He waved to the other deck chair and tipped me his remaining ice water. I took it, grateful and set my baggage to the side. They'd do no worse with a few more minutes in the open, and I'd do a whole lot better after I rested my legs and watered my throat.

"What do you figure's for dinner?" Sven asked.

I raised an eyebrow. "It's not yet lunch and you're already thinking of dinner?" My tone was light, forced.

"Do you blame me? We don't have much grain left. The stockpile's been empty all summer and our neighbours are no better."

He jerked his head to the small barn house our family kept. The door was ajar. In any other time, dad would yell for one of us to run and close it but not now. It wasn't needed now that everything's gone.

I stared at it for a moment. "What do you think of rabbit?"

Sven snorted. "You know we can't eat those things, Mary."

I sighed and hooked my hat on the back of my chair. "Yes, you're right. It's just that I feel—"

"I don't blame you. Brought up as we were, to use every bit of an animal. Treat them with respect, you know?"

"Right."

It wasn't just about feeding ourselves. I could hear in his voice that he knew it too. However much he was brought up on hunting trips with father, we knew the right way to treat animals.

"It's a bad piece of work," he said. "We had to release it. You've seen the charts, how they spread. It was just a bad piece of work."

"Yeah." I nodded. "Our work. It's not as if the rabbits could have swam across the Pacific. We brought them here. Well, not us, but other people. And now what do we do? We kill them all."

"What else can we do?"

“I don’t know.”

“We’ve got to be true to ourselves first. Ourselves and all the other farmers around here. Can’t just let them keep breeding and grazing the land to the earth. We got to feed ourselves, Mary.”

“I know that.”

“But you don’t want to accept it?”

“It’s not as if there’s anything I can do.”

He let it rest after that, sensing that I wasn’t truly a believer of my words. I drained the water, used the wet condensate on the outside of the glass to cool my forehead and slung the bag of rabbits over my shoulder.

That night, in the smoke of the incinerator, I held my bowl of potato and carrot soup close to my chest and tucked my legs in. The sun was a glowing ember on the horizon and the air warmed by the labours of my day. At least we would scatter the ashes next season, so they could return to the land and fertilise the new crops.

I thought that would be the most I could do, but as in most things, I was wrong.

I still went out in the mornings and I still fuelled the incinerator but as the days grew colder and the emergency supply trucks became a familiar sight on the roads, I found a new friend.

The first day I saw Toby, I thought he was a wolverine. The grasses, grown long by the side of our dirt track, rustled and I stopped short. I didn’t have a gun myself but there was a long switch knife that Sven had given me.

Then he fell out, one large, fluffy pile. He had the signs of the virus on him, but only early stages and took one look at me before he fled. I took notice of Toby as he had this white spot on his head, shaped vaguely as a crescent, but rabbits with spots were nothing particularly special and so I left.

Toby kept appearing though. Not just the next day, not just the next week. A month after our first meeting, I saw the crescent-spotted rabbit again, on the other side of the field, fat as anything and bleeding from its hind leg. There was sinew showing and the cut was a jagged mess. Dingo attack.

But he hadn't succumbed to the virus.

I didn't move for the longest time and although Toby saw me like he did last time, he couldn't move from his injury. I could have thrown him in the bag, then. He was going to die with that leg - whether from more dogs or starvation, and I'd have to come collect him in a few days' time.

Still, I didn't exactly surprise myself when after a day, I had his leg wrapped and had smuggled a blanket from the house to the hidey-hole in the barn where I kept him safe. I'd change his bandages and feed him what I could spare from the kitchen but his leg never so much as twitched. The wound, after turning a gory white-green, became black and started to stink like my morning rounds.

Toby died, but not before informing me that 'he' was a 'she' by laying a litter of seven. She had been slowed with her children. Of the seven of them, only two survived. The other four I buried in a cloth next to an apple tree that Mother planted the year before.

Whether because of my care or some other reason, the two that survived kept living. After a month, I figured it was safe to name them. One had a coat of dappled grey and I called him Dandelion. The other was creamy black and liked to sit in my lap. That one was Blankie.

It was harder, collecting rabbits now that I had two of my own. More of a betrayal, somehow, knowing that I might be holding a relative of theirs in my garbage bag.

I had to leave Dandelion and Blankie behind when we moved to the city. Later, when I heard of the resistance, I thought of how they never caught on to the disease. They'd have produced litters of their own by now, making havoc for Trudy the beetroot farmer or Gerald the potato man. I ought to have felt guilty, empathised with the hard working men and women who fed this country.

But at night when the sun was an ember, all but obscured by the houses on the street, I'd return to the old farm and instead of having corpses at my back, I'd be playing with Dandelion's ears and running my hand through Blankie's fur as he lay on my lap.

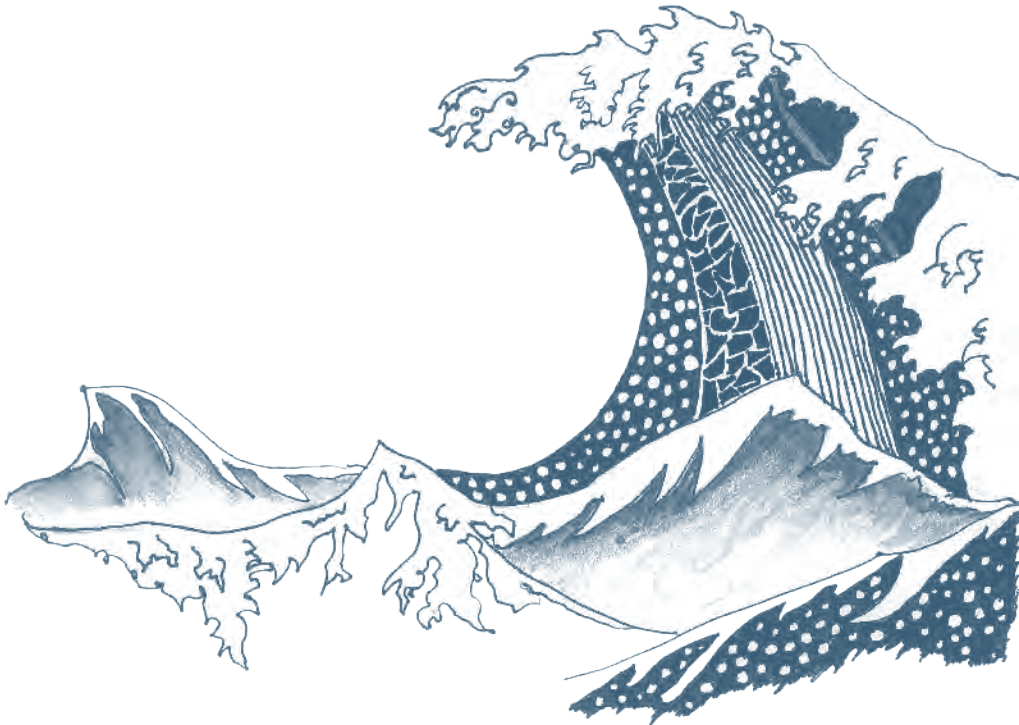


INFINITY

ROSEMARY GALLAHER

I'm afraid that you'll love me like the wind loves daisies,
blowing them over the edge of their precipice overlooking the sea.
I'm afraid you'll meet me sadly at the bottom
and lap the water like a question against my crumpled stem
when the strength of your love has left me numb.

You ask me what I'm afraid of, and I'm afraid that you're a nebula
spanning the vast darkness of space.
I'm afraid that I'm just a lonely speck of sand,
Too small not to get swept up in your currents
and dragged out into the rolling ocean;
Too small not to lose myself forever beneath your stars.



DATE NIGHT

CATHERINE KNIGHT

They slumped into each other in their swaying stroll down the waterfront. The cicadas hissed like fingertips on the computers keys, a sound that had consumed the year for Jane and David. There was a faint scent of citrus and garden manure as they trickled down the hill towards the pier.

The couple was groggy with their dinner wine and the hazy evening warmth. It was the end of the teaching semester for the two of them. David had suggested a celebratory night out, so they headed to one of the trendy small-portion-on-white-square-plate-with-arty-décor restaurants that littered Glebe Point Road. Jane only ate gluten free vegetarian these days. David often wondered if her Prada leather boots and collection of imported beers adhered to these guidelines of alternativism but he thought it best not to ask.

They had so rarely got to spend any quality time with one another this semester, both darting between lectures, phone calls at odd hours from panic stricken PHD students and pouring themselves into a world of contemporary anthropologies that ensured they were up to the minuet in their respective fields. Jane had been working on a book, a continuation of her thesis on Feminist strategies in postmodern art. David had been abroad for a chunk of the semester, giving lectures on his recent research into Künstlerroman in the western cannon. They were an over caffeinated couple who'd worn down their throats from the sandpaper exhaustion of the perpetual performance that was their careers. But tonight they let the silence fall between them. Promised they wouldn't vomit their worktalk all over one another, and for once just *be* together.

They waltzed on arm in arm past the supermarket isles of terrace houses. The kind that intended to preserve old-timey charm on the outside, with quaint downward stretch of peeling painting and chipped roof tiling, while the interiors had all been primed and pampered by some overpaid interior decorator or another into the most modern styles. The humming melody of mosquitos rippled out from the orange orb glow of the street lamps. The cackles of student parties from nearby streets could be heard howling into the night, and Jane smiled to herself. She refused to ever feel old enough to be bothered by the noise of youth. David on the other hand felt that those kids had nothing to celebrate, and his mind flicked to the nights spent excavating through mediocre essays; the ones that marbled the page with erroneous grammar, half baked arguments and unoriginal thought.

David was the kind of Gen X malcontent whose mind could only hold the last ten years in focus, letting any feeling of youth blur beyond recognition. He felt that his late thirty-something angst was far more justified than any rollercoaster of woes of undergraduates, which he met frequently as either late submission excuses or the unfortunate content of poetry portfolios. His angst had had time to ferment, to soak in till it flooded his very core. It is after all what gave him such earnest energy. He was constantly being propelled through life by his own anxieties, alleviated most by the escapism of his work. That's what was so brilliant about being a teacher of literature: he got to feel productive even when all he was trying to do was procrastinate from the gnawing and tug of his real emotional problems; critiquing how well Joyce treated alienation in the characters' lives meant that he didn't have to deal with it in his own. He would so obsessively fall in the love with the whole biographies of writers who were inflicted with the same emotional ailments as he, yet that better and more beautifully articulated them. All David could muster up was "I'm unhappy" which he at most only ever half-spoke to Jane as she was getting changed one night, and she hadn't heard him or at least had chosen not to. Words were all David ever really had and they couldn't even come to his aid at the crucial moments.

Jane smiled at him warmly; her brown irises now dotted with a reflection of the city lights that winked from the CBD across the water. The lights spear-headed down from their neon stations along the rim of the ANZAC Bridge. From this angle it had such a commanding presence that it made the Harbour Bridge look like some awkward pudgy cousin cowering in the background of some family get-together. A host of bats flitted out of a nearby fig tree carrying their eyes to the left where they spotted a hovering cop car, one of the many that would occasionally circle the area awaiting teenagers smoking pot or having sex in cars and the like.

"You'd think they'd have something better to do!" Jane's arm had so suddenly slunk from its entwinement with David's to find its more usual home on her hip. David once again felt that the tablecloth had been torn out from under the mood of the evening and he tried once more to embrace her.

"I mean really, REALLY? All the horrible things that go on in this world and they are trying to catch some harmless kids just having fun? Think of all the murderers, and rapists and organized criminals not to mention white collar tax cheats...!" She had begun listing on her fingers, gesturing frantically towards the undercover car, no doubt trying to lure them out and into an ideological debate. He squeezed her hand trying to swing her in the vague direction of home. "Hey it's a lovely evening, let's not let the bastard pigs take that from us too!" he roared playfully.

She gave him the look; the one that stabbed him with the accusation that he was not taking her seriously. Again. "I just want to enjoy the time I have with just you" he moaned. They had begun their stroll homewards. "Before everyone arrives next week...". Jane snapped into defensive animation once more "What? You act like you don't want them to come now? I asked you! At the time I asked you and you said you were fine with it! Of course you're taking it back now, you're so contrary". She quickened her pace ahead of him.

"Jane! Jane!" he sped up at a trot and took both her hands. "Jane I am fine! I just don't understand why any free moment has to be filled up with other people! Why can't it ever be just us? What am I? Too boring for you? Too hohumm? It's all just too comfortable for you isn't it Jane!"

Jane began to yell, her hands flicking in a furious blur. "Oh Jesus Christ do you have to psychoanalyze every fucking thing? I just like to have people around. Is that so bad? I enjoy it! I enjoy being a host. I just bloody *like* having people around. Is that SO ABSURD? Or does any want of mine have to be some desperate cry for help in an empty marriage! Christ. I like my friends, they keep me young. Can't you even try to understand that!"

David leaned towards her, mouth curling into a snarl. "Look Jane tomorrow we can go for a whirl on the flying fox in the playground if you're going to have some pre-midlife crisis about feeling old. I just can't fathom why you ALWAYS invite strangers into our house."

"They aren't strangers" she spat, her sudden drop in tone startling David. She'd begun to move away her body tensed and hunched inwards like a fist. She walked swiftly with an angry grace, her heels slapping hard and echoey on the crumbling bitumen. A guttural gagging sound of a "youth" hurling in the yard of a nearby share house reverberated in the air that now felt hot and stuffy, bubbling David's head. He sighed. He'd lost. They weren't going to have sex tonight.

HYPOTHETICALS

ROSEMARY GALLAHER

I could talk about myself forever, you know.
I could lean across the lounge,
lay my head on your shoulder
and just breathe myself into your skin
and maybe you'd be too drunk to hear the mumbling.
I wouldn't care. I'd make believe that you were listening.
I'm not a liar
but I don't know if I'm honest, either
people say *twenty-something* like it's supposed to carry meaning
and I've never, I never, I'll never fit in.
When I was six I tricked my classmates into thinking I had a real nose ring.
I danced without care. I won a prize just for smiling.
I wish I was still that girl
instead of a bundle of hair and ribs and wonky thoughts
vainly trying to straighten out,
always stumbling into things.
I could listen to you forever, though.
I'd sink, like a stain into the cushions and
make believe that I was talking.
I'm good at that kind of thing.



CASUAL CASUALTIES

ESTHER YAP

They sat in the quiet dawn. They played in their garden and revelled in the coolness of the morning on the rich, black, earth. Then together, they chose three small blossoms, two pink, one red; bright pigments infused with the longing of an endless summer. The older hands carefully cut the stems that oozed green sap and stilled in the crisp air and sent Anna off to school with pink and red love wrapped in a twist of aluminium foil and kitchen-cupboard rosemary.

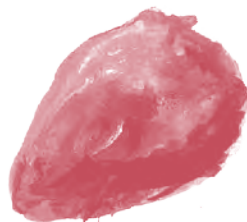
Mountains of flour tumbled into china bowls, breaking under the weight of eggs, sugar and cinnamon sticks. She laughed aloud at her work as flour puffed pompously over the benches, huffing a coating of fine white dust that settled cheekily over the cups. The thick caramel hardened and peaked into sharp wisps of glassy sugar. She placed a tray on the bench and imagined Anna's face beaming from the door. The kitchen yawned hungrily for her return. She returned to the process of stewing and stirring. Jam jars and chipped mugs sat on the floor, bar coasters and steaming pots of sugar surveyed the benches. There were memories in those jars of jam, tart emotion baked into the crusty pies. Sweet feeling in the filling. She glanced at the clock, her hands pink with crushed strawberries. Nine o'clock exactly.

The morning wore an air of celebration and ceremony, from the crackling announcements in assembly to the blackboard's chalky capitals "ANZAC DAY: LEST WE FORGET". Anna waited in anticipation and patiently courted the time until the hands read: Ten o'clock. "3A, collect your flowers from your bags and line up. Please class, Two Straight Lines." The class broke into a scrambling mass of quickly cleared tables and untidy pencil cases. She hurried to her bag, and carefully pulled out the blossoms. Her mother's smile shone softly from the fresh petals, their love gift wrapped in that small twist.

As she stepped into the line, she looked up. Her friends rushed around her, the class scurried from the bags to the door. Formed Two Straight Lines. Cascades of roses, lilies and orchids seemed to spring from each child as tiny arms held back bouquets of colour, fragrance, expense. Stiff cellophane dripped beads of water onto the carpeted floor and happy chatter bounced around the room as she shrunk back, overwhelmed by the display. Her small hands clutched tighter at the foil. The blossoms choked- a cruel mimic of her pained throat.

The class moved, almost in step, towards the door, towards the road, towards the Commemoration Service with the ancient soldiers and still, sleepy guns. The adults led the procession as the flowers marched away from the door. Cellophane crunching children, small shoulders squared and proud. It was almost too easy to miss the girl who trembled with shame, who hid with her tears in the shadows of the bag room. Swallowed great gulping tears of unquenchable, immense sadness. Her sacrifice made small; it was almost too easy to miss. The sound faded from the empty classroom.

His voice had come over the telephone wires. "No, yes, we've calmed her down. It's really not necessary to pick her up early." The phone clicked silently in its cradle. She stood there as her bones, her heart, her skin ached for her child. Filled with the dreadful hollow feeling of Not Giving Enough. She had heard from the cool, adult tones of the school councilor, had heard of the foil flung into the open-mouthed plastic bins, the saved petals ground down into the asphalt playground, their love confined in a mangled twist of foil. Now it was the both of them, muted by unspeakable inadequacy. Her hands drew her own cut flowers from their pot. Small blossoms of pink, pink, red. She thought of the morning, a moment so fleetingly held in their hands. Salted rain trickled over the petals and for a different loss that day in April, she cried.





YOU FELT IT ONCE

KATHERINE NGUYEN

You felt it once, and now
You try to chase it, catch it, taste it, and
When you can't catch it, you try
To make it
Out of snippets of phrases and snatches of smells, you're
Trying to recreate it,
Reshape it, reinvent it into
Something new
That isn't new, that once was new, but is now
A shadow, barely
A shadow of that thing that you thought that you knew,
But were too young,
Too naïve to recognise it,
Too stubborn, too much
Think, think, thinking to do, or try, or even to
Cry about it, and now that
You want to cry you can't, so you're left tinkering
With that little model in your hands, into the night, watching
For it to cast
The right shadow, and here and
There it will almost look
The same, and
You'll recognise
The way that shadow skids across the table, leaving tyre tracks
On the surface, that figure-eight
That jolts your belly,
But as you try to
Grasp it
– It's
Gone.

It was never there.
You only thought it up.



KATHERINE is a medical student with a tendency to overthink things. This poem is from one of the rare times that she didn't. Ironically, it's about overthinking.

ACTION POTENTIAL

NATHAN MIFSUD

Kenny's a stand-up guy,
a real gentleman.
He says beautiful things to
women, looks beyond looks,
but plays three at a time.
Mi casa es su casa,
but don't expect a welcome mat.

He's really into bicycles,
with the pedals, the gears—
not always gears, mind you.
He really grinds my gears, too,
with his cycling obsession.
I've seen him massage himself
with the lube he uses on his chain.

There's a girl who never stops
telling you about eyes.
Kenny met her at the bus stop
in a line as long as his legs,
then couldn't seem
to shake her from his life.
The white of the eye is the sclera.

This girl—call her Eyeballs,
went with him everywhere.
His poached egg yolks
became vitreous humour,
peppered with pupils.
Optic nerves on his nerves.
He easily avoided her gaze,
because the human iris
is highly visible. Hers are green.



Then, Eyeballs was gone.
You know, I think they would
have worked. Kenny pretends
not to see that, no chance.
I notice he rides slow, though,
down the street she used to live,
and always checks his blind spot.



you.

GLORIA DEMILLO

I loved you -
Simple.

No metaphors or similes,
Outdated clichés or hyperboles.

I've written you so many love poems
And they've all come out wrong.

I have this terrible habit of not
Saying what I really mean

I loved you -
Simple.



UNSWEETENED 2014

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An annual fixture of the UNSW literary community since 1998, UNSweetened is a student-run publication that celebrates the diversity of creative writing found on campus. It features poetry and prose from both undergraduate and postgraduate students. You can send your works to UNSweetened throughout the year. All pieces of work submitted before the end of Semester 1, 2015 will be considered for publishing, so keep up the writing and submit!

This project would not be made possible without the committed assistance of its volunteers, whose hard work and valued contributions bring the journal to life each year.

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I've always wanted
to work in a bookshop;
It must be great
reading books all day

We wish. We really do.

Can I use the
bookshop to
interview an
astronaut?

DO YOU HAVE A CURLY QUESTION FOR US?

I'm after a book,
it has a green cover.
It's written by a woman,
or maybe it's about a woman.
Can you help me find it?

They were after Anne of Green Gables

Do you have
Shakespeare's
Romeo + Juliet?
I can't remember
who the author is.
'facepalm'

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