



# dimly writ

## Stories by

Rosie Sedgwick,  
Tanya Ivanov,  
Richard Oyama

## Poems by

Bruce McRae,  
Sisi Bui,  
Richard Collins,  
Hannah Jellen,  
Tanmay Dhar,  
John Grey,  
Jon Summers,  
Nattie O'Sheggzy,  
Jacob Moses,  
Duane Anderson,  
Alex Phuong,  
Peter Appleton,  
Bernard Pearson,  
Colin James

## Artwork by

Sarah Mayo,  
Chad Horn,  
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Kushal Poddar



SUMMER 2025 EDITION



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Dimly*Writ*  
Literature  
Society

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# Editor's Note

We're excited to announce the release of our first ever journal edition!

For our 2025 Summer edition, we tried to compile the short stories, poems, and artworks that are indicative of what we represent as a magazine: authenticity and the pursuit of the unexpected. We hoped to make a final collection that is truly meaningful.

The number of submissions from writers all across the world was remarkable and we were very impressed by the quality of work from everyone who submitted to us. The pieces in this edition do not follow any one specific theme, rather, each piece represents a different topic from the personal inclinations of the author.

This edition features writers from a diverse range of backgrounds, from established writers and artists to newer, up and coming creatives. The included short stories traverse a variety of time periods and perspectives. The poems explore personal themes, such as love, loneliness, and adolescence as well as societal issues such as politics and inequity.

We would like to sincerely thank everyone who took the time to submit to us and our staff readers who helped us in selecting the final piece. We hope you all enjoy this edition and hope you will return for our coming Winter Edition.

Sincerely,

Helen Anderson  
*Editor-in-Chief*

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# The Trouble with Folklore

Rosie Sedgewick

There is a Swedish folk belief that if you go out before dawn on Christmas Eve morning, without eating, without drinking and without speaking to anyone, and sit in a graveyard, you will see a parade of those who are destined to die the following year. Does anyone believe it? Probably not.

Olof had been amused by these stories since he was a child. He wondered how they had developed. At some point, he presumed, someone had asserted that he had seen the ghost of a villager still very much alive, but who had died soon after. The story would have spread, with most people laughing and saying that the storyteller must have had a good skinful. But then someone tried it and complained to the originator that he hadn't seen anything.

"Oh but you did it *after* you'd eaten. No wonder."

Next year someone went out before breakfast. Still nothing.

"Ah, you should have gone out before eating *or drinking*, see?"

Next year, a thirsty and hungry person complained that it still hadn't worked.

"Well, did you tell your wife you were going? You mustn't speak to anyone. That's the issue."

And so, these things grow.

Olof happened to wake early, put some wood on the embers of the stove, and having nothing else to do, walked in the snowy darkness to the graveyard. His taciturn disposition was going to enjoy having followed all the rules and still proving that it was all nonsense. He would have the final laugh about that.

The graveyard was glistening in the moonlight. Olof walked around it, his thick boots crunching prints into the perfect snow. He looked at each stone that he passed.

The inscriptions were dusted with snow, but some he knew anyway. Bengt Andersson, died 1876, aged 53. Lars Svensson, died 1894, aged 37. He brushed the snow off an elaborate stone which had a good flat surface and settled down to wait and think. It was silent. Too early even for birds. After a while, he changed position. He was starting to feel cold and was thinking he had made his point. As he moved, he heard another sound. Was it his boots in the snow? He looked around at the complex patterns of moon shadow. Had something else moved? There was the sound again. Faint voices. There was a wisp of mist by the church doors. As he watched, it formed into an ethereal being, then another, and another. They processioned in a line down the stone path. Their feet left no marks in the snow. Olof stared, trying to make out the faces. Was that Birgitt? And Lars? Old Mrs. Andersson? Then, with a gasp, he recognised himself. He had a cloak on – the same cloak he was wearing right now as he watched. The hood was half off, revealing his own face. The procession continued down the path and then melted away at the gate. Nothing but wisps of mist remained. Olof tried to stand, but his legs were shaking. He sat a little longer to gather his strength.

*“The next year? A year is a long time. No, a year is no time at all. It could be a whole year. Or it could be a month. Thirty days. Is that a long time? What if it is a week?”*

Would it be better to have a *date*? Or would that make it worse? He was feeling very cold now, so stood, steadying himself with the gravestone. It was icy under his fingers. Within the year, he too would be icy. Where would they put him? He looked around the graveyard for spaces. He supposed it would depend on the order.... If Birgitt went first, she would get the best space. Did the order of the procession mean anything? Would fate take Birgitt first, then Lars, then old Mrs. Andersson... and then him? If so, he was safe as long as they lived. But it might be the reverse order.

Maybe he would be first to go? He wouldn't know until one of the others died. He walked back to his home, weighed down by his new knowledge. He could not tell anyone, because they would immediately ask him questions. Because they wouldn't know how bad it was to know.

He poured himself a bowl of broth from the small stove. The fire had revived, and it was hot and comforting. Olof hugged the bowl and wrestled with his future.

Over the next few weeks, Birgitt and Lars and Mrs. Andersson stayed alive. But at the end of February, Hulda died of a fever. He attended the funeral, of course, along with Birgitt and Lars and Mrs. Andersson, coming solemnly out of the church.

*"They don't know,"* he thought.

He hadn't seen that death coming. Maybe he had left the churchyard too soon? He should have stayed to make sure he'd seen the whole parade. But this meant that, if the figures *were* in order, it was reverse order. Just in case, he started to keep a close eye on Mrs. Andersson in particular, enquiring about her health regularly, so that she began to find him a little unnerving. He began to toy with the idea that he could alter fate by looking after her well, and took to dropping off gifts of food, leaving treats on her doorstep. She suffered a fall in April, and he was especially attentive, bringing her jugs of soup and extra firewood. Mrs. Andersson told her friends that she thought maybe he had seen a vision and had a religious conversion. When the rumour got back to Olof he wondered if that was really what had happened.

Then, in August, Lars had a stroke. This meddled with Olof's idea of a system, and he fretted over the man's health for days. He visited so frequently that Lars' wife found him a bit of a nuisance.

"Stop your fussing. Lars is doing fine. His left leg is a bit wobbly, but he's managing. Thank you," as she shut the door behind him, again.



As the summer came to an end, Olof began to become really anxious. The window was closing. He had done everything he could think of to cheat fate, but he could not relax. Was there something he had forgotten? He checked up on himself regularly; he didn't have a cough, or a fever. His clothes fitted him just as they had always done. He had no more aches and pains that a man of his age should expect.

By the middle of October, Olof realised that his fate must now be coming quite quickly. He was not going to have a slow decline, one in which his friends could gather round, offering him support, bringing tasty food and piling logs in his stove. No. It was looking increasingly like this was going to be sudden. Would he just drop, instantly, knowing nothing about it, like Johan a few years back? Or would it be a violent accident like that woman he'd heard about in the next village? The prospects played on his mind, interfering with his sleep and distracting him from his duties keeping Mrs. Andersson well. She told her friends that his religious conversion hadn't lasted long, and she was disappointed in him.

As the days became shorter and shorter, the darkness preyed on Olof's mind. To die violently, unexpectedly, in the night was a horrible prospect. By mid November, Olof had decided that he had to take matters into his own hands. He took a rope used for securing stacks of logs from a small cupboard and put a chair under the main beam of the house. He did a last round of visits to Birgitt, Lars and Mrs. Andersson – “Oh you've remembered me again have you?” and returned to his home. The fire in the stove had burned low. That was fine. He didn't want any risk that the place might burn down afterward. That was not part of his plan.

He knotted the rope into noose, threw one end over the beam and secured the other on a large metal hook on the beam which was for hanging cured meat. Now, it would support a piece of uncured meat.

Olof prepared to take charge of his fate and kicked the chair away.

At the start of December, there was a ceremony in the church, and the body of Olof was laid in its grave. Out of the church filed the procession of attendants: Birgitt, Lars, and Mrs. Andersson led it, and the rest of the villagers followed behind.

## It Never Stops Does It?

Tanya Ivanov

The German fighter planes droned ahead of us, a swarm of Ju 88's to our tiny fleet. I speed up and shoot, aiming for the engine. I see another one of our Hurricanes in front of me to the left, and I can tell the pilot is flying it too fast. The Germans turn, encircling it and lighting it up with fire. I see it start to dive toward the ground, and I slow, letting the enemy planes pull away. I see the pilot trying to control the plane's descent, and he pulls up the tip at the last second, making a painful landing rather than a deadly one.

I dip down too, going to check how he is. I hastily jump out of the cockpit, and open up his plane. The glass is cracked with bullet holes, and I see blood coming from the man's torso. He's light haired and ruddy faced, and breathing hard. I reach my hand out, and he takes it, but he struggles even with my help.

'What's your name?'

"John Wilbur. And yours?"

"Brigham Foxley."

I look up toward the sky, it's clear, no sign of any planes, and we're only about two miles from the city. I glance back down at John, I'm not sure if he can make it that far. The two of us definitely won't fit in one plane, so our only choice is to go by foot.

"Well, we should start heading back now, otherwise the enemy might spot us."

The man nods grimly, and I take him leaning against my shoulder. We slowly move towards the cover of trees, in the direction of my compass, but already he needs to stop and rest.

"Are you all right?"

"It hurts like hell, but I'll keep walking."

"It may hurt, but if we go too slowly you could bleed out before



we get there.”

“I know, come on, let’s get going again.”

We keep on through the woods, and remembering what I saw from in my plane I know we should reach the end of it soon enough. I made sure to memorize the way back from my view up there when I was heading down to John.

We break again, he’s panting and his face looks pale with sweat.

“Maybe we ought to think of another way to travel. I could try carrying you,” I suggest.

“No,” he says, and I can see the fear of death in his eyes. He finally finishes his sentence, saying, “I’d be too heavy.”

Seeing his fear, I feel an overwhelming sadness for the man, I’ll live, most definitely, but he may not.

“I think we’ll make it,” I stammer. “It’s not that long a distance.”

We sit in silence awhile, before he suddenly cries out, “Your badge!”

I look down to my shoulder, the spot where my golden badge used to be is now empty. I stand, and glance back the way we came, but don’t see it along the ground.

“I’m sorry, it must have come off when I was leaning against you to walk.”

“Don’t worry,” I say. “You still have yours, they’ll know that we’re safe.”

We continue on, walking some distance, and then resting. John is clearly in a lot of pain, but I avoid bringing it up as he’s likely thinking about it plenty without me having to mention it. At this particular stop, we finally strike up a conversation. It’s nearly noon, and the heat and fatigue warrant a longer pause than usual.

“Who do you have at home?” I ask.

“Just my mother, my brother’s out fighting in Italy.”

“It’s just family for me too.”

"I guess neither of us are doing too well on the lady front then I suppose."

I laugh despite myself. He, seeing my improved mood, continues.

"Where in England are you from?"

"My parents are from Suffolk, but I grew up in Wales."

"Whereabout in Wales?"

"Cardiff, have you ever been?"

"No, I'm not a big fan of the Welsh."

He glances around for a moment, as if to check that no one was eavesdropping.

"I'm sure many men could say dreadful things about the Welsh, the Scottish, the French, all sorts of other people, but honestly, most of it isn't true. What is true is that they have a funny accent."

I laugh again.

"That is certainly the mildest thing I've heard about them John," I say, John grinning wryly back at me.

"All of my friends call me Jack."

Presently, at yet another break, we are once again talking. I'm starting to seriously concern myself, as I'm becoming more and more sure he will not make it the whole way. It pains me to look at him now, as if my good health is shameful next to his struggle to take every following step.

"Why did you join?" I ask.

"Pardon?"

"Why did you decide to join the war?"

He ponders for a moment, before saying, "I thought it'd be fun."

"Is it?"

"It was, flying those planes and all. I'm not sure if it was worth it though."

We're silent for a while. I look around me, we're out of the forest at this point, now in a rocky open field. It's early afternoon, so the sun is

still quite high.

"I just joined because everyone else was."

"Was it worth it?"

"I'm not sure either."

The rests have been becoming more frequent the entire journey, but now it's alarming. At the last one Jack looks at me, and takes off the badge from his shoulder.

"What are you doing that for?" I ask him.

"You'll need it, otherwise they won't know if you're the enemy and shoot you as soon as you get there."

"But why are you giving it to me?"

"You know why Brigham, you've known for a while. Don't pretend like I'm going to survive."

I feel my eyes smart, the corners start to well with tears.

"I won't just leave you behind like this."

"You must. I won't let you carry me even an inch further."

He looks spent, and I look away, staring at the soil, hoping he won't see my tears.

"Take the badge Brigham. I'm sorry it's all bent from the bullets, but it's still recognizable."

I say nothing, still not looking at him.

"You're a good man, I wouldn't be able to stand it if you died because of me. Please, just take the badge."

I look back at him, and slowly grasp it from his fingers.

"Thank you," I mumble quietly, before I begin walking once again.

It goes much faster without Jack, but rather than be relieved that I'll soon be back safe, I'm disappointed that it won't take me longer. I dread imagining telling the others what happened to him.

After only an hour, I see the edge of the city, and a group of British soldiers guarding a road. I take the badge that I've been clasping all this time and pin it to my shoulder.



I approach them glumly, and before I can say a word, one of them glances at my badge and makes a sour expression.

He raises his gun and shoots, the body falling to the ground. His partner turns to him.

“What did you do that for?”

“I didn’t recognize him, but mainly, look at his badge. It’s all torn and bent from bullets, but he doesn’t have a scratch on him, he must have stolen it.”

The partner sighs, “These German spies, they just never stop do they?”

## Dragging the River

Richard Oyama

In high school my brother Frank had a girlfriend named Lisa Horowitz. They were working at a Catskills resort. She was easygoing and had an enormous rack. Our mother Kyoko proffered unkind words about her.

“She called her a Bronx Bagel Baby.” My brother laughed and took a toke. “Man, I wonder what Lisa’s mother called me. The Jap Gigolo?”

Kyoko urged him to date Cynthia Nakamura whose parents we knew. He declined.

“Sansei girls didn’t turn me on,” he admitted. “They instilled a brotherly attitude in me.” It was a curious thing to say, since my brother’s relationship to our sister Toshiko was characterized not by protectiveness but by condescension and indifference.

In 1966 Frank graduated from Seward Park after repeating his final year of high school, Uncle Sam crooking his bony-ass finger.

“Did you discuss going to Vietnam with Mom and Dad?”

“No way. They were forced into signing loyalty oaths in camp, but there was no question I would serve in the army. None whatsoever.”

“When I first came back from Nam, I’d go to the Cellar at night,” he continued. “I would get wasted, stumble home and take out that kendo sword that I bought in Saigon. I smashed that fucking sword against the wall again and again, pretending I was slicing Dad into ribbons until I started to cry. My roommate Vinnie came into my room and talked me down. I wanted to murder the old man then.”

Toshio and Frank did not speak for three years.

“Dad’s driving me nuts,” I said. “Every night he sweeps, mops and scrubs the apartment. He’s like an acolyte at a Zen temple.”

“He’s an anal-retentive. Fixated on keeping a nice, tight asshole. I’ll tear a new one for him.”

“Quit that shit,” I said, irritated by my brother’s tendency to boil everything down to Freudian terms and scatology.

“Hey, you’ll look back on all this crap and laugh,” Frank claimed.

“After Nam, it took me nearly a year to get my thing together,” he went on. “When the counterculture and anti-war movements came along, I thought, ‘That’s cool,’ but I felt separated from that scene. The vets are the only ones with the authority to talk about the war—not the protesters, hard hats, politicians, not even the generals. We had seen it on the ground.

“I grew up with a macho code in the Fifties, you know,” he continued, “We played the dozens. We used to say, ‘*Yo mamma so ugly she look like she been hit by the ugly stick.*’ ‘*Oh yeh? Yo mamma so ugly she look like she been hit by the whole ugly forest!*’

“It was nasty, no doubt, but that verbal jousting, that mother-wit, that cognitive quickness, was a way of being tested, of showing heart. It became a way of learning how to deal. To jive and survive and be a man.”

Frank knew a 300-pound grunt named Tiny Eldridge. The lieutenant was hassling Eldridge about smoking pot on duty. One night when the lieutenant was asleep, Tiny crept into his quarters. He pulled the pin and bowled a grenade under the lieutenant’s bed and split. The lieutenant was found dead the next morning. It must have been the Vietcong. Tiny was going home.

Blacks in the company were getting militant, raising their fists in Black Power salutes like Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the ‘68 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. They decorated helmets with slogans like “Burn Baby Burn.” They fought on two fronts—in Nam and at home in Watts, Newark, Detroit, Birmingham. My brother was caught between two racial camps but elected to hang with the bloods. They smoked dynamite weed and listened to “Purple Haze.” The good old boys called him *Chinaman*.



After getting high, my brother and I picked up where we left off the night before.

“I was bogged down in *shit*. I was afraid an asshole redneck, fucked up, was going to mistake me for VC, grab his M-16 and blow me away. Paranoia was a normative condition.” He entertained the prospect of his own demise.

“Can you imagine me dead in Vietnam? *The Death of a Counterfeit Gook*. What a joke! The whole year I was in Nam I walked around with eyes in the back of my head. When I was short, I kept a Colt loaded under the pillow.”

On a thickly humid evening, he and his running buddy Juan Gonzalez were on R & R in Saigon, eating dinner at a pizza parlor. A VC grenade blew up the *mama-san* bar next door—shards of glass, peanuts, broken stools, wet cloth, severed limbs and blood exploding from the flames. They figured the next bomb was meant for them. They stuffed their faces with three large pizzas apiece and chug-a-lugged four pitchers of beer. They closed the joint. Heads reeled, spinning into blackout moments. Their bellies revolted. They vomited on the street. The bomb never went off but fear twisted in their gut like a hook.

Monsoon mist inhabited the land with ghosts. In the tropical afternoon the shadowless jungle was a green wall. Sun knifed through translucent fronds. As the light failed, darkness settled among the treetops, thickened between trunk and ground. The grunts were spooked. Dope heightened every synchronous orchestra of bugs, every twig snap, every feral noise. With each step, they were unpeeling a layer of skin, layer upon layer, disrobing the learned civilities, until they were naked of all but primal reflex and magical, irreducible nerve. Out of blackened faces fierce eyes shone like a tiger in the forests of the night.

Frank saw Vietnamese peasants in conical caps who stooped in ankle-deep water, transplanting seedlings in terraced rice fields, thin boys fishing in an irrigation ditch, a girl riding a water buffalo.

“Gonzalez and I rode a *cyclo* into Saigon. I threw spare change at the kids who sold Chiclets and legless beggars who rolled on wheeled platforms under the trees. Saffron-robed monks bustled to the temple. Some doused themselves in gasoline and set themselves ablaze. Bar girls poured shots of Jameson. Juan and I ate spring rolls and nuoc mam, the smelly fish sauce, at a restaurant on the *Rue Catinat*.

“We went to a whorehouse. It was a dilapidated office space that was divided into sheet-rocked, open-air cubicles. An altar was arranged on a shelf under a mirror with a statue of Quan Am, the bodhisattva of compassion. There was a blue plate of oranges and flowers. On the couch in the waiting room, I saw a skinny, malnourished girl in Capri pants and *ao dai*. There was barely flesh on the bone. I didn’t have a clue how old she was. I walked into a cubicle with a table lamp and a fan. She popped a tape of *guzheng*, zither music, into a cassette player and pushed the play button. We had sex on the massage table.”

Back home he had a brief affair with a woman from Manchester he met at the Cellar. She called him “my little Jap.”

“If the white man believes the only good gook’s a dead gook,” he asked himself, “what the hell was I? Did that fucked-up affair with the English bitch only validate my self-hate?”

But self-knowledge was a burden.

# Don't I Know You from Somewhere?

Bruce McRae

You don't remember me.  
I was that spider you watched  
walking across a ceiling.  
I was that horsefly  
in a brothel your grandfather visited  
during the last great war.  
An accident waiting to happen,  
I happened.

I'm your invisible friend  
from when you were five years old.  
That's me in the photograph  
in your uncle Harry's living-room.  
You were stood in a field  
and saw me passing on a train.  
Our shadows once touched.  
I sat at the back of our classroom.  
You were Buddha and I wiped your brow.  
You once gave me half your sandwich.  
You sold me a gun and a gramme of death.  
That ant you tortured gleefully,  
that was me, I didn't forget,  
the scales to be balanced in my favour.

You don't remember me,  
but we played on the same team together.  
I was a dog, your favourite pet.  
You wept when you left me.

You asked me for a cigarette,  
for a match, for a dollar.  
I was that robin that you murdered.  
Of all the fears you ever feared,  
I was that monster.

## A Sackful of Monkeys

Bruce McRae

Monkeys driving cars  
and entertaining doubts.  
Monkeys in business suits  
while operating farm machinery.  
In week-old moonlight.  
In their night-cold beds.  
Fomenting rebellion  
and made drunk with time,  
the smoke of time along the timberline  
an exhalation, a fine miasma.

Monkey gods and monkey governments.  
Monkey messiahs. Monkey sorcerers.  
High on fumes and cherry cola.  
Typing Shakespearian manuscripts.  
Standing upright on a savanna  
and surveying all that is before them,  
a cornucopia of possibilities,  
this questionable reality, our pointless deaths,  
a life that's not worth living.

# A Town Called Snowfall

Bruce McRae

It started snowing while I slept.  
Awake to the world's blizzards,  
it's been snowing pillows and crescent moons.  
It's snowing barn owls and bonds and bedding.  
A snowfield deeper than townships,  
than the dream-lives of children,  
than all God's cotton.

Back to bed, wayward mouse.  
It's snowing in the past and present.  
It's snowing houses and cows.  
It's snowing pressed sheets  
of the finest Egyptian linen.  
Drowsy little bug, it's snowing  
saints and sinners in the cant of night.

The burgermeister, sleeping thickly.  
The ombudsman, in the depths of torpor.  
The watchman, watching  
a snow that's fallen for millions of years.  
In a town called Snowfall  
is a snowstorm as quiet as light's reflections.

Everyone is beautiful in a white-out  
and it's been snowing souls and fallen angels.  
The roads are closed. The world is sleepy.

# Fragments of Girlhood: Between Notes and Cracks

Sisi Bui

how; make an oath to reach the wasteland  
du billet-doux et du raison d'être  
at five, then class half-past-eight,

between solecistic Pinterest captions & chicken scratch Mandarin  
notes  
and thanks yous of faustian bargains at Gemie and you notice the  
phone crack on your skin angled like the slash between the pronouns  
after your name  
cling on, like a lifeline, like a flooding river

because no, u didn't grow up in the milieus of Hedonistic South Saigon,  
not until u escape your father, flesh and wound,  
don't flinch, it's no cult, just girlhood.



# In the Shadow of Mount Baldy

## Richard Collins

In the shadow of old Mount Baldy  
in the land of cactus, citrus and kale

Those railroad tracks now running trails  
orange groves and vineyards razed for McMansions

None of which had yet materialized back then  
just river rock and sage, butterflies ablaze

But places grow up, disguise their age  
decay and decompose to compost suburbs

Like (Rancho) Cucamonga and Upland  
where some self-of-mine was once a boy

A boy who ranged from the Claremont Colleges  
to wild Red Hill (different kinds of country clubs)

Our childhood places try to hide and seek us  
in nonexistent maps and mistaken images

Senses tattooed with long-past synapses  
more primeval than Marcel's madeleines

That's where we retire, after all, when we're tired  
to the simplified exurbs of our memory

No Mexican beach or mountain retreat  
but a return to first raw small-town impressions

All so long ago but not long gone, in fact  
more present having been with us for so long

We ride the inexorable rails of thought, he and I  
into the outskirts of unreal existence

Back to the land of cactus, citrus and kale  
into the shadow of cold Mount Baldy.

## Sticky Fingers Sermon

Richard Collins

*The weakness then of infant limbs, not its will, is its innocence.*

– Augustine

We children are natural anarchists  
who recognize no property rights

We steal things to hold the world in our hands  
fight for bits and pieces temporarily ours

And throw them away with alacrity  
like so many tantrums without regret

Knowing it will all be spanked away  
one capitalist lesson at a time

Heirs to every parental indiscretion  
our ancestors warned us about and scorned

The bad boys (so we were told we were)  
took what wasn't ours but (for a moment) was

Loquats and Christmas lights, lemons and cash  
cap guns in belt buckles that fired at a belly push

Punishments dealt us like witches at the stake  
shamelessness our cloak of faux innocence

Augustine knew from experience what  
each of us knows just craving what we want

We follow in the footsteps of selfish genes  
moms and dads, less tabulae rasae than palimpsests

Say what the Grand Inquisitors will  
say what preachers expect us to stomach

All that sketchy Adam and Eve stuff, the fortunate fall  
there's still no such thing as an original sin.

# The Constellations Have Always Been There

## Hannah Jellen

I used to pretend that the tears in my eyes were stars caught in my lashes. I always wished I was more beautiful than I was.

I would go hill jumping in my dad's '98 Chevy,

I guess I never knew that I was alive unless I was scared or in pain.

Maybe that's why I make bad decisions and cover my sorrow with tattoos. I used to walk on frozen oxbows in the winter and wonder if I'd fall through the ice. I used to bite my fingers until they bled, and I thought maybe that dying Was the most beautiful thing I'd ever do with my life.

But I'm too drunk to leave right now, I've got a bittersweet melancholy That burns like Old Crow at 3am, so I guess I'll stick around for a while longer, And enjoy the taste of your skin, and the way your words linger on my tongue. I don't want to die as much as I used to, in fact I'm starting to feel better now.

Maybe the tears were stars after all.

## The Rock

Tanmay Dhar

I am changed to you in this episode of fossil. Leaps of injured animals and the light and darkness of the Orion's limbs fail on the strange bends of limestone. What will I eat, where will I sleep? An uncontrollable water dripped from temporal mouth.

Sir Aurel Stein came here on an archaeological dig. He stood on your forehead with a cup of hot milk. Under the ground your secret organs, words are swarming with worms and larvae. In Anatolia's Konya Valley, people are seeing the first crops sprouting.

Beneath their skeletons I shudder. A muffled cry was heard and the flesh was gathered. Acting reflects the scene of death, and death reflects a bird. Cell membranes keep moving, keep moving towards our damaged embryo.

# The Amphibian

## Tanmay Dhar

In an intermediate phase you are a fish without memory. A single nickname in lips, the bottomless water fails. The current was coming, the call was coming back with the accent, the child, the hurt. One day the sea receded in front of countless eggs.

The archeologist made me stand on the sand with an eternal astrologer's smile. No oyster, conch, fish skeleton could match my patience. You dig deep darkness for lack of water.

Far below him, the two voices rustled in the lack of air, no one could make out. The darkness is getting harder and harder as the fish picks up the hook.

## Paradigm

Tanmay Dhar

In the next episode I became an emotionless seed. My body splits into prehistoric weapons. You hide it under a rajhasvala devimurti. History slips a little. Eggs of grain-eating birds fail and fall in invisible nests.

Ramakinkar crouched down in the dim light and cut the intense red meat. You don't recognize my face. Cell division begins in an infinity mirror. Bloody furnaces brighten within sleep, the seed of the equine constellation rolling in tender flesh for millions of years.

The artist continues to drift into the endless bliss of the flesh. We add false stories to death by breaking stones. Colors, traps, cages, bridges slowly dry up inside the story. How do we sleep?



# The Packaging

John Grey

I'm in a room  
surrounded by  
the flotsam and jetsam  
of newly opened packages –

hastily ripped brown paper,  
scattered foam peanuts,  
cut up bits of string.

The goods they came in  
are set aside,  
all thankfully as ordered  
and undamaged.

Unwrapping comes  
with such anticipation –  
the prospect, the expectation,  
the surprise, the relief.

But the aftermath  
is a ruin  
of random, disparate objects,  
spread across the floor.

It's up to me  
to pick them up.

There is no good feeling  
that goes with that.

## A Land That is Flat

Jon Summers

A land that is flat and ugly, that  
is how you would have it, though too  
polite to say so, to decry the tongue  
that stumbles over itself in its efforts  
to be understood, cutting itself on the  
sharp edges of consonants that are hard  
on the ear, as difficult to navigate as  
the flat, featureless spaces across  
which we travel, watching dull fields  
merge into towns in which grey towers  
build towards a greyer sky where surely  
the lives which are lived must be ugly,  
too, straining at a hiraeth for the more  
comforting hills of home, where if the  
mist makes the days dull and the sky a  
blanket beneath which the mind strains  
to be free, and the streets are dirtier,  
the lives more desperate, at least there  
remains the illusion of a home where you  
will not always be at odds with yourself,  
bruising a fragile ego on the rough edges  
of bonds from which the conditioned mind  
will never dare to seek release.

## No Room Now

Jon Summers

No room now for pretence, the haze  
through which the memory would regard  
itself, make tolerable a past we have  
so recently flown pierced by the sharp  
eye with which the camera regards an  
eternal present, holding fast to the  
dull ugliness the mind might otherwise  
gloss over with the softest of lights  
in which it would colour yellowed grass  
parched of the warmth of better days,  
bare, grey tarmac the memory treads  
in the sight of the stark lens that  
inflicts these truths on itself,  
the hunched figure that stands frozen  
eternally in its sight, squinting  
accusingly at an ever retreating past  
devoid of the absence that would hence-  
forth dominate its watchful, wary sight.

# When I Grow Old to Become a Paper Idol

Nattie O'Sheggzy

Paper kite is sailing,  
pink wings fading,  
a speck in the torrid air  
like my life's dream.  
I jerk the tethers  
and the adamance  
is nothing forgettable.

Paper plane lost in the trees,  
if you saunter back to me  
or you lay on a midden,  
let the shadow in the window  
whisper in my pillow  
the language of a child.

Now lean with flying,  
kite, why did you endure  
the moorings of love?  
Kite, why are you innocent  
like a plastic doll  
to a child's tears?

## Stigmata

Jacob Moses

Why do I feel my entire body  
Has the layout of Golgotha?

I'm taking on too much pain  
And I wonder if I'm strong enough  
To withstand the continuing  
Aggravation that comes from  
Being taken for granted

There is no stigmata to prove  
How wounded I've been  
Questioning whether or not  
I've actually been healing

Whether the thorns embedded  
Within my pineal gland  
Awakened the wizard within

Whether my hands can craft  
Another fucking poem about  
All I've endured since the last time  
I needed to be observed

Whether my feet can simply  
Walk off the wounds when  
My legs are too weary

Whether my back can carry  
Any more goddamn burdens

I'm growing more and more  
Exhausted from this persistence  
And leery of those praising  
My resilience, for resurrection  
Comes with its own cross

## After the Snow

Duane Anderson

After the snow,  
then what?  
Shovel paths where once  
sidewalks laid uncovered just hours before?  
We walk the same trail,  
the grass grows brown.

After the snow,  
then what?  
Leave it alone, not shoveled?  
We walk the white sands of winter.  
Let the footprints grow deep in the snow  
and scatter with the wind in all directions.



# The Ellipse of an Eclipse

Alex Phuong

Mathematical sense  
Rational sensibility  
Making sense  
Out of reality,  
And as the sun  
And moon combine,  
Marvel at anything sublime  
For time will tell  
If all ends well,  
And fall under the spell  
That light can cast  
As a cast of characters  
Populate the Earth,  
And dare to live  
A life full of worth,  
For the miracle of birth  
Is like a prime number  
Since every person  
Can amend through transformation  
Beyond any mathematical calculation

## Lamentation 2

Peter Appleton

We're wireless, we're in the wind, mobile  
Connected to the sky and sand, the melting  
Of the distant icecaps, to the numinous,  
To precious sources of water and oil,  
Fleeing like our forbidden priestesses,  
Scattering in shock and awe, discarded  
Bangles and beads clattering like lies,  
Ornaments and offerings for jackals now.  
We're homeless, stateless, refugeeed and angry.  
We're cursed. We're the old prayers we half-remember.  
We're difficult. We're problematical.  
We're powerless. We're unprofitable.  
We're spitting back the blood from backhand blows.  
We're daring to imagine a return,  
Singing our songs, rewriting our meaning.  
We're floating and we're sinking, invisibly  
Drowning in our stories and betrayals.  
We're bailing futures with our leaking hands.  
We're paperless and pitiless, impure,  
Only just as old as we need to be,  
Drumming out the polyrhythmic history  
So long now you've forgotten how to hear.

## Stung

Peter Appleton

He wore his loneliness – an insect bite  
to scratch at and abuse, divert the pain  
without admitting that in the hot night  
he'd been caught by his decisions again.

So, when the skin swelled into an infection  
he welcomed the cool enquiring hands  
that took his temperature, the selection  
of drugs, of caution, the imposed demands.

'You know better than to treat yourself this way,'  
she said, 'Next time, deal with the problem right.'  
There was no arguing. He didn't stay  
to hear the rest. He didn't want that fight.

'You choose your pain,' she said as he walked out.  
He thought, 'All choices are an exercise in doubt.'

## Audio System

Bernard Pearson

I have old ears now,  
Like caves.  
Where the sounds  
Of those now gone  
Still remain.  
My mother's  
'Come along, come along,  
come quickly.'  
And the skim of my fathers  
Cherry wood walking stick,  
Marking a course  
through broad leaf waves

## Gaze

Bernard Pearson

The measure for beauty  
Is In the eyes of the infant  
Mini globes whose distant  
Lands mesmerise their parents  
Like those of a snake charmer  
Or the face of a lost grandparent  
In a photograph that locks their  
Past into the one dimension  
Wherein their heart is held secure.

# That Code of Behavior in Harmony with Wise Passiveness

Colin James

Tell you what,  
imperfection is a good thing.  
If my lover's husband  
didn't have hay fever,  
I wouldn't have heard him  
sneezing in the bushes.  
I excuse his possessiveness,  
will he excuse my rapture?  
Not likely, that's why I am running  
and why I moved to another state.  
My current neighbors hang  
burlap bags for curtains.  
However, their gun collection  
is without peer.  
If I offer to plant more flora perhaps  
we can sit together in the quiet.  
Their pit bull won't be inconvenienced.  
I promise as naturally as is possible  
to keep an eye out for the Federales.

# Chords of Perception

Sarah Mayo





# Ugly Suckling

Chad Horn





# Untitled 1

Irina Novikova





## Untitled 2

Irina Novikova





# Wandering

Kushal Poddar





## Biographies

### Alex Phuong

Alex Andy Phuong earned his Bachelor of Arts in English from California State University—Los Angeles in 2015. He was a former *Statement Magazine* editor who currently writes about literature, film, and culture. He also earned an Associate of Arts in English from Pasadena City College in 2013, and tutored there. He has written hundreds of film reviews for *MovieBoozer*, and has contributed articles to *Mindfray*. His writing has appeared in *The Bookends Review* and *The Society of Classical Poets*. His poetry collection is *An Altruistic*. Currently residing in Alhambra, California, he now writes with the sincerest hope to inspire readers while fully supporting the ones who dare to pursue their dreams.

### Bernard Pearson

Bernard Pearson is published in around one hundred journals and magazines worldwide. He is also a spoken-word performer, finalist in both the John Tripp Spoken Word Competition and The All Wales Comic Verse Competition. Plus a biographer and prize-winning short story writer. His work has appeared in many publications. In 2017 a selection of his poetry '*In Free Fall*' was published by Leaf by Leaf Press. In 2019 he won second prize in *The Aurora Prize* (an international competition in Poetry) for his poem '*Manor Farm*' and his first novel '*Where the Willows End*' was published by *Leaf by Leaf Press*. His second novel was published in 2022.

### Bruce McRae

Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with poems published in hundreds of magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rattle*, and the *North American Review*. The winner of the 2020 Libretto prize and author of four poetry collections and seven chapbooks, his next book '*Boxing In The Bone Orchard*' is coming out in the Spring of 2025 via *Frontenac House*.

### Chad Horn

Chad M. Horn is an award winning author and mixed-media artist. He serves as emcee of numerous annual *Kentucky Writer's events*.

### Colin James

Colin James has a book of poems, *Resisting Probability*, from *Sagging Meniscus Press*. He lives in Massachusetts.

### Duane Anderson

Duane Anderson currently lives in La Vista, NE. He has had poems published in *Fine Lines*, *Cholla Needles*, and several other publications. He is the author of '*On the Corner of Walk and Don't Walk*,' '*The Blood Drives: One Pint Down*,' and '*Conquer the Mountains*,' and '*Family Portraits*.'

## Hannah Clare Jellen

Hannah Clare Jellen was born among the floodwaters of Southern Illinois and now resides in central Ohio, where she has found her heart's home among chosen family. After years of writing quietly, she began sharing her poetry with those in her inner circle. With their loving encouragement, she has chosen to share her work more publicly. She writes in the spaces between making music and working—both of which deeply influence the way she sees the light glinting off the world's sharp and magnificent edges. A neurodivergent musician-turned-funeral director and embalmer, Hannah is entangled in the melancholic comfort of life's cyclical nature and remains fascinated by the natural world. Her poetry is the medium through which she processes her journey—one of conjuring reason and love from even the most pallid and tragic experiences.

## Irina Tall Novikova

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "*My soul is like a wild hawk*" (2002) was held in the museum of *Maxim Bagdanovich*. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005, she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, drawing on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was *The Red Book*, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. She writes fairy tales and poems, and illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in *Poznań Art Week*. Her work has been published in magazines: *Gupsophila*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Little Literary Living Room*, and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "*The 50 Best Short Stories*", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "*The wonders of winter*".

## Jacob R. Moses

Jacob R. Moses is a poet and spoken word artist from New York City. Publications featuring his work span five continents. He is the author of the full-length poetry book, *Grimoire* (iiPublishing, 2021) and the co-author of *Tuesday Night Beats* with Douglas G. Cala (Like a blot from the blue, 2025). In 2023, he received a Masters in English and Creative Writing from Southern New Hampshire University. In 2024, Jacob's poem, "*Lottery*", was nominated for a Pushcart Prize by *New Generation Beat Publications*.

## John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *City Brink* and *Tenth Muse*. Latest books, "*Subject Matters*", "*Between Two Fires*" and "*Covert*" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Paterson Literary Review*, *Amazing Stories* and *Cantos*.

## Jon Summers

J.M. Summers was born and still lives in South Wales. Previous publication credits include *Another Country* from *Gomer Press* and various magazines / anthologies. The former editor of a number of small press magazines, he is currently working on his first collection.

## Kushal Poddar

The author of '*A White Cane For The Blind Lane*' and '*How To Burn Memories Using a Pocket Torch*' has ten books to his credit. He is a journalist, father of a four-year-old, illustrator, and an editor. His works have been translated into twelve languages and published across the globe.

## Nattie O'Sheggzy

Nattie O'Sheggzy is a poet who, often accompanied by his loyal dog, Exhale, finds inspiration in the complexities of simple things. He is the author of two poetry collections: *Random Imaginations* and *Sounds of the Wooden Gong*. Nattie's work has been featured in various literary publications, including *Literary Yard*, *Sandy River Review*, *Everscribe*, *Ultramarine Review*, *Heroin Love Song*, *Agape Review*, *SweetSmell Journal*, *Smoky Quartz*, *Feed The Holy*, and *LiteZine*. He is currently working on publishing his third poetry collection.

## Peter Appleton

Peter Appleton has worked in theatre, education, and campaigning. He has lived and worked in several countries and is now settled in the UK. He is a Buddhist. He is particularly interested in exploring where the personal meets the political.

## Richard Collins

Richard Collins, abbot of the New Orleans Zen Temple, directs Stone Nest Dojo in Sewanee, Tennessee. Dean Emeritus of Arts and Humanities at California State University, Bakersfield, he has taught at universities in California, Louisiana, Bulgaria, Romania, and Wales. His work has appeared in *Religion and the Arts*, *Sagesses Bouddhistes* (France), *Urthona: Buddhism and the Arts* (UK), *Shō Poetry Journal*, *Think*, *The Plenitudes*, and *Pensive*. His poetry has been nominated for Best Spiritual Literature and a Pushcart. His books include *No Fear Zen* (2015), and a translation of Taisen Deshimaru's *Autobiography of a Zen Monk* (2022). Also, most recently, *In Search of the Hermaphrodite: A Memoir* (Tough Poets Press, 2024) and *Stone Nest: Poems* (Shanti Arts, forthcoming).

## Richard Oyama

Richard Oyama's poems, stories and essays have appeared in *Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian North American Poetry*, *The NuyorAsian Anthology*, *Breaking Silence*, *Dissident Song*, *A Gift of Tongues*, *About Place*, *Konch Magazine*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Tribes*, *Malpais Review*, *Anak Sastra*, *Buddhist Poetry Review* and other literary journals. *The Country They Know* (Neuma Books 2005) is his first collection of poetry. He has a M.A. in English: Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Currently retired, Oyama taught at California College of Arts in Oakland, University of California at Berkeley and University of New Mexico.

## Rosie Sedgwick

Rosie spent many years as an NHS hospital pharmacist before a change of direction to become a bellydance teacher and performer. She has written all her life; some of her juvenilia was published in *The Language of Primary School Children* by H & C Rosen, and she won a poetry contest aged twelve and read her poem out on BBC radio 4. She went on to write many songs, sketches, poems and complete pantomimes. She has a completed manuscript, *Ants & Cicadas - Secrets & Lies* which won Best Literary Fiction Award from *WOLF Media*, and which she is currently querying. Her prose poem *I never thought I'd see you again* was published in *Mourning in Metaphores* by *Wingless Dreamer* in February 2025. She is currently working on a speculative fiction novel '*The adventures of inconsequential people*'.

## Sarah Mayo

Sarah Mayo is a South Wales poet and emerging artist. Her poetry appears in literary journals including *The Broken Spine*, *Dreich*, and *Gigantic Tentacles* amongst others and she is now exhibiting her art in galleries, gaining confidence as she navigates life and its challenges, now she's past 40.

## Sisi Bui

Sisi is a junior in high school from Saigon with a deep love for English literature. She was formerly a writer for a local youth political and cultural magazine, where she explored issues close to her generation. Outside of formal writing, she enjoys crafting poetry and often sends playful, poetic texts to her friends. Currently, Sisi is stepping away from the written word to explore metaphor and storytelling through other artistic forms, including photography, fashion, and curatorial practice.

## Tanmay Dhar

Tanmay Dhar, born in 1979 in Nabagram, Hooghly, India is a poet, translator and scientist. He did his postgraduate studies at Calcutta University (M. Sc) and Pune University (M. Tech). He did his doctorate in a joint research project between Uttaranchal University, Dehradun and ISAAC-CNR, Italy. Subject: Climate Science. He is currently working in Assam. He started writing in his school days. He has been writing regularly in *Desh*, *Anandabazar*, *Anandamela*, *Kaurab*, *Kabi Sammelan*, *Udbodhan*, *Statesman* and numerous little magazines for the last two decades. Ten poetry books have been published so far - '*Punarjanmanā T-Sankhyayan*' (2012), '*Bhurjapatre Niriswar Angul*' (2013), '*Katha-Sarisrip*' (2013), '*Ruru Harinir jonye*' (2014), '*Thermometer-er oprante*' (2017), '*Atal Ishwarchibneh jantrana*' (2022), '*Chirantani*' (2025), '*Alakh Nadir Uthalthal*' (2025), '*Dwiprabharer Beel o Mrittuyatit Sankhachiler Ichche*' (2025) and '*Chandak o Bipareet Aswamedha*' (2025). Science books - '*Akashganga Katha*' (2022), '*Taraay Taraay*' (2024); History books - '*Hariye-Jawar Boi*' (2024); Story books - '*Premar Hasir Bandh Bhengeche*' (2025). He has been the editor of the international magazine '*Ushnik*' for the past ten years. He has received the '*Web-Literary Legacy*' Award (2018).

## **Tanya Ivanov**

Tanya Ivanov is a young poet and writer from Kazan, Russia. She enjoys visiting local bookstores and runs a book discussion group in her university. Tanya has also explored other mediums such as drawing and photography to express her creativity.





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