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Acta Victoriana, est. 1878, is the literary journal of Victoria College at the University of Toronto.

Acta Victoriana is produced and published on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit, as well as other Nations that have been, and continue to be, subject to historical erasure. As members of the literary community on campus, we recognize the need to be part of the collective conversation required for the ongoing processes of decolonization and reconciliation.



Letter from the Editors

It should be difficult to find a throughline for the thirty-one pieces that make up the fall issue of *Acta Victoriana's* 148th volume. The issue is themeless. Our contributors hail from different continents and academic institutions, belong to different generations, and employ different mediums. If a themed issue strives to find common ground in what its selected works say, *Acta Victoriana's* themeless issue is bound by a mutual interest in what goes unsaid.

As you read *Acta Victoriana* 148.1, you will encounter the different forms silence can take. Many of the speakers and narrators that guide us this issue sit in silent reflection as their stories unfold. Dialogue is sparse, and subtext is the primary mode of communication. Silence is a refusal to communicate and a form of anti-communication. Meaning is not given, but earned through working with fragments. Silence is the space where trauma is created, perpetuated and renounced. Feelings are held in insinuations, inanimate objects, undertones, whispers and touches. There is no language more common.

But silence is a communicative tool, and how it is used informs whether or not it is productive or destructive. If *Acta Victoriana* 148.1 begins by documenting silence's tendency to disintegrate and erode that which it encounters, the issue progresses by considering silence's creative potential. Silent are also the loving glances and attention we offer to others. Meaning and art are often fruits of silence, and silence the foundation for mutually beneficial human relationships. With each unspoken prayer the speaker of our closing piece, Shelley Rafailov's *public transit prayer*, offers to their fellow commuters, they affirm silence's ability to acknowledge the dignity of others, where it could otherwise erase and avoid it. "may there be room for one more" in all of our silences.

If there's anything we shouldn't be silent about, it's our gratitude. We'd like to thank our wonderful contributors for their work; you both offered us your ideas, and allowed them to be shared. We also extend our appreciation to *Acta Victoriana's* editorial board. It is a skill to recognize subtly great work, just as it is to create it—and we commend our board for doing so. This care has been etched into the cover and layout design of our physical issue, for whom we also thank our design editor. And thank you to our readers, within and outside the University of Toronto literary community, who continue to listen to *Acta Victoriana*.

Cristiana Da Costa & *Victoria Wai Kei Li*
Co-Editors-in-Chief



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abstract 1

Daniela Martins Domingues



Difficult things to talk about

Jaxzen Sandell

We sat in your mother's house talking about rivers and the deltas that fan out and close back like a fist grasping at air. Every time you look outside another year passes. But you have the same limes on the kitchen table and the same way of talking like we had just put down the phone a moment earlier. Don't look and you won't see the changes. Time needs a watcher, and when you close your eyes the voices sound the same.



A deretica

Adriana Oniță

When you remember each room | cameră | stanza, take the time to put every object in its place. Arrange the vase with fresh lalele on the sunny side of the table. Lasă să intre lumina, allow light to translate the living room into its habitual honey. Align covorul between bookshelf and sofa. Replace lightbulbs—lemon to apricot. Sort through the tiny architectures: crumpled receipts, stacked passports, pensule like bulrushes embedded in the flower pot. Release decade-old scrisori, cadouri, amintiri. Photography makes the release easier. Collage the theatre tickets, donate the half-read novellas. Uită-te afară. Your balcony in Edmonton is a cinema, the undulating refinery flame glows toată noaptea. Ai dereticat toată ziua prin casă—your body a ginger machinery. Tomorrow, când te trezești, the table will be rearranged with tulips, on 106th Street, or Via Giglio, or Strada Odăi. Before this room, or the many rooms you left: bread sliced and spread with vinete de la Jilava. For the next few days, you won't empty your pockets on the shelves. You will keep the drapes open, tiptoe on the rug, recut the tulip stems. English has taught you how to pick your own bones clean. You discard your mother's tongue and call it forgetting.



Burst

Andrew Rucker Jones

Simon took the grainy photograph that had always stood on the desk in his father's home office and examined it. Next to Simon, his father slid engineering books upright into a moving box. The dust jackets hissed together before the thousand-page tomes thunked against the bottom.

He tapped the photograph in Simon's hand. "Killed instantly." It showed the moment a dam burst, he explained. A security camera at the base recorded a hiker as the incompletely cured concrete fractured. Before the fissure widened, before an entire section of the dam swept away on the deluge, the water sprayed in a pressurized stream straight into the hiker. In the frame Simon held, the hiker's head bent backward, backward, until it looked like just another piece of gear strapped to his backpack.

"I kept it as a constant reminder of man's hubris." He slipped his wedding band off and laid it on the desk. "But I suppose the hubris of men knows no bounds. Nor the memory of women."

He plucked the little league ball cap from Simon's head, tossed it onto the empty desk, pulled Simon into a tight hug, and kissed Simon's hair. His deodorant smelled like evenings on the couch watching Jeopardy! with a squat mug of rich hot chocolate in the winter and a tall, sweating glass of Cherry Coke in the summer.

The front door slammed against the cold late February air, and Simon's father released him. His mother, who was supposed to be gone shopping the whole day, walked by the office, gaze fixed straight down the hall. She carried only her purse and a crumpled tissue.

Simon's father hefted the final box and walked out the door.

Simon placed the picture on the desk and picked up the wedding band. His parents' names were inscribed on the inside in flowery script. He stuffed it into his front pocket and the picture into his back pocket.

Twenty-one weekend visitations with his father passed—twenty-one episodes of Jeopardy! together on a new couch. For Simon's birthday, they shared a hot fudge sundae and Simon's first PG-13 movie.

Then his father left for a month-long contract. A bridge needed planning a few states over.

In the third week of his father's business trip, Simon found his mother behind a stack of books in the kitchen. She sat before a copy of Financial Accounting and Reporting Study Guide. Her eyes were closed, and her lips moved. Simon

waited.

He rarely saw her outside of the kitchen anymore. He mostly stayed in his room, and she studied here after work. They ate dinner together—sometimes spaghetti or scrambled eggs, most times carry-out—and she asked after school, then after his math homework, but was content with short replies so that their meals were quiet affairs. Afterward, they retreated to their own spaces.

Today, he had a question for her burning through his back pocket.

As soon as his mother opened her eyes, before she had a chance to check the facts she was memorizing, Simon slid the crumpled photograph to her and asked if she knew where the dam was.

She pushed the picture aside and swept her finger over the page, groaned, then returned her attention to Simon. “A few hours west.” She flipped the photograph over, as if expecting a message on the back, but the back was empty. “He gave you this?”

“I want to go.”

She looked up and bounced the picture lightly between finger and thumb to the rhythm of Simon’s taps on his thigh as he waited for an answer. “Do you miss him?”

Simon wanted to see the dam, not his father, but he suspected she would make the drive if he said yes, so he nodded.

“He’s a good father.” She reached across her exam preparation and squeezed his arm. “We’ll make a fam—um—mother-son weekend out of it.”

They left Friday afternoon, listening to a CPA audio study guide his mother paused only three times along the way for a gas station or restroom. Simon rolled and gripped the wedding band in his pocket. Metal seemed so indestructible, but his father had taught him about shear and melting points and that gold is one of the weakest metals.

They stayed in a motel and hiked out the next day to the dam through scatterings of vacationing families, youth groups, and retired couples in the sticky late morning sun. His mother asked if he felt ready for math this coming school year, then fell silent. They walked on until the sun stood straight overhead and Simon’s head drooped.

And suddenly, they rounded a corner and stood before the base of the dam.

Simon expected rubble and steel rods that had burst outward as he had thought his eardrums would when his parents had fought for days, and finally weeks, in cold silence. Instead, the dam was whole. The only lingering sign of catastrophe was one section a lighter gray than the rest. Backpackers came and went, and for a split second Simon felt the backpacker from the photograph must be among them, but everyone’s heads stood straight on their necks. He walked away from his mother to

the edge of the trail, where the dam wall ended in a granite bluff. The concrete was rough under his fingers.

Simon dug his father's wedding band out of his pocket. His mother came up beside him and opened her mouth to speak, but he placed the band in her hand. She held it between two fingers and rotated it to read the inscription.

"I don't want to see any more," he said and walked back the way they had come.

When they reached the motel, his mother stood outside the door and phoned his father. For forty-five minutes, they spoke. Simon knew because he lay on the bed on his back, head tipped over the edge of the hard mattress, listening.

Big Baby





David Mekhaieel



Kitchen Timelines

Taban Isfahaninejad

a single solitary hoop of green onion
left behind on the floor,
from before,
after the tea is cleared, the water rings
stay stamped
on wood, where coasters weren't at work
vinegar & olive oil & lemon lift them back off,
scrub off stains with salad-bowl soap magic
toothbrush & salad dressing, salad teeth
toothbrush & toothpaste, salad leaf
and a single slice of green onion, stuck between.
after the coffee's poured,
but before
the grounds are gone,
after the cake layers cool,
but before the buttercream,
after the cake is cut,
before the bite,
after the fork tears flesh, before the fat melts
on the tongue, molars and canines
hard at work between takes and fork and tongue and laughter
after the boil, but before
the coffee cups come out
after the pitcher tips, before the pour,
or after, mopping mess off marble,
after sparkling water spills,
but before the fizzing puddle falls all flat
while arms boil pink in dishwater,
sous-vide in neon rubber,
still one solitary sliver of green onion
takes a time-out from the chaos on the floor.



Tranzac Garden

Christina Dinh



itemised and unrepentant

Elisa Penha

Tell me the same story again: the one where you tell me I can have everything I want: the one where shame isn't a forward slash stuck like a doorstep in my ribcage / the one where shame isn't a child with my face. I've never known what to do with my hands and so I write about putting them on you, but it's all theory and no practice: because you're real and I was born on a witness stand: the courthouse is vast: the jury demands justification. Tell me the same story again: the one where I'm acquitted. I dug up the hatchet we buried and I tossed it through the window of a moving train. Our city is sinking, tell me fast, do you need me in the same way? Have you seen how I pulled the country into the shape of a crucifix? I'm never coming up roses and always coming up short: empty handed and repenting, high strung and waiting for the other shoe to drop but catching it in my hand instead. I tried looking back but I never really left, stuck shin-deep in the driveway, knowing you love me enough to cry but never enough to cut me free. You, in the cathedral, and you, lifting the anchor, and your sermon: a list of non sequiturs where you convince everybody they might be god. Tell me the same story again: where I was impaled on the fork in the road. Where I steal the headlights out of a car wreck. Where your confession is unhurried. But I know: you only say you love me while you pull me out of burning buildings, and I know: my knees are the barrels of shotguns. And I'm sorry for fighting just to get a hold of you and I'm sorry for replacing your bones with wooden spoons: stay still for once and swear you don't regret me.



Measure

Kerri Huffman

5:37 a.m. time of last waking

336 minutes of sleep

267 calories in Ezekiel bread with avocado

151.8 lbs, body weight (a.m.)

3 coffees,

the last half-decaf

7 left turns en route to work

57 unanswered emails

16,404 feet in 5 km

373 seconds per km

149.9 lbs, body weight (post-workout)

19½ inches, circumference of right thigh

tape measure resting against the crest of a brown mole

32 meetings in the weekly calendar

\$16.47 paid to the grocery teller

26 minute drive from office to daycare

1¼ cup of puy lentils measured out for soup

53 minutes for baby at bedtime

3 times through *Good Night Moon*

each time softer

16 stairs down from the second floor

819 days since the last time you called

2 drops of spring water in 1½ oz. of single malt



Easy Out

Jaxzen Sandell

The clouds are dark on the way back. It is impossible not to read this as a sign. Everything is a sign lately: the fact that two birds cracked their necks against my mother's window, for instance, and that this last week I've been unable to sleep because of a terrible new ringing coming from my fridge. Or take today, when we waited forty-five minutes for a bus to come that wasn't out-of-service, and when one finally arrived it was completely empty. It makes me giddy to think about. There is electricity, a bit like stage-fright. I wondered if Rosie felt it too, but I didn't think to ask. She's showing me pictures of her cat stuck in various boxes and compartments. We lurch from our seats each time the bus runs over a pothole. Plastic bags between my feet: Oreos, Fritters, Moon-Pies, McCain's Deep & Delicious Cakes, Cap'n Crunch, Moose Tracks, Cartwheels, Pogo Sticks, Mochi Balls, String Cheese, Insta-Ramen and crackers, cookies, candies and chips of every denomination. I wanted this to go down easy, I told her, so I got everything she could think of. She seems happy enough. Content. Not really showing much at all. I'm trying not to worry, though the worry is always there. The thing is I just can't stand feeling like I've done something wrong, and I can never really know what's going on in her mind. She says it's inevitable, and even if we can't figure how it started in the first place, this is how it has to go. And what a day to do it! I'd laugh if there wasn't something stuck in my throat. It feels like a joke about to click together, like there's some irony visible from way up there. Times like these you just want to step outside and shake the world until it starts to look like something. She shows me a picture of her cat stretched out like a cover model with his feet in the air and his pink butthole bloomed in center frame. She shows me a picture of her cat asleep in a ramen box with his tail hanging down like a feather boa and his eyes demurely shut. He was so young here, she says. Cold air whistles through the half-cracked windows. A tightness in my chest. Something feels wrong, though I can't place it in her voice. I hold her hand, looking for a qualitative difference: fear, anger, doubt. Nothing. Here is the cat as seen from the bedroom window, a yowling spot of black ten miles up the world-tree. Here are her hands, her lips, her inscrutable eyes. I hear only my glassy thoughts. We are at our stop. There's something I've forgotten, and heavy—less clear the further we go—then bags in hand, then sidewalk, then coughed up in a churn of smoke and metal and electric chainsaw two blocks under an otherwise oceanic silence, then unmoored, then existence affirmed solely by the need to keep her hand as firmly pressed in mine as her body will allow. We are beneath a black sky, a great gaping mouth. We are in the eye of the storm

and the eye sees the world. As we near, I squeeze her hand tighter as if she might trip on a stone and hurdling go into the sky. I think about her cottage and that sometimes as a girl she would untie the floating dock from its anchor and drift out across the moonlit night until morning, when someone would come and find her. We are at my door, leading into the basement. I think about the cold mist rolling in across the lake. Inside the lights jitter on. The apartment smells like frost and cat-piss. The lonely echo of a loon. In the dim glow, we are, situationally, either too old or too young. Her face burns on my retinas. We are running out of time, she says, drifting across the room with an uncertain haste. She wheels the hook-pole over to the couch and pads around for the remote. I drop the bags on the counter and prepare her food on the ottoman as she pools beneath blankets and rolls the sleeves up on my high school sweater. I feel the silence for any lesions. She is untraceable and I can't help but ask if she is alright and she says only what she always says when I search for that comfort. I clutch my stomach, my chest caves in, I can hardly breathe. We put on *Legally Blonde*. I am rubbing the alcove between her forearm and bicep with alcohol, a gesture almost ceremonial, anointing her in oils. She is in my arms, small enough to sleep between my ribs. The fridge is ringing. My eyes burn as I handle the needle and attach it to the thin plastic tube. In my fingers, the needle slips easily through her skin and the drip embeds. One last-minute check. I choke a few words. She eats the ramen I made just as Elle and Warner split over dinner. The noodles are not too spicy. I inspect the drip and the squishy bag above her head. Clean and clear. Only slightly more viscous than water. And what will I do after? Harvard is watching her admission video. She breathes. She eats a chip. She plays with her lower lip, drawing lethargic circles as she tries to keep up with lines she knows. She feels silly looking at the food, realizing she can't possibly finish it all, but she isn't upset—only a couple chuckles. She makes something like a smile and puts her lips to my hand. Is she okay? She only dips her head, mmhm, and nuzzles closer to my shoulder. Elle encounters Warner in the hallway. What, like it's hard? Rosie does not finish the line. That's what kills me. She doesn't say a thing. Her eyes are looking out from the side, scanning back and forth, and her warm cheek is pressed against my neck. She is aware, like when you are on the verge of realizing that you are awake. It takes everything in me to keep from crushing her in my arms. My heart tremors, breathless, we are both so still. Elle is only now meeting Professor Callaghan. I have a hand on her chest and am feeling for a heartbeat. I say something—I don't know what—and I think she looks at me, then I think she looks at the screen. I want to shake her back to earth and make believe it is just another zone she is passing through, but I know it is not true. Her eyes wide, motionless—she could almost be sleeping, in the way that some chairs and tables seem to be sleeping. I wonder how much is going on when we think a person is fully emptied. How many grains of sand you can remove until it's no

longer a heap. It must've happened by now. I must've missed the cutoff. I wasn't looking close enough. Why am I sitting here now? I shouldn't have looked away. I pause the movie. She would've said something there. Maybe I wanted that. I can't look this in the face. The silence is dizzying and light. It's a terrible thing to say but I feel something lift. I can hardly live, but something's lifted. This is what I've done.



Black-Eyed Susan

Aidan Chafe

Often grown in the claustrophobic crevices
of divorce. Absorbs light between knuckles,
water between tears. Known to survive
abusive conditions. Forgives neglect.
Blooms in the summer when her man
is fishing by the river or drowning at the bar.
Blankets open fields with her golden-yellow
beauty. Attracts more bees than butterflies.
Winces at the growl of a Chevy, wilts
at the whiff of whiskey. Acts as a catch-
basin for misplaced rage. Dreams of living
in a garden, a pair of gentle hands tending
to her in their delicate dialect of care.



Scattered Moments

Irina Tall Novikova



For richer or for poorer

Aaron Rabinowitz

I was nervous because it was black tie though you did not have to wear a tux if you did not own one and when I got there I saw that not many did beyond the many groomsmen. At the wedding dinner we found the champagne flutes with our names on them and we were seated with the cousins because we were not quite friends or family and there was no other place to stick us, but the cousins leaned back in their chairs and raised their glasses toward us. They told us about their great-aunt who owns a landmark seven-story brownstone and was married to an avant-garde artist whose paintings are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. The filet mignon was fantastic and the speeches were heartfelt and the band was brassy and the bar was open and the venue was right by the water. We felt lucky to be invited and treated so well and there was nothing wrong with any of it.

Our wedding was in Sara's parents' backyard. We built a chuppah under the oak tree and Sara walked around me seven times, no six because she miscounted, and I stomped on the glass and everyone shouted mazal tov and there was the fragrance of lilies and klezmer music in the air and there was nothing wrong with any of it, but I am thinking of the cousins from yesterday and when I asked what the avant-garde artist painted, the way they leaned back in their chairs and said, White on white.



Formalin

Robert Beveridge

It was after the affair we don't speak of,
that of the woods, the trail, the candy house,
that the twins abandoned their predilection
for sweets. Their father, bewildered, nonetheless
rejoiced at the reduction to his staples budget.
"We learned to enjoy different things,"
they told him, behind the shack, at the darkest
minute of the Feast of St. Bartholomew.
"We learned sustenance." The three of them
passed the pipe amongst them,
savored the mixed scents of tobacco,
humus, hickory smoke from the oven.



Little Red

Trisha Valdez



The Lemon Tree I Set on Fire

Samhita Shanker

I watch the lemon tree catch fire and I wonder whether my mother could still love me. As acrid smoke curls through my hair and citrus-sweet ash falls on my tongue and my blackened fingers close around nothing at all, I wonder whether I would ever find out the answer to that.

I am six and my little fingers are streaked brown with mud. There are earthen crescent moons in the beds of my nails and I think about sleeping under the stars. I am wrist deep in soil and I am digging till I find the thin root that I can clasp like a hand in the dark, digging further until it is wrapped around me like the arms of a loving mother.

Shriya! Where are you?

I'm outside, Ammama!

My grandmother rushes outside the little backdoor and sees me laying on the ground, half-asleep, nightie ruined. She picks me up even as it puts a little crack in every vertebra of her aching spine. I put my dirty arms around her neck and nuzzle in the space somewhere between her shoulder and her face and close my eyes. It smells wrong, talcum powder and rose water instead of lemony citrus and musk.

What is wrong with you? Why would you leave your room at night?

I couldn't sleep. I yawned.

You seemed to be sleeping just fine outside.

Amma was there.

Oh, child. Ammama patted my hair and whispered soft prayers under her breath as she changed me out of my clothes and wiped me down with her pallu. She missed a spot, a brown smudge in the soft of my arm and I don't tell her about it. As I drifted to sleep once more, I dreamt of my mother.

She has dark brown skin, richer or dryer depending on the season that you catch her in. She stands tall, straight spine and pride lining her bones. Her eyes are green – no, sometimes yellow – but green at the moment, and she's got eyes on the back of her head. No matter where I am, if I am helping Thathiya make coffee in the kitchen, or flying a kite on the terrace, or in my friend's balcony down the road, I catch a glimpse of her eyes and I know she is watching and I am safe. She's sweet when she wants to be, a little bit sour when she doesn't, but she never resists when I climb all over her, arms sure and strong. I am told she loves me.

Ammama used to sit me down on her knee when I woke up too early and the milk was not yet delivered on our doorstep, and we would look at her little garden

outside the backdoor. She would rock slightly back and forth and feed me little stories with her gnarled hands about days when her palm didn't have quite so many lines in it. They were mostly about her daughter.

You look just like her, you know? Ammama says so often that when I see myself in the mirror, I trace the shape of my jaw and kiss my hand and pretend like my mother, this stranger with the same face, is kissing it instead. Ammama looks at me and sees her child; I am a vessel carrying the ghost of my mother. I place my feet carefully in her footsteps, both the real ones in the tilled garden soil and the echoing ones in this house, and search for something more tangible to fill myself up with instead. I hold a lemon and roll it over my chapped lips until I feel it stinging the cracks and I know my mother is here, with me.

I lean back against Ammama as we let the stories settle heavy in our stomachs and look at the garden, pink and hazy at dusk. Ammama's garden used to have everything – a mango tree that stretched so tall that in the summers, Thathiya and I would go to the terrace and he would lift me up so I could carry as many would fit in the little pockets of my dress (two, maybe three if they were small); a vine bursting with tomatoes that steadily crawled up the walls of our house; curry leaves that Ammama plucked fresh every day to make rasam. Some of these came and went as seasons changed and soils turned and the sun hid – except one. The prized possession of Ammama's garden wasn't anything she had planted, but it was the lemon tree that my mother had planted when she was two.

Even when your mother was a baby the size of my arm, she would still crawl all around me in the garden, poking holes and trying to plant things the way I was. She would bury all sorts of things – her toys, paper, a cup – and pour water and wait for it to grow. Oh, and she would get so upset when they didn't. She would cry and cry and pour more water and eat some mud and wait for little plastic dolls to grow from the ground. Until the day she somehow got her hands on a lemon and planted it there, see, in the corner?

Ammama had told me this story so many times that it was like a song I had memorised every beat of, but I never got tired of it. So, I nodded along in time to the beat of her breath and looked at the corner where I imagined a sapling once grew.

And look at it now. Ammama leaned out of the backdoor steps so she and I could crane our necks and see the massive tree that stood in its place instead, bursting with lemons as its branches grew well beyond our walls and into the neighbour's plot. Somewhere along the way, even as Amma stopped growing, the tree continued to for her.

Remember, Shriya, as long as the lemon tree keeps growing, so does your

Amma. You can look at that tree and know that she is still here, watching you grow, and loving you – okay?

Yes, Ammama.

Good girl. She'll always be there for you, okay?

Yes, Ammama.

Over the years, I grew older and Amma grew older with me. I stopped trying to bury myself next to her, but she is one of my closest friends, the presence I still look for when I am away from home, a lemony scent I could never entirely wash from my hair. And I don't want to.

The tree has grown so tall that I can't climb its branches anymore and I have to get a ladder to pick out the lemons. It feels like I am braiding the ghost of my mother's hair as I run a water-soaked cloth over the bark, carefully pluck out any dry leaves, and pick just enough lemons so that she could keep growing. It feels sacrilegious to use the lemons myself, so I wrap them up in newspaper and leave it at the temple and chose not to think about what they do with it.

Sometimes, I think everyone should have a tree for a mother. We never fight. I take care of her and she takes care of me in a symbiosis so perfect that it could only exist between a mother and daughter. She holds me so close and tight and I never once have to fear the growing frailty of her bones, or the pain in her aching spine. I never have to look for grey hairs or wrinkle-folded face – no, my mother will far outlive me and I never have to bear the pain of losing her. Not once, not ever. My human body never had a hope of catching up with her youth.

That is, until the day I did. Until I go to pick lemons and they come away slimy in my hands, sweet-rot dripping down my wrists at the gentlest of squeezes.

Amma will be okay, though. She always is. I whistle a tune and pick more lemons and do not listen to the priests at the temple when they refuse to accept my dripping bag of rotted fruit. I water the dry soil and tell her about how I am going to stay in this house forever and take care of Ammama and Thathiya when they can't do it themselves. I pluck armfuls of dead leaves before they could float away in the wind and scold her for not taking care of herself.

I pull Ammama outside (she moves a lot more slowly now than when I was six, and I think about carrying her and her broken back to the tree instead but I hold in the urge). Ammama, I don't know what to do – look at the lemons. They're rotting, I think. How do I fix them?

Oh, child. Ammama whispers soft prayers under her breath again, but this time she is looking at me with a look of pity I have never seen the shape of her face make.

No, Ammama, that is your child. I point to the corner. Remember? She

planted it when she was two after plastic toys wouldn't grow from the soil? Don't you remember? You said as long as the tree is there, then she will always be there – remember?

Ammama opens her mouth but I can't hear it as my fingers scrabble at the soil and I am searching for my mother's fingers and I need her to hold me. I push my ears to the soil and listen to her silent heartbeat and smell the oversweet lemon and close my eyes against Ammama and her cruel words and sighs. Everything is quiet again. I am in the loving arms of my mother.

For days and weeks I sit beside my mother and beg her to please get better, for me Amma. I was told you always will love me, Amma. She is stubborn and doesn't listen. The rot spreads up the roots and bark flaked off and splinters my palms and the lemons continue to rot, rot, rot. My mother is slipping from my fingers with every withering root and collapsing fruit but for a while, I can close my eyes and pretend like everything was fine because she still smells like my mother and she still holds my hand in my sleep.

But I wake up with limp roots ripped in my hand, putridness surrounding me. My hair is tacky with the green slime, not the same green as my mother's eyes, but something hollowed, something dead. I don't know where the lines blurred between mother and tree but somewhere between last night and today they have separated and I don't know who is in front of me anymore. Ammama said as long as the tree is there, Amma is there, and Amma will love me. Once the tree is gone, is Amma gone, and—

I go back into the house and get the gasoline Thathiya keeps in the storeroom in case we need to light the fireplace in the winter. I pick up the entire gallon and pour it all outside; in the soil that once nourished my mother, on the trunk that grew her soul, on the lemons that were tart little fruits of love. Now, as the tree decays and decomposes beneath my fingertips, I can't find my mother inside anymore. The tree is killing her and I am losing her. I won't let her be the fruit of the poisoned tree.

There are only flashes of memory after that, edges splintered and jagged cutting lines into me along the same paths that mud once streaked. I remember how quickly the flames licked up its bark and through the branches. How easily the dry leaves caught on fire. How the lemons resisted just a bit, but once it caught it exploded like vomit. How bits and pieces of flesh caught in my hair, my eyelashes, my skin, thick and disgusting.

I watch it all burn, until I see the skeleton emerge among the glowing coals, that white ash that tells me that the cancer infesting my mother's body is dead.

I am just about to turn away from the carnage when I smell it. Rising above the smoke and char, a thin golden ribbon drifts towards me, twines between my fingers, tightens its grip just a bit. The scent of lemons, fresh and sweet and whole and healthy. It is immediately swallowed by coal black ash and I choke and cough around it, gasping.

Amma? No...

I watch the lemon tree and I wonder whether my mother could still love me. As my blackened fingers close around nothing at all, I think I know the answer to that.



good intentions / red herring

Elisa Penha

The garrotte you use on the battlefield in my dreams is made out of my teeth. I blew a cannon through the hull of the ship of Theseus. You were my favourite paradox, you are high on oxymoron. The air feels thinner the further away you get. I don't know how I ended up with these hands and this heart: I think I must have been a grave robber in another life or maybe in my sleep because I'm made up of pieces that don't go together (your arms fit in your shoulders and my arms only fit around you). How far is too far when it's me on the line? Nobody talks to me the way you do. I look for you in everybody and in everybody I find a mirror instead. Did you know Icarus was alive when he hit the water? The truth is that my heart rejects your voice like a body rejects a transplant. The truth is that you make me think the stars are there on purpose (justforyou). A five-minute romance in between keychain stands in a tourist shop. Neither of you belong in this place but you might just belong together. What is self-sabotage? You are doomed to love people who are only ever passing through. I want to be more than a bad omen. More than holes where wings should be. I want to be looked at in the light and not be standing at the end of it. I want to be swallowed whole. Holding hands through the triangle holes of a card house: sitting in a car after smelling gas: something is going to go off. Come forth or just come home.



Outside a Memory Window

Aidan Chafe

I grow cold as a winter field

bullied by permafrost

black-eyed by ice sheaths of snow

tensed in a fledgling light

A field in the March of my mind

wind-spooked aching

The pillow planted under my head

a field a furrow formaldehyde

A field outside a memory window

The body field the bones

broken and sowed like germinated seeds

where daffodils flourish

despite the dead in the field

My head in the field My head

is a field I am a field clutching

my head like a fistful of dirt

I envy those flowers be-

headed by the wind.



Comfort
Marie Gamboa



Damnoen Saen-um

Luke Sawczak

You laughed, you laughed in your sleep.
What, O ice cream truck driver, in dream,
did you find riotous?

When night fell, even
cool dark rivers of mind seemed funny,
and the coin of light you see when you close your eyes
was like the moon reflected in a still pond
you spotted in your boyhood,
rising to catch up, running after
the sweet taste whose fleeting,
whose faint faraway air
makes colder, more delicious
that melting ice of sober joy.

Whatever secret joke you held
within that sleeping mind,
you laughed without waking
for two whole minutes nonstop
while your wife woke by you, giggling at first,
then elbowing you and chiding, "What? What?"

before she shook you, pulled your eyelids up
to empty white, and pounded on your chest;
you roared and wheezed
she wept and pleaded
but could not keep you here,
could not bring you back to this sad world,
nor would be admitted where you went.

Like a baby who burbles at nothing,
like siblings after nine at night,
needless gladness seized you
and you were carried off punch-drunk
in its strong arms.



An Ocean

Kay Johnson

I miss having you and the ocean to smoke with

The spray-painted mossy concrete wall says this

on a January beach where even the little dogs
are wearing sweaters and jackets

Maybe it's just a former smoker's craving—
something I wouldn't understand. But the waves

are steel grey and this has been a season full of loss.



Unfiled Crime Report

Andrew Rucker Jones

What crime was committed?

Charles Martin, age 47, Black, 5'10", residing most nights under the steam grate outside the kitchen of Mr. Chang's Chinese Paradise at 120 Cedar Lane, broke into the townhouse of Mr. Jeffrey A. Andrews at 108 Cedar Lane and stole his Xbox Series X along with the disc for the game Grand Theft Auto V. These Mr. Martin sold at the GameStop at 232 Main Street. He used the money from the sale to purchase a parka and a pair of ski pants at Dick's Sporting Goods three doors down.

When was it committed?

Two nights ago, on January 7, 2022, between 11:17 pm and 11:24 pm by the oven clock in Mr. Andrews' townhouse. Mr. Andrews, carrying a six-pack of Coors and a full duffle bag, had been picked up from his home around 8 pm by three friends.

Is evidence available? Were there witnesses?

The patio door shows signs of forced entry and no longer closes completely. There may be an unfortunate draft through the townhouse.

If Mr. Andrews has not disturbed it, the dust silhouette of the Xbox is still visible in the TV cabinet.

No witnesses have come forward, but Mr. Martin confessed.

Additional notes:

Mr. Martin declared his motivation to be that he was "cold." When asked if he had ever requested monetary assistance from Mr. Andrews, he said, "every weekday since I was evicted three months ago: once when Mr. Andrews entered the subway at 7:32 am, and once again when he came out at 6:15 pm. He ignored me. I'm hoping he won't this time."

Signature: _____

Dear Mr. Andrews,

I took the liberty of obtaining a blank report from the police precinct and filling it out for you. It only needs your signature once you return from your weekend with your buddies. The police can find me behind Mr. Chang's again this evening, provided Mr. Chang doesn't notice and chase me off. Please be prompt in filing the report—the temperature is supposed to be ten below tonight, and I couldn't afford a sleeping bag. The police don't hand out warm jail cells for confessing to unreported crimes.

Yours,

Charles Martin

P.S. Please tell the police I am unarmed.



To the capitalist time is money but to me time is time, he says

Aaron Rabinowitz

He sprinkles water on his plants in the morning with a simple hose. What twenty years can do to a man, from ten to thirty is muscle and swagger, thirty to fifty is close calls, fifty to seventy only havoc. Now he walks more with shoulders and hips than legs but his eyes are still greener than any cliché, his voice still speaks phrases into grand gestures. I built this house stone by stone he says and it has broken my bones. If time were money, if the years he lived were returned to him as shekels, he could pay for tickets to Paris or fancier hoses or new knees, if time were money he would buy more time. We stand together in his garden as he sprinkles water on his plants, his thick thumb over the nozzle to soften the spray.



Bigger Fish to Fry

Christina Dinh



A Poem For The Inhabitants of the New World

Tosh Sherkat

Here and

see?

bird, this windowed
 grey, national, locked
 in cloth and a ground
box. This is a window, this here

is the terminus of canadian poetics.

Here

are all the dead things.
now you're supposed to love them
into something beautiful
like a new world.

These words we have
are like the fresh birds
at the cleaving end of winter,

those birds that call
attention, become
alive in the sound of their body

ending on the lake-facing window.



Unicorn. Drowning Dream

Irina Tall Novikova



car party

Audrey Lai

For the last few days of our senior year, I got out of my own car and sat in the shotgun seat in Diana's for a few minutes before the first bell rang.

"It's a car party," Diana said as a few more friends opened the passenger doors and got in, sitting shoulder to shoulder. I thought of our empty desks in first period AP Literature and how we would come sprinting in, out of breath, only a few minutes later. There was something comical about it: piling into a Subaru Forester like a couple of circus clowns ready to honk our clown noses at oncoming traffic.

"It's a carty," I said. I had a penchant for portmanteaus even if the resulting word wasn't funny at all. I imagined that the college "darty," a similar yet far more popular portmanteau for "day party," might be in my future.

I don't know if we could all feel it, but I certainly did—the passage of time, as melodramatic as it sounds. Maybe I was under the influence of our in-class discussions on *Mrs. Dalloway*, but I really did believe there were few moments where you can catch up to time for a second, right before it'd escape you. There was a buzz in us to disperse, to leave and go off to college and do great things, or, probably more likely, quite mediocre things. Yet on those late April mornings we were like sardines in a can, the summer not yet in our rearview, still sealed and packed in tight.



Supposed To's

Tehlan Lenius

Callie's apartment was on the seventeenth floor and I never got sick of the view. I peered at the street lights dotting the city below, the cool spring breeze ruffling my hair. From here, I could see our high school, the soccer field beside it clearing out a square of green on the floor of the city. My house was just to the west, and to the east was the strip mall where we went most days for lunch, sitting on the curb of the parking lot and eating 75 cent beef patties from the Jamaican takeout place.

"Here," Callie drew my attention back inside the balcony, where we sat on the floor across from each other, cross-legged. She nudged me with her foot, holding out the still-smoking joint between her fingers. "Ready to try?" Her voice had always been like sandpaper, as if she was just recovering from a cold and had to strain her voice to speak. When I first met her, I thought that must've been what it was, but it didn't take long for me to realise that that was just how she talked.

"You don't have to if you changed your mind," she reminded me for the third time that night. There was a measure of uncertainty in her voice, like she was wondering if she was doing something immoral, but she wasn't. We were alone in Callie's apartment, her Mom out on a business trip. It was just us, in a safe place. There were far more dangerous ways to get high for the first time.

I shook my head and took the joint from her.

"No, I want to." I brought the end up to my lips, drawing in a deep breath, which devolved into a cough embarrassingly fast. I was half-convinced that I had swallowed a handful of cinders, the smoke burning the back of my throat, but Callie had told me what to expect and I was determined to see it through. Once I could catch my breath, I tried again, ignoring the way the smoke clawed at my throat until I was sure that it had done its job.

"Okay, but I'm not peer pressuring," Callie said pointedly, even though that was obvious. This had all been my idea, and it wasn't like she smoked either. Not regularly anyways. The weed wasn't even hers; it was her brother's. I took one last drag for good measure before handing it back to her and pulling my knees up to my chest. I rested my chin on top of them, looking out between the bars of the balcony railing, the cold from the concrete floor seeping through my jean shorts.

"I don't feel anything yet," I said after a few moments.

"You're not supposed to." Callie passed the joint back to me and I took another few drags, a little proud of the fact that there was significantly less coughing.

It's only been like a minute. Don't worry."

We waited for a little while, listening to the cars passing by on the streets below, the gentle murmur rising and falling in the air. I wondered if any of the drivers looked up and saw us—what they would think if they did. Who would I be to them? That was one thing I was beginning to like about the city—the anonymity. The idea that I could be someone other than me. I leaned back against the railing, the bars digging into my shoulders.

"Maybe weed doesn't work on me," I suggested absently, turning my gaze back to Callie in time to see her mouth curve into a smile. I had to take a moment to process how different it looked from before. Callie had gotten her braces off a few weeks ago. It was still strange to see her teeth all perfect and lined up, like they were surgically put into her mouth. When we first met, she had a crooked front tooth, sticking out from the rest. Some part of me still expected it to be there, even after all the years of metal and glue.

"Some people just fall asleep, you know? It's called greenning out." She paused for a moment, eyebrows furrowed. "I think."

"Well that sucks." I wrinkled my nose in distaste. I wanted to feel something, at the very least. "Why bother smoking at all at that point?"

Callie shrugged, taking the stub of the joint from me and tossing it onto the floor, the toe of her pink Walmart sandal driving it into the concrete.

"Let's go inside, I'm cold," she said, but I hesitated, looking out at the city then back up at her.

"Can we stay just a little longer?"

She sighed, leaning back against the wall and offering me her usual half-smile.

"Alright, a little longer."

On our way home from school, we always stopped by the park at the corner of Ipswich and Clydesdale. There was a swing set off to the side, hanging over a little circle of wood chips. Callie liked to swing as high as she could, but I preferred to twist the chains, winding up in a circle before letting go and squeezing my eyes shut while I spun around.

I stared up at the tangle of chains above me, Callie dipping in and out of my peripheral vision as she swung back and forth.

"Come on, just tell me who you like."

I glanced over, catching her eye as she flew past. Callie was grinning with her mouthful of blue braces, eyebrows going up and down suggestively. I looked down at the floor before the heat could rush to my cheeks, digging my feet into the wood chips and twisting the chains one round further.

I had tried to tell her before that I didn't have a crush, but she didn't buy it, convinced that it was a tactic to throw her off. I didn't know how else to tell her that I had never felt that way about anyone. I kept waiting for the butterflies in my stomach to kick in, or my heart to skip a beat when a boy looked at me—the way they show it in the movies—but it still hadn't happened, and I was starting to think that maybe it never would. I didn't mind, but Callie did.

"Tell me," she pried, and even if I had nothing to say, I wanted to give her something. A beat of silence passed, her expectant gaze still pinned on me, a strange sort of guilt twisting in my stomach. It felt like I was letting her down somehow, like I wasn't trying hard enough to keep up my end of the conversation.

"Okay okay, I'll say," I caved, mentally flipping through the faces of every boy in our class. Callie had stopped swinging with her legs and began to slow down, each arc she made growing smaller and smaller as she waited. I settled on a name, picking it at random. "I like Mateo."

Callie's face broke into a grin.

"Mateo? Really? What is it about him?"

I shrugged, praying that the panic building in my chest didn't show on my face. I thought of the things I had heard other girls say about their crushes, trying to find something that would work for me.

"He's..." I chewed on the inside of my cheek. "I like—" no I couldn't say that, he didn't have curly hair. "He has a nice jawline," I said without thinking, hearing how stupid it sounded only after it was too late.

Callie nearly laughed, catching herself at the last moment and shaking her head.

"I didn't think you were like that, but it's okay. That's a good reason."

"Didn't think I was like what?"

"I don't know." She shrugged. "Into looks?"

"I'm not," I jumped to assure her. I didn't actually know if I was or not, but the way Callie said it made it sound like a bad thing, and I didn't want her thinking that about me. "I just said the first thing I thought of, that's all."

"Yeah and his jawline was the first thing you thought of."

"Well, I also like him because—" I riffled through every fact I knew about Mateo, trying to find one that would dig me out of this hole. "He has a lizard. I saw

pictures of it once on his phone. It has one of those neck things that pop out like a flower, it's really cool."

I watched Callie's expression carefully to see if it worked, but she just tilted her head to one side, giving me a funny look and a sideways smile.

"You're weird," she said, though there was no malice in it. She didn't wield her words like a weapon, the way other people did. In her hands weird wasn't something to be afraid of. She went back to swinging and I smiled to myself, closing my eyes and lifting my feet, the wind flying through my hair as the chain untwisted and sent me spinning.

"Do you want anything to drink? Or eat?"

Callie had convinced me to come inside after she caught me shivering for the third time.

"I'm okay," I said, curled up at the end of her couch. I leaned my cheek against my knee and watched Callie drift around her kitchen in the dark, opening a cupboard just to close it again then move on to the next one. There was only one lamp turned on in the apartment, the light warm as it shone through the lampshade.

"I still don't feel it," I sighed, picking at a scab on my hand. Callie looked over at my dejected expression and gave up her search, coming back into the living room. She laid down in the middle of the carpet, motioning for me to join her.

"Come here."

I hesitated for a moment, but eventually slid down onto the floor and found a place beside her, staring up at the ceiling.

"Why?"

"Because it's fun." Callie shrugged, and I couldn't argue with that. There was something childishly amusing about being on the floor. She turned onto her side and I took that as a sign that I should too, shifting so I could face her. Up close, I could tell that she was tired. Her eyelids were drooping and she had a faraway look on her face, the rims of her eyes a shade of pink.

"Do you want to watch a movie or something?" she suggested and I almost snort-laughed.

"I don't think you could make it through a movie."

"No, I could do it. *I could*—"

I actually did start laughing then, Callie shoving my shoulder with one hand.

"Shut up, I totally could, watch me," she insisted, widening her eyes to an

exaggerated size and staring me down, which only made me laugh even more.

“Okay, okay,” I conceded. “If you can stay awake for the next five minutes, we can watch a movie.”

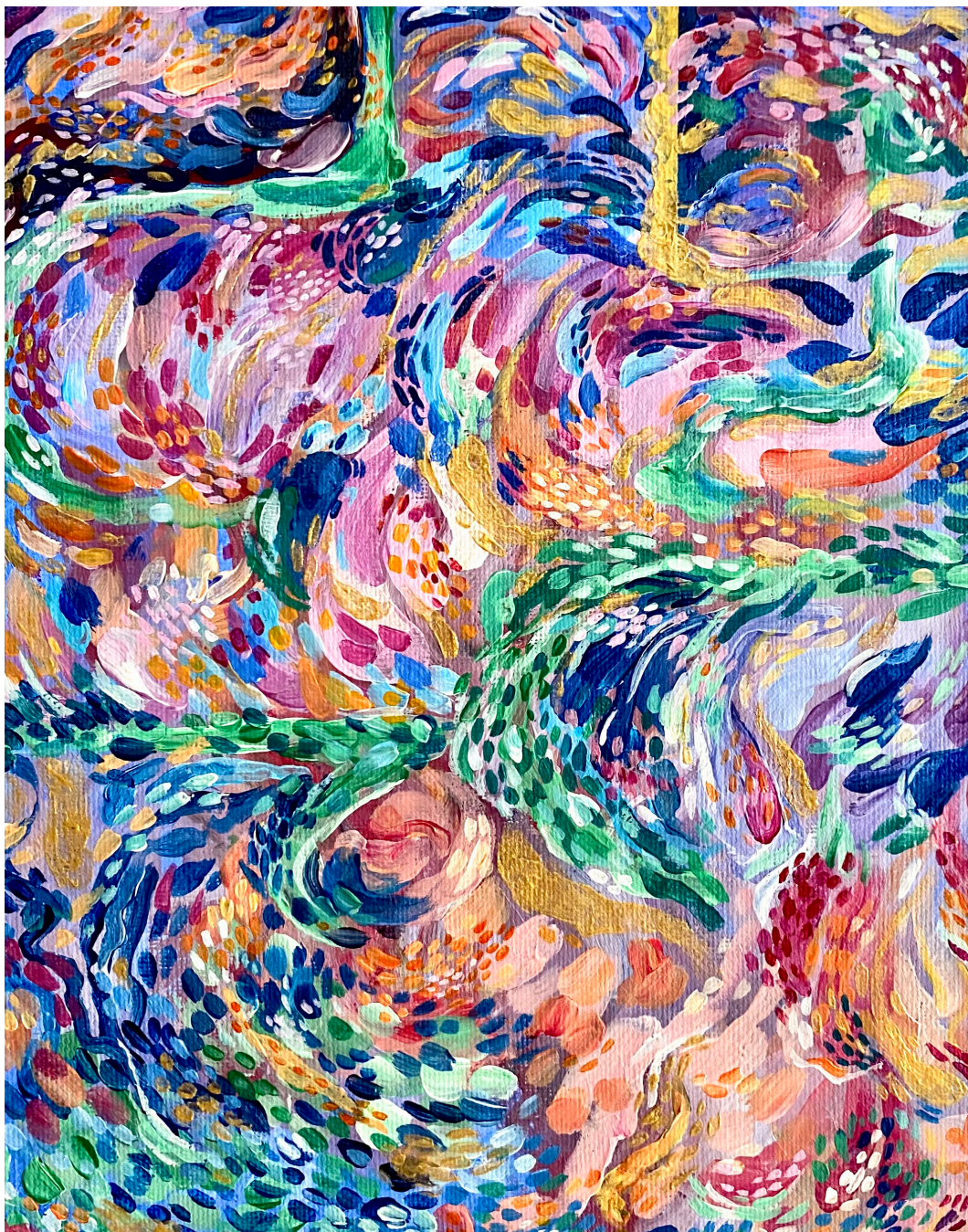
She grinned, as if she had a sure thing.

“Alright, deal.”

I didn’t have to wait long. It was warm and quiet inside the apartment, the light dim. As hard as Callie fought to keep her eyes open, they drifted shut in a matter of minutes.

“I’m still awake,” she mumbled in a final act of defiance.

“Uh-huh.” I nodded along, just as her breaths fell into a slow rhythm. Her features softened in sleep, her lashes casting shadows over her skin and a few wayward strands of hair falling in front of her face. My eyes traced the gentle curve of her nose, drifting down to her lips, and for a moment, I was convinced that if she opened her eyes and smiled, I’d see her crooked tooth, sticking out at that strange angle. I slipped my hand into hers, holding on as tight as I dared, and by the time I closed my eyes, I finally felt it.



abstract 2

Daniela Martins Domingues



Lorette, MB

Aliya Kabani

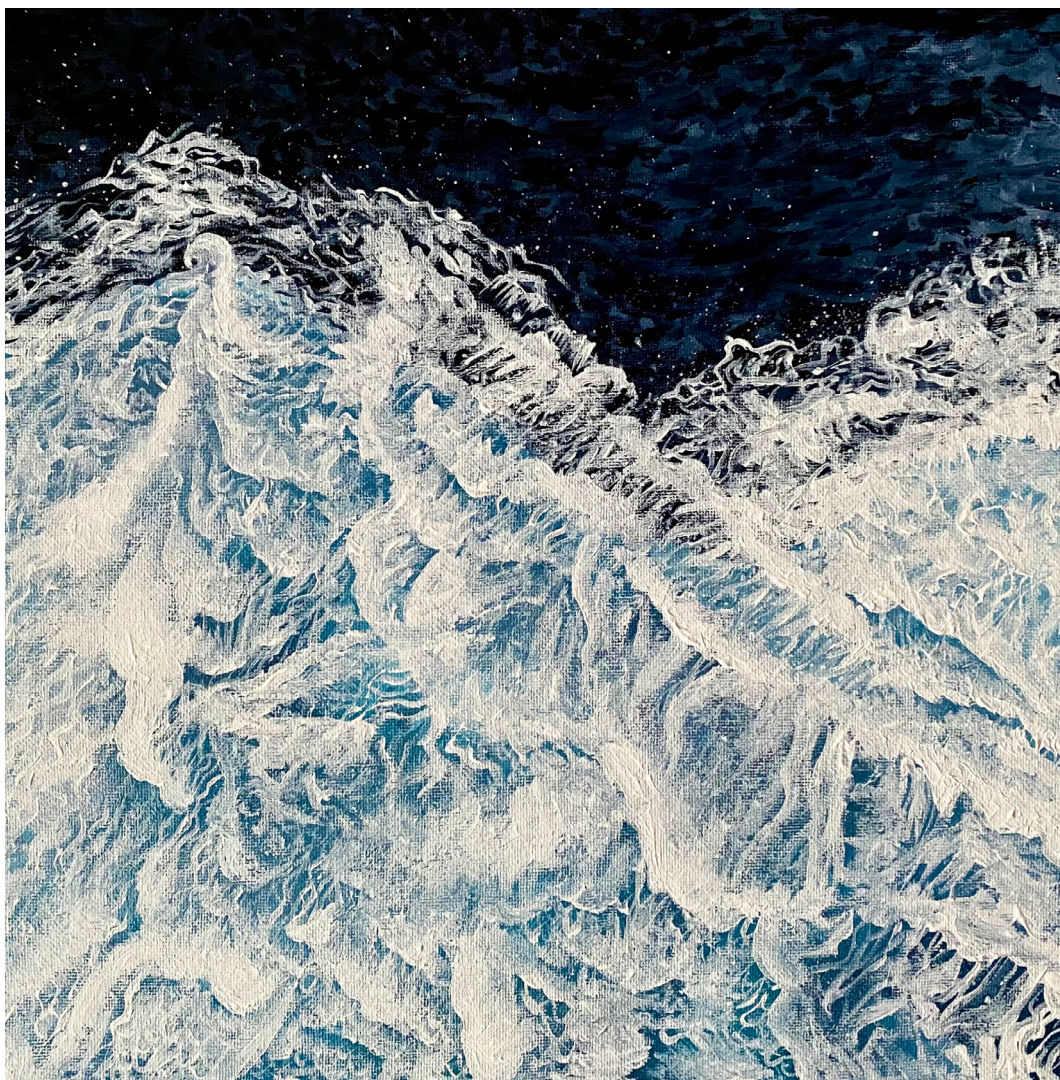
August stirs its tongue like syrup, languidly, the thought
Unbearable in the heat, the window reads *Coffee, Cigarettes, Motor Oil*
My half-birthday is coming up, I tell the tire tracks
The bicycle rack hums a half-hearted sizzle in the sun, incessantly
Crickets slice spire-like legs against their wings, all the while
The radio gulps down silence jittering in my lap, as the car hits pothole after pothole
Humans smell rain better than sharks smell blood, better restock the glove compartment
The air has been on the brink of bursting into rain for weeks
If the flowers on your dashboard are dying, they sell more south of Deacon's Corner, I can see
Ahead the steeple, any small town's skyscraper, a path of
No-cross lines and canola stretching endlessly
The gravel road hits a fork and the car door unlocks
Fumbling out onto open sky, the flax seed fields are a fresh indigo
As crows swarm the blooms in a cemetery-like fashion
The fog of a blue Sedan floats back to a yellow brick driveway
Empty, lingering



public transit prayer

Shelley Rafailov

may there be air enough to share. may the thistledown tumbling in through the cracked window find itself in the hands of someone who really needs that wish. may the train rush above ground in time to see the sky blush from pink to red. may rush hour traffic not test the bus driver's patience. may the station security know which exit you should take this time. may we never forget our passes. may there always be a pitying stranger with an extra ticket, or exact change. may you exit the streetcar in the same state you entered. may they see your slouched, sleeping form and leave you be. may you always have a wall behind you when you wear a short skirt. may your headphones let in enough ambient noise. may the impassiveness you feign be passable. may we move through tides of bodies coated in five o'clock sweat like eels swerving through coral. may you maintain a one-inch breathing bubble. may your shoes be comfortable to run in, and your timing exact. may there be room for one more.



Change and Constancy

Marie Gamboa



Contributors

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry on unceded Mingo land (Akron, OH). Recent/upcoming appearances in *Ez.P.Zine*, *Agapanthus Collective*, and *Throats to the Sky*, among others.

Aidan Chafe is the author of *Gospel Drunk* and *Short Histories of Light*, which was longlisted for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. His poems have appeared in numerous publications, including *CV2*, *EVENT*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Montreal Review of Books* and *Prism international*. His poem “Pas de Deux” was selected for the 2019 BC Poetry in Transit series. He lives and teaches on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples (Vancouver, BC).

Christina Dinh is a third year political science major with a double minor in urban studies and women and gender studies. In her free time, she illustrates for various campus newspapers and journals.

Daniela Martins Domingues is an artist from Portugal. She’s been drawing since she was very little, with a lot of inspiration and help from her older sister. She’s still quite young, but very observant and inspired by pretty much everything she sees. This translates into her work in many different ways—usually in realist or abstract illustrations.

Marie Gamboa is a recent graduate from the University of Toronto and spends most of her spare time and money at Aroma Espresso Bar. Her art and poetry have previously been published in *Acta Victoriana* and *The Trinity Review*.

Kerri Huffman is a Toronto-based poet, whose work has been published in *Taddle Creek Magazine*, *The Antigonish Review*, *The Hart House Review*, *Broken Pencil*, *CV2* and *The Fiddlehead* among others.

Taban Isfahaninejad (she/her) is a student at the University of Toronto currently studying English, History, and Book & Media studies. In her free time, she enjoys grandma activities like knitting, sewing, and cooking. Taban copy edits for the *Varsity* and has previously published both nonfiction and poetry.



Kay Johnson has published in the fields of adult education and arts-based learning. She writes poetry in response to uncovering her family's hidden stories and exploring loss, memory, and difficult childhood. Kay is an instructor at Athabasca University and divides her time between her homes in Edmonton, AB and Victoria, BC.

Andrew Rucker Jones is a former IT dweeb and American expatriate living in Germany with his Georgian wife and their three children. His greatest literary achievement to date is authoring ninety-eight iCloud reminders for every household chore from cleaning sinks to checking smoke detectors.

<http://selfdefeatistnavelgazing.wordpress.com/>

Aliya Kabani is a second-year student at Victoria College, double majoring in English and History.

Audrey Lai is a second-year undergraduate student at the University of Toronto studying English. She hails from Northeast Ohio and is an editor for The Trinity Review. Her work can be found in the UC Review, Cleaver Magazine, and The Strand. In her free time, you can find her watching sitcoms, overanalyzing Taylor Swift lyrics, and trying not to trip in platform Doc Martens.

Tehlan Lenius is a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto, studying Literature and Critical Theory with minors in English and Creative Expression and Society. They spend much of their time fantasising about their next writing project and very little of their time actually writing it.

David Mekhaiel is a doctoral student in Neuroscience at the University of Western Ontario. He has an interest in art, politics, and debate.

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, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, 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”.

Adriana Oniță is a poet, artist, educator, researcher, and publisher. Her recent multilingual poems have appeared in CBC Books, The Globe and Mail, Tint Journal, The Humber Literary Review, periodicities, Conjugated Light (Glass Buffalo, 2019), and the Romanian Women Voices in North America series. Adriana recently completed her PhD in education at the University of Alberta. She is the editorial director of the Griffin Poetry Prize and the founding editor of The Polyglot. She divides her time between Edmonton and Marsala. Website: adrianaonita.com

Elisa Penha is a first-year humanities student with plans to double-major in Classics and Celtic Studies, and minor in Medieval Studies. She is a lover of Richard Siken and Ryan Ross, and a defender of paragons and chosen ones. She enjoys writing stories about elves, over-analyses of Percy Jackson novels, and melodramatic personal essays.

Aaron Rabinowitz writes poetry, creative nonfiction, and young-adult fiction. He placed first in CANSCAIP’s Writing for Children Competition and is a two-time finalist for Hunger Mountain’s Katherine Paterson Prize. In 2024, he will be a writer-in-residence at PLAYA. His work will appear in forthcoming issues of Queen’s Quarterly and The Nashwaak Review. Aaron also will water your plants when you are out of town.

Shelley Rafailov is a PhD student at the University of Toronto. She is patiently waiting for the nights to get longer, because writing by lamp is just easier for some reason. Her writing can be found in previous issues of the UC Review, The Trinity Review, and on Instagram @shrpoems.

Jaxzen Sandell is a student of Philosophy and English completing his fifth year of undergrad. When he is not writing, he is probably singing, or walking, or worrying about something. He loves his cat very much.



Luke Sawczak is a teacher and writer in Toronto. His poetry has appeared in *Sojourners*, *Queen's Quarterly*, the *Humber Literary Review*, the *Spadina Literary Review*, *NorthWord*, *Nashwaak*, *Ekstasis*, and elsewhere. It has been nominated for Best of the Net and included in Best Canadian Poetry. His creative nonfiction was a finalist in *Napoli Racconta*. In his spare time he composes for the piano.

Samhita Shanker (she/her) is a recent graduate from the University of British Columbia with a BA in English Literature. She has been writing stories since she was six (with no promises on the quality of these) and continues to do so today. She is most interested in the intersections of womanhood, queerness, brown identity, and age and inadvertently includes at least two in her work at any given moment. You can find her struggling to finish her latest crochet/knitting project, struggling to finish her reading goal for the year, or struggling to finish her writing goal for the day.

Tosh Sherkat is a Persian-Doukhorbor settler-of-colour living on Syilx territory. They have recently started their MFA at UBC Okanagan with a focus on poetry. They were born on Sinixt territory, in Nelson, BC. Among other publications, their work can most recently be found at *carte blanche*.

Trisha Valdez is a 3rd year UofT student currently studying English and Visual Arts. Trisha is a self-taught artist who often creates her pieces digitally or traditionally, though she enjoys the power digital art holds and its loveable, easy clean-up. Trisha mainly enjoys doodling for fun, which includes: girls and derp pets. Though, in her spare time, Trisha enjoys making her own stickers to use for school, to give to friends, and/or just for fun! Currently, Trisha is working on the visuals for the UofT Fashion Collective, a new fashion club, who she is also the president for. She is excited to engage more with the UofT community and get to know more people.

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