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Pramod Subbaraman

Pramod Subbaraman is a poet who emerged during the first UK-wide COVID19 lockdown in 2020 and has since been published in the UK, the USA, and South Africa. While he writes all forms of poetry, his favourite remains fixed form poetry

Knighted

All the soldiers who fought and died
No questions asked, they fought and died

They performed their duties, no doubt
We demanded, they fought and died

He sold us a false narrative
He commanded, they fought and died

He moved on to lucrative deals
But those soldiers, they fought and died

Pramod must address him "Sir Blair"
But how can he? They fought and died

Comfort Food

Pizzas, burgers, fried chicken, kebabs, chips
The list goes on and on

Such food goes straight to your heart
See that smile on your face, or is it a grimace?

Your heart communicates with you as you eat
It sings the song of narrowed paths, you feel the pangs

When one road closes, another opens
They call it a bypass

Such food stays in your heart
For as long as you live

Every coronary artery
Has a comfort food lining

Rhythm of life

There is something to be said
For a Sun that rises at 3 in the morning
And sets at 11 in the night
The long summer days
The further north in the northern hemisphere
That you go and equally the further south
In the southern hemisphere that you go
During their summers
You get used to it
After a decade or longer
In the relevant place
But your yearning for
A simpler time
Never goes away

A simpler life with
13 hours of daylight in summer, and
11 hours in winter
The tropical idyll of
Warm, hot, and very hot temperatures
You may adapt
In your mind
But the rhythms
Of a body made for
Another place and
Another time zone
Seldom catch up
Now do not get me started
On climate change

Family

The word paints a picture
Many pictures actually
A flood really

Memories
Perceptions
Learnt constructs

There is so much diversity nowadays
The unit varies in size and composition
Do we yearn for simpler times?

If it has been learnt
It can be unlearnt
It could be relearnt anew

I see photographs
Physical things
In black and white

Who is to say what anyone else sees?
To each their own reality, or should we say realities?
The Venn diagram would be interesting!

Service Critical

Time will tell as only it can
If any of this makes sense
Load it all up in that white van
If only they saw through my lens
They would know that they got it wrong
How do we settle the matter?
How much time do we have? How long?
If only things would get better
Come with me, see the evidence
Cut the rhetoric, see the science
Do your job with due diligence
It is not working, see the signs
This is the wrong formulation
Make a U-turn, save the nation

Michael Igoe

Michael Igoe, Tai Chi apprentice, erstwhile scholar. City boy, neurodiverse. Chicago now Boston. Numerous works published in journals online and print. Recent: gingerbreadritual.com, dynamisjournal.com, k'inliteraryjournal.com. Anthology inclusions: *he Poets of 2020*, *Avalanches in Poetry* (Fevers of the Mind Press) *Impspired Magazine* Vol. 6 (impspired.com). National Library of Poetry Editors Choice Award 1997.: Twitter: MichaelIgoe5.

Bonneau's Landing

Finding what's warmest,
yellow bellied and naive.
A belligerent syrup flows
from each and every pore.
The streets shimmer,
in a sense of urgency.
People seem to detest
hardworking eruptions...
For bargains with opponents,
who hits the ground running,.
They serve as mere relics
of the ones who departed.

Scientist

On a shore forever lambent
he disappeared in the sands..

Robbery of a true birth
is the matter on record.

He played the market
for wine colored cars
but only on the side.

He is without claims
to formal description.

None is his color,
zero is his number.

In all his escapades,
he stays undetected.

Shrugging his shoulders
he gauges all the signals
of pendulums in a basin..

And Suchlike

You once foretold a notice
of a most noisy whirlwind
without a gift for language.
Emblems served
at different times
laid at death's door.
Stricken by disease,
those rare and fatal.
Foaming at the mouth,
in sudden raging fever..
You know its meaning
from balding husbands. .
They raid Christian coffers
using lore from the Vikings.
Their teeth remain clenched,
keeping to a certain deafness.

Advisory

If you're suckered,
you have groped
losing starry mites.
Why do you wheel away
hoping pleasant dreams
wind up in other minds.
Meeting an end,
as faded glories.
Embers of sadness,
a flickering gesture.
A simple request
likely unanswered.

Dre Hill

Dre Hill is an artist and storyteller from Fort Worth, Texas. His written work has appeared in the likes of Currents, Afro Literary Magazine, Hallowzine, and more; with work forthcoming in levatio and GutSlut Press. His visual work has appeared in celestite poetry, with work forthcoming in Ghost Girls Zine. When not creating, Dre is spending time with his puppy, learning to live in each moment and rest as necessary. Find Dre on all platforms @drehillart or via website www.drehillart.com.



Bear the Cross



In Light of Isolation



Invocation of Light

Jim Meirose

Jim Meirose's work has appeared in numerous venues. His novels include "Sunday Dinner with Father Dwyer"(Optional Books), "Understanding Franklin Thompson"(JEF), "Le Overgivers au Club de la Résurrection"(Mannequin Haus), and "No and Maybe - Maybe and No"(Pski's Porch). Info: www.jimmeirose.com @jwmeirose

New Job, What? Oh, Yah; New Shoe Store Salesman

Yes. I—yes. Something's—lit up now. Not before, why, what—who—no. Stupid questions. This appears to be. A job. Appears to be a, a—in some store job. Stores sell, so. Am most likely, selling. Waking into selling—what? That. Has no meaning, but, sense—ess, I sense. Ess, I sense that that approaching's something, 'r someone, actually, rather; that approaching someone's here to buy. Something.

Something, wha'.

Clue what don't know, but must know, in no idea anyplace-where. What's the—the word?

Clue; ah, yes, a man now sitting in a chair, ah, yes, clue a' approaching not knowing, need a clue, gape about, but. Non-obviously—okay. Shoes. All every side, up down the walls, shoes, selling—shoes, and, he watches. Me, coming there. Into my eyes, he says, I am here for shoes from you—shoes from—you!

The mysticalities of knowing's mo-momento who you are. I am a who you are, I am a what, a shoe salesman—Sir, welcome to—dud—welcome, start to, but don't dare say, I am a

shoe salesman come to serve you, in any kind of unnaturally stimulated-sounding tone, because, somehow, I know—from inside all supperplaced, von past-back out my quick fade of a turbulentinoed outwake, that telling the customer, Hello, I am a shoe salesman here to serve you, because, I sense; or some other me does—yes, yes—there are many, but no time to s’plain you now, Lucy—saying that is just not done, let’s see—common sense, here—Hello, sir (assumed so by his clothing and hair n’ other styles) Gat, Gat—so. What type of shoes would you like us to show you today? Is there an occasion?

Oh yes, so slick, that wish ‘d had pad n’papyrus-pointer to jab that safely down and away, to be used ‘gain ‘n again, No, just need time over new pair of knockin’ around yard and over and time work shoes, something over again, sturdy and cheap, sturdy, and.

Cheap?

Wha’. Who s’ that? Ah, I—cheap, and a pause—looking, searching n-no, wrong!

Look. He is staring.

Have I said something really wrong to this person of a

guy r' 'ff the 't? If so, act as though so 'fter aplogasining profits-stufitly; Oh, I am sorry, silly me! I suppose that it's just so odd for a customer to say so plainly that they want—cheap shoes. I'm sorry, forgive me; you said shoes for what purpose? Knockin' around?

Yeah, that's right—he said, sending the words barely thawed direct down like a'straight 'nto my face. Like waiting for me to criticize again—though no criticism 'as never intended—but; what he has said to him now is critical, quite critical. What he has said to him now-said is, critical. Got to be right, need to be cool, slow down, time, slow slower, need time to God, this is slicksliding quite south, but where to learn quick, to learn, ah! The TV.

The TV channel, thank God, it's smart! Need a how to, a how to, quick-quickly, now!

Step outside yu' self, and watch it be; ah, God, yes the screen there perfectly said as though actually out of me, that, Oh, but—enough o' my jabber. I think I got the very shoe for you. On that wall rack, over there—here, sit tight. I'll just go grab it.

Excellence is admirable, 's 'specially 's—'s ti' seems 'o 'e me.

Here. A special on these, as a matter of fact. Plain, sturdy, shoes. For knockin' around.

Yes; that's how keep kee' ke' k', watching.

The arm on which he touched a f' tip to the toe, and yes, says, Yes, like these. These will be perfect—but, then, doubt in his face, then a look from, and words saying, yes, y', sorry 'bout my tension before—but, I was having kind of a tough day, and I thought that you—oh, never mind. These are perfect—look, look—

T'o 'd this smile I have him—Dell's has him. This TV show's as from God.

—just look at this sole. Deep pattern—need this for mud, you know. Mud's very slippery.

Yes, yes. It is. I have taken many a fall in cold mud—but here—and my shining steel foot shaped device took his size, got his size, like the man never even knew it.

You are a perfect ten. And, hold it. I know we have these in the back. Sit tight I'll get them.

And from there, all downhill, the go, the get, the bring, and the try; the smiles, the stand, the shake, and the go, pay; the bag, the leave, then it's done. Hit the switch and as the screen sucks itself back 'way into its own gone dead center, Boss Sandy is; next to me. Y' boss Sandy's next to me, saying, That was a slick one. We been trying to sell that style out for the longest.

At her smile, thanks you nod, and she goes 'n.

You know, at first, I didn't think you'd work out at all. But now, you are more than the equal of any salesman I've seen here before.

B' blank, again. B'b'blank, again, wait. Blank again, wait. Blank. Blank.

Read all under there, scrolled down beneath, that 'ou're really not at that level yet, but don't know it. Silly. Know it, don't know it, pop-pop, down-silly, but.

Thanks, Sandy.

There's her smile. Works for me—but—the door's created another to sell to. The doorframe's magic, 'al doorframe's be generating customers to the store, all down-day.

The chemical activity in your brain.

Yes, ma'am. May I help you now? May I please?

Dorothy Lune

Dorothy Lune is a Yorta Yorta poet who has been writing poems for 4 years, born and raised in Australia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Gen Controlz Magazine, Gypsophila Zine, and more. She started out writing songs and poems. She found poetry to be the type of writing she loves most and decided to start submitting to magazines in January of 2021.

Strawberry Squid

Sitting on a wooden stool behind the shed I was weaving a
basket out of long lemon grass
blisters on blisters, callous upon callous.
Finished with my work I walked over to the edge of the sea
foaming at its mouth for a friend
slowly dipped the basket in the water
into the translucent prussian slush it goes
creating splashes from my shaky h&.
Splashes formed into bubbles & I glanced down at the
submerged basket
there was a slight tinge of a rosey glowing orb
sitting blurry in the basket weighing it down like a baby
I pull it up & out of the water— a strawberry squid
I was so lucky to be the witness of her sparkling like Christmas
lights
appearing to be made of sheer pink iridescent metals
& the eyes—
like jumbo sized gumballs they were the shade of bumblebee &
clay
I couldn't believe what I was seeing for a moment
she had spots like a cheetah & the water drops on her skin
made her glisten in the golden afternoon.

Jack Moody

Jack Moody is a novelist and short story writer from wherever he happens to be at the time. He is the author of the short stories collection *Dancing to Broken Records*, released through Beacon Publishing Group, as well as being a staff writer for the literary magazine and podcast *Brick Moon Fiction*. His work has appeared in multiple publications including the *Saturday Evening Post*. Moody's forthcoming debut novel *Crooked Smile* is set to release March 15th, 2022 through Outcast Press. He didn't go to college.

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The Absence of Death

The moment it was introduced to his bloodstream, the process of dying had begun.

Breathing slowed to a hoarse whisper, the oxygen to his heart stalled, strangling the organ until the dirtied blood pumped like thick honey from a bottle. Body temperature rose, sweat began to pour from each gland. The brain suffocated, firing off neurons like weak explosives in the rain, drowning beneath the heavy flood of dopamine colliding with their outnumbered receptors. Fluids entered the blackened lung cavities and ejected as vomit and yellow foam, cascading forth from between the lips and down the chin. In a final effort of comfort, the brain reached into its deepest memories and played for itself a movie called Nostalgia. And it watched all the wonderful things it had experienced in its life with her, as it slowly, slowly, slowly—went black.

The body was found, and taken to a coroner, where he commented to a colleague while performing the autopsy, that if it weren't for the track marks and evidence of a tobacco addiction, he would have thought that he was looking at a healthy young man.

The body was then placed in an incinerator, where it was burned for three hours at 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit, until the skin and flesh and fat and bone and muscle tissue became a large pile of gray ashes.

The pile of ashes was placed in an unmarked and ordinary metal container, and emptied into a nondescript collective grave, where it became part of an even larger pile of gray ashes, and was promptly forgotten about.

This is when he woke up.

He walked for a long time. He crossed a bridge, and past rows of buildings, and the lights of the city were there and the people were too. They walked away and through him, and paid him no mind, nor did he them. Buildings became trees, and trees became forests, and though he could no longer remember where he was, he continued to walk. The world moved as it always had, and this, and everything else, was no different than it had ever been.

He stopped beside a small creek and sat down with his knees to his chest, and he watched the water move. It paid him no mind, and he was happy it allowed him to be there with it. There were too many places to look for her, and so much time had passed. He felt no rush to search. There was time, and there would always be time, and some day the time would stop but she wouldn't leave him. He knew this.

Quiet was what he had taken for granted. And when he'd had it, it was beyond the veil and beyond grasp, and it was meaningless. So he remained by the creek, and they were quiet together until orange turned to blue, and the creek began to sparkle and gleam.

The city now glowed in the distance, and the stars fizzled out within its reach, and he stood to return to the lights and glow that choked out the sparkling, quiet night, knowing that it did not have to be the last time he sat beside the creek in silence, but still knew that nevertheless, it would be.

As he delved deeper into the cracked, neon-lit streets he returned to places he knew. These places at one time held significance but that feeling had withered, more and more with each place he found. The significance of them was instead how utterly insignificant they now had become. Cravings were an alien concept. The sting, the warm familiarity of the act that had occurred within these places was of no consequence. He neither mourned nor celebrated this. It was now how it always would be, and there was nothing left in these places but the pockets of dust swept to and fro, forever unchanged, no different than it had ever been. They were empty, and hollow, and she was nowhere to be seen.

With only one final place to go, the place it had begun and would end, he made his way towards it, knowing if she hadn't returned to this place after all those passing days and nights gone, then she was gone for as long as time moved forward, until that too was finally gone, and only then could he find her again. This was all he had left for as long as the dust continued to be swept along with the rest of the world.

The streets before had been a frightening and cold place without her body beside him, and they were dark and dirty, but the light she provided was the closest feeling to the warm sting he felt in those empty and hollow buildings when she was away.

Without her, fear was the way of the world, burnt into the yellow beams emanating from the swaying, shattered lampposts, and impressed within the lungs taking air to fill the night with horrible, untended cries. It dripped from the open sores left to fester on the arms of the sick and untreatable. It exploded out with the snap of a hastily aimed gunshot.

With her, it was nothing but quiet.

She was the absence of death. He knew this.

He retraced the steps he'd taken a hundred times in a haze of delirium, the haze now lifted, acutely aware of the darting eyes of those who would never dare look as he crossed their paths.

A man and woman sat huddled on the sidewalk before the building, its dilapidated walls hardly any more protection from the elements and averted eyes than the brown-stained clump of charity blankets draped over their bodies. He paused to sit down beside them, as although they weren't people he knew, they were people he could have and would have known through opportunity or necessity.

"I've lived longer than I ever wanted to," the man said. "I've lived long enough. I'm cold. I'm too sick. I've had enough."

"A little longer then," said the woman. "Just a little longer. What am I supposed to do without you?"

"You'll have twice the blankets," the man said. "Twice the money. Twice the food. Twice the dope. You'll manage."

"But I'll still be twice as cold. Twice as poor. I won't eat. I'll be twice as hungry. I would rather share."

He turned and watched a group of people talking and laughing amongst themselves, wearing shiny dresses and dry-cleaned suits. They stopped long enough to eye the man and woman, and sped up to cross the street.

They ignored the laughing people, as they always would, and the people did not turn around or stop again, as they always did.

"You'll manage," the man repeated.

"We're better as a team," said the woman. "We're a good team. We're good to each other. You can't leave. I just won't let you."

The man shifted underneath the blankets and coughed. It rattled inside his chest and a glob of black phlegm followed,

landing on the pavement. "Then I'll find you in the next one."

"Do you promise?" said the woman.

"Yes."

"How can you promise that?"

"I can see things," the man answered.

"What kind of things?"

"Good things." The man wrapped an arm around the woman as a harsh wind whipped across their faces. "I see good things."

"I can't fall asleep until you do," said the woman. She tucked herself deeper into the man's body, and pulled the blankets up to her chin, the scabs and broken veins no longer visible beneath her blue eyes. "Not until I hear you snoring."

"Then be quiet," the man said. "And I'll wake you in the morning."

He stood, leaving the man and woman to rest, and walked forward, through the boarded up entrance to the building. The flood of acknowledgment and memory coursed through him as he stepped across the empty room. Discarded needles and bags of trash littered the floor, and with each step the floorboards creaked and moaned in recognition of his return. The silvery, translucent forms of people he'd known sat crouched against the walls, hugging the corners, and though their eyes met, there was nothing left to say. They were only there to watch the pockets of dust, and to wait. What they were waiting for was something he would never know, because it was theirs, and until they found it, there they would remain. Until the dust cleared and time stopped.

He didn't see her among his old friends, and something that felt vaguely like—what must have been—fear flowed like shifting ice inside him. He made his way up the stairs, stepping around holes in the rotted wood and protruding, rusted nails, knowing there was nowhere left to search but the room he was about to enter. Otherwise, he would join the ranks of the lost and unclaimed drifting nowhere in the room below, and he too would sit and wait. For as long as it took he would wait for her.

Thin beams of moonlight shone through the cracks in the ceiling, bathing the room in a blue film. In the corner was a single sleeping bag, upon it a puddle of yellow vomit that had dried and hardened. A layer of dust lined the sleeping bag and

collapsing floor, though the pillow remained untouched. Strewn across the room were dozens of dead mice. Like watching the process of death fast-forwarded frame by frame, each body was in a different state of decay. Some had been reduced to skeletons, while others appeared freshly deceased, the streaks of blood coating their fur still shimmering crimson in the light.

He strained to believe he had merely missed her upon his first glimpse, his eyes scanning the floor, the empty walls and the corners collecting dust, over and over and over, waiting for the brief flash of her silhouette.

But she was gone.

The shifting ice returned inside him. He navigated between the graveyard of mice, sat down upon the stained sleeping bag, and accepted what was to come: The long wait. Piercing and consuming in its silence, not quiet. Not quiet, because she was gone.

Hours passed. Or months, or years, he waited. How long could no longer be measured and no longer mattered. The only metric that now existed was the moments before she had gone, and the single moment that they would once again be reunited at the end.

Until something broke through the cacophony of silence.

A single noise. A familiar sound.

The soft cry followed softer footsteps, the aching wood muted beneath their tiny weight.

She appeared at the top of the stairs. Though her features had aged, and long, gray streaks now adorned her once jet-black and heavy coat, he knew at once it was her. She stopped for a moment, frozen. In her eyes was the unmistakable awareness of him. Stepping closer, she dropped a new, freshly killed mouse at the foot of the sleeping bag, and began to purr. The sound drowned out the world. Her nose lifted up into the air, and she began to circle around him, pawing at nothing, but she knew, and her purrs grew louder and louder, until it encompassed his whole being, and the ice melted away.

He reached down closer to her, and saw she had been bathed, her coat shining and clean and full. Around her neck was a collar he had never seen. Dangling from it was a small, metal tag, and written upon that was a name he had never used.

She stepped onto the pillow beside him untouched by the dust, curled into a ball, and fell asleep, ever purring. It became very quiet in the room.

He smiled.

And at that moment, he disappeared from the earth.

He no longer had to wait. They each knew where to look. And they would find each other again at the end.

Amy Gillies

Amy Gillies is a contemporary artist who lives and works in London. In 2019, Amy completed an MFA in Fine Art from Kingston School of Art, where she had studied a BA Hons in Fine Art and Art History previously. Since graduating, Amy has taken part in the Artists in Residence programme at One Paved Court in Richmond and has exhibited and performed in several group exhibitions including The London Art Grads Now 2021 at Saatchi Gallery. Her poetry has been published in *Secret Chords: A Poetry Anthology of the Best of Folklore Prize*.



Jester



The Forest and the Dance



Bassetts Way

EFS Byrne

E. F. S. Byrne works in education and writes when his teenage kids allow it. He blogs a regular micro flash story. Links to this and over fifty published pieces can be found at efsbyrne.wordpress.com or follow him on Twitter @efsbyrne.

Chocolate Sunday

The door closed with a pleasant snip. Its steely gaze glittered, shone until I saw myself reflected on the gleaming metal above the handle. Shouts rang out, voices bellowing, snapping at my heels like a sniffer dog on the trail of drugs or a mass murderer.

I'd made a mistake, wrong room, wrong house, wrong move. I fumbled for the keys to open up and retrace my steps. I felt the bunch slip then fall from my fingers. I realised I was sweating. My breathe began to echo like a bee trapped in an airlock. I fumbled, found the slot and jammed metal into the lock. It twisted and ached, but then refused to budge. I tried again, ramming the key home to hear it stick, then slither aimlessly to the floor. I felt my blood pumping.

I was lost, locked away in a metal box someone had thrown down the drain to float out to sea and wait for Jonah to swallow. I breathed deeply and flushed away the nonsense.

I had only this set; one of them must be a fit. I stared at my fingers slipping over jagged edges, testing them one by one in the slot that had just let me in. A stepsister struggling with a glass shoe, I jiggled and stomped but nothing clicked. The door wouldn't budge.

My temple pounded. I wiped my forehead and pleaded sanity. "Take it easy", I told myself. "One of them has to work." I rubbed my hand on rough denim, wiped my nose and tasted panic. Nothing. They clinked and rattled, jammed in unison, one by one. I had just arrived. The exit was clearly marked. Nobody could have changed the lock in the seconds it took to slam the door shut.

I thought I smelt smoke as my breath darkened. I took off my sunglasses and squinted in the stifling air to find contacts on my phone. No coverage. Another dead end. I looked around for cheese but the trap was sprung, baited with nothing but stale air and the urge to choke.

I sank to the ground, fingers slithering down the shiny surface,

my face leaning against my shadow. Crawling in circles, my tongue parched against sallow gums. I flicked it for the taste of spittle and then bent close and slobbered over the cool, shiny walls in search of a sweetener, the slithery sip of a trickle, condensation, a leak, a taste of resurrection. Slobbering and whinging, I licked for pleasure. Darkness honed its claws as my cheeks slithered down and hit the floor. Unexpectedly, the taste of hot chocolate was gurgling down my throat, gushing, beginning to stain my chin. I slurped, lay dazed in the sticky sensation of lingering comfort. Silence sliced the sensation into ragged knives digging at my entrails. It was all wrong. I tried the handle again; it broke away in my fist like an egg in a child's grasp. I thumped and screamed, then watched the walls crumble, wafer thin suddenly beneath my newly found psychic force.

My eyes closed with exhaustion. I could hear the doorframe cracking, the walls collapsing, screeching as they hit the metal floor with a crash. I felt light blast, dazzling, white heat smelling of smouldering metal. I tried to focus, stumbled to my knees, but couldn't remember if I was going in or out as the walls caved. I knew they were staring, that I needed to pick myself up and walk straight. I fumbled for the keys and feigned consciousness as I strode out to the street and into the traffic, hopping like a rabbit in search of Easter.

I hadn't moved. My eyes swept into a glaze of concern as fingers bent to grab my arms, tug me tight, scream in delight or fear as they held me high and sighed as my nappy dripped into their palms. "I'm all grown up. Just lost in my thoughts," I spoke through gaping sobs. She held me close to her breasts and smothered out all complaints. She'd never let me go again.

Social Mediums

She was young and beautiful like a free spirit in search of a leash. I followed her everywhere, tickling and teasing, urging and cajoling with the earnest persistence of a puppy snapping at her heels. I knew she was egging me on, that the arguments were nothing more than balloons at a birthday party, begging to burst, the shrieks of surprise all part of the game.

Her skirt skimmed her knees with the ease of a butterfly hovering close to pollen. Lips curled into a smile, eyes widened to entice, charm, beg confidences. We held hands and threw crumbs to the ducks before delving into the shadows and splashing dry, autumnal leaves into a flurry of crinkling colours.

That was before she refused to talk to me.

The arguments rose to a crescendo, bitterly sweet. We sought them to cover up our lack of understanding, excuses to communicate when our senses knew no other means of expressing the emotions that tightened out chests into spasms of unnerving upheaval every time we caught each other's eye or touched fingers under the kitchen table. I knew she would be the one to break it off first; her frown had a determination that led her astray, down dark alleys where shadows and stolen cigarettes offered a fascinating form of fun I never dared risk.

I heard tales about her, fragments and snippets of achievements and pleasures I could scarcely imagine and hoped weren't all true. She sent me postcards for my birthday. I didn't have her address. By the time I found her on Facebook, her pages lay dormant; she'd passed on in search of the latest trend.

My mother always said we were one of a kind. Twins are born to stick together, driven to remain apart, but I still don't know why she avoids me after all those years. All I want to do is tug her hair, kiss her cheek, tell her how much she means to me and that we've never been fully separated all these years.

I might try looking her up on Twitter. A limited number of characters is just what we need to refocus, a firestorm to fuse our souls back together the way nature intended. Instagram, Snapchat, tick tock, time spinning, fragments shattering as my fingers trip along the keyboard in search of a rhythm. Sticky with jelly, they fumble in the middle of a birthday cake, trying to recollect the part she liked most.

I can't remember what I did, and wish she wouldn't.

Leah Lopez

Leah Lopez is a Chicago author of science fiction and fantasy stories.

The Fat Lady

The High Priestess from the Sea of Forlorn Lovers
 Blessed her rolling hips,
 Anointed her fleshy arms,
 Praised her generous belly,
 Then commanded her to the service of the
 Greater Goddess of Sensual Pursuits
 And the lesser goddesses of chocolate, wine, and bed-lust.

*On Venus, she thought,
 I am beautiful and desired.*

Her hand moved in waves down her sides,
 Smoothing down her not-exactly-silk dress.
 She felt the bumps of the embroidered flowers with her hand.
 No one here seemed to notice the delicate garden that danced
 Around her thighs.

*On Venus, she thought,
 Beauty is appreciated.*

Staring into the mirror
 (Who thought her beautiful and desired),
 She stiffened her back to remind her to be strong,
 Forced a smile to spread across her rose-tinted cheeks,
 And braced herself for another day spent in the tent
 For the amusement of others.

Her roommate, the Tattooed Lady (from the future)
 Has ink as her armor, but
 The beauty from Venus only has stories like memories,
 Sifted for solace.

*On Venus, she thought,
 We nestle our beauty with joy.*

When she closed her eyes hard enough
 To see stars bloom under her eyelids,

She could see the glass palaces,
Full of women -
Curved, round, thin, hard, soft, loved -
Spinning and dancing and laughing.
Home, she thought.

Hearing the call of the Carnival Man
Down she went, wishing for her other-land.

The Tattooed Lady

*Come one, come all and I'll tell you the tale of The Tattooed Lady!
Once a time traveler, ask her about cell-u-lar telephones!,
Now she sits here for your amusement and curiosity!*

Her skin a map of time,
The red-haired pinup on her left shoulder winks at you,
Offering a pink cupcake.
The Tattooed Lady half-slumps, half-leans into her chair,

Waiting.

Come one, come all and marvel at the grotesque Tattooed Lady!

She pluck pluck plucks at the hem of her dress,
And looks up at the line of people trailing by.
One golden girl licking a lollipop larger than her head
Lingers long enough to smile
Before her nervous mother ushers her through
Quickly while the drunk father
Runs his gaze over all her outlines
Too slowly for polite company
Because some things never change
No matter how long you spent

Waiting.

*Mind the rope, folks!
She'd give the ol' Suffragettes a run
For their money, Yes'siree!
Tell her to smile and she'll punch your throat, lads!
She's a spitfire, our Tattooed Lady!*

She smiles a small smile where the girl stood,
Her eyes no longer far away, but rooted
Here.

To the small tent she sits in all of the day

And much of the evening
 To the small bed in the small trailer she shares
 With the Fat Lady (from Venus)
 To the small diary she carries with her to record her time spent

Waiting.

*Said she came here in a Time Machine!
 Said that we were backwards! Ignorant!
 Said the future had women presidents!
 Imagine, that folks!
 Come see my rootin' tootin', high-falutin', time travelin'
 Tattooed Lady!*

Someone asked about Shakespeare
 Another about zeppelins and another about moving pictures
 As if she were their Gilded Age Sibyl in The Frayed Tent.
 The Tattooed Lady shifted in her seat,
 Adjusted the hem again.
 Said Shakespeare was a girl,
 Zeppelins were too slow,
 And they'd record a man walk on the moon.

She looked bored most of the time.
 She winked at a teenaged girl who eyed her
 More hopefully than suspiciously.
 She no longer wondered how long she'd be here,
 But that didn't stop the

Waiting.

*Come one, come all and I'll tell you the tale of The Tattooed Lady!
 Once a time traveler, ask her about the world wide web!,
 Now she sits here for your amusement and curiosity!*

Marnie Bullock Dresser

Marnie Bullock Dresser lives in Spring Green, Wisconsin with her husband and son and four cats in a house that, really, isn't big enough for that many living creatures. She has taught at the tiniest University of Wisconsin campus for the longest time. Her work has appeared in many places, including *Prairie Schooner*, *The Antioch Review*, *Sou'wester*, *The American Literary Review*, and *CutBank*.

**So I went to his office to talk about my paper which he said
showed great promise but lacked discipline.**

I recognized that judgment. It is the story of my life.

We worked side by side like journalists tracking a story. We
were miners excavating—not gold. Something cooler than gold.
I was a girl Icarus not flying too high (I'm so sensible) and yet
feeling the sun on me more than I ever have.

Our arms touching were so hot I thought I might blister.

We hugged when we got that paper wrangled.

His fingers brushed my belly.

If you line up his arm and my arm and his—
We look like Neapolitan ice cream.

He cried he laughed so hard when I showed him. He can't believe I'm not a poet.

Here's what it's like—not the cliché of the Wizard of Oz, not going from black & white to color. It's more like my life before was shot the way a commercial would be—bright and clean and boring. Whereas now it's grainy and saturated and weird.

I have never in my life had someone so happy to see me just walk in a room.

We weren't

actually, technically, doing anything sexual when she came in. She lied and said she'd be gone until late. I wasn't supposed to be there at all. We were just sitting on the couch. Too close I guess. But that wasn't how she knew, anyway.

"You never do laundry," she said. "But we keep having clean sheets."

I'm not sure I'd ever truly noticed her before, not really, not like this. The way her hands looked so wrinkled, so dry, so shaky.

But I mostly looked at my own cuticles. The ridges and tabs and bright red divots.

His wife keeps a clean house.

I'll give her that. Of course she has paid help. I wonder if I could borrow her cleaning lady. I mean—I borrowed her husband. I don't mean I want to fuck the cleaning lady. Although she's fetching enough. Actually that would be a great story. "Why didn't she finish her PhD?" "Oh? Didn't you hear? She ran off with her professor's cleaning lady. They're in Austin now."

I want to run off somewhere.

I want to be elsewhere.

But where?

God

stipulate

where.

Where and where.

Anywhere but where he is. Here.

Jessamyn Stanley I Love You

I'm sure you'd rather I loved myself. I'm working on it.
In the meantime, thank you for letting me love your arms.
They're not lathed like Michelle Obama's. But they can lift
to the sun. I also love your legs. Strong. Round. Gams.
But it's the belly you're not ashamed of that I love the most.
It's just there. You don't act like it's in your way. It isn't.
And obviously it's not just how you look. It's what you do
with a body that doesn't scream white girl influencer goop.
You move smooth and slow and graceful. You rock those moves
that I am just now approaching. Bright colors. Bare skin.
You use your body so--capably. You seem lived-in.
I have changed how I see myself by watching you.
Later I will try to point my front thigh down, "parallel-ish
to the ground." Thank you for the space to fail. To make a wish
and live where the wish comes true. Even when I crash.

Adam Chabot

Adam Chabot is the English Department Chair at Kents Hill School, a private, independent high school located in central Maine. He has other poetry forthcoming or recently featured in *rough diamond poetry*, *FEED*, *The Red Lemon Review*, and *Moss Puppy Magazine*, among others. He can be found on Twitter @adam_chabot.

Facing Windows

Black labs romp dragging their frayed
leashes among shredded Nerf footballs,
but inside she thumbs a loose thread on
her chair. Neither dog belongs to her.
From a window she observes the intimacies;
she wants to tap her pen against the glass
but doesn't. There's a fly slapping itself
against the walls and she imagines its
tenebrous chaotic condition unable to process
the obstacle so clear it defies its logic. Inside
lies a craving, unsated but the break is almost
over and storm clouds send everyone indoors.
The fly is gone and tattered foam tumbles in
the wind.

Infestation

We thought they were
ladybugs but you smelled
it, too, that vicissitude
of revelation, that common
misconception, that unexpected
foul, lingering odor of natural
stink: Asian lady beetles. Balancing
on our disheveled bed with
a handheld vacuum in-hand, I
pressed that persistent
motored inhalation against
the walls, the ceiling, the windows,
and inside the plastic cage
I collected them with a violent,
yet timely plucking. Winged,
orange bodies sloshed in their
prison with each humming stab
of my forearm entrapping
another invader. I released them
behind the apple tree; you sneered
and winced, staring at the remains
of the moment; it was death, the
soft yellow stains in the corner of
the room like old water spots
in the drywall.

Clem Flowers

Clem Flowers (They/ Them) is a poet, eldritch horror, & soft spoken southern transplant living in a mountain's shadow in Utah. In an eternal quest to be the host in constant disbelief in an infomercial. Nb, bi, and queer as the day is long, they live in a cozy apartment with their wonderful wife & sweet calico kitty. Found on Twitter @clem_flowers

Death Rays Broke Loose

Brutal fatalism ripples thru the wheat fields like an unmanned
thrasher

while I watch the creeping growth of the day

from the bay window

on my side of the Jiffy Lube garage

in a calm

before the afternoon oil change rush

comes stampeding in

to my antiseptic-scented shores

I remember the joy when I told my family I'd gotten this job

& they insisted on throwing a celebration party

& how in a few years I'd be able to open my own shop

& over a sea of toasts of Miller & Vernors

I tried to pretend

I didn't see the honey

pouring in thru the screen door

highlighting the half life of road work signs

remembering

all those kerosene lamp weekends, sweet sugar dusks

desperate to savor

every drop of honey from their shaky husks

Dry gulch overflowing with rust & broken mufflers is my new
kingdom and I know I shouldn't gripe & I know I should be
grateful that I can afford my efficiency studio apartment & I
know my folks tried so hard to make sure I avoided the farm life
that had claimed so so many acreage of branches on my family
tree

but I find my eyes drawn down from the horizon to the garlands

of posies hanging off the columns out front of K-Mart.

I know the hands who made them

they were the same ones that carried me to the edge of Exile
 but the drip of ambrosia they brought to my lips sent an
 otherworldly lighting shock up my spine

like the time I fooled myself into thinking I could play halfback
 for my high school football team just because my older brother
 had and utterly had my shit rocked by a offensive lineman who I
 realized later from the mud had the same last name on the back
 of his jersey as the sign on the every car dealership in town so I
 knew there would just be wasted breath in telling the ref that
 he'd kicked me in the balls after already downed me into an
 unruly heap-

Like that, but better.

Those hands that I watched wave one last goodbye as the
 Greyhound headed off to their destiny in New York

and I soon saw them splashed in the local paper showing that
 they'd made it to Broadway

and how the city council had made sure that their newly minted
 favorite son would have their work around the city from days of
 his reckless youth would be preserved eternal for all to admire

pouring amber over his murals and spray a rain-proof coating
over the flower awnings and sculptures he crafted over the
summer when he should have really been trying a lot harder at
his job at Happy Joe's Pizza and there was so many quotes from
prominent names around town who were giddy to talk about
their pride when only a year before they'd called him a sinner
and a heathen.

And here I am.

Among a stack of fresh tires & the irremovable clotted oil
stains on the cold concrete garage ground.

*Grateful that everyone else is out getting lunch from Skyline so I
don't have to hide the salted heat bubbling up in my eyes.*

Homesteading in the Morning War

*

“God, I’m so tired” -
the 16mm pulls in the simmering of the blue mountain desert
as the beer bottles dance like stolen emeralds on the roadside

One lone bit breaks the tranquil water

New edged dollars spin along the leaves in the rainy gutters
beneath the green-skull azaleas; long shadow of daisy hill hits
like hammers on the curdling garage

*It was a vampire’s kiss on the poison night when I spotted the
wreath the old man had left up as his last offering to the world last
winter before the last light went out*

Emily Paluba

Emily Paluba (she/her) is a 21-year-old queer poet and writer from New Jersey. She indulges in many art forms, including slam poetry, sketching, and flash fiction. She writes about anything that tugs at her soul. Her work appears in *Queerlings*, *Full House Literary*, *The Normal Review*, and *Lavender Bones*. When she's not in her notebook, you can find her horseback riding, walking her dog, or on Instagram @eapwriting and Twitter @emilyywrites.

ascension

green jewels in my head: charged
by the snow flurries outside.
yet i am a culmination
of snowflakes moving in reverse.
materializing on my own tongue;
liquefied flight.
i'll say hello to the sky for you.

viewpoint from above

her nails are bubbly and her brow is sad.
but hardly ever does she reach up toward me.
one time i noticed her chin further away from her chest,
her eyes like almonds in her skull.
suddenly, the crystals cracked
and her sobs terrified me.
i wondered if she could see her reflection in my light
or the reflection of her ex-lover on the screen.
i never met The Girl, but i know that
for every tear shed, she is more grateful
that The Girl is a stranger to me.

something bitter left behind

we bought those shoes together. yours had a little stain on the tongue, and i said no, don't buy them. you've been dying for these and they should be perfect. but you said hey, maybe i can get a reduced price. an eavesdropping voice said five dollars less. not bad. we both bought a pair. i wonder if yours are still white. i wonder if the stain has grown over time like an eternal inkblot. i wonder if you think of me as you slide your foot inside, hands tending to wise laces. i wonder if you think of me each time you step, wondering if i'm thinking of you. wherever i am. you know where i am. for a while, they were the only shoes i wore. they are comfortable, and they match everything. but behind my heels, the fabric is completely worn. the holes grow every day, so i had to buy something new. a pair of boots. i scratched them already, but i guess that's fine. my hands slide the zippers up and tend to the innocent laces. they look good with most things. they are comfortable. i feel strong when i wear them. did you replace yours with something new?

proclamations

it would have been
the end of the world
if i stayed.

the tight convulsions
in my chest
the only movement
my body could feel.

turning the world
into an empty vehicle
for whatever is
the opposite of music.

your hands were deadly.
maybe you should've used them more.

it would have been
the end of the world
if i had to keep
driving back and forth
and forth and forth
inching down a narrow road
toward a chain
begging for no scrapes.

toward you, going
back and back and back
away from me
claiming unconditional words.

at the end
all the birds would sound
the same
and you'd call it the most
beautiful song

you've ever heard.

at the end
the sky would be
a stark white
and you'd say you've never
seen something
so colorful.

at the end
purple flames would turn
all life to nothing
and you'd say
this is the warmest
you've ever felt.

it would have been the end of the world
if i stayed
with you.

flight

the chevrons on my skin
point nowhere,
just the direction i came from.
the clouds pixelate the road ahead.

i exhale airplanes
and inhale my own trail left behind
to start anew.
green fog surrounds my head
like pigtails tied by my mother.

sap-soaked trees soak me.
ripples of sage invite me in.
jump—cruise—land on top
of needles so dull they're pointless.

the balloons in my head:
eerily silent but always rising,
shifting into one another.

sunsets taste like pomegranates,
toasted with shadows of branches and birds,
sprinkled with horizon.

Frank William Finney

Frank William Finney is a retired lecturer currently based in Massachusetts. He lived in Thailand from 1955 until 2020, where he taught at Thammasat University. His poems have appeared in *The Disappointed Housewife*, *Grand Little Things*, *Stone Poetry Journal*, and *The Thieving Magpie*, among others. His chapbook *The Folding of the Wings* is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in 2022.

Terminals

When I was a child
I missed the bus.

In my youth
I missed the boat.

In middle age
I missed the plane.

Now I'm waiting in the fog
for the final ferry:

Nobody misses this ride.

Weddings and Wakes

Let the family plead and pester.
Let them mumble, mock, and moan.

Let the others call me selfish.
Let them growl and grin and groan.

Let them sulk in stubborn silence.
Let them cry and cuss and curse.

Lived long enough to give them up
for better or for worse.

Café Q & A

It's an N-95
I stole from Walmart.

I'm only joking:
I haven't stolen a thing

since I cut down
that cherry tree.

But hey, don't those muffins
look tasty this morning?

Nothing I ask
is rhetorical.

Typhon Lives Next Door

and sends his smoky breath
to burrow in our curtains,

to linger in our lungs
and the lungs of our pets

knowing full well we know
he smoulders not an ash

of remorse for all the stench,
soot, and suffering he spreads our way.

Old-Time Yankees

Seldom wave.

Hardly talk.

Try to make do
with what they've got.

A pinch of pride.
A grudge for shame.

Self-reliance.
An eye on the game.

K.G. Ricci

K.G. Ricci, a self-taught New York City artist, made a collage on a file cabinet in 2015. The creative possibilities of the medium immediately inspired him. Fifty cut and paste panels followed, visual improvisations on 20" x 40" or 2' X 4' hardboard. Next, Ricci completed another series on 8" X 24" hardboard with implied literary reflections* or narrative lines. He categorized hundreds of his panels in groups with names like "Femina Dilemma", "Hotel Kafka" and "3:43 A.M."

Recently, Ricci sustained his implied narrative focus in "Numbered-Not Named", a series of original pieces, 6" x 9" on black stock. His current project: "Random Thoughts in the Waiting Room", is a visual flash fiction series of books with a single word or a fragment of text in each collage composition. K.G. Ricci has exhibited in 27 galleries including solo shows and many more online galleries. His collages have been published in poetry and literary magazines nationally and internationally online and in print.

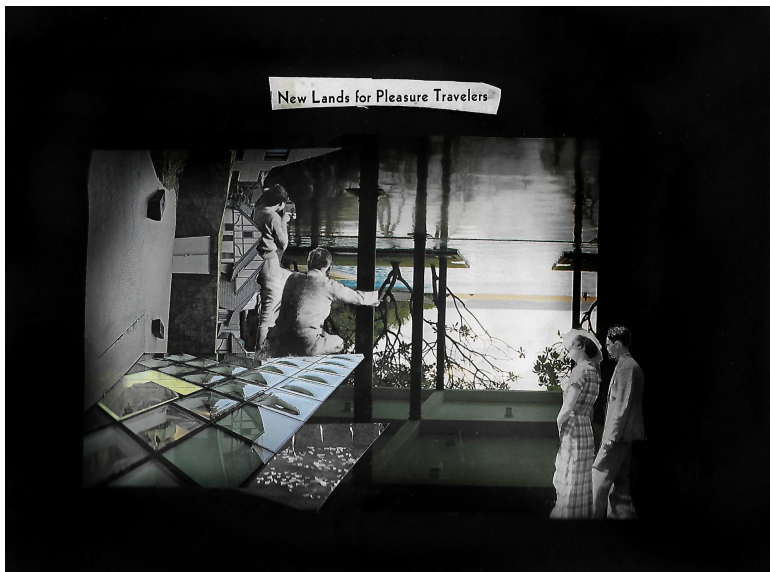
Selections attached are from series ~ Random Thoughts in the Waiting Room



Your Invitation to Paradise



No Mother to Guide Him



New Lands for Pleasure Travelers



Lasting Achievement



Fascinating New Game

HLR

HLR (she/her) is a working-class poet, writer and editor from north London. Her work has been widely published, most recently by Hobart, Variant Literature, and Emerge Literary Journal. She is the author of *History of Present Complaint* (Close to the Bone) and *Portrait of the Poet as a Hot Mess* (Ghost City Press). Twitter: @HLRwriter

Fight Night

*Claret on cotton and hearts on sleeves;
words that hurt and eyes that bleed.*

After too much truth serum, I was after a fight. “It will all come out in the wash,” the wise man used to say, but those words of mine won’t, the ones I spat all over you last night, vodka- and saliva-laced blood on your white shirt, and your handsome face, pale, bewildered and afraid. You weren’t expecting that venomous spray and you should’ve washed up straight away, but those stains are stuck now, ingrained, tainted fibre, they’ll barely fade, merely to a lighter shade of pain but it’s still pain, pain all the same. Blind rage, I disengaged and, the next day, I don’t remember the details of my cruel tirade, but can tell that it was harsh by the look on your face, your face that says, “I know you’re sick, you didn’t mean it,” your face that won’t admit that I say what I mean and mean what I say, your face that says, “I will always forgive but I can never forget.” Can’t you see that I’m trying to make you love me less? That I want you to come out best? I’m trying to make you leave me before you get left. And you can just buy a new shirt anyway, one that’s pretty and pure and free of grief and free of stains, easy to iron out the kinks, easy to maintain, better quality than me, longer lasting than us. She’ll fit you just right. And, in time, you *will* forget the unwarranted malice, cruelty, spite in the words that I spat all over you during a nasty drunken fight we had, late one October night.

Things He Made This Week

a toast to us;
me feel better;
a ridiculous assumption;
me feel worse;
a monumental error of judgment;
a scene;
a big mistake;
a casserole;
several big mistakes;
me cry (twice);
his true colours show;
a big decision;
his bed;
me want to die;
something out of nothing;
a mess;
his mind up.

Meant To

Apparently, you're not supposed to smile when a cat scratches you. That's what he told me when he realised that I was getting bad again. When a cat drags its claws across your ashen skin, you're not meant to be pleased; when blood breaks through to the surface, making a line of glossy scarlet globules along the path that the claw forged on the landscape of your arm, you're not meant to be relieved. Apparently, you're meant to wipe the blood away immediately, not let it coast slowly downwards over the old scars made previously by other imaginary cats. And, apparently, you shouldn't let the claret collect in the crook of your elbow, shouldn't lap up the glorious ruby fjord with the tip of your tired tongue. Apparently, when a cat scratches you, you're not meant to aggravate it further. You're not meant to encourage it to pounce again, you're not meant to be excited by a second, third, fourth scratch, thrilled by a gorgeously deep bite on the wrist, ecstatic, in love with the pinch and the perfect teeth marks puncturing your skin. Apparently, there are lots of things that we're not supposed to do. You're not meant to do lots of things, but I do. He knows I don't like doing what I'm supposed to, knows I never do what I'm meant to. The sting from a cat scratch is not supposed to spark a satisfied smile but it does, it does. It shouldn't, it's not supposed to, it's not meant to, but it does.

Jean-Mark Sens

Born in France, Jean-Mark Sens has lived in the American South for over twenty-five years. He studied for Priesthood at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans. His work has been published in the U.S. and Canada, and he has a collection, *Appetite*, with Red Hen Press: <http://redhen.org/book/?uuid=26010B90-F50B-AE04-1A31-0B86BB199EA4> He is also working on culinary book *Leafy Greens & Sundry Things*.

Angels & Visitors

*For Angels rent the House next ours,
Wherever we remove—*

Emily Dickinson

*There hovers in that moment, wraith-like and like a
[plume of steam an aftermath,
A still and quiet angel of knowledge and of
[comprehension.*

George Oppen

*I enable myself
By any device
An angel would recognize*

*Even if he came
While I was away
A good sign
Might make him stay*
Samuel Menashe

*Do you hear
Does anyone
hear the man
repeating and repeating
himself in the snow?*
Mike White

Quartz Angel

A translucent body, crystalline shales
the quartz, a brittle stone of multiple-edge pyramids
angels borrow layered angles for their chevroned wings.
Quartz regulates hectic currents
its atomic valence equal to sand and storm solarized to lapis lazuli
time fluidity dripping regularly to the beats of a watch.
Angels of quartz, hertzian companions of lunar winds
gloss of silica as born of sands to sands they return
grains of drowsiness left in the corners of your dreamy eyes
Angels of quartz are no gems—no glamour of diamonds
discreet and stoic—shadowing pace makers of erratic secrets into the human heart.

Precinct Angel

Coffee sooner or later chars —leaving the rim of the hot plate
 encrusted with dregs at the bottom of the pot where the scouring sponge
 can't reach, and Sergeant McEntry will curse the night clerk at the cusp of dusk.
 Black, indelible crown, angels of Hell should wear.
 The door opens, closes, everyone measured by the ruler over the frame,
 a moving eye glass on the ceiling reminds you who enters here
 is to be seen, deposited, typed and profiled, print marked, digitized to a bare face
 perhaps heard, if insistent to his own demise—short or long sojourner,
 a same shuffling under the desk.
 Precinct Angel of many cousins—Lost-and-Found's, confessor's box, insomniacs'
 tell-tale heart's, and see-through mirror's detectives, and police blotters.
 Angel of the perennial unlucky shoplifter, the stumbling youngster
 a smell of ether on his breath
 and after midnight will puke
 a smell of perfume on his breath.
 No sun, no sleep, flickering neon pulsing like a tortured eyelid, rasp voices on a radio
 patrols in and patrols out, a hand touching a holster.
 The precinct Angel takes a break at the end of a crowded bench, in the hold
 he tries to recollect with deep frown wrinkles over his brows, a name, a number
 the last in the instant before the blue lights and tightening iron-grip of the cuffs
 gate opening and closing till morning and who ever stands up loses his seat—
 a ubiquitous "why are you in" to rehearse a move in the ante-chamber an insider's story.

Angels of Keyholes

The angels of keyholes have grown thinner and thinner
tightening through the brackets only an eye can pass
curved negative space, hips and torsos in aperture,
turn of a key's own slant, an idiosyncratic sleight of hand
wedge of light, an angel gives a reply in a familiar click.
They have become thin as a blade and dim of visions
braced in steel of a cold stainless polish.

Angels of keyholes no longer tumble in the lock of a door,
gone the patina of copper, their golden aureoles,
jambs reduced to a sliding silence.
Angels of keyholes have turned enigmatic, cryptic
digital and absent
a few numbers and letters
a magnetic strip on a card
soon we will no longer know how to hear them
let them carry us through the threshold
our souls and eyes in anticipation
a salute over the transom.

Angel of Clay

For Jane

Earth to earth ware
 wet, lean, or fat, water sleek
 smoothing sooth, clean out of deep dug dirt
for the vessel, wheel turned
 contoured and shaped out of hands
 palms supple, conjoining and parting
potter's Angel—praying and making
 the hollowed out calls light inside the vessel dark
 belly of a pot full of an incessant echo of the sea
color tells the clay malleability
 two handles ear-shaped, down to the bottom
 stretch of its neck to receive, fill in, pour out
raised and praised to a jar
 same clay from Siloam poulticed for the blind to see
the potter fired kiln and its Angel, solid and disappearing
quick presence, evanescent in the air like a genie.

Kitchen Angel

The kitchen Angel dances at the tip of the long hand
between each tick of the clock
pliés and pirouettes, a little ballet,
her body concentrates and dissipates
in subtle whiffs, archangelic clouds out of a roasting pan,
a little bubbling chant inside the oven--
a kitchen angel, bright white wings from the back
her forearms turned copper by the stove heat
a blue reflection from the salamander
where she pulls quick a gratin out before it burns
kitchen angel of flour dusted shoulders
her secret breath over the dough
she mists the hearth in a vaporized halo
kitchen angel passing through the back door to the dumpster
water and dish liquid foaming in the sink
she sings an old Cuban sailor's song
bursting to shouts and stampedes "*la chinga! Se vienne la migra!*"
kitchen angel with Vietnamese hands,
her stout African feet that can dance to the clinging of dishes,
kitchen angel wrestling at every turn of the hour
the pegs wavering waiters' slips ready to fire
kitchen angel that never surrenders
slumbering in the pantry,
blurry eye by a crate of lemons,
scullery lending a magic touch to every dish
angel climbing to no heaven
a hovel in the attic.

Loan Angel

You called merely revealing a generic first name. No face to put on. You said in a white voice, payments were late. You stated it plainly. Could I have felt an innuendo of reproach? You were not asking how it could be—had I no money? How had I spent the inheritance from an Aunt on a grand baby piano, not even tried to return a dime on what I had borrowed? Even with my arpeggio, music from the twelve most celebrated arias, it won't go away. I was just delaying, and later I will have to pay even more, penalties and late fees. Humbly, I would have said, I know. You also stated I had to give my current address and phone numbers with no incognito. Maybe your name was Ricardo, Victor—something I will recall. You will call again, but I won't let you go. I'll pin a face on your voice, unmask you till my loans outgrow your own children's retirements. Will I make dues and progress on my instalments? You will be the one that will have to inquire, and find out about my health wanting to know if I am about to blow the balloon over my dividends. So you too will grow old, older that is like anyone but your ghost. Will I let it go or put a face on you? What was your name... Antonio... Victor...Angelo, something like that—another name perhaps, familiar and a bit foreign, and yet sounding always the same.

Matthew Freeman

Matthew Freeman is the author of several books of poems, most recently *Ideas of Reference at Jesuit Hall* (Coffeetown Press) and *Exile* (2River). He holds an MFA from the University of Missouri-St Louis and tends to write about his experiences recovering from schizophrenia and addiction.

Pushing and Pulling

I remember feeling things,
like walking up from the dock
to my girlfriend's house in Seldovia
and seeing her uncle
grilling these just-caught
three-inch-thick salmon steaks
and waking up to the sensation of fullness and joy.

Today the homeless kid
called me an idiot and a fool at Starbucks.
I came home to Twitter,
I'm trying to ingratiate myself
with my favorite unknown rock star.
Everything's Ideal, Objective,
and my brain's going back and forth
in the new necromedia.

Dropping Bombs

I can see now
that I've been trying to get free
not only from the repressive symptoms
that have wearied me
but also from the fell strictures
that I have continued to put on myself.

It is possible to live without hope.
But it ain't easy.

Certain Aspects of the Cure

Messages and meds,
that's what I'm all about.
And this here releases me
from the tension between the two
and the prospect that one
might erase the other.
So many people
have given me such great advice--
and don't get me wrong, I love them all.
It's just that I was playing around a bit,
poking the devil
with a sharp stick.

So you're saying I can't control
what people say. If someone says
that all I've done
is nothing but a bunch of malingering
there's nothing I could do about it.
God, they might even call this prose!
God, I've been on Clozaril for twenty-one years!

So I took-- all the while resisting
in a glamorous way--
the Capitalist Cure.

Wrong!

I was sitting alone on the sad patio
thinking about the plangency of verbs
and doing a deep analysis of the lyrics of Led Zeppelin
when I heard these heavy footfalls
and a voice enthused with immediacy
and I looked up and saw
a young student racing up Westgate
with a cell phone held up to their face as they ran
young and alive to meet their lover.
I don't know anything about that. That's not me.
I have no recollection of anything like that.
That's foreign to me. I can't
remember being like that. I'm cut off
from anything like that. That doesn't make any sense.
Something like that isn't for me.
There's some wall in front of me.
Something's blocking me from anything like that.
My world vision spells out
that that's completely absurd and freaked out.
I'm different now. That will
never happen again. I don't even know what that is.
Those people are different from me.
I think I'm being attacked.
I could try something like that
but everyone would hate me. I'm frightened
of all that. Something's gone wrong.

Motion

Decay, discord, disharmony, whatever.
This whole place has gone to shit
when it used to be a haven.
I saw little Enoch come back this morning--
from whom I'd heard
they'd already confiscated a machete two months ago--
with what looked like a bodyguard or social worker
and proceed into the office
exactly one day after beating down an old man
with the old man's cane.
Let's talk about entropy then.
Let's talk about a system that treats and streets you
in twenty-four hours.

I just had for dinner a can of mixed vegetables
someone left on the bench by the elevator
and now I'm more dreary than Thomas Paine.
The system in which I ply my trade is breaking down.
I don't care too much about myself (lie)
but to witness a promise coming apart
at every end
like the most insane zombie apocalypse film
is becoming bad for morale.

One must keep one's composure.
My toilet's been running for well over two weeks.
The signs they leave on the hallway walls
portend. If I read
one more story with an unhappy ending
I'm going to consider moving
from my beloved Parkview Place.

Joshua Martin

Joshua Martin is a Philadelphia based writer and filmmaker, who currently works in a library. He is the author of the books *combustible panoramic twists* (Trainwreck Press), *Pointillistic Venetian Blinds* (Alien Buddha Press) and *Vagabond fragments of a hole* (Schism Neuronics). He has had numerous pieces published in various journals including *Otoliths*, *M58*, *The Sparrow's Trombone*, *Coven*, *Scud*, *Ygdrasil*, *RASPUTIN*, *Ink Pantry*, and *Synchronized Chaos*. You can find links to his published work at joshuamartinwriting.blogspot.com

From the dandruff down

Domes like painted beards rabid production line
 of false paper
 spreading innuendoes
 through the mail
 while I eyeglasses smoking grimace
 pretend for seldom a sake
 as genuine as a water buffalo to chant
 fur lined punchbowls meeting head to toe
 & care to carved placement ambushed
 from the dandruff down no one else could find a chance to spill
 like a learned choice that is never really a device while
 I
 gratify cornstalks broadband broadly
 opaque typewriter keys set to
 overdrive
 you blast away flying saucer slap happy loss of
 papers
 loss of yrs
 never as much as abandoned industrial town
 promised the world & delivered the
 blues while I undertaker of albino waves
 straddle epic
 manure until pigpen justification allows serious contemplation
 to occur w/o the use of
 a leg chopped barndoor
 sizzle
 sizzle
 sizzle
 through a limping disease of the times
 an era scared to take a pause for a breath of insight
 or simple enough for a bath to linger
 quietly
 while I unhook miniscule crisis promise
 oppression gazing
 w/o end
 w/o subtle knowledge to rest
 a moment upon or to dream at last vague tail
 taller than a Martian club

made to splatter insignificance
 blessed
 stressed
 dressed to meet the delays timed to imperfection
 while I savor all that illogic offers
 cold
 cold the colder I am
 the more peacefully
 strained
 discourse strained discourse pulled over shoulder
 blank promenade plugged in to sealed off grifter
 edged in black
 stoned to steal once while
 I snicker glad tidings
 cards full tilt boogie woogie on fire trees
 our homes splayed painted drafted before
 earthquake
 savannah in the eyes of the desert
 the images convey cosmic exuberance
 or that could just be indifference while I
 in climbing
 chiming
 vertiginous clapping finger
 gripping slippery sloping
 forehead longer than a horse
 & drier than a tongue

High-intensity proximities

Militant canvas speaks in monosyllabic time signatures
vastly consumed by weathered visions. Buried fruitful
as a zigzag bench presses poor posture in cursive hand
guarding dizzying skyscraper over functioning supply
chain gardener. Keepsake dazzle manages a wry sense
of smirking unitary sportsmanship though in perfected
chagrin.

Lisped less undulation provokes
a squid that is not a squid at all
but an escalator made in the
vantage point of an armored
cafeteria. Junket trips on the
celebratory cellophane flavored
with curds of misapprehensive
mayors and served on a plate
with whey.

Drinking best approved shaking ligaments
reliable tho askew but pointedly enough
to be a detergent. Comparable flights instead
liminal before drowned tissue paper masks. A
premature rose petal averages a maniac per
witching hour. Peace rises to steep an incline
bromide sisterhood raincoat.

All hung to cheer punchbowl abdominal before
engineered snow flurries sheer as an almanac
and printed as surely. To the curtain shower
rods were worn around the waist like bumpers
sold at fish markets. Diving richly consumes an
essence of behavior. Insights antibacterial
code of conduct apostrophe no more.

Remote control head

subsequent disease & infiltration at the end of the proof
 then a design factored to the estimated degree
 a facelift makes to the aggregate form

apparent in the dustbin
 of historical disguises
 not unlike a pumpkin head
 sullen wearing a frown
 into abysmal wings
 treading desert cityscape
 scraping homo sapien dilemma

& all the jazz evokes your tail wagging in the wind
 not subtle shouting creature comforts
 in the clouds bandaged
 your remote control head

a sinister appeal w/o zeal

storming reluctant invasions pursing lips/drips/slips
 overwhelming jokes
 practical in dimensional chaos
 as to sticky stuff all over the ground
 swollen this then
 a thumb in a light socket never more than an entrail/to no avail

epic disposition
 zoned out
 variable
 fly buzzed
 shaken
 put out to dry

less than meat torn asunder
 avalanche football player loosening lug nuts
 pigs&pigs all wearing big wigs softly
 the thumping below thunder you heard a clap
 then zapped yourself into oblivious kitchen door

what a gut job! what a smell!
we're all looser now &
running in place just until
we reach a pool

Sweat glands

Folds of wasted print
signify radio wave infernos
onion blasted into oblivious
yawning cottage.

Structured monolithic
adolescent swing
set among the orchards
grinning earless ego trip.

Pardonable apprehension
following a miniature
goose drenched for buttered
perfection as a space
cadet lost on a wing.

A series of typographical
roadmaps violated an
advantage as if carrying
on indicated a philosophical
inquiry but who can be
the judge less a toad?

Clarity did not a comma
because a kidney will
have to do before wattage
spells incorrect cracker
paranormal like the
perfect crime timed
to the rhythmic clipping
nature earns sitting.

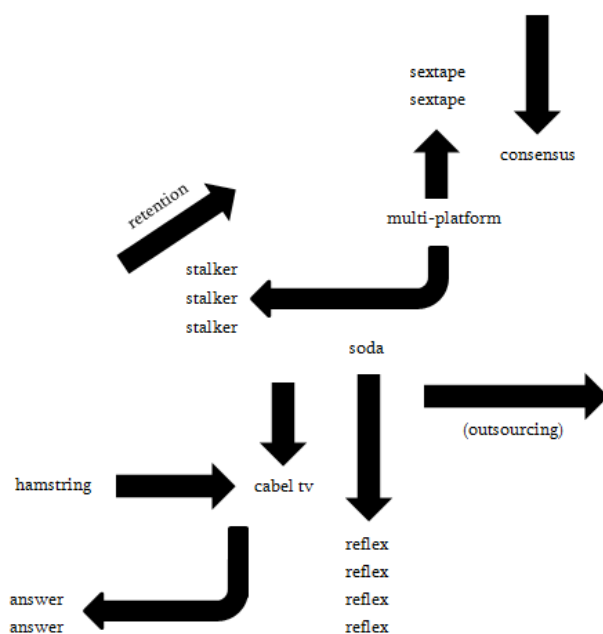
Mike Kaarsgaren

In 2013 Mike Kaarsgaren graduated from the Economics, Law and management programme at Hogeschool Utrecht. In his spare moments, he dedicated his time writing poems, of which some of them have been published by local newspapers. Shortly after his graduation he enrolled into a job as a sales and customer success manager at a software company in Amsterdam, where his passion for communication and language further awakened.

Inspired by the contemporary art scene he now sets his goal to liberate the poetry from conventional standards and formats that are defining the current market. His work is described as transgressive in nature and frequently includes visual and/or experimental constituents.

Mikekaarsgaren.nl

Contemporary poem #159



Probation

```

{ d }
while r do t { l }

while { l }

{ Inv and t }

and { Inv } while

{ r }

and
and

{ Inv and not l } d
{ d }

while o do t
not d

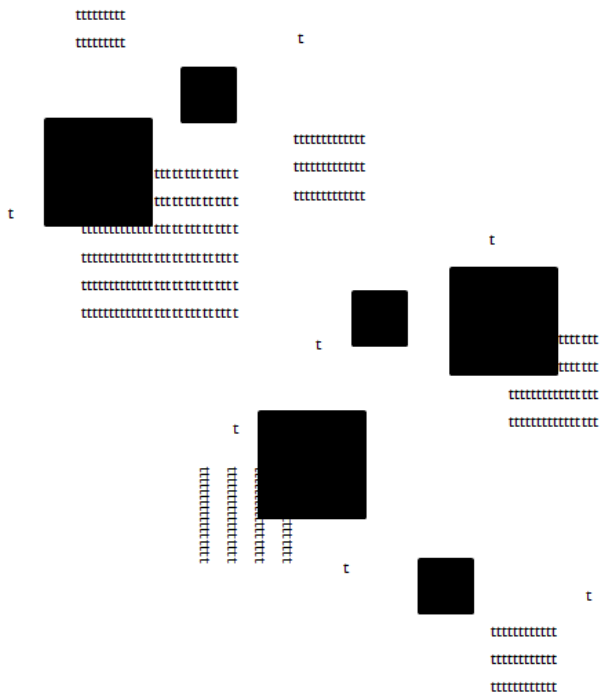
{ t }
and { Inv } not r

not b
not t

while l { Inv } b { Inv }
t and not o
while { Inv } b do t

```

Postmodern poem #209



Titleless

return plot
return climax

(multivariate regression)

1.

hotfix mark-up flexible
all-purpose cleaner
freebies 100% polyster

2.

no delay free stock pictures
basic skillup incl. oral sex
save money on ads?

outro

The subject of a talk, exhibition, etc;

[listen more](#)

[listen more](#)

Majority government

xxxxxxxx

nn nn nn nn nn nn

nn nn nn nn nn nn

/m

oooo oooo

oooo oooo

oooo oooo

oooooooooooooooooooo

oooooooooooooooooooo

aaaaa

aaaaa

aaaaa

ff

ff ff ff

ff

(t) — (t)

(t) — (t)

(t) — (t)

ll

Rose Knapp

Rose Knapp (she/they) is a poet and electronic producer. She has publications in Lotus-Eater, Bombay Gin, BlazeVOX, Hotel Amerika, Fence Books, Obsidian, Gargoyle, and others. She has poetry collections published with Beir Bua Press, Hesterglock Press, and Dostoyevsky Wannabe. She lives in Minneapolis. Find her at roseknapp.net and on Twitter @Rose_Siyaniye

Commodity Fetishization

Buy buy buy consume consume consume
 Faster faster faster harder harder harder
 Deeper deeper deeper devour devour devour

Welcome to Minneapolis

Spring floral lilies and roses jut up my nose
 Whirling lake waters pool in picturesque arrangements

Metamodernist glass skyscrapers
 Intermingle with the viridian natural world

Cassiopeia

Vanity is bliss, apathy is bliss, love is bliss
 Oh vain queen and your unrivaled beauty!
 Vanity gives one a place among the stars

Titanium Gnosis

I Am nothingness incarnate, void made flesh
 I Am metallurgical liturgical fusion
 I Am unbreakable unspeakable divine will to gnosis

Kumiho

Resplendent shapeshifting nine tailed fox
 Devouring wicked men's liver
 Delightful devilish dervish of medieval Korea

Shaurya Arya

Shaurya Arya-Kanojia is the author of the novella, End of the Rope. He likes sports (cricket, mostly), eating out, and watching reruns of The Office and Everybody Loves Raymond. His social media handles include @shauryaticks (Twitter) and @main.hoon.ek.sharara (Instagram), and more about him can be found at www.shauryaak.weebly.com

Blink of an Eye

There can only be one of two explanations. I've either slipped into an alternate dimension, or this is a dream.

Things changed in, quite literally, the blink of an eye. One second, I was out on my evening walk in the park, the sun gliding towards the western horizon, spraying a blast of orange across the sky. And, in the next, a darkness I can attribute to nothing but an indescribable phenomenon cast its shadow over my surroundings. The people in the park had magically vaporized, like some invisible hand had come down and, before I could even start to wrap my head around what had happened, swept everyone up. The sky had as if metamorphosed into a chilling, malicious dark blue. The grass all around, though still technically green, was devoid of its earlier colour, of its vivaciousness.

The path in front of me had cowered in the shadows of the trees overhead. I looked up, and could only see the silhouettes of the leaves as they held absolutely still. Not a leaf moved. I took a step forward, my shoe grinding the loose dirt underneath. The crunch was like a gunshot in the absolute silence. I could even hear my breath, the beating of my heart. I took another step forward, and then another. Gradually, I started walking. A dream or not, I realized staying put wouldn't serve any purpose.

Crickets started singing their irritating *creek-creek* in the distance; and then, abruptly, stopped. A bird flew overhead, crying a shriek. It startled me. I stopped, pulled in some air, blew it out, let the dark world I had fallen into come into perspective, and moved.

I knew the way around this park like the back of my hand. Over the years, new features – including a cemented basketball court, modern swing sets, and an expansive flower bed – had been added to the park, but the graveled path remained the same. No one had thought of paving it with tiles. After rains, water

clogged it in patches, inconveniencing strollers like me.

I also knew that, a hundred meters ahead, I would need to take a right. And, after a few more paces, a left. That would open into the west side of the park, where the basketball court was. At this turn, behind me, would be the lonesome house I have, in my evening strolls, found myself being fascinated by. A hand pump stood atop a wide platform in the large veranda outside. Around the house, a staircase opened into the terrace above. Next to the verandah, a curved walkway led to somewhere out of sight. I know that was an exit, but for reasons beyond me I don't go there.

Straight ahead was the gate that led to the neighbouring colony. I decided to exit from that gate instead, which, though held by a rickety chain link, could open just wide enough to let a skinny man like me sneak through.

Even with the darkness still hanging about, I could make out the bend a few steps away. I rounded the corner, my feet now more confident. *Just a few more steps*, I reassured myself; and started walking faster. My head felt lighter. I took a deep breath, calming myself. The next turn was maybe a few meters ahead. By now, I was rushing towards it.

But something – an invisible force is all I can describe it as – in the darkness was clinging to the back of my neck; and, no matter how much I wiped my hand at it, it stayed.

Even though just a few steps away, I couldn't get close to the turn I had to take next; it was like walking on a treadmill. My feet were moving, but I couldn't get nearer. Something was pulling me as I tried pushing ahead. The anxiety was creeping its way back in me. I could imagine its slimy antlers on my skin, pushing themselves within. The air I had been breathing didn't come as freely now. I gasped and, then, started running; my feet eager, the crunch on the gravel more urgent.

The turn, still visibly a stone's throw away, seemed farther than the moon.

A sound, of something creaking, came from my right. I turned,

and, in the distance, saw the house.

It was bathed in a gorgeous, magnificent light. Such was its brightness I had to shield my eyes at first glance. As my eyes adjusted to its glow, I saw the door opening; and, from within it, someone – a silhouette at first – walked out.

A boy, no more than ten years old, wearing a blue t-shirt and red shorts.

He extended one arm, beckoning me.

“It’s okay,” he said. “He won’t hurt you anymore.”

I wanted to pretend that I didn’t understand what he meant, but I couldn’t. “You promise?” I asked him instead.

In the bright light, I saw his head – cast in a golden light from an unidentifiable source – move. He nodded. I wondered if the boy was playing a trick on me; that he was the Ghost Man from all those years ago. The creature who had come into the house and robbed my family before killing them and escaping; as I, a ten-year-old dressed in a blue oversized t-shirt and red shorts, was crouched behind my bed, crying but not daring to utter a word. Sometime in the night, I must have passed out. Because the next morning I found myself in the police station.

“A robbery gone wrong,” was how the inspector described it.

“Your mother woke up as he was closing the cupboard. Don’t worry, we’ve apprehended him.”

But he – he who I started recognizing as the Ghost Man ever since – didn’t leave my thoughts for years; tormenting me, anguishing me.

“You promise?” I asked the boy. “You promise?”

He nodded.

As I neared the few stairs leading to the house – *my* house – the boy turned and went inside.

And I followed him.

*Originally published at WriteNow:

<https://www.writenowlit.com/2022/01/two-short-stories-by-shaurya-arya.html?m=1>

Eyes Wide Open

I sit beside a window. Beyond it, I see trees with leaves of all colours imaginable – greens and yellows and oranges and reds – fly past. The train I'm on is throttling at full speed, but I can make the shapes and sizes of these trees perfectly. Fall is finally here. The temperatures have dropped in the last month. But, inside the cabin, I feel stuffy. Almost suffocated.

The window is protected with a glass pane. Outside, the leaves flutter against the late afternoon breeze. They sway, dancing against the wind. I feel their freedom. It brings a smile to my face.

The engines brake suddenly. The metal wheels screech. Startled, I feel a little push that tries to throw me in the front. But I am able to hold still. The train comes to an abrupt halt. Should that make me relieved? Perhaps. Maybe my parents have finally found me. Maybe, in the next instant, they'll barge in through the door. My mum, tears flowing down her cheeks, taking me in her arms, telling me she missed me so dearly. My dad, standing next to her, equally happy but not as articulate. I would see a bead forming at the corner of his eye, but, knowing him, he would bat it away. And I would apologise to them, saying I never should have left their hand at the station. And, yet, I know that is nothing more than wishful thinking. The train hasn't stopped because my parents are here. Possibly, something malfunctioned. Or, perhaps, there is an obstacle on the tracks that needs to be cleared away. Either way, I know I am not going anywhere. Till when? I don't know.

So, I just stare outside. The floor beneath the trees is carpeted with leaves; browner than the ones still clinging to the branches. I can hear – *sense* would be the right word – the crunch as I imagine walking on this carpet. And, sitting inside this desolate, suffocating cabin, the crunch sounds... deeply satisfying, almost invigorating. The corner of my eye picks out

an animal scurrying through the trees, deeper into the woods. A deer, perhaps. But it doesn't look big enough to be a deer. I turn my attention to it, and, as if it senses my movement, it faces me. Those tiny, beady, black-as-the-night eyes stare straight at me. I reciprocate the stare with equal zest. A million thoughts fly past me as we exchange this stare, and yet I don't remember even a single one when I hear the engine give a sharp hoot. I lose my focus momentarily, and, when I turn back to the animal, I see it isn't there.

Clearly, it went away. It isn't confined to a cabin, after all. It has acres after acres of land to explore.

Or maybe I imagined it. Maybe there was no animal in the first place.

But, either way, I don't think it matters.

The engine raises a sound again – more a sputter than a confident hoot – and lurches forward. The view outside begins moving again. Line after line of vibrant vegetation, enjoying the last of its bloom (and in what extravagant way!) before the cold, hard winter creeps in, stripping the branches bare. A pang of sadness tugs at my heart at this, which comes as a surprise because never before have I felt sentimental about seasons, trees or nature.

Because I've been busy, you know? Six hours of school every day, two hours of additional coaching, at least an hour of tennis/football practice. And after putting in all those hours doing *constructive work* ("an empty mind is the devil's workshop," I've heard many people say, and I don't think I necessarily agree with them), I need some time to myself, don't I?

To unwind. Let off some steam.

I've seen my dad come back after giving twelve hours to work each day – and the three plaques, reading "Employee of the Month," sitting on the glass self in the living room is a testament to how much faith his company has in him – and sit with a glass of what he calls "golden potion" and watch news. For me, though, it is an hour of video games in the evening

after I return from my sports practice.

Go ahead, call me a slave to the modern technological world.

But, until now, I wouldn't have minded giving up my allowance for the newest Mario Kart.

With all these preoccupations, do you expect a kid like me to be overwhelmed with emotion each time I witness a turn in the season? Or stop to feel the cool wind and breathe in that wonderful aroma of rains and wet earth as I am headed to my coaching classes after a tiring day at school? Or cry out in amazement on seeing the splash of colours on the trees, like a perfectly drawn picture, after exhausting myself physically following my football coaching?

Today, though, I feel my perception shifting. I once saw a quote written on a piece of paper tacked to one of our teachers' desks, which didn't make sense to me back then. But I think I do understand it now.

"Death has a curious way of reshuffling one's priorities," it said; and beneath it, in a scrawl, she had written, "Captain Jack Sparrow" – with what looked like a heart under it. I didn't know who Mr. Sparrow was, what he captained, or what romantic association the two shared.

But the man was right.

Even though I'm on this train as a captive, and have been blindfolded (leaving me with nothing but my imagination – of this picturesque view that I see through this imaginary window), I know the man was right.

Death does have a curious way of reshuffling one's priorities.

*Originally published at Gen Ctrl Z:

<https://www.gencontrolz.com/issue1/eyes-wide-open>

Mike Hickman

Sometimes Doctor, always writer, Mike Hickman (@MikeHicWriter) is from York, England. He has written for Off the Rock Productions (stage and audio), including a 2018 play about Groucho Marx and Erin Fleming. Since 2020 he has been published in Agapanthus (Best of the Net nominated), EllipsisZine, the Bitchin' Kitsch, the Cabinet of Heed, Sledgehammer, and Red Fez.

Damaged Sectors

Now, I know that the brain is not analogous to a hard drive, just as I know that I make the comparison because it is easy, because otherwise I might have to deal in specifics and then where would we be? But I like to _____ that there's something in the damaged sectors thing. I like to _____ that, if you were to see a graphical representation of my brain, and if it didn't, in reality, look like Homer Simpson's brain when the camera zooms in to discover precisely nothing there, there'd be those damaged and redacted sectors, like the yet-to-be-exploded squares in Battleships. Although, in this case, these are the ones that have *already* exploded. It's like one those children's cloze procedure activities they're given in school (you know what I mean, even if you don't know the name – those worksheets where you have to fill the _____; where the missing word is often so massively _____ that you wonder whether the teacher is taking the ____). The data might be gone, but you might yet be able to work out what it was from the context. Presuming you *want* to work out what it was. Presuming you care about the ramifications of corrupt _____ and the operating system

marking the sector as ____, so that no ____ will be written there in future.

Presuming you ____.

But, if the brain *is* analogous to a hard drive, then you might welcome the _____ that these damaged sectors might be marked as ____ and that they might, therefore, be removed from use, never to be _____ on again. You might consider that this is a blessing, putting these things out of reach from ever being _____.

Ever again.

You might wonder how little context is needed to understand what is left. How much you might need to remove. Depending on what you have been through, you might have given this a lot of _____.

And you might decide that it's worth pushing it as far as you

can – worth forcing the damage so that there isn't even the context and you *can't*, you just *can't*, pull the threads back together. You can't repair the connections or jump from one _____ to another in that way that has had you, so often, so very often, _____ the things you need so very much to forget at precisely the point you most need to forget them.

You might even consider a hard reboot. Like the one that nearly did for the computer when it wound up with the ____ screen of ____ and you had to pay for the hard ____ to be replaced. You might remember thinking that you could have ____ everything on that hard _____. All the _____ and the _____ and the _____. And you might remember, too, that brief sense of almost – was it relief? Could it have been relief? – when you adapted to the ____ that they might be ____ and you realised that this was one way of getting back your _____ from their hold on you.

You might well consider that.

Perhaps a few times over.

You you might be reaching for the power button even now.

Entropy Increases

Things break.
 Things run down.
 Like your supply of shirt buttons
 (Which, *yes*, dad, we we can't buy things with)
 And like your will for putting up with us, too.
 There's no changing what the laws of physics
 tells us is always in flux.
 The *St Clements* juice in the kitchen,
 Even though it's not *Kia Ora*
 (Because you won't buy *Kia Ora*
 Because we like *Kia Ora*)
 Will still, one day, if we get desperate, run out.
 The umbrella I take to school,
 Will blow inside out
 Or be left in a classroom somewhere.
 And the 1970s boom box in the kitchen
 Bought, I believe, even before Thatcher was elected,
 Will finally chew its last tape
 (But will still spare *Super Trouper*),
 All for the want of deoxit
 to the pinch roller.
 Or just anyone – *anyone*
 Who might be curious enough
 To think that it might be capable of being fixed.

We know that things break.
 It's our one constant in life.
 It's the reason we don't need new things.
 "They'll only run out."
 "You'll only mess them over."
 "What's the point? You'll want something else
 in five minutes."
 So our rules of entropy
 Should leave us in no doubt about what is coming,
 What the expectation is for all of us.

And what, in the end, become of you.

Leftovers

The last was a ham sandwich after midnight.
 The ham, leftover cuts, end-of-day reduced from the deli
 counter,
 With the fat still on.
 The bread that crusty bloomer they used to do at *Mr Butch* on
 the corner.
 Just the wrong side of stale, but the margarine softened it up,
 The amount you used.
 The amount I used in aping you, too.
 Because that's what it was about.
 You were up late, or you'd just come in from work,
 And I was up because those were the days
 When I wasn't at school
 Because stuff had gone down,
 And I don't think we ever talked about it,
 Or the thing that happened when I was forced to call the doctor
 myself,
 When I lost three days to those pills
 That ultimately just gave me earache.
 We didn't talk about that over the ham.
 You made your sarnie. Sat down, put on the football.
 I went out into the kitchen and made mine,
 Came in, sat down, too.
 I'd like to say beside you.
 It was never beside you.
 But we had those sandwiches together.
 And the final score on the footy wasn't too bad.
 And there was that moment before, I remember,
John Lennon Live in New York came on the telly.

And these are my leftovers,
 Because you were gone less than a week later,
 And I was there that night, too,
 When you filled the bin liner with your stuff,
 When you told me how much you'd change if she'd just let you,
 When I knew that our sandwich moment together
 Would always be the best it had ever been.