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Issue 18

The Fieldstone Review

*Wild
Spaces*





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Oak" by Katie Rosenblatt



About The Fieldstone

The Fieldstone Review is an annual literary journal published digitally by graduate students in the English department at the University of Saskatchewan.

Established in 2006, the *FSR* has published poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and literary reviews by authors from Canada and abroad.

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Please find us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to keep up to date with calls for submissions and new issues!

Note from the Editor-in-Chief

For this year's issue of *The Fieldstone Review*, we invited writers and artists to consider the theme *Wild Spaces*—the landscapes, experiences, and imaginings that exist beyond the boundaries of the familiar or the tame. Certainly, a mountain range or a river can be a wild space, but our contributors remind us that so too can a kitchen, a Chinese restaurant, or a children's T-ball game gone slightly feral. A wild space can even be a body or a self that won't hold still or allow itself to be explained to someone else's satisfaction. And sometimes, a wild space is a state of not knowing what happens next or of being near someone or something you can't quite predict. A wild space, really, is any space free from a script. The pieces in this issue explore the danger, excitement and freedom of going off script. The prose, poetry, and art in this collection invite us to risk discomfort for the sake of discovery and offer a temporary escape from the predictable.

On behalf of *The Fieldstone Review*, I extend my sincere thanks to all of our contributors for sharing their work with us, and to our wonderful editorial team for the care and enthusiasm they brought to this issue. It has been a pleasure to bring these works together.

Sincerely,
Jenna Miller
Editor-in-Chief
The Fieldstone Review



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Fiction





A Wild T-Ball Game

by Marie Halapin

A sandlot sits on the edge of town, the fence rusted, the outfield overgrown, and the bleachers in desperate need of paint and repairs, but it was the cheapest field to rent for the Church League T-Ball, 3-year-old division. Just beyond the outfield fence, a state park flourished where deer, rabbits, squirrels, and the occasional opossum wandered onto the field, delaying the games.

On one sunny Saturday afternoon, the Creekside Baptist Lambs were playing the Kurtston Catholic Penguins. The bleachers were packed with proud parents of future baseball stars, including Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Grandpa Jones, who had joined them for today's opening game to watch his 3-year-old grandson Tommy.

Grandpa Jones, genuinely perplexed, asked his son, "Exactly what does the pitcher do in a T-ball game?"

Mrs. Jones was handing the players grape juice boxes and bags of homemade baseball-bat-shaped sugar cookies, which had unfortunately turned out looking slightly obscene. Mr. Jones ignored his father's question and yelled out to his son, "Okay Tommy, you're gonna do great today. Remember, watch the ball, son!"

The small blond-headed boy turned and waved to his father before taking a juice box, squirting purple juice onto his clean white uniform.

The umpire and both coaches walked out to the pitcher's mound. Father John, the umpire from a neighbouring Catholic church, called out in a loud baritone voice, "Let's all bow our heads in prayer for these fine athletes." After the prayer, he lifted his head and joyfully exclaimed, "Play ball!"

Tommy, the pitcher for the Baptist team, ran onto the field, past the pitcher's mound, past second base, and all the way to the back fence with Coach Smith in pursuit. With a skinny right fielder under his right arm, Coach Smith finally placed Tommy on the pitcher's mound, led the second and third basemen to their bases, and dropped the outfielder in the weeds with a thud. As the coach's brow dripped with sweat and his head dropped low, he walked back to the dugout and grabbed one of Mr. Jones's embarrassing cookies while reexamining his life choices. Little Johnny Stewart was the only player who strolled directly to his proper position in the outfield.

Tapping his son on the shoulder, Grandpa Jones noted, "The coach looks like



e's trying to herd a field of big white butterflies."

Father Paul, coach of the Catholic team, and his assistant, Sister Mary, had their team lined up in the dugout, ready to play. Little Liam was first at bat. He picked up the plastic wiffle bat and began swinging it wildly, bashing Father Paul on the shin. When the Father let a few good swear words slip, the ladies in the front row audibly gasped. He took the bat from the boy, reminding him to swing at the ball, not people.

The ball was placed carefully on the tee, and Liam swung and missed. The umpire roared, "Strike!" Liam's four blond-haired brothers stood in the bleachers and shouted, "The Ump is blind!" and "That swing didn't count; it was a practice!" Then they called, "You got this, Liam!" With a big smile, Liam tried again and missed again. Father Paul lowered the tee, offered a few encouraging words to the young boy, and stepped back. Liam looked at the ball and, with his tongue sticking out the side of his mouth, swung again, hitting the ball a good 3 feet.

All the parents cheered as his boisterous brothers yelled, "Run, Liam, Run!" After looking at his brothers, Liam ran left up the third base line, still swinging the bat wildly. Father Paul hollered, "Drop the bat, drop the bat!" Liam listened and threw the wiffle bat with all his might. It bounced off the priest's head and landed near home plate.

The umpire yelled, "Run the other way, boy! The other way!" Meanwhile, the ball sat on the ground just a few feet in front of Tommy. Mrs. Jones called to her son, "Get your hands out of your pants!" while Mr. Jones shouted, "Tommy, get the ball, get the ball!" Tommy looked up at his parents and waved. Benjamin, the first baseman, ran over and picked up the ball and threw it to the third baseman, who, unfortunately, was too busy picking dandelions to notice.

With Coach Paul's help, Liam found first base while Tommy picked up the ball and handed it to the umpire, Father John, with a smile. During the entire play, little Johnny Stewart in the outfield was petting a fuzzy green caterpillar as it crawled along the fence.

Grandpa Jones looked at his son and asked, "Is this really a sport? I hope it doesn't last nine innings. Did you bring beer?"

"They're just kids learning the basics, Dad," Mr. Jones explained. "It isn't professional baseball; give them a break."

"So, no beer, I guess," Grandpa Jones mumbled.



The next player walked out of the dugout carrying a bat. Father Paul was standing a good six feet away this time. From the bleachers, the crowd heard, “Okay Bradley, now concentrate like we practiced. You got this, bud!”

Grandpa heard a high-pitched voice coming from the back picnic table. “Jr., don’t sit in the dirt in your clean uniform. Get up right now, young man!” The small second baseman stood up, wiped the dust from his hands onto his clean white uniform and adjusted his glasses, getting dirt all over his face. His mother grumbled loudly, “I can’t believe we bought white uniforms for three-year-olds to play in the dirt. What idiot thought that was a good idea? Lambs don’t have to be white!”

Bradley—in his black penguin uniform—stood by the tee looking at the ball. He lifted the bat to his shoulder and declared, “Look, Mommy, there’s a butterfly!” and then dropped his bat on the base and proceeded to chase the butterfly, which was headed for the pitcher. Tommy saw the player running toward him and dashed to the tee, snatched the ball, and began chasing Bradley with it. Parents, coaches, and the umpire yelled instructions to the two boys, but neither boy seemed to care. Grandpa Jones laughed as he thought about how boring professional baseball games could be, stood up, and cheered for the butterfly, “Fly little guy, they’re right behind you!”

Father Paul and Sister Mary left the dugout to help wrangle the butterfly chasers as Liam left first base and ran to second, his brothers urging him on. In the Penguin’s dugout, Susie, the only girl in the league, picked up a bat and hit Charles with it, screaming, “I am not a princess! You take that back!” She was wearing a pink tutu over her black baseball uniform. “I’m a ballerina baseball girl, not a princess!” Upon hearing the cries from her son, Charles’s mother ran into the dugout and took the bat from Susie. Susie was now crying, so her mother joined them in the dugout, yelling and claiming that Charles’s mother hurt her child. The umpire, ignoring the hubbub in the dugout, got Tommy back on the pitcher’s mound and the ball back on the tee.

The two mothers were soon brawling in the Penguin’s dugout, hitting each other with wiffle bats. The hollow sound from the plastic bats bouncing off the women’s heads could be heard in the back bleachers. The battling women’s husbands, who had run down to separate their wives, quickly joined in the fight. As Father Paul and Coach Smith tried to stop the fight, everyone noticed a pungent odour wafting toward the bleachers. Coughing, gagging, and covering their noses, people wondered where the smell was coming from. Grandpa Jones discovered the cause first and burst into laughter.

Little Johnny Stewart had been wandering back and forth along the rusted fence, which separated the playing field from the state park. Quietly, he had listened to the



birds in the bushes and watched a bunny run under the fence as his enthusiasm for wild animals far exceeded any interest in baseball. He was excited to find a cute little black-and-white kitty and had picked it up by its soft, long, fluffy tail. He ran across the field toward his parents in the bleachers, screaming the entire way, “Mommy, mommy! I found a kitty! Can I keep it? It needs a bath, but it is so cute. Can we keep it? Please Mommy! I wanna name it Penguin!”

Horried, Mrs. Stewart leapt to her feet and began yelling, “Johnny, drop the skunk! Drop the skunk! It is not a kitty, put it down!” The little outfielder, with a smile that beamed from ear to ear, ignored his mother’s command and continued his journey to show her the cute kitty.

One of the mothers yelled, “Rabies! Run from the rabid skunk!” The bleachers shook as mothers cleared oblivious children from the field with the efficiency of a tornado in a trailer park. Children flew into cars which then sped out of the parking lot.

Father Paul turned towards the commotion and got elbowed in the eye by the backswing of the fighting mothers. Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Jones were running onto the field to grab Tommy, who had picked up the bat and was using it like a golf club to hit the ball around the bases, and Sister Mary unzipped a small pocket on the side of the equipment bag and pulled out a flask. She sat down, opened the flask, and took a long, slow drink.

Grandpa Jones was the last person still on the bleachers, standing and cheering for little Johnny, who was still holding the skunk as his mother, father, and both coaches chased after the giggling boy. Johnny wasn’t quick, but he was agile, twisting and turning to elude the pursuing adults.

Dust flew as Mrs. Stewart slid to her son—like a baseball player diving into third base—and grabbed him, allowing the skunk to escape, though not before it left one more rancid gift behind. Mrs. Stewart carried the crying boy at arm’s length as she stormed to her car.

The field now cleared and the parking lots almost empty, Grandpa Jones walked down to his son’s car, looked at his grandson, and proudly stated, “Tommy, that was the most exciting baseball game I have ever seen. It was a wild time. I’ll be here next week to cheer you on.”

Looking out the back window, Grandpa Jones watched the Stewart family open all their car windows as they drove away. Inside the Jones’s car, loud lecturing was heard two blocks away.



All Are Welcome at Writing Group

by Miranda Jensen

All are welcome at writing group. That was their first mistake, if you ask Susan, and you should, because she's the only *real* writer here—a fact that everyone accepts but no one states, not even Susan, because she wasn't raised to boast. On the contrary, she was raised to tell the truth.

"Your story lacks... weight." Susan taps the tips of her painted pointer finger and thumb together, and the rest of the circle waits for more, but she's said her piece. It's only in the spirit of camaraderie that she spoke at all.

A third of the attendees fidget on a tasteful bamboo variety of Vietnamese plastic stools, while Clarice looks to Betty, the group leader, for permission to speak. Apparently, it's one of the writing group rules to swallow feedback in silence, and sure, Clarice would be happy to behave if she had any fucking clue what Susan was talking about. More often than not, no one does, so Betty folds her hands together like a prayer and says, "You may pose a question of clarification, Clarice." The papaya trees wrestle the wind over her tinny voice, and Walter grunts at the symphony of motorbike horns from the street below.

"Betty told Clarice that she can ask a question!" Tina pauses her knitting to shout into Walter's good ear. "To clarify what Susan said!"

Walter mumbles something along the lines of "What in god's name did Susan say now?" but Tina's returned to her child-sized beanie, a recreation of the Vietnamese flag for her darling grandson in North Carolina, whose third birthday is approaching all too swiftly. Of course, the kids still haven't made any plans to visit Saigon, so Tina will have to risk mailing all his knitwear (and the poem she wrote imagining Jacob's first baptism, because her daughter, for some strange, silly reason, decided against organizing one).

"I just...well, I don't think that I understand your critique, Susan?" Clarice doesn't mean to pose her words as a question, but her courage falls short and her voice hop-skip-jumps an octave or two. To be fair, it's been a while since she's read her fiction in a workshop, and even though she has a publication to her name—much more than any of these other expats, Susan included, can boast—sobriety has done one hell of a number on her ego.

Clarice joins the fidgeters all the same, however, because this is her first week at writing group, her first month in Vietnam, in fact, and she'd like to end the day



with at least one more friend than she started with.

Susan swaps her pointer to her middle finger, tapping along. “The words you use, Clarice, are insufficient *emotionally*.”

“I don’t know,” David feels obliged to pipe up on behalf of the new girl, knocking his shoulder against her bare one. The Vietnamese sun will tan all that pale porcelain soon enough unless she starts hiding beneath an umbrella like his darling wife. “I felt sad,” he says somberly. “Especially during that scene in the vineyard.”

A chorus of hums in agreement follows, and Clarice scans the circle, counting their approval, until her gaze latches back onto Susan directly across from her.

“You felt sad because she told you to be,” Susan tells David, “but a true writer surprises us with feeling.”

“Wow.” Fanny blows out a breath beside Betty. “That’s profound, Susan.”

“Yes,” Susan agrees.

“Which scene was the one in the vineyard? There were too many.” Walter’s face is as sour as it is sagging.

“The part where the young fellow cuts his hand and talks about his father’s passions as a gay gigolo!” Tina shouts.

“I believe the correct terminology is ‘sugar baby,’” Margaret chimes in without looking up from her clipboard.

“Sugar baby!” Tina echoes, for Walter’s sake.

“No, actually, uhm, Fritz’s father wasn’t paid for his—”

Betty so dislikes interruptions, but the rules maintain harmony: “The beauty of writing group is that your story speaks, indeed, *sings* for itself,” she tells Clarice gently. “Now, let’s move on—”

“But—” Clarice winces. “I’m sorry, but I’m still confused. How exactly does one surprise their reader with feeling, Susan?” She regrets her follow-up the moment she’s finished, watching Susan’s spine straighten as if she’s somehow shoved a few more sticks up her ass.

“Is that not the writer’s task?”



Clarice decides then and there that whatever aspirations she had of making friends have flown far out the window.

“Yes, we all are faced with quite the journey,” Betty cuts in with her calmest cadence, swirling her arm forward to dispel the negative energy planting seeds in the circle. “Now, we are due for a break, but before we seek to satiate and relieve ourselves, I have promising news to share.”

The group’s sandaled feet turn toward Betty with interest, and some alarm, while Margaret’s eyes dart up from her clipboard at the same time as Tina’s needles fall into her lap, but Clarice continues searching Susan’s face for answers she expects she’ll never get. Not that she needs them, necessarily; her writing will be just fine without whatever “weight” it supposedly “lacks,” but Susan can’t get away with the last word. Susan doesn’t get to make a shitshow of Clarice’s first impression.

“A fellow traveler of the mind’s infinite realms has a connection to the *Sài Gòn* US Consulate Agriculture Attaché’s wife,” Betty continues. “She told me that soon they will gather to host Olivia Harte in a private event, and that one of us may attend as a representative of the writing group.”

Clarice’s stare breaks at the name of her old friend—or rather, old classmate—but with the entirety of the circle raising their brows in delight, she doesn’t understate herself: “Livvy’s coming to Vietnam?” She smiles. “What a treat. It’ll be so nice to see a familiar face.”

For perhaps the first time since the writing group began, Fanny looks away from Susan to turn her attention Clarice’s way. “You know *Olivia Harte*?” she stage whispers.

“Oh, well, yes. She and I attended the same MFA program.”

David lets out a low whistle and bumps the new girl’s bare shoulder again; if she’s got that fancy degree and even fancier friends, it’s no wonder Betty selected her from the long waitlist after Jonny moved up North.

“Then surely ‘Livvy’ must have already invited you to the event?” Susan asks Clarice, her pursed lips barely moving.

“We’re...She and I have lost touch recently, but maybe it’s time to reconnect.”

“Are you suggesting that you should be the representative of the writing group?” Susan guffaws, barely containing her snort. “Why, it’s only your first week, Claire!”



“Clarice,” she corrects with a pinched expression, and it’s sad—much sadder than her piece—how personally she seems to have taken Susan’s feedback. Thick skin is a necessary skill of any good writer, of course, and Clarice will come to learn that when she queries agents and her inbox inevitably overflows with rejections. Or more likely, no responses at all. Susan feels for her already.

“Surely, it ought to be an American,” Margaret says gruffly.

“Well, actually, I am.”

“What?” Walter cuts in. “You’re going to have to speak up, sweetie. I’ve lost almost all my hearing.”

Clarice swallows, hoping Tina might come to her aid, but she’s left to fend for herself. “I—I said I am an American! Or, I guess, I’m still technically a citizen, if not a resident.”

“But you’re—”

“Not Vietnamese,” Clarice says flatly, tacking on before anyone can ask: “My dad’s parents were Mongolian.”

“Since our writing group is a mosaic of wanderers from the fifty states,” Betty cuts in before Walter’s racism scares off their newest friend, whose aura shines like a starstorm, “I think any one of us would be a wonderful representative. Why don’t we take fifteen minutes of meditation and think about who we’d like to go on our behalf, and then after our second half of readings, I’ll invite us all to an anonymous vote.”

David’s knees crack when he stands, stepping over the new girl’s bare legs to grab himself a glass of Betty’s homemade *nước chanh*—it almost tastes like summer in Tennessee, though he doesn’t miss home, not even a little. Everyone here agrees, of course, that Vietnam is paradise. A true haven far, far away from those idiots in the White House. Margaret says as much to Clarice when she helps herself, and only herself, to a glass of *nước chanh*.

“You were right to leave. Hoi Chai Minh City is so much better than anything back in the States.”

“Sorry?” Clarice tries not to laugh. “What city?”

“I mean, it’s heaven. Just make sure to choose your stalls carefully at the market. Or



better yet, order delivery from Annam Gourmet.” Margaret pulls out a flask from her linen pants’ deep pocket and pours a healthy serving into her *nước chanh*. This time, she offers it to Clarice, and it takes her too long to remember to say no.

Meanwhile, Fanny and Susan share a hushed conversation by the painting of the boy playing flute on the buffalo, both smiling tightly at Betty’s maid, Tran, as she dusts the shrine to Buddha behind them.

“It’s got to be you, Susan,” Fanny agrees, her blunt bob swishing against her stretched earlobes as she nods. “No one writes like you.”

Susan sucks on the front of her teeth. “Mm. I can’t even remember the last time I got a real critique.”

Nước chanh in hand, Clarice overhears Susan’s words and steps toward the pair. “Well then, I hope I can be helpful today. Maybe I can give you something... specific.” Clarice turns to the maid before Susan can respond. “*Sin chào toy ten la* Clarice.”

“Oh, no need for all that, dear,” Fanny says with a laugh, patting the poor girl on the back. “Tran speaks English!”

“I’m trying to learn Vietnamese. I’ve only just started, but—”

“Don’t bother,” Susan cuts in, saving the girl the time she wasted. “You won’t need it.”

Clarice wonders if anyone notices how her top lip begins to twitch, how it persists well after the group gathers in the balcony once more, the windows of the neighboring high-rises refracting unforgiving sun rays, and Susan flaunts her extensive vocabulary in a “prose-poem,” more purple than poetic.

“God, Susan.” Fanny claps profusely when she finishes.

“She sure can write,” Walter mumbles.

Betty hums her agreement, though as ever, she’s wary of the shadows in Susan’s eyes when she dips her head in thanks. “As always, I’m humbled by your praise, and if you’d consider me as your representative, I’d love to—”

“Actually,” Clarice interjects. “I wonder if you could use some moments of... simplicity.”



“Simplicity?” Susan repeats her words with batting lashes.

“It means to keep things simple.”

“I know what it means, of course, I just don’t see its relevance.”

Clarice leans forward, clasping her hands together; maybe that *nước chanh* had some of Margaret’s liquid courage after all. “Your figurative language could be accentuated, emboldened even, by sentences that don’t make the reader work so hard to understand them.”

“I expect a certain level of intelligence from my reader,” Susan responds smoothly.

“Really? Because it sounds like you think you’re better than them.” Clarice quickly amends her mistake when she spots Susan’s crossed legs turning toward Betty. “I know you don’t actually think that. But your writing doesn’t give much leniency.”

“Your opinion is noted.”

“And welcome,” Betty adds in a soft voice. “We thank you for joining us today, Clarice. Now, I believe, Fanny is next?”

Before Fanny can read any more of that dull, depressing memoir of hers, David’s already turning down his hearing aid, his shoulder leaning once more against the new girl’s bare arm, and this time staying put. “Nice work,” he whispers. “You’ve got balls to challenge Susan like that.”

Her answering smile is shy but grateful, just the sort of expression his first wife wore when he first asked her out for dinner. “I was only trying to help.”

“I could use your help,” David says with just the right amount of suggestion in his voice. “If you want to come to my place after writing group?”

“Excuse me, Fanny, but I’m not sure everyone is listening,” Susan speaks up, and Fanny is grateful that someone is looking out for her, waiting for both David and Clarice’s full attention before she continues:

“And that’s when the doctors said my husband had high blood pressure. The room spun. My knees went weak. ‘Oh no,’ I said. ‘What are we to do, Donny?’ ‘Why, we’ll be just fine, sweetheart,’ he told me, as confident as ever. ‘But I’m so worried, Donny!’ Then he took my hand, and I knew everything was going to be just fine...”



Walter doesn't bother to even try to listen until they all move on to David's turn, because David's the only one in writing group with a novel worth reading: a set of female triplets sold into cyberslavery on the Thai market. David won't admit to it, but his characters' Asian features and pleasant personalities are inspired by his wife, no doubt. He's just getting to a good part—a fight scene against a cyberlord with lighthammers—when Betty tells David his ten minutes are up.

“But I only got a few more pages in the chapter,” David begs, but Betty takes her timing as seriously as she does her crystals.

“If you read more, you won't have time for feedback.”

David shakes his head back and forth before launching into the next part.

“Alright,” Betty says five minutes later, after Babe 1, Babe 2.5, and Chandra have been tied to a pole by the cyberlord Achilles and forced to escape by performing various acrobatic moves. “Your time has elapsed, David. We must return to our discussion of representatives. Is everyone ready to—”

“I'd like to say something.” Susan raises her hand after she's already spoken. “As you all know, I'm a diligent note taker, and if you were to vote for me, I would be sure to keep track of everything Olivia Harte says and report back to writing group in detail.”

“I don't know, Susan. I'm not sure you're a great representation of us,” David says, scratching his beard. “Whereas...” he turns to the new girl. “Well, you've got the right look. Young and—”

“Maybe Betty should go,” Clarice offers instead. “Seeing as she's our leader.”

“Only in spirit.” Betty shakes her head. “Hierarchy has no place in writing group.”

“I could go,” Margaret says, barely looking from her clipboard.

“Or me!” Tina waves her half-finished Vietnamese beanie.

“I don't want to,” Walter says before anyone gets any ideas. “Olivia Harte's writing is garbage.”

“That's a good point!” Tina pats Walter's shoulder appreciatively. “We should pick based on who's the biggest Olivia Harte fan! Now, how many books does she have —”



“Five,” Fanny supplies. “And I’ve read them all. So, I could loan them to you, Susan.”

Clarice scoffs. “She can’t possibly read them all before Livvy comes.”

“I’m an above-average reader, actually—”

“Whoever goes,” David cuts off Susan. “They should bring some sort of souvenir or something that represents Vietnam. That way, Olivia will have something to remember us by.”

“She’s not meeting *us*; she’s meeting one of us,” Margaret drawls.

Betty clears her throat softly. “A *representative* of us.”

“That’s a good idea, David!” Tina sets her hands beneath her chin. “Now what on earth should we give Miss Harte? One of those hats?”

“How about chopsticks?” David proposes.

“No, it should definitely be coffee beans,” Susan says as if her word is law.

Clarice can’t help but respond: “Actually, Livvy doesn’t drink coffee.”

“Oh, I know!” Fanny exclaims, jumping to her feet and making Walter flinch. “One of those silk robes, oh, what do they call it?”

“Kimonos are Japanese.” Margaret rolls her eyes.

“We could ask Tran?” Clarice says when she spots the maid dusting a crimson silk lantern. Betty smiles brightly at Clarice and calls Tran over; she had quite an array of helpers to choose from when she was hiring staff to tend to her sanctuary and garden her spiritual home, but Betty found true trust in Tran’s eyes and hasn’t once regretted her choice since (with the exception of one minor incident involving a mysteriously absent set of gold Brahma bangles).

After they explain the souvenir conundrum, as well as the details of Olivia Harte’s literary fame, the entirety of the writing group turns to Betty’s maid for her wisdom.

“You must get her a *sầu riêng*, miss,” Tran says without missing a beat.

“A what?” Walter grunts.



“A *sow reen*!” Tina shouts.

Susan looks away. “I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“Since you don’t speak Vietnamese,” Clarice retorts, tilting her head with a grin. “That’s not all that surprising.”

“It’s a kind of fruit. Very special, with a strange smell and sweet flavor.”

Betty offers a smile of understanding. “You mean a durian, Tran.”

“We must get it for Olivia,” Fanny gushes. “Don’t you think she’d like it?”

Susan bristles when her number one fan turns to Clarice for input. “Yes, Fanny.” Clarice smiles. “I think Livvy will love it.”

The writing group sits back, all of them content with their plan, and after Betty leads a vote, most of them content with their representative. But in the end, Clarice can’t find a durian that doesn’t smell like rotten eggs whisked with straight-up gasoline, so she settles for a small figure of Ho Chi Minh, and thank fuck, Livvy does seem to like it, smirking to herself as she signs a book for Clarice.

“That’s sweet of you and your writing group.” She passes the book to Clarice, pushing the figurine to the side.

“And they wanted me to let you know that you’re welcome to come,” Clarice says with a laugh, as if she can’t believe she’s saying this either. “We meet again tomorrow.”

“So sweet. Thanks so much for coming.”

“Of course. It’s great seeing you, Livvy.” Clarice walks away, with the book to her chest, and it’s only after she’s walked in a loop past the bright yellow facade of the Saigon Central Post Office, down Nguyen Hue, and back to the opera house to buy a bahn mi in front of the People’s Committee that she realizes that Olivia didn’t recognize her at all.



The Coffee Pot in the Graduate Lounge

by Indiana Humniski

The Coffee Pot in the Graduate Lounge, spout.
towards the
Part-time percolator; *full-time terrarium.* higher,
The limescale acts as a trellis, tempting gangrenous grime higher,

The blooming cyanobacteria, something I had presumed was only confined to lake shores, is the ruler over this contained space. Brilliant periwinkle fades (if one could use the word *fade* to describe this ordinance) into toxic shades of turquoise—a palette of poisonous allure. These bitter blues flavour the lingering coffee grounds that float upon the murky water. One would assume the primary shade of growth to be green, but the pot denies easy categorizations. The leaf-like petals of pink mould unfurl against the glass, traced lovingly with violet spores. The cranberry shade at the centre seems as sour as the taste of the real berries.

Spilled sachets of *Splenda* pepper the space around the pot, teasing my over-curious tastebuds into a frenzy. I wrestle with the part of me thirsting to pull the pot from its hibernation. A piece of myself – perhaps *all* of myself – yearns to lick around the rim just to test if the dotty mould would travel as quickly from my mind onto my lips, into my throat. I ache to push this hunger into a singular limb, something easier to sever.

It is a wonder that no one has thought to clean it.
It seems that students are content to leave things as they stand, or rather, as they stink.

The pot possesses no roots, yet this infestation has been developing since time immemorial. The stench began as a gentle malaise, a waft of mildew; the smell existed alongside the unclaimed woollen sweater that lingered happily in its own humidity during the summers of its prolonged abandonment. Fibres festered; bacteria bloomed. In that dim, windowless room, the heat of the Sun tip-toed like a distant, harsh-handed relative. Beneath the seeming security of the locked door, the rays shimmied through, flashy, saffron fringes swaying.

Thus, as if competing
in a months-long game of limbo,
the Sun crept into the dark, dark room.



Orange light cradled the metal filing cabinet, warming it ever so slightly. The tin held onto heat. Through this conduit for categorization, the Sun stretched its tendrils of summer lightning towards the “empty” pot: a vessel devoid of drinkable fuel yet full of abundance. The graduate department’s well-worn edition of *Hamlet* served as a pedestal for the plant-filled, potion-holder. Its pages, yellowed with age and transparent with sweaty hands of yore, transferred the creeping heat at breakneck speed; it was an *antic* amplification, sans the snow.

As summers compiled, the smell grew from waistline trends of low-rise to high-rise and back again. Navels were peeked at and put away while the pot remained in a state of stasis. A bead of brown, syrupy and congealed, still rested on the spout, forever in a state of post-pouring, as if one had entered the room moments prior, they could have had a cup. This was, of course, not the case. I did not know if the amber bead was even *coffee* or, rather, some slippage of shit from something living inside the water filter. In the quietest hours of editing papers – and only when I was alone – I swore that I could hear a faint tapping sound against the machine’s plasticky backing. Tiny taps promised even tinier paws. If ribbons of algae could grow in the happenstance jungle of the coffee pot, perhaps something else – some scurrying creature – could asexually appear as well.

Like the pot, the stench became a part of the room. I yearned to peel it back, to see the students that it had witnessed before my time. It was not flowery like the vintage wallpaper but still held a creamy, lactic note within its aroma matching the colour of the walls. The object, an alumnus itself, sat vigil over our sweating work sessions; I wondered if the pot compared our syntax with the ones who sweated (and swore) before us. There was no visible corner to tempt into submission, to tease away like the wallpaper that shirked from the planes of the room. Instead, the smell hung mid-air like a clothesline, something that a student could snatch a piece of and claim it was theirs and theirs alone: an oversized t-shirt, a stretched-out sports bra, a pair of red panties. The smell fit the size of the English department’s student body, sprawling and resplendent in its own dominance yet completely unique, fitting each student’s nose in an entirely new way.

The smell’s long-fingered reach swept the nostrils first, but it only grasped the brain of the lucky few. For those who chose to linger in it, the stink clutched the brain stem, like a bouquet, held in a rotting grip. For some, it bordered on sweet; for others, it was as pungent as gorgonzola, as revolting as cilantro; there was something genetically amiss about the flavour – soapy and antiseptic. For some, it was not to their taste – much like the literature they read within those walls. Some resisted. Others *feasted*.

I sat there at times, leaning over the light of my laptop as if it were a grow-lamp. My



eyes remained the only mucous membranes open for infiltration; one had to sacrifice some comfort for the cause of careful prose polishing. My well-loved machine's halogen glow did not deter the smell; rather, it encouraged it. My hands reached for the dimmer – *F5* – like a lover: quick, desperate hands.

The thin cloth, tented over my nose, did nothing to push away the punchy aroma. The cover acted as a mirror, reflecting my own lunch-scented breath into my nostrils. The ham-on-rye from the dining hall was the furthest from fresh. The meat had been inevitably blended and cut into a uniformly sad square. The slapdash spread of mayonnaise was mechanical, covering the bread from corner-to-corner as a bricklayer prepares a square for stacking. But, evermore disappointing, was the lack of abstract newness. The wilted lettuce was as unsatisfactory as an amateur kiss – similarly wet and flavourless. This sanitised splash of green was pale, lifeless. I yearned for the earthy taste at the base of garden carrots, imperfect vegetables that refused to let you forget their origins as they smeared your lips with mud.

Ravenous, I bared my freckled face to the glorious wild of the room. The fabric shield of my shirt shrunk away in horror, buttons gasping at my unladylike desire for dirt. Newly naked and open, I drank in my fill, imagining the spores tickling my tonsils, basking in my bronchi.

I wondered what colours would bloom inside me, where the tendrils would take hold.

My lunch rose in my stomach as I breathed in the rotting air, higher,
higher,
towards the
spout.

The Dumpling Woman

by Victor Wang

1. *The Restaurant*

慢慢吃, the name of the restaurant, is printed in gold lettering with a shimmer fit for royalty. If you look closely enough, you can see that the paint has started to wither and chip, and the red sign beneath has been painted over by hand, hanging onto its colour through sheer stubbornness. This is the Dumpling Woman's restaurant after all.

Below the sign, the window is covered with newspaper, taped together at the edges; every gust of wind finds its way beneath the exposed corners. In the centre of the window is the front page from a week ago, a new report on the Wuhan virus that threatens to make its way into Canada. Maybe it was the red and gold of the sign that reminded some of a Chinese flag, and why they decided to take matters into their own hands. They must not have known that 慢慢吃 is just a restaurant, and it looks like they only realized after throwing their first, second, and third rocks. To the right of the front door, a crinkled page of comic strips is taped over that day's top sports story. The Maple Leafs lost again.

Just as I reach for the door, it swings open, and I'm hit by the rich aroma of pork and onions. Two old Chinese women walk out slowly, their eyes barely at the height of my chest, scanning me from head to toe. I step aside to let them through. Even as they disappear into the parking lot, they take turns glancing back at me, whispering in each other's ears.

With a shake of my head, I walk into 慢慢吃. The air inside the restaurant is humid, and the smell even stronger and more intoxicating. Before I have the chance to look around, I am greeted by the server, dressed in a red shirt and ill-fitted black pants, “你好.” They look at me with a slight smile, exposing green braces, their Chinese hesitant. “Hi, I'll have a table for one,” I respond in English. The server's smile relaxes, relieved to hear me speak English. They take a menu and lead me through the restaurant to my table.

As I slip between chairs, I immediately recognize the Dance Crew. They are sprawled out at the table closest to the window, a group of ten Chinese grandparents from the neighbourhood, all wearing the same jackets and visors. They meet every morning at the local park, dancing to music played through two loudspeakers. When locals complain about the noise, the Dance Crew simply invites them to join. From across the room, they look at me with curious eyes. The



server's voice shakes me awake. They offer to explain the menu, but I say it's alright and ask if I can have some water instead of tea.

The restaurant is smaller than I remember, but its decor hasn't changed much. The soft white wallpaper is accented with pink lily flowers — though some sections have started to peel away. A TV hangs in the back corner, playing an episode of *Sun Wukong*, a Chinese drama about the mythical monkey king. In my hands, the menu feels the same, still a single laminated sheet with a short list of dumplings, side dishes, and Chinese liquor. No English whatsoever.

“Here's your water. Are you ready to order?” The server pulls out a small notepad. I scan the menu and point to two dumplings listed halfway down. “These are the ones with pork, right? Not with shrimp?”

When the server goes to the kitchen window to hand off the ticket, I hear someone yell out my order in Chinese. From my seat, I lean my body to peek into the kitchen, where I see Wendy standing by the boiling pots. She is short and bulky, still wearing the same buzzed hair. She grips a ladle in her hand like a warrior about to strike. Suddenly, she throws her arms down into one of the pots and out of my view. A moment later, her hand is back in the air, the ladle now overflowing with glistening, milky dumplings. She transfers them to a plate with care and pokes her head through the kitchen window to yell for the server, who rushes to bring the plate to the Dance Crew. “慢慢吃,” I hear the server say.

My stomach growls at me. I haven't had fresh dumplings in months. As I hear Wendy yell again in the kitchen, I think about the Dumpling Woman. I wonder what she is doing now, what she is thinking about. I try to picture her face.

2. *The Dumpling Son*

The Dumpling Son loved to eat dumplings. Even as a six-year-old, he could eat twenty all by himself. When too hot, the Dumpling Son would carefully pierce each dumpling with his chopsticks, letting the steam rise to his face. He loved crafting his own dipping sauce, throwing together an umami-filled concoction of vinegar and soy sauce, sometimes even chili oil and oyster sauce if they were within reach. The Dumpling Son savoured every dumpling on his plate until it was empty and then asked for more.

慢慢吃 was his second home. When the restaurant first opened, the Dumpling Son sat at the table closest to the kitchen, working through his homework while the Dumpling Woman prepared for the evening rush. Whenever he had a question, he would yell through the kitchen window, and the Dumpling Woman would blurt



back an answer. In return, he taught the Dumpling Woman new English words that he learned in school, and she would try her best to repeat them.

During evening service, the Dumpling Woman couldn't watch over the Dumpling Son as closely. He would run through the restaurant like a small bull, weaving under table legs as the Dumpling Woman chased after him with an embarrassed smile. A group of elderly Chinese men and women, who ate at the restaurant every day, would play with the Dumpling Son while the Dumpling Woman worked. They tried to teach him Chinese, but he loved most when they would all dance together instead. He referred to his new friends as the "Dance Crew." By the end of the night, tired from all his dancing and laughing, the Dumpling Son would fall asleep on one of the dining tables, the Dumpling Woman finding his head and arms folded together like dumpling skin.

By the time the Dumpling Son started middle school, he would refill tea, wash dishes, and even take orders. The Dumpling Son could just barely hold a conversation in Chinese, but he could write all of the most important characters on the menu by heart: 猪 for pork, 葱 for onion, 饺子 for dumpling. It was around this time that the Dumpling Woman hired Wendy.

Wendy was much younger than the Dumpling Woman and had just moved to Canada to join her husband and daughter. Though Wendy had a quick temper and perpetual frown, the Dumpling Woman welcomed her happily. The Dumpling Son, on the other hand, never learned how to get along with Wendy. He didn't like that Wendy worked so close to the kitchen window because he couldn't speak with the Dumpling Woman like he had before. He especially didn't like it when Wendy lectured him for serving customers too slowly, or for making mistakes on his tickets. Over time, the Dumpling Son stopped showing up to his shifts. When the Dumpling Woman asked him why, he simply insisted that he was too busy with school.

The Dumpling Son was a good student, and he managed to get into a top-ranked high school outside of his neighbourhood. On the night of his middle school graduation, the Dumpling Woman prepared a feast at the restaurant for the Dumpling Son, Wendy, and the Dance Crew. When the Dumpling Son tried to convince the Dumpling Woman to allow him to attend the same school as his friends, Wendy jumped in and told him that his education was the reason his mother worked so hard, and that he should be grateful and focus on getting the highest grades. Before the Dumpling Woman could speak, the Dumpling Son jumped out from his seat and threw his chopsticks to the ground. He started to yell, his words slurred red. The Dumpling Woman reached her hand out, asking him to sit down and repeat what he said in Chinese. But the Dumpling Son only raised his



voice, weaponizing the English words he never got to teach his mother. With a final scream, the Dumpling Son ran out of the restaurant, not stopping until the 慢慢吃 sign disappeared from his view. Tears poured from his eyes. He pictured the Dumpling Woman's face, realizing he no longer knew enough Chinese words to express everything he felt. His anger now belonged to a language his mother couldn't understand.

At his new school, the Dumpling Son found it hard to make friends and hated the long commute. When he came home each night, he would find his house empty except for a plate of dumplings on the kitchen table, tagged with a sticky note with instructions for heating. The note was written in Chinese, etched with the Dumpling Woman's distinct handwriting. The first time he read the note, the Dumpling Son crumpled it in his hand. There was so much he wanted to say to the Dumpling Woman — he wanted to ask her if he could switch schools, to get her advice on making new friends, to tell her about the clubs he wanted to join, to ask for her help with his math homework. But the Dumpling Woman would only come home every day at midnight, long after the Dumpling Son had already fallen asleep. She always left a plate of dumplings and a note, but with time, the Dumpling Son stopped bothering to heat up his plate. Sometimes, he left the dumplings completely untouched.

When the Dumpling Son eventually found a group of friends, he was excited to invite them to 慢慢吃, feeling sure that the Dumpling Woman's food would impress. As they walked up to the restaurant, the Dumpling Son pointed at the restaurant's sign with pride, explaining that the name of the restaurant meant "eat slowly." The Dumpling Son opened the front door eagerly and the scent of pork and onions flowed outwards into their faces.

"What is that smell?"

From the back of the group, one of the Dumpling Son's friends giggled into another's ear. The Dumpling Son tried to ignore them as he led his friends through the restaurant. At the corner of the room, he spotted the Dance Crew, who winked at him with a smile. They never gave up their favourite seat in the restaurant, but that night, the best table by the front window was set up just for the Dumpling Son and his friends. The Dumpling Woman had prepared the cleanest tablecloth and placed just enough teacups and bowls. In the centre of the table, beside the condiment tray, was a slip of paper: 慢慢吃's menu, in English, handwritten by the Dumpling Woman.

While the Dumpling Son helped everyone settle in, his friends rummaged through the condiments, peeking into each jar and scrunching their noses, staining the



menu with vinegar and chili oil. Taking the menu back in his hands, the Dumpling Son volunteered to order for the table, trying to move the night along. But when Wendy yelled their order in the kitchen, a few of his friends snickered, and the Dumpling Son felt his face burn.

When their food arrived, the Dumpling Son served a bit of each dish to his friends. They poked at the food on their plates, taking hesitant bites. When the Dumpling Son insisted that the food tasted great, one of his friends asked if the dishes were made with MSG. They explained that MSG gave them headaches and stomach problems. As one spoke, others around the table slowly pushed their plates away. The Dumpling Son didn't know how to respond, and the pace of his own bites slowed down, too. He wanted to refute his friends, to speak up for himself and the Dumpling Woman, but his words were caught between the soggy, half-eaten dumpling in his throat.

By the end of the meal, many plates were barely touched, while others were littered with broken dumpling skins, drowned in soy sauce. No one drank their tea. The Dumpling Son looked through the kitchen window and saw the Dumpling Woman for the first time that night. Her forearms were coated with flour, her forehead glistened from fatigue. She looked at him with kind eyes that the Dumpling Son could not meet. His friends decided to get fast food before heading home, and they asked the Dumpling Son if he would join. The Dumpling Son wanted to stay behind and help clean up, but by the time he started to speak, his friends were already making their way to the door. As the Dumpling Son scurried out of his seat, he noticed that napkins and chopsticks were strewn across the floor. Without looking back at the kitchen, keeping his head low on his way past the Dance Crew, the Dumpling Son followed his friends out of 慢慢吃. As the door closed behind him, he could hear Wendy cursing in the kitchen.

When he got home later that night, carrying a paper bag with a cold cheeseburger and six-piece chicken nuggets, the Dumpling Son saw that the Dumpling Woman was already in her room. He wanted to apologize, but he couldn't find the courage. From his bedroom, he thought he could hear the Dumpling Woman cry.

From that day on, the Dumpling Son avoided the restaurant as much as he could. After school, his friends would often invite him for more fast food, and the Dumpling Son learned to hate the smell of hamburgers and fries. He missed the Dumpling Woman's cooking, but he didn't dare to mention the restaurant again at school. He had already earned a new nickname from his friends: "The Dumpling Son." The Dumpling Woman got her own nickname to match.

As Wendy had predicted, the Dumpling Son did manage to graduate from high



school with the highest grades, but he didn't feel the urge to celebrate this time, so he attended his graduation ceremony alone. He also applied to a university on the other side of the country, in a city with different seasons and no promise of good dumplings. The few times that the Dumpling Woman asked about his plans, the Dumpling Son responded in short sentences and only in English. The Dumpling Woman would just nod and smile.

On the morning of the flight to his new city, the Dumpling Son saw that the Dumpling Woman had already left for the restaurant. Before heading to the airport, he considered stopping by 慢慢吃 to say goodbye to the Dumpling Woman, but he didn't have the right words to express everything he felt. He took a taxi directly to the departure door.

When his flight was called to board, he dragged his body towards the gate, down the tunnel, and into his seat. His stomach growled at him as he sat down, and he realized what he craved most were fresh dumplings. As the plane soared, the Dumpling Son looked out the small window, trying to pick out 慢慢吃 among the rows of buildings below, the city growing hazier beneath the cover of clouds. The Dumpling Woman was just starting to prepare for the lunchtime rush.

3. The Dumpling Woman

Her name is 王晓惠, but everyone calls her 惠姐, or “big sister.” Every morning, she gets to 慢慢吃 before sunrise, spending the first hour preparing dough and meat filling for the day ahead. Her first guests arrive at the same time every day, tired from their morning exercise. They all say that 惠姐 serves the best food in town, that 慢慢吃 feels like home.

Most days, 惠姐 doesn't leave the restaurant until midnight, staying long to clean and prepare for the next day. She spends the last hour alone and in silence, accompanied only by her own thoughts. These days, she only thinks about her son. They have not seen each other for months, though she keeps a photo of him in the kitchen, right above the table where she folds dumplings. In the photo, her son is around ten, his mouth stuffed like a chipmunk.

惠姐 first opened her restaurant fifteen years ago, and she has only taken a handful of days off since, and only ever for her son. One time, she had to close the restaurant for lunch and rush to her son's school with a new pair of pants, after he had soiled himself during morning recess. She ran through the street while laughing to herself, her son's pants hanging off her shoulder like a superhero's cape. On most days, though, at least when she was younger, she had to make sure the restaurant stayed open.



These past few years, she has found that she can't work as hard as she used to. That evening before, 惠姐 stood alone in the kitchen, cleaning the metal worktable with a ragged cloth. It was a relatively quiet dinner rush, and she suggested everyone go home earlier. All by herself, 惠姐 could hear every sound around her — the rumble of the AC, the cars rushing by outside, the soft thump of her heartbeat, the creak of the table under her arms. She suddenly winced at a pain in her lower back. 惠姐 stood still for a moment before folding the cloth and giving the table one more wipe. Maybe it was time for her to go home too.

That night, shortly after 惠姐 locked the front door and turned the corner, three rocks smashed through her restaurant's front window, spraying shards of glass into the dining room and onto the best table by the window. Amidst growing fears of the COVID-19 virus, 慢慢吃 became the latest victim of hate crimes in Canada and around the world. The police claimed there were no witnesses, no way to identify the culprits, nothing they could do to help. They told 惠姐 that they could keep investigating once they filed a report, but she just shook her head and waved them away. 惠姐 faced her restaurant with a deep sigh before rolling up her sleeves and unlocking the door.

She examined the damage: parts of the window were still intact, and she remembered that she had been collecting a stack of newspapers that were never read. By the time the usual guests passed by, thinking that the restaurant would be closed, they could already smell the familiar aroma of pork and onions flow through the parking lot. There to greet everyone was 惠姐, who stood by the door with flour on her hands and a proud smile on her face.

...

"I think your son is back." The Dumpling Woman can barely hear Wendy's voice over the roar of the kitchen. "What did you say?" Wendy points out the kitchen window towards the tables at the back of the restaurant, before handing two plates of overflowing dumplings to the Dumpling Woman with a wink and a rare smile. The Dumpling Woman's eyes open wide. She runs her hands on her apron and then through her hair. She dashes out of the kitchen as fast as she can, her apron still on, flour falling from her hands like the petals of a jasmine tree.

I hear commotion from the kitchen. At first, I think it's Wendy rushing the server again. From the corner of my eye, I see the kitchen doors open. For a moment, it seems as if the restaurant becomes dead silent. It's the Dumpling Woman.

As she walks towards me, my eyes fill with tears. I want to say so much — ask her if she was hurt during the attack, whether she's been sick at all. I want to apologize to



her, to tell her that I missed her so much. I want to tell her about my new life at university, the classes I've loved and hated, and all the horrible meals I've made for myself. But I just can't seem to find the right words.

As she sets the plate of dumplings on my table, I notice how much older the Dumpling Woman looks. Her fingers are swollen and dry, cracks and dark spots painting the backs of her hands. I notice the burn marks that run along her arm, paving a path to the wrinkles on her neck and in the corners of her eyes. I stand up, and to my surprise, she pulls me into her arms. She holds me close, and I think I can hear her cry. After a moment, the Dumpling Woman pulls away gently. "Sit," she says in English.

She places a pair of chopsticks between my fingers and gestures for me to eat, pushing the plate of dumplings towards me, warm steam rising to my face.

“慢慢吃, my son.”

Poetry





The Kitchen is a Wild Place After the World Has Gone Dim

by Suraj Gupta

A sparrow of steam rises
from the mouth of the kettle,
and the window, darkening slowly,
holds its own small weather.

On the counter, a knife glints
like a fish turning once in river.
The onion waits, a moon
you can smell before you see.

My mother used to say
every house keeps a secret weather.
The pressure of silence,
the thunder of dishes left unwashed,
the rain of words we never learned
to let fall gently onto one another.

So I stand here
where flour dusts the air,
and the refrigerator hums its animal
song, and a spoon circles tea
as if tracing the rim of a pond.

Outside, the street is only street,
its cars asleep in a row,
its porchlights blinking awake.
But in here, the table is a clearing,
the sink an estuary,
the dishwater floor a marsh
holding our footprints
before it swallows them whole.

Wild is the way grief enters
quietly, without knocking,
and how love, just as quietly,
sets another plate.



Is a woman peeling carrots in the half-light,
radio breathing song into the cabinets,
child asleep in the next room.

I have seen the mountains,
prairies turning faces to wind,
shorelines trembling under noon—
and still, I return to this room
where the ordinary breaks open.

A window full of dusk,
bodies bending toward flame.

And all at once
the house becomes a country
I am learning how to survive.



The Dog

by Robert Benz

I do not know why
this black dog follows me
but she has always been there
as I pick my way along the river bank
stepping from stone to stone
she pads along quietly
for the most part

from time to time
friends walk with me
beside the water
now pebble-clear and lucid
now stone-dark and taut
they do not notice her
unless I gently point her out

they will ask me to sit with them
and have some tea
I decline
politely
she does not like the firelight

but sometimes
I pretend she isn't there
I sit with them
drink and share a song
and then I see her
at the edge of the moonlight
watching
and so I take my leave

I try to imagine
her absence
it grieves me
there is comfort
in her presence
in the knowledge of her
but she gnaws
terribly
my shoes are ragged
and still we limp along.



Cartography of What Refuses Ownership

by David Anson Lee

The fence fails first:
a syntax of wire, forgetting
how to hold a line.

Posts loosen their vowels.
Grass revises everything
into a softer argument.

Wind keeps speaking
until there is nothing left
to answer it.

I walk past the last permission:
where maps begin to stutter,
where naming grows thin.

Something in me unfastens.
Not freedom:
that old, overused word;

but a quieter undoing:

the body recalling
it was never agreed upon.



Absence

by Yolanda Hansen

The sagging barn is missing a door, wooden planks warped by years
of freeze and thaw, right side tilting to the ground, gone to seed
with invasive brome and tansy. Prairie palimpsest. Where bison are absent,

now cattle are gone too. Horses, pigs, chickens, all vanished,
though if you nudge apart clumps of bluegrass, you'll find the stones and bolts
of their pens. I don't know where to look for the bison.

A naturalist once told me native prairie thrives with disturbance. When we suppress
fire, when bison are disappeared, the land chokes and becomes aggressive.
I heard it as a metaphor for colonization. Maybe that's not what he meant.

I am looking for lessons on how to prepare for collapse but all I can find
are answer keys on moving, inked by people who say
the grass is always greener on the other side.

Listen: grasses will push apart grains of sand and soil
to spread rhizomes across abandoned gardens, beetles will tunnel
the earth, the breeze will ruffle trees seeded in our absence.

The wind will sigh when the future pushes fingers through plastic takeout
containers and rubber tires, searching for dirt.



clementines

by Meryem Yildiz

clementines grow in winter. i spot them
along the highway, small stars freckling
leafy trees in mediterranean december.
the air is thick with anomaly, and my hand
clutches the last text you sent—*I want
to make it clear that if something
happens to me, I didn't do it myself.*
clementines are sweet, tangy, easy to peel.
on the highway, i squeeze you in my sweaty
palm, the phone and your words, but no juice
comes out. you once told me that the man
polishes his guns to a shine. he goes
to the firing range for fun, keeps a few bullets
in a hollowed-out toy car because it reminds him
of your son. in an acacia wood bowl
on my kitchen counter, i keep clementines.

Screenshot & save, in case.

your son is taking his first steps. the man is taking
shooting lessons. we learn something new
every day, don't we? i am thinking of growing
a clementine tree. my windows are drafty and
don't let in enough light, but maybe i could
pluck you from these heavy branches.



once the sun is no longer the sun

by Emily Garland

- i. the birds inherit the flowers, and a deceit
of lapwings take root in a mausoleum
of skyscrapers. you see
the humans vanished, leaving nothing
but wired things and dances: samba,
floss, disco, merengue, and a parcel
of crows, who did not take the name
murder, turn from nickels in fountains
to pecking their own reflections. for
what else is shiny, once the sun is gone.
- ii. the flowers inherit the birds. parliament
of owls under the not-replaced moon. congress
of eagles. tower of falcons, roosting with trembling
finches. the flowers grow up the buildings
the humans left. grow into
the cold sky, caressing the empty
space that once belonged
to the sun.



Museum of Endangered Sounds

by Emily Garland

“Giggles. 2042.” The voices of eight children crackle over a speaker, circa 2035. A pair of canaries tilt their yellow heads, unaware both children and giggles are now extinct.

A year after “Confirmed Speech by Live President, 2036” was added to the museum, humans went underground. The robots attached speakers to the top of every telephone pole, so the city became the museum. It is still unclear if the robots meant to attract or repel humans through the broadcast of their own sound.

Today, the canaries flutter to “Umbrella Opening, 2035,” and “The Four Seasons performed by the Vienna Philharmonic, 2033,” and “Humans Whistling, 2038,” which sounds more like humans playing “Prayer in C” on recorder. Speaking of prayer, two streets over, every telephone pole plays a different bell from the Notre Dame Cathedral, and the next street over the slogans of restaurants and chewing gums.

Where the shopping centers used to be, robots put the sounds of carts and sliding doors. Every now and again, a baby cries. A mother yells. Someone says “see you tomorrow,” never knowing they’ll outlive the end. Never knowing anything endangered may soon be gone.



Baori

by Harsh Vardhan Singh

i. बावड़ी

My grandmother descended two hundred steps each morning
before the sun could find her, bare feet on stone
worn to silk by the feet of every woman
who'd made this argument with gravity,
this daily negotiation with the dark.

The baori opened like a mouth at the village edge
a word the desert had been trying to say for centuries
and she walked into it,
matka on her hip, the clay still cool
from yesterday's water.

Down past the first landing where the pigeons
burst like grey prayers from the walls.
Past the fourth where light thinned
to a single gold thread, then nothing.
Into the cool gut of the earth
where water waited
black, still, a rectangle of sky
folded thirteen storeys deep.

The paniharis gathered on the seventh landing
where the air changed its mind about being hot.
They sang, not for beauty—for accuracy
each note placed like a foot on a wet step.
Their voices rose as their bodies descended
and the baori held both the singing
and the silence the way a matka holds water:
with its whole body, or not at all.

She said paani has moods.
Some mornings it wants to be found.
Some mornings you have to convince it.
She said the water knows who's lazy
it drops one step for every morning you miss.
She said this without smiling,
the way she said everything,



as if a joke and a warning
are the same thing in the desert.

I never saw her spill.
She carried the full matka up two hundred steps,
one hand beneath, one hand steadying the world,
and set it down in the kitchen
where the water inside settled
without a sound
as if it had agreed to come.

ii. टंकी

My mother hasn't lived in the village
for thirty years, but every night
she fills every vessel in the house.

Steel buckets, plastic bottles, the copper lota
her mother gave her
the one we're not allowed to drink from
and the bathtub once, before a wedding,
as if the guests were camels
and the house a rest stop between oases.

We have a tap, Maa.

She looked at me the way
the desert looks at rain
as if I might not come again.

The government tanker comes on Tuesdays.
She knows the driver's name, his wife's name,
the name of his village near ours.
Though ours is a place she doesn't return to
since the baori gave its last water
and the women climbed the steps one final time
carrying nothing.

She never told me this directly.
What she told me was:
pipes are for people who can't
convince a well.

On the balcony she keeps four matkas,



clay, unglazed, sweating in the afternoon.
She says water tastes different from clay.
She's right—it tastes like the inside
of the earth, like something
that was underground and remembers.

We're always in the desert, she says.
Even here. Even with taps.

I laughed.
She didn't.

iii. नल

I live where water comes
from a chrome mouth in the wall.
I don't know its source.
I don't know its mood.

I let the tap run
longer than I need to
hand under the stream,
feeling for something.
A pulse. A temperature.
A recognition.

I take showers that lose time,
standing with my eyes closed,
descending stairs I cannot see.

I've started collecting rain.
Jars on the windowsill,
a week of monsoon,
trapped in glass.
A friend asks
if it's an art project.
I say yes.

My cells are thirsty
in a way no tap can fix.
Last week I caught myself
holding a glass of water
to the light, turning it slowly
the way you'd check a gem for flaws



looking for the bottom.
The black water.
The rectangle of sky
thirteen storeys down.

Listening for the pitch
a matka makes
when it breaks the surface
the sound that meant
the water was ready,
the season had been kind,
that meant come,
I've been waiting.

The tap runs.
The meter ticks.
The water I waste today
would have made my grandmother
climb four hundred steps.

iv. स ीढ़ी

I turn the tap off.
Cup my hands beneath the last drops.
They pool in the hollow of my palms
the smallest बावड़ी,
no steps, no landings, no song
just water, held the way she held it,
the way her mother held it,
every woman in my blood
descending the same dark stair
toward the same impossible thing
the desert taught us to love
by taking it away.

I drink.
It tastes like clay.



Ars Poetica of a Transgender Body

by River Vetter

The doctor asks me to explain my self.
She cannot comprehend my body's words.
I'm mistranslated every step along
the way; a fragment of a language lost
to time. To her, I am a mystery
to solve; a lexicon she can't decode.
I retrace histories along my chest.
I crack my rib and use the bone to write,
find ink within the blood of all my words.
Relearn this broken tongue between my teeth.
I'll write a page where I can be believed,
establish truth with every stroke of pen.
What is a body but a sonnet put
to flesh? A song I'll sing. A plea. A poem.



To The River

by Brandon Fick

Where I went for space

sluggish drift pelican pointillism

when my university cell became crowded

pure fall heat ghost joggers

with Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton—then Trump.

precipitous drop anxious undercurrent

To the river and the air and the life, my touchstone

peculiar moulting scent torn leaves slash path

Diefenbaker's grave, Sweet William stems in granite,

grey pebbled tarmac fly to ski jump

I knew there was presence in the absence, the river hums

bursting loud gold-yellow copper-red

as we choke on our passions, what we think we want.

steel-blue to silver metal clangs

Somehow magnified, river, bridge, and Bessborough bulge

toward olive pine gnarled roots grip

against my eye, savouring and calculating, the distance

who falls in breeze whispers like lovers

to Hudson Bay, the railway, the point where I can stand

cream-dusted loafers en pointe in grit

alone, thoughts refreshed like a cool glass of water

no swimming clip clop on wood

from glaciers that feed this city, nourishment to the divided,

hand pinches ferry geese splatter and down

the way we live these days, in the unreal real. This space exists

old waters sing songs we forgot

to remember remembering. To walk. Reconcile beast, burden.



Rules for Playing Poker

by Sean Mulroy

Camp Goshen, 1996

small rocks are worth 10 points
 and the big ones are worth 20
leaves are 50
 acorns are 100

Adam's not allowed to play
 because he cheats

you have to talk like a gambler

 you've got to spit and cuss
and threaten to get rough if someone
at the table won't pay up

 most important

if you lose the whole way
 you can't just go find more
leaves and rocks

 you've got to get upset and call your wife
and beg her not to leave like Martin's dad

or get scary angry like Sean's

or get wasted drunk and weepy
 just like Brandon will,
10 years from now—
 right before he flips his car
 into a ditch



Udobong

by Eliongema Udofia

All salt & thyme, she brisks about the kitchen
—conjuring dinner by the hearth. Before,
dissolving into the adjacent room, where your
siblings—not yet dead but keeping to their
pretentious act of living—lie in a large raffia
cot. She circles around them. The way a
hawk hovers over what crackles, over what's
likely to go aflame. You graze her cheeks
with your palm, stifle the tear before it matures
into anguish. & she smiles, revealing her
diastema, the size of a keyhole. Outside the
house, a weaver bird launches at its reflection
against a window & recoils; learns of the
folly in loathing oneself. Your father appears
in the doorway, still cloaked in the pungent
fragrance of the lady with whom, hand-in-hand,
he faded out of your lives. Became an ache in
your mother's chest; a mole on your chin.
He stretches out his arms to hold you—the boy
sharpened into a man on the whetstone of
his absence—& fails. Fails the way as a child,
you attempted to palm bubbles only to hold
handfuls of nothing. You shy away from his touch.
Knowing how, in times past, names have
overpowered you, he calls you *Udobong*. &
you seize your breath, become dry wind in
the mouth of harmattan. Where was he, when
silence conquered every room of the house?
When sorrow built a nest on the *iboñ* tree in the
courtyard? Now he leans against the doorpost,
skin wrinkled. Hair greyed with age. Now,
the weaver bird, exhausted, sits on the window,
pleading its replica for a peace treaty. Both
of them, willing, but unable to get to each other.

Udobong: (Annang) an common name for second sons
Iboñ: kolanut



Creative

Nonfiction



Make Yourself a Wild Space with These Easy Steps

by Anastasia Caron

I have been reading articles about ‘rewilding.’ A lot of people use the term, but no one will explain to me what it means.¹ I should be more specific. Rewilding is an ecological attempt to return ecosystems to their “natural” state “before” human interference. It includes things like reintroducing predators and indigenous plant life. That definition is straightforward. I understand that rewilding.

I have been reading Substacks and scrolling Instagram posts and listening to podcasts about rewilding *myself*, hosted by people who use words like “inner child” and “unmasking” and “soul blueprint.”² The kind who walk barefoot through fields, bake bread from heirloom recipes, and wear linen dresses. To my credit, I wear linen³ and bake bread⁴ and like to walk in the grass barefoot.⁵ But I don’t do any of it right.⁶

That’s the only thing I know for sure about this rewilding process: I haven’t done it. I say process, but maybe that’s my problem. Maybe it’s not a process but a mode of existing, a state of enlightenment. Pure, shining, and only available to the right people. The chosen few.

I will attempt, here, to list all the other things I know for certain about rewilding. Maybe it will help you.

First, you must be ecologically conscious and sustainable. But this isn’t the first step really. This is background work. You have already eliminated plastic bags and containers from your home and started eating vegan, organic, and gluten-free. You’ve set up your personal compost and use cloth menstrual pads and line-dry your laundry and use bamboo toilet paper and, and. This is easy. You have already done this.

Next, you must live surrounded by nature. I spend so much of my free time on real estate websites that I probably qualify for a license.⁷ I haven’t found what I’m

1. I feel that way about a lot of things recently.
2. I do not believe in souls.
3. In bold, aggressive prints.
4. From an online recipe. My grandmother uses a bread machine.
5. When I visit my parents in the summer. I think this counts as inner child work.
6. I can’t follow these beautiful, calm, self-assured women into their paradise even when they invite me in.
7. I avoid looking out my window at the busy city street below whenever possible.

looking for, but I have a vision of a lonely cottage in a forest with neighbours I could walk to but can't see for the tree density. I follow influencers who own homes I would kill for.⁸ This step is potentially more complicated but still intro level. Absolutely doable.

The first real step is that to truly rewild you must have a knowing, intimate, unashamed connection with your own mind. You absolutely must unmask.⁹ You must know your true self and at all times let it guide you. Crucially,¹⁰ this includes being in tune with the natural world. Something inside you already knows how to do this. Your task is to find it. You must follow the wheeling of the stars and the phases of the moon; you must know your astrological birth chart by heart and what that means for each phase of your menstrual cycle, and do only the things that are appropriately energetically aligned. You must know, for instance, that we are moving into a year of the fire horse¹¹ and so everything will have energy and passion. Every choice, every movement, every word must be brimming with intentionality, if not destiny.

That is all that you 'must' do, but what about what you 'may' do? You may ask questions such as, "Who is my true self?"¹² You may follow yoga tutorials online from slim blonde women with names like Hannah and Mykailah. When they say, "put your hand over your heart and whisper to yourself *I am supported*," you may breathe deeply and take them entirely seriously.¹³ You may go to the doctor,¹⁴ but if you are in touch with your nervous system, you will have no need to. No need for their lab reqs and diagnostic machines.¹⁵ You will always know exactly what you are feeling and where and why. You will know the warning signs. You will know when to speed up, when to slow down. Nothing bad will ever happen. As long as you're really, truly, honestly trying, you will have perfect clarity. Absolute certainty.

All of this is Wild. I promise.

8. Jealousy is not Wild.

9. Neurodivergence not required.

10. Though, of course, it's all crucial. To skip one step is to fail.

11. Chinese heritage not required.

12. So long as you have an answer prepared.

13. And if you feel silly you must start over from square one.

14. But only if you've tried every alternative medicine, you can get your hands on first: echinacea, ginger pills, the aforementioned yoga.

15. I spent the weekend in the emergency room the day after starting to write this. There is no Wilding of any kind in the emergency room. The inside of a CT scan machine is the least Wild place in this house city.



Still Holding

by Ruth F. Corro

I am tired.

The kind of weariness that settles behind my eyes and deep in the small bones of my wrists. Five years now since these roles took root in me. I wake at five every morning, work until late afternoon, then ride the tricycle home with Mother beside me—her thin frame leaning into the wind, reaching for any scrap of the outside world she can still touch.

The weight never really lifts. By day, I lead the school; by night, I become daughter, nurse, and the distant hands for siblings calling from Manila and abroad.

I am lonely.

Not the loud kind with tears and noise. Just a quiet, steady ache that refuses to leave. So many elementary and high school reunions have slipped past. Evening trainings and district events I could not attend. Laughter from old classmates reaches me only through photos on my phone.

In our house in Ibajay, there are only two heartbeats after dark. This silence has become its own wild space—vast and untamed—stretching wide inside these walls. Mother sleeps in the next room, her walker resting against the wall. No one is here to ask how my day truly went or offer a cup of coffee. The emptiness keeps expanding.

I keep my faith.

It flickers like the small lamp we always leave on for safety, steady through the long hours between dusk and dawn. Love is not always loud or easy. Sometimes it is measured in careful steps with the walker, in medicine given on time, in documents sent across oceans so my siblings can sleep more easily. These five years are seeding something deeper in me: patience, endurance, and a quieter kind of grace.

The air feels cool tonight. Mother's breathing is slow and even. My body begs for sleep, but my mind turns over the day's unfinished tasks. Still, I close my eyes, trusting that tomorrow strength will come again from somewhere inside this wild.

midnight breeze drifts
through the half-open window —
candle holds steady



My Aunt's Garden

by Sue Sesnon Salt

As a child I loved going to my aunt's house, an old Victorian lovingly cared for with a large sunny flower-filled garden that she delighted in tending. She would be seated on a faded cushion, pulling weeds and clipping dead flowers, tossing them into a large basket for a trip to compost. She liked to take her time choosing new blooms, smelling them as she snipped, and taking them into the house for her vases.

I would wander about, following old pathways to hidden places. One path of crunchy stones led to an abandoned badminton court, a relic from the past. It was a large rectangle, paced off to prescribed dimensions, with a concrete curb bordering its edges. Two leaning poles held a sagging grey tattered net. I would drag my fingers over its knotty web when I crossed the court, the brown earth firm beneath my feet, trampled over years to a hard-packed surface.

Ancient oaks blocked the sky, limiting the sunlight's reach. Overgrown bushes encroached on the court, some with thick, dark leaves that looked waxy, others with thin, pale leaves curling brown at their edges. It was a bower of green except when rhododendrons and camellias bloomed large in their magnificence of mauves and magentas. So too would poison oak have its time and seasons of colour from spring's fresh green to the deep reds of fall.

I felt an exhilarating and ominous presence in that dark, dank place. Even in summer, it smelled of dampness and decay. The air was so still, it seemed afraid of moving, and a heavy quietness filled the space as if no sound could enter or escape. A rustle or snap would startle me into a heart-pounding statue, all senses alert. I'd hold my breath, hoping it was just a bird, a squirrel, a rabbit foraging in the density.

Then, feeling overwhelmed, I would quickly retrace my steps back to the sunshine of the garden and seeing my aunt's hat-covered head, I'd feel safe and secure again. I dared not tell how that wild and forgotten space beckoned me for fear the adults would forbid my secret wanderings, wishing to avoid any middle-of-the-night disturbing dreams. My aunt would tell me what pleasant company I was and ask if I was enjoying myself. I'd say yes. And was it time to go inside for cold lemonade and cookies?



The Bank before the Water

by Chisomaga Evelyn Umenyi

The river did not know I existed.

This was the first thing I understood about Omi—not its current, not the way it darkened at the bend where the water dropped suddenly away from your feet. What I understood first was that the river was conducting its own life, and that I was not part of it.

The question of whether I was permitted or forbidden was entirely a human question, a question the river itself would have found uninteresting. I found this indifference, even at seven, both devastating and clarifying.

We lived in the kind of Ibadan compound that no longer exists the way it used to in Nigeria—full of people who were not all family but behaved as though they were. The compound smelled of ogi and engine oil and the wood-smoke from Mama Funke’s kitchen next door.

The river was called Omi. You said it the way you said the name of someone who had once done something unforgettable—with a small, involuntary respect, a half-step back in the voice.

The women in our compound spoke of it mostly in warnings. “Don’t go near Omi when the rains come.” “Swimming in Omi would reduce your worth as a woman.”

I filed these under the general category of things women said to limit what children reached for—which, I had already noticed at seven, was one of the primary projects of adult womanhood. The management of reach. Carried out without full awareness that it was happening at all.

My brothers did not receive these warnings. Or they received them and did what boys do with warnings from women.

Saturday mornings they ate, argued about nothing, and disappeared down the red clay path to Omi. The path was worn smooth by feet—their feet, and the feet of boys before them—a bright, dusty track that ran past the back of Mama’s fallen poultry shed. I stood in the kitchen doorway and watched them go. They walked with that broad, casual swing of the shoulders that Nigerian boys acquire the moment they believe no adult is watching them, their shorts swinging against their thighs, their voices thrown back over their shoulders in sharp, overlapping bursts of



Yoruba and Pidgin. At the bend where the cassava leaves grew heavy and grey with dust, Emeka's yellow shirt was the last thing I saw—a flash of bright cotton caught in the morning sun before the bush swallowed it whole. Then there was only the stillness of the path, the red dust settling slowly back onto the dry grass, and the sound of my mother's spoon against the pot.

I was invisible on that doorstep for six years.

The first time I asked to go, my mother was making egusi—that deep, roasted smell of egusi in hot oil that means Saturday and that exists nowhere else in the world. I thought the smell might soften the answer.

“Can I go to the river with the boys?”

She did not turn around.

“The river is not for you.”

Six words. Back still turned. Spoon still moving.

What has stayed with me across twenty-seven years, across Ibadan and Lagos and the life I built on the other side of all that watching, is not the refusal. It is the absence of cruelty in it. My mother was not keeping something from me. She was reporting the shape of the world as she had received it, as her own mother had handed it to her—this part of the world in which rivers belonged to boys and kitchens to girls. Both arrangements were as natural as the bank between them, and as certain as the way the river rises in rainy season and the fact that egusi needs oil before water.

She was a woman who checked my mathematics with a ferocity that said my intelligence was not optional. She believed in my mind completely. It was my body she had not thought to liberate.

I did not ask again.

Instead, I went underground with the wanting. If I could not enter the river, I would learn it from the bank. I watched the current pull left. I watched the dark patches where the depth dropped. I watched my brother Emeka enter right foot first, always, a pause before the rest of him followed, as if introducing himself to something that deserved the courtesy.

I watched Tunde become liquid.

Tunde on land was deliberate, contained. Tunde in water was what I can only call himself – fully, without negotiation, as though the person he actually was had been waiting in the river all along and land was simply where he waited to return. I



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watched the water give him that. I stood on the bank in my dry clothes holding my dry towel and telling myself it did not matter.

I told myself this until it stopped feeling like a lie. Until it calcified into something I could not locate as loss anymore—like a splinter the body walls off, surrounds with itself, absorbs into its own tissue until the splinter and the flesh become indistinguishable.

I carried that for twenty-seven years.

I carried it through university and through Lagos and through every hotel pool I stood beside with a drink in my hand, presenting the performance of a woman who had simply chosen not to swim today. Not a woman who was never taught. Not a woman who had stood on a bank at seven years old watching her brothers receive what she was not offered.

The performance became my posture. The posture became my life.

The leisure centre pool in Lagos Island smells of chlorine and, beneath the chlorine—a chemical approximation of cleanliness that has none of Omi in it. No mineral cold. No red clay. No green-gold light through riverside trees. This pool has walls and a roof. A temperature gauge. Lane ropes in blue and white.

Omi would have found this deeply amusing.

I am thirty-four years old, standing at the pool's edge in a swimsuit I ordered online and almost returned twice, and Patricia is watching me with the professional patience of someone who has a name for the way I am standing. She doesn't say what it is. She is twenty-two and has the body of someone who entered water young enough that the body never learned to treat it as foreign.

I am not afraid of drowning. The shallow end is one metre deep, and I am five feet six. The drowning would require unusual commitment. What I am afraid of is simpler and more Nigerian than drowning.

I am afraid of being seen not knowing.

I have spent thirty-four years being the kind of woman who already understands the room before she enters it. I have built a career on this—on walking into spaces and projecting the impression that I have always been here, that nothing here is foreign to me. And now, I am about to be a beginner. In a swimsuit. In a pool.



The water, at least, has no opinion about any of this.

This is what I did not expect to feel standing here: the small relief of the water's indifference. It is wet and present and has no investment in my history. Like Omi, it is conducting its own business, which it will continue conducting long after I have sorted myself out and gotten in.

"Let's start with your face in the water," Patricia says.

I put my face in the water.

The world underneath is something no bank ever showed me.

Its silence is not silence but the replacement of air-world sound with pressure. Its light, bent and uncertain, making familiar things strange. My own hands in front of my face look like my hands the way a translation reads like an original. I am under for three seconds before I come up gasping. Not for air. For the familiar.

"Good," Patricia says. "Again."

We do this until the underneath becomes a country rather than an emergency. She teaches me to blow bubbles, to turn for air, to kick from the hip. The lessons are good.

Then she asks me to float.

One hand under my shoulders. One hand at the small of my back. "Let go," she says.

My mind agrees. My body declines.

Hips sinking. Legs following. I am rigid with something that has nothing to do with muscle—it is the physical form of an old decision made so long ago I have forgotten making it. The decision of a person who stopped expecting to be held, who walled off the want so completely it became tissue, became the thing you do not notice because you have incorporated it into your own structure.

"You're fighting it," Patricia says.

"I know," I say to the sky.

She looks at me with the particular expression of someone who has heard this exact exchange before and understands it is not really about water. She doesn't say this. She simply waits with the steady patience my mother had at the comb on Sunday



mornings.

“Omi will hold you. Trust her,” she says.

I try again.

The third lesson it rains.

The rain on the roof fills the pool room with sound. Water above, water below, water in the air—because in Lagos in the rainy season the humidity leans against you, breathes on you, makes the boundary between inside and outside feel like a bureaucratic distinction the sky has decided not to honour.

Tonight, Patricia only hovers. Hands beneath me without touching. A promise rather than a fact.

I get in. I go to my back. Arms out.

My legs begin their protest.

My hips begin their sinking.

The rain gets louder.

And then something stops.

Not a decision. A cessation. Like the argument my body has been making runs out of words mid-sentence—not because it was defeated but because whatever was fueling it has quietly, without announcement, run out.

I float.

Patricia says nothing.

What arrives, which I was not expecting, is grief.

Not sadness. Not despair. Grief has a different weight, a different temperature, a shape you can feel pressing against the inside of the chest. I am floating in a swimming pool in Lagos Island, and I am grieving the Saturday mornings in our Ibadan. Grieving the red clay path worn smooth by feet that were not mine. Grieving Tunde becoming liquid while I stood dry on the bank. Grieving the seven-year-old who went underground with her wanting because surface-wanting was too



costly, who walled the loss off so completely it became part of her structure, became load-bearing, became the thing she did not examine because she was too busy standing upright inside it.

I am grieving my mother, who is still alive, who will never know there is anything to grieve.

And from beneath the grief, even more surprisingly, rises fury.

Not the loud kind but the quiet, specific fury of realizing, from inside the water, that this was always available. That the pool was always here. That the water had no preference for my brothers over me, no investment in the arrangement, no opinion about who stood on the bank. The water was simply water. It would have held me at seven the way it is holding me at thirty-four. The twenty-seven years between were not the water's decision. They were made on land, by people who loved me, who were themselves loved by people who handed them the same map that was drawn before my kind of wanting was considered worth including.

The grief and the fury occupy the same moment in the chest. This is not comfortable. This is, I am learning, how most true things feel overcrowded, contradictory, refusing the simplicity you would prefer.

I have been swimming for four months now.

I go on Tuesday evenings. I am not graceful. I am not fast. I do a thing Patricia calls freestyle that it seems the swimmers in other lanes are too polite to look at directly. But I move through the water, which is more than the girl on the bank was allowed to want, more than the woman with the drink and the poolside performance and the calcified want could admit she needed.

Last Saturday I took my daughter to the pool.

She is fearless in water, which no longer surprises me. Before I could say anything, she jumped in with both feet, without looking down, with no introduction and came up laughing. The sound hit my chest like something solid. The sound of a child who had never been told that she was too loud or taking too much space, who expected the air around her to simply expand because she had decided to make a noise. And as her sound carried across the room, I watched her. Not from the bank, where I had spent twenty-seven years standing dry, but from inside the water, beside her.

This is the detail I keep returning to—that when she jumped, I was already in the



pool. That when she surfaced and looked around for me, she found me there beside her, in the same element, wet, present, at home in something that I had once believed had no room for me.

She did not know this was significant. She simply swam to me, grabbed my shoulders, and said, “Mummy watch!”

She pressed both of her feet firmly against my chest, curled her small toes against me for leverage, and pushed off. Her body shot backward, gliding through the water before twisting onto her stomach. I watched the water parting over her shoulders, her dark back shining just below the surface as her legs took over. I watched her knees bend and strike in rapid kicks, churning the blue water into a thick white foam around her heels. With every kick, her braided hair, heavy with water, slapped against her shoulder blades. And when her head broke the surface, I watched her blow a sudden spout of water from her lips, her eyes wide and shiny, her arms already thrashing in energetic circles, pulling her farther away.

I thought of my mother. I think of her often at the pool – at the stove, back turned, spoon moving, delivering the shape of the world as she understood it. I have spent time being angry about those six words—the river is not for you. I have spent time understanding them, and I have arrived, lately, somewhere that is neither anger nor understanding but something quieter. Something that recognizes that the spoon kept moving. That the egusi got made. That my mother’s love was enormous and had edges, the way all enormous things have edges, the way the river itself had edges – the bank, always the bank and the edge is not the same as the whole.

She did not hand me the water.

I walked to the edge of it myself.

My daughter is already at the far end of the pool, attempting something that is not quite a backstroke but is full of confidence and completely unbothered by its own imprecision.

That is the thing I gave her.

Not swimming, exactly. Not technique. The assumption that the water is hers. That she belongs in it. That there is no door to wait beside and no path worn only by other feet and no doorway in which to stand invisible. That the river—any river, every pool, all of it, all the water in the world is also, without question, hers.



Outside, somewhere beyond the roof, it is probably still raining.

The river does not pause.

Neither, I am finding, do I.



Glacial Disarticulation

by María Sol Beker

They served us Scotch whisky out on the Perito Moreno Glacier, poured over ice they had just cut from its ancient walls.

By then we had hiked almost nine kilometres on ice, which may be nothing for certain bodies but was very much something for mine. The metal spikes of the crampons our guides had given us to wear over our boots made every step deliberate. My legs were tired, and my face hurt from the cold but even more so from smiling.

The white bar cart appeared between blue walls of compressed time, glasses in rows, chocolates in a basket. Our guides led us down to the small plateau where the refreshments awaited us. The three men wore matching jackets with the company logo stitched to them, *Hielo y Aventura*. Ice and Adventure. The youngest, a student of geology or tourism or some other discipline with an interest in the ice, passed around the chocolates. The older two chopped the ice for our drinks right there, in front of us. With the ease of men who did this every day, they pulled from their packs the ice picks they had carried all morning, hoisted them overhead, and hammered the points into the glacier. The ice broke loose, landing in chunks at their feet. They lifted the ancient pieces with bare hands, placed them in stainless steel pots, and crushed them with their picks into a coarse granita that they tipped into our glasses and poured the whisky over.

It felt less like a tourist gimmick than a reward. A ridiculous but perfect reward for completing *Big Ice*, the “most extreme ice hike on the Perito Moreno Glacier,” as the company’s website boasted. They ran this tour twice a day, every day of the warm months from September to April for tourists from all over the world. Our group of fifteen had people from Chile, Brazil, Mexico, and several countries in Europe. Aside from the guides, I was the only Argentine in the group.

We all lifted our glasses. Someone said, “Salud.” We said, “Gracias.” Everyone laughed. I was cold but proud and absurdly happy. After all, I had crossed the ice. I had not fallen into a crevasse or embarrassed myself beyond repair. Fabrice touched his glass to mine, smiling, and we drank. Whisky is his department; he drank slowly, approving. The whisky was not bad and not good—the kind of whisky that becomes interesting because of where it is being drunk.

Under my boots, the glacier moved. Not in any visible way, but I could feel its instability, hear small, internal sounds that did not belong to the wind. The guide



had already told us what to do if we heard cracking: move. Do not look for the source. Do not interpret. Move.

My work has trained me to listen past the sentence. People rarely say the most important thing first. Sometimes they do not say it at all. A silence can arrive already full of evidence. But the glacier's sounds were not testimony. They were instructions.

I was scared. I knew I could reach for Fabrice's hand. That changed the fear without removing it.

This does not appear in the photographs. In them, Fabrice and I are smiling under helmets, bright-faced and absurd, two tourists performing delight atop a moving body older than the country that sells tickets to it, older than the idea of nations, older than the language the tickets are printed in. Fabrice's phone kept the grin and lost the calculation.

I had taken almost nothing onto the glacier with me; carrying my own body across the ice already felt like more than enough. So his phone became the archive: orange helmet, wet jacket, dark glasses, my mouth opened in the bright, ridiculous smile of someone trying to look braver than she feels.

I had brought Fabrice to Argentina because love, among other humiliations, makes a person want to be understood geographically. I wanted him to see something of me that did not fit in Geneva, in my apartment, in my stories about airports, mandates, and all the countries where I had learned to move as if belonging were a professional skill.

Before Switzerland, I had known disorder. Not as romance. As air breathed daily, before I could name it, before I felt a need to. First in Argentina—broken pavements, delayed buses, paperwork that ate up entire mornings, prices that changed between morning and noon, the smell of shit, actual shit, rising from the street into that air on hot days, and the everyday improvisations people later convert into national charm because the alternative is despair. Then I chose work that made disorder a profession—other countries' wars, other people's emergencies, my backpack kept ready by the door.

By the time I reached Geneva, around thirty-eight, the seduction of functioning systems was real. Trains arrived. Forms made sense. Streets did not ask forgiveness; they had no reason to. At some point, I stopped leaving the backpack by the door. Staying was its own verdict: every train that arrived on time said something about the buses back home that never had.



And still, I became ferociously defensive of Argentina, especially in front of Argentinians who criticized it. Nothing activates patriotism like hearing your own people complain too accurately.

Argentina did not perform for Fabrice, did not cut itself into polite pieces. There is a version of my country that does—steak pre-portioned into medallions, a tango show with dinner, an English menu explaining the chimichurri. Fabrice did not get that version. For New Year's Eve, the week before we drove to the glacier, my brother made asado con cuero in the middle of the campo: a whole animal on the parrilla, covered with tin roofing sheets and cooked half a day in its own skin. Dinner would not exist before midnight; Fabrice was sent to nap.

At the table I gave him the one instruction—don't eat the skin. The rest needed no knife: half a day of fire had done the cutting. The meat came away on its own, buttery and tasting of smoke. He photographed everything for his family in Switzerland, who are partly vegetarian and look at me, I know, the way Europe has always looked at its lovely savages. The anthropology is mutual. They see a woman who eats meat off the bones and sets a table for twelve when we are four; I see a family that shares one sandwich between two and calls it lunch.

A week later, at a parrilla in the South where locals eat and the only tourists are the well-informed kind with serious appetites, the metal tray arrived carrying heaps of chorizo, vacío, ribs in long strips cut across the bone, morcilla: meat with meat, and a few leaves of lettuce at the edge pretending to participate. Fabrice reached toward the green.

“No, mi amor,” I said. “No se come el decorado.”

You don't eat the decoration.

This depiction is unfair to him. He is not a caricature of Switzerland, not a man made of timetables and recyclable packaging. He is the person who stays awake while I hold his manita, who follows my mother's recipe so I can have biscochuelo on my birthday, who learned to make my margarita properly and searched supermarkets for Tyrrells when the Coop supermarket stopped selling them, as if crisps were a matter of international security. He loves Lego for its order, and precise pieces that click together and become a castle, a spaceship, a city. Every piece has a job.

I had brought that man to a country where even the salad was decorative.
Then I took him south.

Then I took him south.



El Sur, as I call it, as Argentines do—more than a direction, more than a region, it is a myth with coordinates. In his famous story, Borges sent a dying man south to meet an older Argentina—one that was waiting for him with a knife. Or did he? Borges leaves his readers to wonder if the man made the journey in the physical realm or dreamt it from his deathbed. Even in our finest story, the South may be real or imagined. In one way or another, the man does not come back.

La Patagonia indómita is what the brochures like to call it, though “indomitable” already sounds like a human fantasy, as if the land exists to resist us personally. But this tiny turn of phrase transforms a tourist with a rental car into an explorer, romanticizes the land and ‘the conquest’ of it.

For most of its human time this was Aónikenk country—people of the south: El Sur long before men from Spain and England took the liberty of renaming the place after themselves. If the Aónikenk people had a name of their own for the million square kilometres now known as Patagonia, it is not one that I have learned. I have read that their names were smaller, more relational, describing the roles a place played in their lives—a camp, a crossing, a place where one stays: aike. The word still studs the map of Santa Cruz—Güer Aike, Pali Aike, Camusu Aike or camp by the tall grass moving in the wind—where the Aónikenk community, gathered onto a reserve in 1898 and whittled down ever since, remains today. Only those seeking to lay claim to it needed a word for the whole of Patagonia.

The claimants began with Magellan's men, who met the Aónikenk in 1520, measured the people against themselves, and called them giants—patagones, perhaps after the monster in a chivalric novel all of Spain was reading.

The maps kept the Spanish monster's name.

Perito Moreno bears not quite a name but a title: perito, the expert. Francisco Moreno earned it honestly, walking El Sur from his twenties. When Chile argued the border should follow the waters, he showed the waters could not be trusted to hold a steady line. Rivers here had swapped oceans over time, rerouted by the ice itself. His science held; the border ruling kept forty-two thousand square kilometres in Argentina. The state paid him in land; he gave a portion of it back, and his grant became the country's first national park—the tradition that is meant to guard the glaciers.

Patagonia is not simply mountains. Most of it is steppe—a dry plateau of wind and scrub running east to the Atlantic, with the Andes pressed against its far edge. The steppe runs into Chile without slowing down, one land under two flags, though the land itself never signed anything. The postcards are all mountains; the territory is mostly the wind between them.



The mountains are almost the reward, the sudden vertical event after hours of horizontal exposure—rising, when they finally come, like a fortress wall the horizon had been hiding, white and serrated across the whole west. Before them comes the road, which kept changing its mind—asphalt for an hour, then ripio—the pavement arriving and giving up in stretches, a lone parador appearing after so much emptiness it seemed less built than hallucinated.

Ripio means gravel, but gravel is too polite a word. Ripio is stones with opinions. When another car appeared in the opposite direction, I lifted one hand from the wheel and pressed it against the windshield.

Fabrice stared at me.

“What are you doing?”

“Holding the parabrasas.”

“Why?”

“So it doesn’t break.”

He looked from my hand to the approaching car, to the stones, back to me.

“You are holding the windshield?”

“Yes.”

“With your hand?”

“Yes.”

“While driving?”

“It’s normal.”

It was normal where I come from: half superstition, half practical knowledge, half theatre, which already makes three halves and therefore Argentina.

I was driving at sixty kilometres an hour. Fabrice tried later and did not go beyond forty. Love is many things. Sometimes it is watching a Swiss man negotiate gravel at the speed of philosophical doubt.

Foreign writers have often gone to Patagonia to collect fragments: bones, rumours,



giants, exiles, scraps of skin, stories made stranger by distance. I understand the temptation, but that is not why I came. I did not want to collect the South in pieces. I wanted it to vouch for me. I wanted the man I loved to understand where I came from without me having to explain it.

I wanted Patagonia to do the talking.

Some days, El Sur yells. The wind throws itself against the car, the ripio attacks the chassis and the signs declare sovereignty for Argentina in capital letters—provinces announcing themselves, distance markers counting down to Antarctica, a claim kept frozen by an international treaty. Liliana Ancalao, a Mapuche poet writing in today's Patagonia, knows this wind: it always returns, she says, borrándonos los pasos—erasing our footsteps.

Other days, the land goes so silent you can hear your own need for meaning become embarrassing.

The road to Perito Moreno Glacier went on and on. Past blue signs that state Las Malvinas son Argentinas, insisting the islands that English maps claim as the Falklands are Argentine. Past lakes too turquoise for realism, toward horizons that refuse to come closer.

Before the trip I had made Fabrice watch my private Malvinas syllabus with subtitles, “to understand,” I said, though it was really for me. I love those films—Illuminados por el fuego above all—stories of the boys sent south to war in the cold by men with speeches, brothers and sons freezing in their foxholes while the radio promised victory.

From the scrub alongside the road, guanacos watched us pass with the calm of animals who know humans have overestimated the importance of asphalt. People had warned us about them even more gravely than the weather or scarcity of fuel stations along the way. They cross without warning, someone said, because they do not understand cars. I thought this could not be accurate. It is not that guanacos do not understand cars. It is that they do not recognize the moral authority of the road.

Getting to the glacier is itself a system. We drove into the park, left our rental car in the lot and boarded a shuttle to a service area that provided a cafeteria, toilets, maps, and the sense that we were inside a machine that had done this many times. The maps laid out a circuit of balconies and walking trails classified by colour according to difficulty, a whole stage set designed for the choreography of safe astonishment.

The park system was so orderly I caught myself looking for the foreign operator behind it, some Swiss ghost in the machinery. This was unfair. Also revealing. I had

become so used to defending Argentina's disorder that Argentine competence briefly seemed suspicious. Just beyond the service area, the set designers' last trick: the path to the balconies climbed under trees that gave nothing away. Anticipation pulled us through the leafy tunnel—green above, dirt below, the backs of strangers' heads bobbing ahead. Then the trees opened.

From the balconies, Perito Moreno looked less like an ice wall than like a country in another state of matter. Nations are made of paper, signs, and maps; this was a country made of ice. Its front stretched five kilometres across the lake, white where the light struck it, bruised blue in the fissures. Not the postcard blue of travel advertising. It was deeper, stranger—the blue of air pressed out of ice, of density, time under pressure. And it was dirty along its edges and crevices. Magnificent without cleanliness.



Title: Choreography

Photo Credit: Sol

Somewhere beyond us, the ice cracked—a clap like thunder, then a crackle of smaller detonations. The sounds moved through the glacier before they reached the air, or that is how it seemed: internal first, a thought passing through a body too large to see the whole. Every head on the balconies turned toward the sound before there was anything to see. The calm before the storm—still motionless on the surface, already chaotic below. A section of the wall leaned outward with terrible calm. It did not fall immediately. It inclined, as if considering the lake. For a second, there was almost grace. Then, the mass plunged, and the lake burst white where it took the ice in—a second surge of sound now, nothing like the first: not the breaking of a body but the water taking it, deep, rolling, a sound with tonnage in it. It arrived late to our ears, after the fall was already finished. The delayed report of a violence already completed.



The crowd made a noise in return. The lake closed.

Still, the balcony was not enough. Seeing the glacier from safety, hearing it crack and calve, produced the old human problem: distance sharpened desire. I wanted to touch it. To walk on it. Lay my body against it. The protected view made contact feel necessary.

The glacier is sold in tiers with increasing access. Balcony views come with the park fee, which is all that most Argentines can afford. Our Big Ice tickets bought us a boat ride to it for an afternoon of “exploring caves, crevasses, and blue labyrinths in the heart of the glacier” and the chance to feel briefly like explorers. The boat toured us around the lake for exactly thirty minutes, nosing along the glacier’s front so we could photograph it. We docked at one of several moorings and walked half an hour through the forest to a rocky clearing at the glacier’s edge where we sat for our guides to strap on our metal crampons.

Our first steps on the ice were inelegant. Crampons make a person honest. You cannot glide, cannot charm the surface, cannot perform ease. You place one foot and feel the metal bite. You shift weight. You place the other. The body becomes practical. Ankles, knees, breath. Pride, for once, was useless.

I reached for Fabrice’s hand before I could make a theory of it. His glove was wet. Mine was frozen stiff around my walking pole. That was all: pressure through fabric, balance moving from one body into another. I had spent years being proud of not needing that transfer. Pride, on the glacier, had no traction.

Then came the white cart. The chopped ice. The whisky. The chocolates. The toast.

On the balconies I had wanted to touch the glacier, to walk on it. Nobody had said anything about drinking it.

I drank. Of course I did. I was cold and thrilled and human. Refusing would have been another act, and I was tired of performing purity. But all I could think, as the ice melted in my mouth, was: what are we doing?

Not what are they doing. What are we doing?

Days later we visited “Glaciarium,” the ice museum in a building shaped like shards of ice, standing alone in the steppe just outside El Calafate. I wished I had gone before visiting the glacier, not after. Our guide spoke of the park’s glaciers like siblings: Upsala the giant, retreating; Spegazzini with the tallest front; Viedma, Mayo, Ameghino.



Perito Moreno, she told us, has a record: it advances until it seals an arm of Lago Argentino. The trapped water rises by thirty metres and floods the shoreline ranches. Once, the Argentine Navy came to fight the ice, but their bombs failed to break the dam. It has sealed and broken the lake more than twenty times in a century, on no schedule anyone can fix.

At the end of the visit, she guided us towards the *Glaciobar*. For an additional fee you could also have a drink served over glacier ice. We kept walking.

A blue sign on a Patagonian road announces possession over islands most Argentines will never see. The South is full of claims that explorers staked over immensities that do not answer to them. The glacier did not answer. It advanced, cracked, calved, absorbed light, let its sound arrive late. Moreno never saw the ice that carries his title, and yet it was he who took Chaltén, the Aónikenk's smoking mountain, and renamed it Fitz Roy, after an English captain. All of it—the science, the border ruling, the park, the names—served a nation that had already made the original people of the land almost disappear from it. Desaparecer—a verb my country would learn to use again.

For years, Perito Moreno was offered to us as the exception: the stable glacier, the advancing glacier growing in size while others shrank, the one that allowed awe without guilt. Later I would read that even this story was failing: thinning, retreat, acceleration. Later still came the legal language, deciding which ice matters, which ice functions, which ice may be subjected to extraction projects.

My work had trained my attention on human damage: what one person, one army, one state, one corporation can do to another body. On the glacier the frame widened. The victim was not metaphorical. It was under my boots, in my glass, moving and breaking while we called it an experience. That was the industry's word. The trek was an experience, the whisky was an experience, the calving that made the crowd gasp was the experience of a lifetime. In my work, when a body breaks, someone opens a file. Here, we took photos, clinked glasses.

I had brought Fabrice to Argentina thinking I needed to translate the country, but the talking had begun to die earlier in the trip, at a Magellanic penguin colony. We walked through where they lived, stepping on ground paved with their shit, and one of them bit me. We were not welcome, and the penguin was right. See? said a voice I recognised as my own. See where you are, Sol. After that I went quiet, into myself, the way I sometimes do, holding conversations no one can hear. Somewhere along the ripio, I had stopped interpreting the country for anyone. But you can give up on a job and still feel a sense of duty to it.

In my work I have spent years beside interpreters. Everything passes through them

without being addressed to them, and when the session ends they carry nothing home. It is how they survive. I had taken this position without noticing: my country passing through me toward Fabrice, none of it landing where I stood. But the glacier relieved me of my duty. It refused translation so completely that I finally understood: Argentina did not need me to make it legible. I had needed Argentina to make me understood.

It also accused me.

I had wanted Patagonia to prove something: that my country could be beautiful beyond disorder, vast beyond crisis, worthy beyond the small humiliations of systems that fail and napkins that dissolve in your hand. Instead, the glacier showed me a larger indictment—not against my country, against us. We were standing on a body of ice, drinking from it, joking about it, and loving it, while men in offices across the globe found new ways to decide which parts of the frozen world could be turned into profit, new ways to defy borders and park boundaries, and new ways to ignore the rivers and the ice and the laws that are meant to protect them.

The thought arrived without diplomacy: I am tired of humans.

Not people. Not Fabrice beside me, warm-handed and patient. Not the witnesses and friends and strangers whose lives have made mine. Humans: the species with the flag, the knife, the glass, the law, the development plan, the smiles hiding fear in photographs.



Title: Glacier's Edge

Photo Credit: Fabrice



Maybe that was what the glacier did to me: it made the old patriotic reflex feel small.

I had wanted Argentina to be admired. The glacier asked for something more difficult. It asks to be heard. It is asking to be protected from humans.

On our drive back to El Calafate, a group of guanacos crossed almost at once, moving slowly, long necks turning toward the car with mild, bureaucratic interest before continuing across the asphalt. In that car, before I had words like career transition or environmental protection, I began a private inventory of the words I already had: law, harm, responsibility, protection. I had used them for humans. The ice was a body too.

I did not own the South because I was born in Argentina. I did not understand it better than Fabrice because my passport said so. I was just one of the creatures passing through—nervous, overdressed, underprepared, trying to keep balance on something ancient and unstable.

The second guanaco came alone and fast, a pale body cutting through the scrub without warning. We slowed and watched it disappear into the wind-flattened steppe, into the older Argentina.

Fabrice was beside me, quiet. I did not ask what he thought. For once, I did not need the country to be reviewed. Behind us, the glacier kept moving in its own time. In my mouth, the oldest ice I had ever swallowed was already gone.

Visual

Art



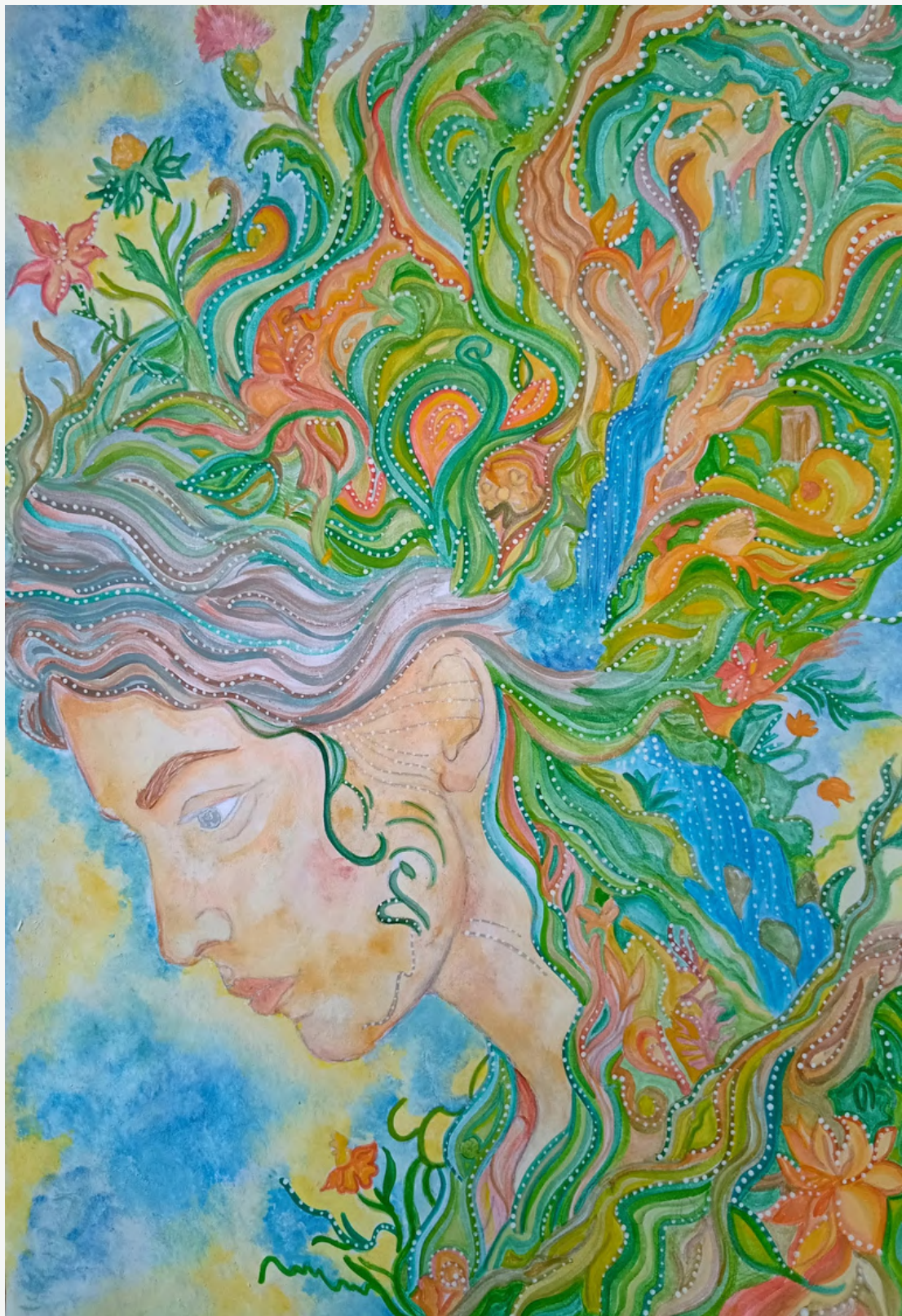
The Sound of Oak

by Katie Rosenblatt



Wild Wheat

by Jasmine Redford



Untamed Currents

by Naduli Sahanya Gunathilake



Blue

by Cara Schwartz



Tranquil Tempest Amazon

by Ishita Das



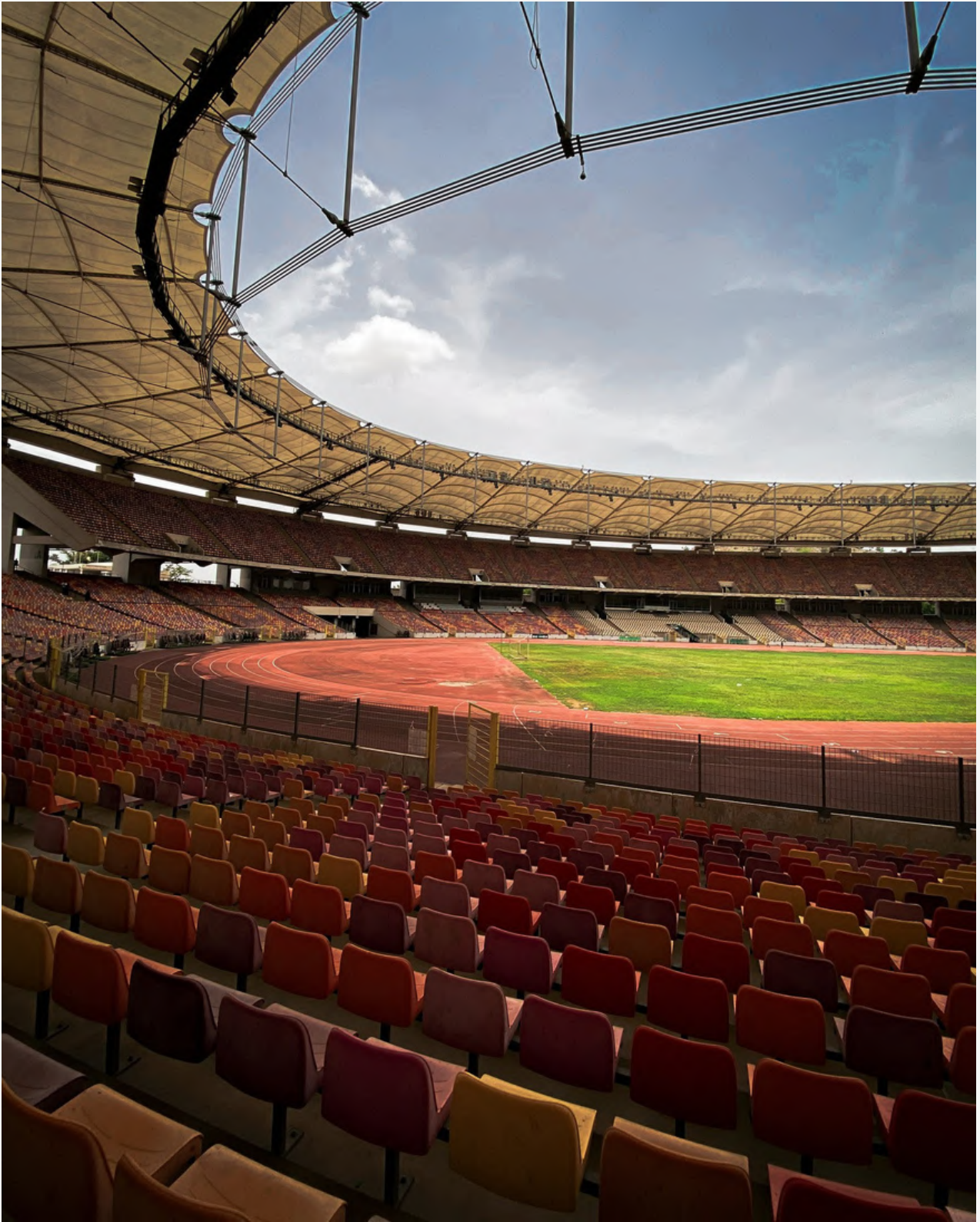
The Wilderness Resists

by Angelica M. Dalinas



Butterflies in Love

by Christine Glinski-Kaufmann



The Moshood Colosseum

by David Anyanwu



Fall Creek Treesit 1998

by Jenna Shaputis

Contributors

David Anyanwu: David Anyanwu is a Nigerian visual artist and fine art photographer whose work explores identity, symbolism, emotional conflict, and cultural memory through conceptual portraiture. He works primarily in fine art and documentary photography, using colours, objects, props, and environments to create narratives that reflect culture, identity, silence, and vulnerability.

María Sol Beker: María Sol Beker is an Argentine writer based in Geneva. She has worked for fifteen years in humanitarian response across conflict-affected contexts including Afghanistan, South Sudan, Ukraine, and Syria, with a focus on human rights, rule of law, and the protection of the natural environment in armed conflict. Her work has appeared in *Brevity*, *The Republic of Letters*, and *Iron Oaks*. "A Glacier Without Manners" is part of a longer project on landscape, complicity, and what people do to the places they love.

Robert Benz: Robert Benz is a child of immigrants. He was born on Nakota territory, grew up in Denendeh, and has spent most of his adult life on Cree and Métis land. He has been a bush pilot, an actor, and, when budget allows, a wanderer. His poems and lyrical short stories have appeared in *New Welsh Review*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *The Antigonish Review*, *The New Quarterly*, and *Grain Magazine*.

Anastasia Caron: Anastasia Caron is a queer Métis scholar and writer currently based in Tiohtià:ke where they are working towards a Master's degree in English Literature. Their academic work focuses on the intersections of science fiction and Indigeneity. Their creative work explores connection to the land and what it means to be a woman in a colonized world.

Ruth F. Corro: Ruth F. Corro lives with her mother in Ibajay, Aklan. For five years, she has balanced work with full-time caregiving. She writes haibun in quiet moments, finding strength in faith amid exhaustion and loneliness. "Still Holding" reflects her interior landscape of endurance and grace.

Angelica M. Dalinas: Angelica M. Dalinas is a 14-year-old visual artist from Biñan City, Laguna, Philippines. Her work explores themes of reflection, introspection, and the search for purpose within everyday spaces. She is interested in photography, visual art, and conceptual storytelling, often pondering how life persists even in unexpected environments.

Ishita Das: Ishita Das is a neurobiologist, writer and self-taught artist. Despite years of training in high-tech medical research, some of it at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where she earned her Ph.D., she decided to

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become a naturalist after two visits to the Peruvian Amazon. She writes and illustrates creative nonfiction on nature and wildlife and has also ventured into speculative science fiction, with some short stories receiving small awards. She now lives in Bangalore, India.

Brandon Fick: Brandon Fick received his MFA in Writing from the University of Saskatchewan in 2022. His fiction and poetry has been published in *Toronto Journal*, *El Portal*, *Hart House Review*, *Scrivener Creative Review*, and in medias res, and he has published reviews in *Prairie Fire*, *Prism International*, *The Fiddlehead*, and *SaskBooks*. Longlisted for the 2022 Bridge Prize, and recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Brandon is slowly attempting to write a novel.

Emily Garland: Emily Garland is a queer, neuro-squirrely writer hermitting in Regina, Saskatchewan. She has a dusty MFA from the University of British Columbia, entirely too many dogs, and is constantly procrastinating against novel revisions with poetry. She loves big, yellow sunflower fields and dreaming of the end of the world in equal measure.

Christine Glinski-Kaufmann: Christine Glinski-Kaufmann was born in 1953 and lives in Liechtenstein. She worked as a lawyer until 2008 and later pursued further education in journalism, photography, and fiction. Her journalistic and literary work—including columns, prose, and poetry—has received awards for short stories. She frequently collaborates with her husband, Adam Glinski, on literary and photographic projects.

Naduli Sahanya Gunathilake: Naduli Sahanya Gunathilake is an artist and writer born in 2007. Their work focuses on psychological realism and the internal wild, using a contemporary folk style inspired by historical frescoes and traditional painting. Through intricate, rhythmic linework and mosaic textures, they aim to transform complex family dynamics and mental landscapes into vibrant visual narratives. They have previously participated in the Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition and the Ocean Awareness Contest.

Suraj Gupta: Suraj Gupta is a writer from Bhojpur, Bihar, India, drawn to quiet human moments, memory, and the hidden poetry of ordinary spaces. His work explores emotion, place, and the beauty found in everyday life.

Marie Halpin: After retiring, she and her husband spent two years traveling the world. When they are not on the road, she spends her time in their South Dakota home, writing short stories. Although fiction, all her stories are inspired by the places she has visited and the many people she has met.

Contributors

Yolanda Hansen: Yolanda Hansen lives and writes in Treaty 4, where she works with the writing community. She has an MA from the University of Regina and her work has been published in literary magazines and the anthologies *I'll Get Right on It* and *Sublime*. She reads voraciously, eats local and likes to wander outside.

Indiana Humniski: Indiana M. A. Humniski is a creative writer born and raised in Gimli, MB. She holds deep interest in reading and writing about crafting and corporeality. She is a fan of making each piece of writing a multi-sensory experience, something that she hopes to evoke in this piece about a surprisingly sensual yet troublingly inhabited coffee pot — abandoned by graduate students, on the academic grind (sans coffee beans).

Miranda Jensen: Miranda Jensen is a creative activist with roots in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through her writing and critical theory, she seeks not merely to interpret the world, but to change it. She is a Casa Uno Residency recipient, and her work has been published in Nature Futures, Across the Margin, and Pictura Journal (nominated for Best of Net 2026 and Best Small Fiction 2026), among others. You can find her at www.mirandajensen.com and on X @MirandaJensen.

David Anson Lee: David Anson Lee is a physician, philosopher, and poet from Texas, born on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. His work explores the intersections of landscape, identity, and the interior wilderness of human experience. His poetry has appeared in *The Orchards*, *Braided Way*, *Eunoia Review*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, and other literary journals. He is currently preparing a full-length manuscript that examines medicine, memory, and the shifting boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical.

Sean Mulroy: Writer and multi-disciplinary artist Sean Patrick Mulroy is an internationally recognized poet, performer and award-winning professor. Mulroy has given lectures on history, poetry, politics, and queer rights, as well as readings of his creative work in bars, museums, schools, embassies, theater festivals, and underground clubs on 4 continents, in over 30 countries. A 2013 Lambda Literary Fellow, 2018 Writer-in-Residence at The Kerouac Project in Orlando Florida, winner of the 2019 Margaret Reid Prize, and winner of the 2020 Button Poetry Chapbook Contest, Mulroy's debut poetry collection, *Hated for the Gods*, was published by Button Poetry in 2023. Born and raised in the American South, he presently lives in NYC.

Jasmine Redford: Jasmine Redford is an illustrator, instructor, and PhD

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candidate whose research covers comics, graphic narratives, and Canadian Literature. She obtained her BFA (Visual Art) from the Emily Carr University of Art Design and her BA (English Honours) and MA (English) from the University of Saskatchewan. She's the artist of *Siegfried: Dragon Slayer* (2022), signs her work as Minjaz, enjoys coffee a little bit too much, and is team Oxford Comma.

Katie Rosenblatt: Katie Rosenblatt lives and works in Western Massachusetts. She is a mother, painter, and poet, and she works in public education. She studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she received a BFA in Jewelry and Metalsmithing.

Sue Sesnon Salt: Sue Sesnon Salt is a fourth-generation Californian. She is now retired and has the time to pursue her writing. Her nonfiction has been published on the Brevity Blog, Blood and Bourbon and in Pure Slush anthologies. Her fiction appears in *Pacific Review*. Her poems are featured in the "Women in a Golden State" anthology, online at the Wave and *The Modern Artist*. Her haiku have also appeared online.

Jenna Shaputis: Jenna Shaputis is a mother, gardener, tai chi player, sawyer, biochar advocate, and chicken herder. Born in a Chicago suburb to a Lithuanian family, she studied Interior design, liberal arts and creative writing in greater metropolitan Chicago. Street puppet theatre, indie music, waiting tables, and traveling abroad marked her early interests. The Mayan Route in Central America's jungle inspired her move west to the wild places of the Pacific Northwest, where she now lives in Olympia, WA.

Cara Schwartz: Cara Schwartz (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the University of Saskatchewan. A settler scholar situated on Treaty Six territory, the homeland of the Métis, her research is situated at the intersection of Black and Indigenous literary studies.

Harsh Vardhan Singh: Harsh Vardhan Singh is a writer from Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India, whose work explores inheritance, landscape, and the architecture of memory. Raised between the Marwari-speaking desert and the English-speaking city, his writing lives in the space between languages, tracing what survives migration, drought, and modernity. His work draws on the vanishing traditions of the Thar Desert — its stepwells, its water-carriers, its oral grammars of survival. "Baori" is his first submission to a literary journal. He is interested in how form can mirror the structures it describes, and in the stories that live in the body before the mind learns to tell them.

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Elongema Udofia: Elongema Udofia is currently an undergraduate at The University of Uyo, a Best of The Net Nominee, and lover of dogs. He has been published in Brittle Paper, Salamander Ink, Blue Marble Review, Full House Literary Magazine, Sunlight Press, Ekondo Review, The Bombay Literary Magazine, Arc Poetry and elsewhere. A Recipient of The Art of Unity Creative Award (Youth Category, 2023), Winner of The Fireflies Prize for Poetry (2024), Finalist for The Ninth Letter Literary Awards (Poetry Category, 2025) and Winner of The Inaugural Joe Ushie Prize for Poetry (2026). Say hi to him on X: @obongemem_001

Chisomaga Evelyn Umenyi: Chisomaga Evelyn Umenyi is a Nigerian writer and pharmacy student at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Her work explores memory, girlhood, and the quiet inheritances that shape people's lives, often rooted in contemporary ordinary settings. She has been longlisted for the 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize.

River Vetter: River Vetter (they/them) is a queer and trans poet currently working towards their MFA at UMass Boston. Their work has been published by or is forthcoming from Impossible Archetype, Vagabond City, petrichor, June Road Press, and other magazines. Find them on Instagram at @riv.er.v.

Victor Wang: Victor Wang (he/him) is a Chinese-Canadian writer living in Montréal. His writing has appeared in JoySauce and Cold Tea Collective, and his first children's picture book was published in 2025 with Flammarion Jeunesse. Victor strives to tell stories that are multicultural and unapologetic, though his greatest passion is helping others become storytellers too.

Meryem Yildiz: Meryem Yildiz is a Turkish-Canadian poet from Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), and the author of Backbone (Guernica Editions, 2025). Her poems have appeared in literary journals across the country, including Arc Poetry Magazine, CV2, The Ex-Puritan, The Fiddlehead, and PRISM International, among others. She's also a poetry editor at LBRNTH, a queer literature and arts magazine, which she co-edits with Misha Solomon. Winner of The Malahat Review's Far Horizons Award for Poetry and the Quebec Writers' Federation's carte blanche Prize, her work explores identity, culture, and the psyche.

Editorial Team

Jenna Miller (she/her) is a second-year PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Saskatchewan. Her research explores how women authors depict more-than-human relationships and respond to environmental crisis through life writing.

Kyle Jansen (he/him) is an English major and Fine Arts minor who recently graduated from the University of Saskatchewan. This year's *Fieldstone Review* is his initial foray into professional editing. When he isn't cradling his loving cat Faye, you can often find him deeply immersed in, or creating, all manner of fantastical works. Kyle is also a staunch advocate of using writing, in any form, to discover personal truths and find succour from trauma and illness, and he believes it's never too late to pursue writing and the arts.

Anna Gow (she/her) is a second-year English PhD student. She is excited and grateful to help others hone their fictive craft. When she is not hyper-fixated on studying and writing for school, she can be found reading fantasy/sci-fi, colouring, doing puzzles, and sitting on her couch with her cats.

Bonnie Heilman (she/they) has a Bachelor of Arts with distinction, emphasizing Postcolonial Literatures and Indigenous Studies. She is completing her MFA in Writing at the University of Saskatchewan with a literary memoir that reflects on experiences of prairie settlers in Canada, by examining the building blocks of imperialist power structures, which have both benefited and harmed farm families like hers. Bonnie is a fourth-generation settler of German-Russian descent. As a queer woman with roots in small town Saskatchewan and inner-city Saskatoon, Bonnie is dedicated to understanding and nurturing Treaty relationships, seeking pathways toward harmony, liberation, and justice for all Treaty People.

Van Osborne Zimrose (they/them) is an emerging writer from Treaty 1 Territory. They write fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction, and are currently working on an MFA in Writing at the University of Saskatchewan.

Parastoo Tahmasbi (she/her) is a second-year PhD student in the Department of English. She is interested in digital humanities and 18th-century literature. Her PhD research focuses on eighteenth-century lewd literature and memoirs of sex workers through the frameworks of gender and spatial literary studies. Parastoo spends her free time deep-diving into her crafty hobbies and researching weird historical facts.



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