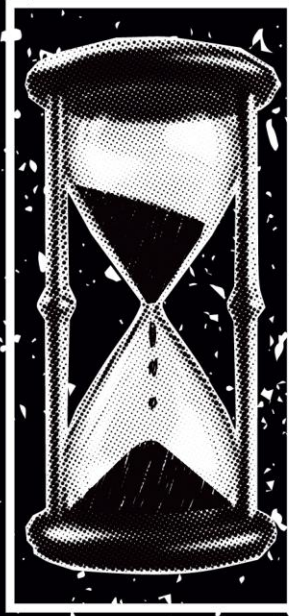


# GENERATION:

# SECRETS



SPRING  
2025



# GENERATION: Secrets

Spring 2025

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## Foreword

It's no secret that these are trying times for the arts. We are witnessing the erosion of creativity and innovation in our institutions of higher learning fueled by cost cutting mandates that are brutally short-sighted and disheartening. Regardless of business efficacies and the sudden need for "accountability," the resulting adverse impact in classrooms, our university and college campuses and in society in general will be detrimental to the growth and development of our young people and our collective well-being.

At the same time, it is gratifying to see students filling the ominous void by resurrecting this time-honoured publication. By extending the invitation in this issue to students from other universities, we see collegiality at its best. For some, *Generation Magazine* is a first opportunity to be published; in fact, I was one such rookie when my offerings appeared in an ancestral edition of *Generation* nearly a half century ago. Though I would call my early work "experimental" (read mediocre), my fondest memory was of a future Governor-General's Award winner, the Canadian poet, Phil Hall, who acted as our esteemed student editor. His encouragement and insights were welcomed by those to whom he gave this initial publishing break. For one shining moment, the future never looked better.

To produce a publication that includes poetry, prose and collage/visual art is to speak stridently about the importance of art in our lives. It is a statement to what is vital to a community. It is a challenge to conventional thinking and advances the proposition that a celebration of all that is creative has value—a manifestation of that which is the best in all of us.

The artist Henri Matisse tells us that "creativity takes courage." In these unprecedented times, we need all the spirit we can muster. So, cheers to these young authors as they do what it takes to build brave new worlds. We will watch in awe and wonder.

Peter Hrastovec  
Poet Laureate, Windsor, Ontario  
February 2025

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## **can you hear me?**

*Callum Duncan*

What I'm trying to  
Tell you isn't  
True the world is  
Hidden from  
View the lies  
For what they  
Aren't you tired  
Of being played for a  
Fool the eyes  
That continuously  
Watch your  
Step out of the dark  
—and escape the cycle.

## Secrets in your chest

*Kitti Keller*

From whispers and shivers,  
Running down your spine.  
From gossip and folly,  
Spilled tea leaves,  
And friends leave.  
Accusations and shushes,  
Chuckles, gasps and tears,  
A great big knife, you cannot  
Tell.  
Pull it out of your chest and  
Watch the shushed conversations wash down the drain.  
Gone...  
Or washed into the waterways,  
Mingling, tangling,  
Caught in your pipes?  
Or unclogged by your neighbor?  
By the pressure of the open fire hydrant.  
Spraying the words over the ashes of your home.  
Flooding back to the gutter, to the sea, to the hungry fish.  
Now all the bubbles have heard, or  
Did the knife stay lodged, the whispers only  
Replaying in your mind.  
Radio on repeat  
Again,  
And again,  
And again.  
The urge to grasp the handle, coming  
Again,  
And again,  
And again.  
Yet you pretend it's out of reach.  
Your glass ever being filled with water but never spilling.  
Always out of reach.  
But what if...  
No.

It's pushed further inside you.  
Out of reach.  
Behind the ribs, the heart and the walls,  
Skin reclosing,  
Blade inside,  
Almost all right, even  
normal, on the outside.  
Almost...

## Cavities—Unknown

Joven Panahon

An empty space sits in my body, between my stomach and chest. Some days it lingers in my intestines, right at the junction between big and small. Other days, it sits high at the top of my lungs, a numb slice of tissue. Wherever it lands, I know that it will only stay for a little bit. A personal sinkhole roving across my body.

*have lost*  
(*You are running out--*)

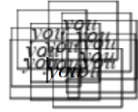
My hands do not move, yet tremble. The room is a mess, every corner bared, every pile dispersed. This Pangea of clothes and detritus, and, still, I remake it, millennia of work accelerated with fast hands and careless tosses. Searching for something that carved itself out of my body, the new eyes and wandering emptiness it left the only reminder that it was once there. Negative space in this body of art.

(*You are *lost*---you?*)

Meditation and tumbling through sixteen laundry runs have done me no favors. So, I left, the red thread of Google Maps tethering me back to my apartment. The modern-day Ariadne guides me through this labyrinthine city that has stolen away my ██████. Somewhere in between reflective towers and brick walls lies the piece of myself that I have lost.

Piped moonlight illuminates the streets and notes filter into my vision, as if I were wearing those Snapchat glasses I tried on last month. Crunches sound out beneath my feet as grass backs are broken in half by my worn-out shoe. Stilling momentarily, the sinkhole gouges out to the hand closest to the half-notes floating by. I shoulder through five alleyways that smell of the liquid at the bottom of trashcans and disposed cherry fruitcake vapes, led by a hole in my nails.

Answer is a balcony garden with an LP player. A woman stands, mug in hand and finger swaying in the wind. It settles on me, pointing, a challenge and confirmation. Her pots of plants writhe, leaves rustling and bees pollinating in the breeze. The doors beep.



The woman's hair is naturally silver, not just a trick of moonlight, and the mug is excessively ornate. Rococo architecture in a cup. She sips, hums, and "You come looking."

"You know."

"Know enough," she sighs, gesturing for me to come in. "Your friends worry about you."

"Do you need to know?" I respond, maneuvering around a tall plant that writhes in its pot, covered in a bell jar. A lizard crawls around inside, feet sticking to the glass as its tongue whips about in the humid air.

"Sit on the couch. It's what you deserve for following my notes," the woman waves to the couch, a lumpy thing riddled with swathes of faded colors. A three-eyed cat prowls on its arms, yowling once before blobbing about. I sit on the other side, watching as the woman opens up a drawer in the coffee table. The sinkhole evolves into a caldera.

"Thank you for the confirmation." Upon glancing back at the cat, there are two eyes and an eye-shaped marking, no third eye blinking at me, just loose fur rustling.

"We had an arrangement, before," she pauses, making a face, "Truthfully and technically, it was my boss you had an arrangement with, I was just the handler." She passes the papers over, placing it on top of a stack of hardcover books. "Enclosed within the contents of these papers are the details of your arrangement. Everything is as it was and should be."

"Are you sure? My memory is not as pristine as it used to be. How do I know tha—" A hearty meow sounds out from the cat as it prances off the arm to swat at the bell jar.

"Look at the paper. All the details are in there," Handler says as she turns to the cat, "Rebeccana, do NOT swipe at the bell jar holding Sir Magnimus! You know what happened last time!"

Reading through the papers, I note this:

- I gave up something. It was redacted.
- I gained financial support for every creative endeavor.
- My hippocampus will be faulty in regards to parties involved, but not the content.

- The caldera regresses. The sinkhole cracks out to a colossal, gaping maw that spans the entirety of my torso. A gash or a valley, aching to be filled. Stitched close using inked lines and the fur of a three- or two-eyed cat. Still, it is hollow and dank, odor leaking out.

“Was it worth it?” Handler asks, unruly cat soaking the yellow light in her lap. “Obsessing over something you cannot identify?” She laughs.

I release the lizard as I leave.



# CALLING CARDS

*Maya Roumie*

stolen pearlescent moments. coveted quicksand, slipslides in only our two heads. abracadabra.  
no flash, no camera. see, i am one half of a show on the road. set up shop for a short time.  
curfew stretches as it does. snaps still not enough. skipped stairs two at a  
time to tell scripted lies, fragmented secrets. sincerity lost like Sappho scrolls. silverwand  
slices sunset. night falls quicker than it does with you. i stand where we stood,  
six minutes ago. scheduled cabaret disappearing pact. polished act.  
house of mirrors moves around me. refracted scene.  
now i see you. now i don't.  
a kaleidoscope feeling. heavy as velvet  
curtain. light as silk kerchief.  
we were half-easy to swallow.  
a cloud of puffed smoke  
and not a single green carnation  
on gravel. like we were  
never really there.  
like we were  
never really  
there

## Plotches

*Hannah Montello*

Dripping wax on words,  
Pressing the emblem of my love to its spine.  
Paper and ink join in a kiss  
To form the prose of my heart.  
Send to the wandering eyes of your mind,  
Did you catch it?  
Sighs transcribed  
To form shapes that sing and cry.

Lies cover lies and lies.  
Hidden deep in the pages of the demised.  
Love is folded and creased and fined,  
Stamped and signed.  
Star-crossed scarred across the sky,  
Each twinkling wound a reminder  
Of what would never be mine.

# Inheritance

*Meagan Mellor*

The house feels like walking into a stifled scream.

The walls softened with hanging coats of dust  
complement tumbling splintered stairs that creak dry.

The hallways weep, the ghosts in the closets linger  
slinking down your mother's Persian carpets;  
away from their skeletons that  
hang.

Your childhood bedroom reeks  
of the smell of a childhood dog,  
who waits for you.  
Once by the door, now nestled in the vines  
of an overgrown backyard—  
and god, you wish you could join him.

But your childhood bedroom feels like an antique birdcage.  
The smell of brass hangs thick,  
and your wrists constantly ache.  
And you take it in.

Its rust-covered chain reeks of tang,  
and rocks you from that sweet place above.  
You'll perch on your throne of bones, made from  
Your childhood dog,  
Your parents' marriage,  
Your mother's broken dreams  
Your wasted potential—  
And you claim it.

Your legacy.

You'll look around the cage, and you'll scream.  
Scream like your mother did.  
Howl with the rage of your father,  
and accept your inheritance.

Maybe one night, you'll find the strength to escape.

You'll fly to the moon and dance with the stars,  
be a creature made of cosmo dust and shadows.

But the house wants you, and your mother needs you.

Yet, you try to fly like the Gods anyway,  
forgetting you're a mere parrot—

An echo of your family's shame, bound to a generational curse.

You spread your wings like Icarus,  
Before your destiny clips them,

and you fall.

Your screams stifled by the clanging of your corpse on the  
cold cage floor.

## **A Continuously Moving Standstill**

*Lazur Victorian*

Slowly, the tortured, tainted soul began to turn to gold as you tightly trapped my terrible traumas in a time capsule. Lost in the sea of clocks, those once-cold memories drifted away, leaving only the best moments behind.

## **Her hands smell like the earth, but she doesn't ask why**

*Jordan Murray*

She doesn't go near the garden anymore.  
Not since the day the air turned strange,  
thick with the smell of rain that never came.  
The gate is rusted shut now—  
or so she tells herself.

Beneath the o v e r g r o w t h,  
something shifts.  
Ivy twists up the trellis  
like veins under her skin,  
carrying whispers of memories and the salty taste of tears.

She tells herself it's just a place—  
just roots and leaves and dirt.  
But her hands still ache  
when she remembers planting something  
she can't name.

At night, she dreams of blooms  
in shades too dark to name,  
their petals jagged,  
sharp enough to tear her skin.

When she wakes,  
her hands smell of earth.  
She doesn't ask why.

## Finally, A Wake

*Teagan Summers*

The room hissed with whispers amidst the clinking of glasses and the gnashing of teeth on finger sandwiches. An engorged, pixelated face observed them from its place in the corner with a smile that mocked the dramatic frowns of the room. Its piercing green eyes watched people take turns slowly approaching the bed against the far wall where a girl lay still, surrounded by a translucent black veil separating her from the life around her.

I approached a group of mourners clutching dry, crumpled tissues, clustered around the smiling portrait. An elderly woman suddenly grabbed my arm, digging in her cracked, yellow nails as she wailed, “Gone too soon! She was such a precious girl!”

I yanked my arm free and took a small step away, disgusted. The people around her nodded and mumbled, patting her shoulder and squeezing her gnarled fingers.

“You want to know something about her?” the old lady continued. The crowd nodded enthusiastically, looking like a flock of black vultures pecking at a corpse. “She used to cry every time we watched a romance movie. She thought everyone deserved love.”

The crowd sighed in unison, and the sound washed through the room like a sandstorm scraping my skin. I looked away, repulsed, and caught sight of the body on the bed. I watched in horror as the girl’s features began to shift. Her pale, white lips bled into a ruby red, and her hooked nose that sneered down at everyone in her portrait was smushed in and stretched out, molding itself like a contortionist to become soft and round. Around her the veil darkened so that she became more obstructed from view, but her figure could still be seen lying in bed as though sleeping, listening to the chatter.

My stomach churned at the sight of it, and I put my glass down, believing it to have distorted my senses.

A shrill voice piped up, slicing through the noise: “She was a perfect girl! Everyone thinks she turned down that job opportunity because she was holding out for something better, but I know it was really just to stay close to me. She knew how much I needed her!”

The woman broke down in sobs, and the group comforted her in soft tones. “Such a good girl. The perfect daughter.”

I backed away from the group, unable to stomach it, and noticed the body on the bed writhing once more. Her neck was strained, like an elastic being pulled taut, until it burst into an elegant length, hoisting up an increasingly unfamiliar head. Her plump cheeks and the baby face her mother joked she never lost were sucked in as though a vacuum were slurping on her face, creating dimpled valleys that slashed her soft skin.

As I turned away, I noticed the curtains darken even more, so that all I could make out was her outline.

A man cleared his throat, the grumble silencing the room. "I loved her." There were some gasps at this. "We never talked about it, but now I see... It was always her. I'm in love with her."

The crowd exploded in cries, bowing their heads in front of the mocking portrait as if in worship. The figure that could be gleaned through the veil was warped once more. Her waist was pinched in, as though she were being squeezed from either side, and the hips erupted into gentle curves, stretching the skin as far as it would go. Her ankles were wrenched from her hips, stretching her legs and making the muscles pop so that her feet reached the end of her Procrustean bed. Her fingers, delicately placed on her chest, were pulled from her knuckles to become slenderer. Manicured spikes burst from her bitten fingertips.

The veil darkened until she was no longer visible.

I couldn't bear it.

The green eyes of the picture gazed at me with a challenging sparkle. The group continued to talk about the girl on the bed, who was no longer recognizable.

I took a step toward the girl and cleared my throat. "She cried during romances, but she laughed during horror movies because she liked seeing people in pain."

The crowd turned to face me, their faces paler than the body behind me.

"She stayed in town because the job offer was revoked after she tried blackmailing them for more money." I paused as the mourners murmured, shifting on their feet. "And the only person she ever loved was herself."

The green eyes in the corner flashed, but not out of anger. It seemed more like...relief.

The group shook their heads. "That's... that's not true," they muttered.

"Do you want to know who she really is?"

I pulled back the curtain, and the crowd gasped.

## **Cutting Away**

*Lazur Victorian*

And as I chisel away at the weight on my shoulders, I am always curious what I will get out of it. Sometimes, they turn into statues, works of art that please the world. Other times, I find precious crystals hidden deep within. Unfortunately, these occasions are rare. More often than not, I continue to work away with no reward in sight. Nothing to show for what I have been through, and I suppose that is the harsh reality of life. Not everything comes with a gift fit for your struggles.

## **Insatiable**

*Ryan McLaughlin*

You tongue out the source of it all,  
trying to release it from time's crooked teeth.  
This bad bite, this malocclusion in a maw so cold  
the brightest lights keep their distance.  
You unstitch the sparkling veil and poke  
the dense dark behind. And wonder, more.

Removing pages to stoke a truth from the embers,  
you point a sunlit glass on binding ties,  
scrubbing the world of secrets  
that never asked to be found.  
Picking limestone scabs to get at the slick slime sunk low,  
you fracture beds,  
vinegar the well,  
and exhaust yourself.

And you think: could this be God? Could I be God?  
And then you are gone.

# Monster in My Closet

*Katie Adjin*

There is a monster in my closet.

It appeared when I was twelve or so. Two white orbs in my closet, a hand of loose black threads keeping the door agape. I cried to my mother like any child would. But Mom just grumbled that it must have been my imagination, the darkness and streetlights teaming up to play a trick on me. And I believed it. After all, it was the middle of the night, when dreams touched the waking world with hazy hands of sleep. A simple little poke, no more.

But then the next night, as I settled into sleep, the orbs appeared again. Sleep no longer shielding me, fear grated against my muscles until they throbbed and locked. I didn't remember falling asleep that night, but I must have because the next thing I remembered was heated rays peeling open my eyes and the tired expression dragging Mom's lips.

The monster never left the closet.

Still, I learned to pull my pillow over my head to block out the dim glow. To keep my feet tucked under the blanket, just in case. To tell my mother I slept well despite the needling of eyes on me pricking me awake any time I tried to nod off. Music helped sometimes, curling into the crevices of thought that the eyes would often occupy. Other times the eyes would push it out and overflow into every corner of my mind. But on the very rare occasion, the eyes completely disappeared, and a soft snore would weave amongst the melody.

I tried to tell my mother again.

"Oh love, it's just in your head," she had said. The words seemed to drip out like sludge, but the tone was sweet this time. Like cough syrup. "It shall pass. We've all been there." She squeezed my hand, a smile scrunching her eyes closed. I never brought it up to her or any adult ever again.

Maria also has a monster in her closet.

She told me once at a sleepover when we were fourteen. We were celebrating the end of our first ever exams. Her arms encircling me, voice trembling against my ear like a moth's flutter. Or perhaps I was the one trembling. Two sets of clicks and chirps floated out of her closet. My monster seemed...happy. I had heard it said that when you know someone else is going through something similar, you feel a bit better. But

I knew it was only a matter of time until those eyes found me again. Even with a pillow over my head and my body plastered against Maria's back.

There is still a monster in my closet.

The closet is new, yet the familiar pulse of eyes is ever constant. Forehead to knee, because there is nothing else I can do with a chest ensnared by barbed wire. At least it's getting less painful. The first rays of morning dart across my bed, revealing the deep purple. "Five things I can see..."

A drawn-out creak snaps at my attention. So much for the exercise. A foot of tangled threads slithers out, halting jaggedly once it reaches the strip of sun.

"It won't hurt you," I snark.

For the first time, it listens to me. The threads unwind under the sun's expert touch.

Clumps of messy tightness turn into loose swirls and squiggles. A low laugh gurgles in my chest, but I can't let it get any farther than that.

I crack the curtains open a bit more. The sun reaches out to the strange figure, unwrapping it more. Rolling off my bed, I let the cool floor seep into my hands and crawl over to my monster.

It towers as much as I expected, though no taller than my father. I pat it a seat. It obliges, leaning against me. The threads wriggle against my exposed arms, some wrap around, but only for a moment.

It's...strange. Prickly like Grandma's cardigans. But not as bad as I thought.

"It's always going to be you and me, huh?" I think aloud.

The monster groans. I think that means 'yes.'

"This better work then..."

It's my turn to lay into the threads, their twisted bodies imprinting on my own, a lighter version of a rug burn. But at the centre, beyond the thread, frigid grey nothingness numbs it all. I sit there until my alarm jostles the monster back into the closet.

## **Tucked Away**

*Morgan Bezaire*

I sit and stare at desolate bedroom walls during hours of the night when nobody should be awake. Writhing about under my sheets, my brain continues its conscious rambling, pleading with my body to help its feeble attempts at memory association. After numerous restless nights, I cannot pinpoint how we've reached this point. The point where my mind is plagued with memories of you, each attempt to vanquish them vainer than the last.

All of my options have been exhausted: countless therapists, piles of personal essays, distractions that could never live up to you. Personally, I believe it to be a matter of closure. Years of stringing someone along and ending so abruptly cannot help but make you consider what was done so wrong. Perhaps I could have avoided the trainwreck of emotions last summer brought as it wound to its end; then again, maybe it was set to fail from the beginning. Some things simply aren't meant to be as much as you would like them to work. You and I were not made to last, but the memories that I procured in your arms were.

I will never forget how safe I felt each time you embraced me. Strong arms around such a frail young body, a girl who would've trusted you with anything. Each time you comforted me I looked forward to the next, never wanting to leave your grasp—and to some extent, I had gotten what I wished for. You still hold on quite well to my mind as I picture you each day—each time I feel myself struggling each time I fall into a blissful sleep; each time I struggle to close my eyes, you're always there.

Now, with my head clear, I realize that you were my everything while I was simply another skeleton tucked neatly into your closet. Your perfect little nothing.

## **Garden**

*Hannah Montello*

My hand grasps the cold metal handle of the gate,  
I pull and find resistance.  
So, I pull harder,  
Suddenly it is not a gate;  
But a box.  
A scream releases,  
I try to push  
And I push harder;  
It is too late.

Ignorance once brought bliss,  
Truth is a cold knife on skin.  
Truth and lies equal in malice,  
Serum swirls in a golden chalice.  
What is done is done.  
Glass that was once rosy turned  
To crimson blood.

Blooming thorns instead of buds,  
Reaching towards the sky,  
begging to be burned.  
Crusted brown and grey,  
Deceived and challenged and strayed.  
Curiosity weaponized for destruction,  
A cause and a consequence.  
No angels are found,  
Not even a harp, or a lyre or a trumpet.

# **The Gardener's Little Secret**

*April Conley*

## **Prologue**

I took my heaviest book and placed my delicate flower inside. I tried to preserve her life by binding pages. Her beauty was something I desperately wanted to maintain. The problem was that I knew her colour and fragrance would be lost in the test of time, but I needed its beauty to be protected, and I would stop at nothing to preserve it. My Iris, this one is for you.

## **Forms**

Meadows. Meadows filled with vibrance and variety. Differing forms, stems, petals, and thorns. So intricate, so serene. I felt potent that I got to choose the fairest of them all. Flowers are tender and must be handled with care. Nevertheless, they are a living thing that gives me life and entraps me in my profession, which I have entitled myself to as The Gardener.

Flowers need to be groomed, perfected, and never overdone. They always need the right amount of everything. I made it my mission to never overdo my flowers. I chose my Iris because of her blemishes; those blemishes made her reliant on me. My Iris was never the conventional beauty, which is why she needed me to groom her, perfect her imperfections, and praise her in the process.

## **Stems**

The coiling of stems was the most challenging part of my profession, and destroying said stems was the hardest part of taking care of my Iris. But it had to be done, for the vines that engulfed my Iris suffocated her, and it was my job to protect her from entrapment. You can't blame me for it. They would have strangled her, and I couldn't have that. You should've seen her form dwindling, the way she withered, her stems becoming less sturdy, and when her petals shrivelled, it broke me. I nurtured her back to

health in those months. I didn't have to, but I did. She was my pride and joy, and I took my job much more seriously than most.

### Petals

Petals have bewitched humanity for the duration of time, mesmerizing viewers with their saturation and beauty. My Iris was no exception, which is why I had to shield her from the world. You would do the same if you had something so sacred. Taking away my Iris from the world was the best and worst thing I could do, for once she was taken, her beauty never fully returned.

### Thorns

Irises don't have thorns. I know. But my Iris did. She was not herself in those months, and I believe the mandatory process of shielding her away had been for the best, though it was hard to see then. Nevertheless, I do not regret my decision. She was getting strangled by those stems, by those seemingly innocent beasts. Though try as I might, those vilified creatures were what became of her.

She was now a villain in my eyes. Her saturation grew less vibrant, and she looked ghastly. Her figure drooped and coiled up, making her appear demonic. Try as I might, her figure never returned to its once lively state. Which is why I knew what I had to do.

### Picked

I had no choice but to pick her. She had given up. I looked at her limp body pulled by the root. Her once sturdy figure dwindled beneath my hand, and her saturation, which I used to fawn over, was seemingly cast to the abyss. Her thorns had dropped off as she lay with no defences. She wanted to be picked, craved to be picked. Which is why I did it. I would not have done what I did if not for the desire of my worshipped one. My Iris, my love, you wanted this. So, you cannot be mad at me for providing you with your deepest fantasy.

Once again, this short narrative is for you and only you. You will live on in the pages and never be lost to the testament of something so earthly as time.

## **Morsel**

*Joel Dennison*

Gather in close for a little bit of gossip.  
It's no big secret, but I'd rather you hear it from me.  
I know you're new here, and you only came for a meal.  
There've been some rumblings around camp. Don't let it bother you,  
but everyone knows you're

Knowing Attempting

To decipher solid shapes from shadow  
Shifting silently at the edge of sight  
to fit this shanty camp vessel formless  
soft sibilant syllables snake skyward  
spiraling smoke signals scattered semantic  
hissing fragments slither weave tapestries  
worlds around a desperately clinging ape.

White knuckle wrapped around the turning wheel  
veins squirming sweat dripping mind spread searching  
closely clung connection relationship  
threads plucked pulled wound around an old finger.

Another stranger amongst lifelong friends  
hungry shifting venomous creatures  
asking you if you'd like to stay the night.

## **(not) cursed**

*Jordan Murray*

i am cursed captor  
and captive  
locked in an intricate waltz between  
the two halves of my being

as the sun retreats  
so does my sanity  
a swelling toxicity  
a tormentor within me

tearing at my wounds  
as if self-inflicted pain could somehow  
purge the poison  
coursing through my veins

a monster spits  
words like acid  
fangs snarling  
claws unsheathed  
a beast unleashed

covering in primal fear  
the moon wanes  
and i weep  
a wreckage of inner warfare

the sun shines through my bedroom window  
in the light  
i am no longer comforted  
by the familiarity of pain

i lock the beast away  
a mental prison  
that has no key  
she will return by day's end—  
ravenous

## **inescapable**

*Callum Duncan*

The failure innocent of minds to hold  
those ancient memories both dun and gold  
oft gives life to phantoms strange and prime  
false shades of the past now filtered rose by time.  
That fiend, false time, who warps the past and lies,  
with greatest skill he seeks to vandalize  
those faces precious and moments last,  
those faces long abandoned to the past.

## The Whispering Tree

Salina D'Agostino

I keep my mouth shut.

*I promise*, I said, my eyes narrowing, your smirk growing,  
the heat on my cheeks scorching,

So, when they ask me,  
my eyes shift right instead of left,  
I smile instead of sweat,

And when he goes to cup my cheek,  
the action making him almost seem weak,  
my heart doesn't beat  
and my eyes don't long,  
because I know his capabilities rest in his palm,

the possibilities of reading me.

So, when I turn to leave,  
the only thing I see,  
is the promise I made, his secret I'll keep,  
all for the other boy beneath the whispering tree.

## **To whom does the wind belong...**

*Pratham Kamboj*

To whom does the wind belong,  
As it warbles in its rote path?  
As trees to the ground are given,  
The snow that was once water  
To whom do I belong?  
Am I bound to this name, or  
Is it the patient dread that once seduced me  
And clings and does not stop to think or feel,  
But just steals away little pieces of life  
To whom do those pieces belong, I do not know  
Why were they taken or if they were important, I do not know  
I know not much of the workings of the world,  
But I am glad to know that when snow falls on all the lively things  
It's beautiful.



*Axel Obersat-Johnson*

# Lamb to the Slaughter

Khloe Rowse

- I. I grow out my wool. Buttercream curls over tenderized gooseflesh. Piles of puff. I comb my smoke tendrils. I clean and comb and repeat. Yank muddied hooffulls and thread red ribbon through my yarn. A bow on a little lamb.
- II. I grow to brush, braid, bury, bow. Am I well kept? Have I grown into a proper little lamb? Does my softness attract? I play dress up in my fleece coat. Shepherd's staff smacks soil and I bow down snout to ground, achooing stony snorts. Do I make a good sheep?
- III. I grow to hoard. I grow to hide. White puffs of cashmere curl stash flecks of ~~your~~ dark lashes against dots of dust. Wool wetted from rolling in grassy morning dew. Blush-smearred lips sticky in my fibres. Papers pressed between palms stained in ~~your~~ inky lettering. All ~~your~~ words woven through my tangles, Cupid. I collect each of ~~your~~ bows. And arrows. ~~Your~~ punctures take root. Sink into silken flesh. Snug touch under layers of fleece. I keep all of ~~you~~ close under thick woolly gauze. My coat is not the insulator.
- IV. I think I'm going to cut my hair. Would ~~you~~ hold the scissors? Unstitch this little lamb. Gleaming blades glide through woolly cover. Watch puffs of snow land at ~~your~~ toes. I can feel the crawl of your fingertips.

# **I know you**

*David Scott*

You don't know me,  
but I know you

If I sat here and listened  
any longer, my bones would calcify,  
my eyes darting about  
in a dream playing out in front of me

Always gathering, pooling mannerisms,  
taking the best, sympathizing with the worst  
moments that could only be captured  
through the unintentional outlier

Some of you go about  
boisterously parading  
your image, some see  
only that

To most, I am molded clay  
of which Athena neglected her breath;  
I remain Prometheus' vision, lacking  
sculpt motor function

But surface level has never been  
my thing: I look between you all

Waiting for some

Glimmer of invitation that could be  
my anti-Medusa, release me  
from petrification that has kept  
me still as an exhibit of Lot's wife

If I turn away now,  
I will remain a pillar

Never to step forward  
and be known

## LANDLINE LOVERS—a dialogue

*Maya Roumie*

2:38 A.M.

Line 1: I know you're used to hiding [REDACTED]

Line 2: I don't wanna hide from you. [REDACTED] We hide enough from everyone else.

Line 1: You don't want to hide from me?

Line 2: [REDACTED], not even a bit.

Line 1: [REDACTED]

Line 1: I don't want to either, [REDACTED]...how much of it do we have left in us?

Line 2: Not enough [REDACTED] and seek from each other.

Line 1: We should stop then, [REDACTED]. I'll start. I want to fall asleep next to you. Lips pressed to your forehead.

Line 2: That's the loveliest thing I could have heard.

Line 1: What if we spent [REDACTED], late-night reveries, big city lights.

Line 2: Really?

Line 1: Something like that. I want to sleep next to you, that's all.

Line 2: [REDACTED] my body pressed against yours. I wouldn't know to separate.

Line 1: [REDACTED] kiss in the dark.

Line 2: God, [REDACTED], that is it, to sleep and kiss you [REDACTED]

Line 1: There would be power currents running through cotton sheets, [REDACTED] only you would feel it.

Line 2: Then we would sleep.

Line 1: In that bed, everything is [REDACTED] And I want that. I crave it. I'm desperate. Just once.

Line 2: “

Line 1: Ours ours ours.

Line 2: “ ”

Line 1: A litany, a chant.

Line 2: I'd do anything for [REDACTED].

Line 2: Wouldn't we both do anything for just once?

Line 1: [REDACTED] when we won't have it?

Line 2: But we just wrote it, crafted the scene, serving for two.

Line 2: [REDACTED], give each other our imaginings, spin stories with the thread of everything we can't do.

Line 1: We could. I could write about [REDACTED]. That darkness. That space. Those blankets. Our bodies.

Line 2: [REDACTED] thinking about it for a long time, could go on forever too.

Line 1: [REDACTED] We'd kill it.

Kiss the melancholy. [REDACTED] passion.

Line 2: You think it would be good?

Line 1: Good writers [REDACTED]. Great ones write one for the ages.

Line 2: What if it's never read? Or what if they know [REDACTED]

Line 1: Well, the love is there.

Line 2: So the art is too.

## Secret Agenda

*Ella Saltsman*

They believe I don't know.  
When I love them,  
They believe I don't know.  
But I do.  
I know about the secret agenda they each keep.  
I see it when they think I don't.  
Their secret expectations of  
My body,  
As they hold me down.  
Demanding confessions,  
From my mind.  
Reaping,  
Their needs  
From my soul.  
Prying their desires,  
From my life.

Each of them  
Sink  
Into my skin like  
The sin,  
Sloth—  
Wrapping themselves around my throat  
And seeping their laze into my bones  
To attack  
And dismantle my  
Individuality.  
They fool me.  
At first.  
With smiles and laughter,  
Unknowing that I know.  
I know what I'm looking at when the  
Smiles fade  
And the laughter dies.  
That the men of my past lives

Want nothing but  
Me  
To themselves,  
Not to be of the world.  
know.  
I see it each time.  
Their secret desire to  
Strip me  
Of my worth.  
All because I have more life  
Than them.

They think it  
Owed to them,  
My life.  
For loving them.  
But I am a fool no longer.  
I see what they seek to keep  
Hidden.  
Their desire to hide  
Themselves  
Truly.  
To kill silently and leave me  
As nothing.  
But I know.  
I see it.  
It is a secret no longer,  
As I leave them  
And their  
Sloth  
Behind me.  
Far,  
Behind me.  
No secrets left to keep,  
No agenda left to fulfill,  
No ability to hold me down  
Forevermore.

## To Reveal, or To Hide

*Coralie Lachapelle*

As we gazed into each other's eyes in the quiet of the night, two souls longing to be held by the other, did I truly know you? When you seized me by the hand and I felt this warmth, was it simply the hopeful whispers of my heart? I do not know you, nor do you know me. The truth is, that for as long as I shall live, no one else will feel this flesh that I inhabit as much as myself. I have grown familiar to the swirling of shame that is birthed in my vulnerable, all-too-sensitive stomach. This affliction has made me aware as to what I hide away. Even towards you, my dear and esteemed reader.

At this very moment, my words are woven by precisely what is not known to you. But most of all, they are a selling image. None of these lines lie in the essence of truthful admittances; I place upon them glittering eyelashes that flutter to the heights of pleasant imageries and falsities. These words—they are all glamorized versions of my soul. They are meant to enthrall you. Embellished lies are pleasant to hear. Even in your so-called truths, you exaggerate and distort, all to make them more appeasing to the ears. But now that I have appeased you, when you are in your comfort is when I shall strike.

My apprehensive eyes finally meet yours, and you ask me, “What is it that you speak to me?” To bury is to admit only to myself—but now, I must be open to you. This is difficult, for we often wrap ourselves in the temporary safety blanket of quiet. I must strip myself bare, until I am nothing but a shivering skeleton to your critical eyes. In this moment, you hold all the power. Your mind penetrates through the veil of my words, and I allow this, for it is a need for me to fall, so that you may understand. My body is seized by this seismic shaking, and it is your duty to finally see me as I truly am, weaknesses and all.

My mouth meets the edge of your ear, and I confess: “My secrets have grown with me. One day, their hair will colour themselves as grey as me. They are pitiful beings, really. They pester me, such as the incessant bugs that make their existence known, as I attempt to take a bite of the once-beautiful fruit. But they ruin it. With the force of my hand and the passing wind that it creates, I try in vain to scour them away. However, I am aware that their home is mine. As long as I shall live in fear of judgment, my days are shared with these disgustingly shameful things.

They are the product of the rotting fruit in my kitchen, and how they deplete the internal quality of my gut. When I kill them, do they not stain my fingers for others to see? To murder a secret is a public affair; I must coat my hands with my own bloodied vulnerabilities and shamelessly shout, ‘Look! I bleed too!’ But most of all, my secrets nourish and destroy me. Do I hide as a pillar of independent strength, or am I ashamed to be myself?”

When I hesitantly whispered this confession into your curious ear, did you draw away, consorting with your mistress of judgement? You cheat on me. But your “Miss Judgment”—what is her last name? Shame. My eyes beg for you. Please, look into me. Understand me. You avoid me—surprise is your hierarchy.

“Silly reader, did you assume that only you could hold secrets? It is the common act of humanity to desperately try to hide our intrinsically flawed and imperfect nature. They are the whimpers that seize us all in the middle of the night. They are the windows by which we cannot see the interior lives of others. But they know that we are aware of the secrets that lurk in all of us; and yet despite this, we are disconnected to all. However, this shame, this suffering, the embarrassment that lies in the revealing of vulnerable truths—only when we dispel these interior layers to another, is a bond of true nature formed.”

Quietness ruled you for a moment, until you finally met my eyes again. Your gaze told me, “I understand.” How I love you now, and you love me too.

Funny how lies, in the end, create one whole truth that unites us all: how fundamentally imperfect we are.

## Rep After Rep

*Regis Bogahalanda*

I never told you this, but one of my favourite hobbies is working out. In those blocks of time I spent away from you, claiming I was too busy and couldn't see you, I was holed up in the gym. Whether I trained via resistance, dead weights, or weight machines, my priority was pushing and pulling and tugging until my muscle cells tore themselves raw.

There are so many benefits to exercising, so many reasons that could have pushed me to work out—a boost in energy, a shot of dopamine, positive body-image. The list is truly infinite, but I didn't care about any of that. When I was struggling with my seventeenth rep, the ringing in my ears would grow louder. That same ringing that hit me when you relayed to me, in detail, the first time you experienced the feeling of someone's middle knuckle cracking your premolar. You had done nothing wrong.

That event took place before we met, but the second you recounted that experience, I knew I should have been there to pull you out of harm's way. I was perpetually stuck between two guilt-inducing ideas. One was that I should have been there for you when you were a victim under attack. The other—painful, yet true—haunted me constantly: even if I'd been there, I didn't have the strength to protect you.

So now I lie to you, and I will continue to do so. I will think of your tender gums, and push my way through those last few reps. I'll remember how much you don't like when people go out of their way for you, and I'll happily accept the soreness. My ability to keep you safe will forever remain under my long, baggy sleeves.

## **Gradually**

*Joven Panahon*

The thing people (adults, media, teen dramas) don't tell you is that eighteen is important enough for some things but not for everything that warrants hushing and searching. When midnight struck and the grandfather bellowed, in the court I became my own person, responsible for myself and capable of bearing the sword of Damocles—despite my inability to cook pasta without incessant beeps or the chants of disgust as I package mossy and soft scraps of onions and celery or the confusion with papers and forms detailing interest and taxes and slopes.

Nineteen comes with a cake and forty dollars lost, not quite alone, and yet...and no closer to learning how to open a U.S. dollar account with an inconsistent e-signature and 25% tariffs. And, I don't quite know how to get a job, even though I think I should. Skinny cuts and straight cuts latch onto my legs, and then I don't quite like how I look, even though I think I should. I can't understand monosyllabic scansion and can't remember which bank holds which account, even though I should. I like pastries too much, so I take to squats in the morning and attempt to define musculature, and, even though it is startling, it is logical that deltoids show.

Despite the lone physical change, I still know that I do not know how to: open a job for a house, turn off the smoke alarm, have a steady hand, keep walking, and wield a sword. Then the viper secret, revealed by puncture marks: I've gotten two above-nineties, spent less than ninety on groceries, prepared resources in advance, stopped stress breakouts on the third eye, and decided that I like straight cut pants more. And despite this partial-coming-of-age-nineteen illuminating my growth, I still want the numbers in my CIBC to go up and to learn how to make a resume and to be like the teenagers in those dramas that are unrealistic.

## Flicker

*Regis Bogahalanda*

Do you ever wonder why I never look you in the eye? It's not that I don't like looking at them, but if I do I fear I'll have to finally watch your pupils suck into themselves. The same way that I've been trying so very hard not to suck the happiness out of your life.

I don't want to meet the people closest to you. Not your parents. Not your friends. Not your family. I just wanted to hang out outside, in class, in the car, at the mall. Not at your house, and definitely not at mine. Can we be close even though I behave like a fugitive?

I hated watching your dog wag his tail at me, when I was finally in your foyer after months and months of what I thought was expert evasion. My stomach sank when your cat threaded itself between my feet. I cringed the first time your mom hugged me, and when your dad went in for one I almost threw up down his back. Plastering on a fake grin when your cousins came over and wished I could escape through the back door. Feeling the cat rub against my thigh while I sat, whipcord tight, at the edge of the couch—I wished I had the heart to pull its tail.

Before any of you could ever ask, I would always make sure you knew that *Yeab, I already ate* and *I have my water bottle with me*. Please stop treating me like I'm one of you.

Don't tell me about your goals for the future. Don't look at me with that hope—that naïve hope that suggested that I would be a part of those goals, part of that pristine future. Never. For your own sake, never.

When I finally leave, just know that I'll always be eternally grateful for all the kindness you showed me. Thank you for being such a beloved companion, but please forget me. Look at your life and notice that I never left a tangible impression, never told you about the thoughts that torment me on a daily basis. Never let you see me cry, see me angry. You were kind to me, yet I had nothing to give you in return. For that I am sorry, but please know that I will always wish you well.

# Advice for Secret Fears

Em Nicholls

Babes ur navigating huma  
ns its okay to feel tired fr  
om carrying all of it ur com  
plex and evolving into a pe  
rson and while that can be  
exhausting its also beauti  
ful not sticking to one ver  
sion of yourself doesnt m  
ean youre failing it means you  
are growing and figure  
ing out what aliens with u

Bubi its completely natu  
ral to hate inhabitants who  
wake at 5am go for a jog  
and r down to work by 7  
instead of measuring ur  
worth or productivity by  
a morning routine stick  
ur head out of a window  
at 330am and watch the  
snow fall it may help to  
lean into your own patt  
erns to become a pers  
on find a rhythm that is  
human and definitely n  
ormal perfection isnt

Sweets dont overthink it  
no one is looking too hard  
the more you try to fit in  
the more obvious it beco  
mes that ur trying to be  
human its ok to b different  
the things that make you  
feel foreign are often what  
make you unique instead  
of trying to erase the beau  
ty of your perspective offer it  
to the earth before it is  
destroyed by reptilians

## Where the Light Won't Reach

*Jordan Murray*

I keep her name folded in my jacket,  
a pressed flower between the pages of something I pretend not to read.  
The truth was too sharp,  
so I planted it beneath the crab blossoms  
and let the roots twist it into something unspoken.

The garden grew strange—  
leaves curled inwards,  
petals wilting,  
heavy with things unsaid.  
The air sits thick with knowing.

I feel it when I close my eyes—  
the bitterness,  
rotting underneath my skin,  
shifting beneath the surface,  
pushing upward and begging for light.

Now, I sit here in the dark,  
hands stained with soil that will never clean.  
The crab blossoms bloom in colours  
that never existed before you.  
New shades,

born from the shadow of something  
we both pretend we've left behind.

# **A Night of Overwhelming Beauty**

*Lazur Victorian*

The nighttime brought wonders; the wonders brought life to imagination.

We stared at the stars, creating stories with the creatures we dreamt of. We watched as a lion played hopscotch with a bull and a fish waltzed with a ram. The suns played pool with their sister planets, and the asteroids created a belt to hold up the night sky. So come, my darling, let us see what else the vast universe has to offer.

## To Leave Things off Sweetly

*Jai Mann*

Dear Livia,

Under the vibrant colours of spring, I remembered how beautifully you blended in with the blooming flowers, a darling in the light with your broad smile, an untouchable ray of light as you danced circles around me. Your bright hazel eyes would shy away in cunning turns, drawing me ever so closer. You kept me at arm's length, then pulled me in, cursing yourself for it. I found loose flowers and placed them in your raven hair that fluttered in the wind. I noticed your new necklace—I wish I had complimented you on it.

As the heat came in greater stride, we would meet a few times a week. I would watch you sink your feet into ocean water and laugh in the face of the salty breezes. You turned only to tilt your head curiously at me for my perseverance in keeping dry, and with a sigh, you came to lay next to me, resting your chin on my shoulder. I remember you smelled like vanilla with a whiff of sandalwood. We spent hours sitting in place, admiring the vast blue sky. We would meet at the park and walk up and down the baking cement, admiring the displays in the shop windows as we talked about all things possible. You'd put on a Hollywood accent, sounding like Marilyn Monroe, and dramatically joke about running away together into the sunset of tomorrow. Periodically the summer storms came showering down on us. I'd ask for your hand, and we'd dance to the beat of the rain under broken streetlights.

Autumn came, and the leaves carried by the wind decay and crunched under our feet. Blood flushed through my flesh as it tried to battle the cold, and you came wearing thick cotton turtle-necks and heavy blouses that covered every inch of skin. I thought your face was puffy due to the stinging cold, and when I pestered you on it, you'd flick my cheek for being nosy. I asked where you lived, but the wind must have dried your lips closed. As we walked your heavy shoes brought you down, and I watched your eyes grow wide. When I leaned down to ask why, you quickly pulled me down. Laying on the grass you pointed up, and I was amazed as the sun ran through the tree above us showing each vein of each bold scarlet leaf. We both turned to face each other with astonishment, and your breath on my lips warmed my chest. You smiled with sorrow and said we've met too late, and I grabbed you close and

whispered that we have each other now. I wish you'd explain to me what it was that pulled you away.

As winter sharpened our breaths, it took the colour from the flowers, and from the trees. It put a cold breeze in the wind that seemed to slip through the cracks in the doors. I waited for you at our normal spots. I tried to call, but it was in vain. I hope this doesn't anger you, but I went to your neighbourhood. I walked to each door and pleaded my case. An older lady said she had met you before and pointed to a house. She said not to knock on the door because it would lead to trouble, but that you still come to collect your letters from the mailbox out on the lawn. It felt like a small victory, and as I wandered away, I pondered what to say. I walked past your supposed place, and it took everything in me to not ring the bell. As I turned, I thought I saw you, but I was quick to realize that I was mistaken. I just miss you more than I can bear.

So, I have written my admiration for you in this letter as I reminisce how your spring dress encircled my once dull world, your summer laughs, and your warm breath in the fall. I hope you read my words out loud so they can stay on the tip of your tongue and rest on your lips. You were my everything, and I will see you in the flowers, sea, and trees. You will always have a place in my heart and mind.

I love you dearly, I hope to see you again. I will be waiting for you every Sunday at our spot till the sky falls or the sun burns out.

Sincerely,  
your O.T.P

## **Walking Novels**

*Lazur Victorian*

I have come to find that sometimes the greatest of stories are not found in the newspapers or on the world wide web, but instead, they are found in our ancestors' scars and the fragments of the past. Entire novels can be uncovered, written across the skin of those you pass by in your lifetime.

Yet, they will never share these hidden gems with just anyone. So, why not rest and talk to strangers along your path, letting them carry you across their world and sharing their journeys with only time to stop you?

# The Weight of Feathers

*Nina Tellier*

Whitecaps crash gently against the cliff, echoing memories of laughter, muddy feet, and crackling bonfires. An easel stands at the cliff's edge, feathers scattered around it, drifting away.

A dated wooden bench sits nearby, where an old woman with a weather-beaten face and long grey hair gazes out. She inhales the scent of pines, lake water, and the awakening earth. The distant cry of a fox resonates with her, though she can't understand its struggles. She remains silent, for there is no one left to listen.

\*\*\*

The boy races through the house, soaring his little wooden canoe—handcrafted by his Nukumi—like a toy plane, complete with excited “brrrrr,” sounds. The walls, decorated with painted feathers of various animals, blur past. Packed boxes create an obstacle course for him and his beaten canoe. He narrowly avoids a box of winter boots, only to crash into his mother's hip. His tall, strong-jawed mother, with dark brown braids, stares intently out the back patio door. The boy abandons his plane, curious about what she sees. At the yard's edge stands an unfinished canvas with mashed preliminary colors, next to his grandmother.

“What is she doing, Mum?” The boy asks curiously.

“Your Nukumi is getting old, Nijinuis. She doesn't want to go,” she responds, absently running her hands through the boy's dark brown hair. “Go on. Finish packing.”

The boy doesn't quite grasp what his mother means, but the thought of a bigger room in their new home fills him with excitement. With a burst of energy, he slaps his bare feet on the floor and dashes back to his room to continue packing.

\*\*\*

“Mum, is Nukumi okay?” The boy asks his mother as she tucks him in his bed later that night.

“Your grandmother... She's stuck in the past.”

“She doesn't want a bigger room?”

“No.”

“Mum, why are we moving?”

“... Because the wesu, the white people, want us to live in a better place.”

The mother sighs, remembering the community meeting where they were told about the new development project. The government officials had spoken of progress and opportunity, and all her old mother could see was the loss of their home and their family. But to herself, it was an erasure of their past, an opportunity for a clean slate. She can only hope to be able to believe in her own illusions.

She kisses the boy on the head goodnight.

\*\*\*

The next morning, standing in the mildewy grass outside, the mother of the boy stares at the tan man on the canvas. The man has his eyes closed, reminiscent of an eternal sleep taken too soon. His dark military uniform contrasts with the vibrant red feathers around his head, giving him a presence, despite being painted.

The woman remembers his laughter, his kisses on her cheek, and his dark brown eyes. Tears form as she feels a pull toward the earth.

She snaps out of her reverie when the little boy gently approaches, his brown eyes filled with innocent worry.

“Mum?”

In acknowledgment, the woman gently runs her fingers through her boy’s hair, the same rich brown as the man’s, whose likeness is captured on the canvas.

“... Mum, who is that?”

The woman pauses, appearing ready to answer. Suddenly, she takes the boy’s hand and wipes her eyes dry with her other hand. She leads the boy towards the front of the house, where the grandmother waits in the car.

“Wait, Mum! You forgot the painting!” The boy tries to pull her back.

“Nijinuis, stop! It’s too heavy. Your grandmother is done painting. She’s too old, and it’s time we moved on. You don’t need that either,” the mother says, pulling the canoe from her son’s hand and throwing it into the grass.

“Hey!” The boy says in a whining tone, his lip starting to quiver.

“Nijinuis, don’t whine. We’ll get you new toys. I’ll get you those Legos you wanted,” the mother says in an effort to calm her son.

The boy stops in his tracks, his gaze settling on the canoe lying sideways in the grass. He’s had that canoe since he was two, ever since he

could first remember his grandmother. But then again... Legos. He could have all the Legos he wants!

“Okay!” The boy, happy again, lets himself be pulled to the car, his legs skipping the entire way there.

She buckles her son in with a sigh and slides into the driver’s seat. Beside her, her own mother looks at her with disappointment, and not a word is exchanged.

She pulls out of the long gravel driveway, watching the trees blur by her window for the last time. She glances into the overhead mirror, seeing her son happily drawing smiley faces in the dewy window.

They will build a new life together. Her boy will never know the cruelty her family faced, the fate of his father, or the losses his grandmother endured as a young girl.

She will make this family adapt and survive, and her son will have the opportunity to grow up the same as anyone else. It will all be okay.

Her hands grip tighter on the steering wheel.

## Lake Lanier

*Sofia Ellenor*

Beneath the waters, deep and still,  
Lake Lanier whispers with a chilling thrill.  
A thirst that cannot be quenched by time,  
Craves the living to restore its rhyme.

The drowned ones sleep in depths unseen,  
Their faces blurred, their voices keen—  
Calling from the murk and silt,  
To those above, with souls to wilt.

The town that vanished, ghosts remain,  
Their echoes rise, their hunger plain.  
For in the depths, they long for light,  
To stir the bones and reignite.

A shimmer calls from the water's edge,  
Where once a town stood, now a ledge—  
A haunting cradle, waiting still,  
To lift the lost from water's chill.

The lake is restless, a hungry tide,  
Wanting life to fill the divide.  
With every wave and whispered sound,  
It pulls from silence, pulls from ground.

The drowned return in soft disguise,  
To walk among the living skies.  
The lake, its thirst now quenched and sated,  
Breathes life anew, though it's inflated.

Yet know, dear traveler, if you near,  
The lake will take, and you may disappear.  
For in the depths, the town is whole,  
Fed by the lost, and fed by soul.

## The Secrets stirred in the heart of this sea

*Fatima Adan*

The smell of war and the sea mix.  
Women selling tomatoes on the street.  
The sounds of men bargaining roam the alleys of Bakaara market.  
The heart of Mogadishu.  
A place once known for its resilience,  
Turned into a battlefield.  
The stones on the wall shed tears.  
They have seen what an eye has never seen.  
Heard what an ear has never heard.  
Mother and her son cling to the boat for dear life,  
Longing to escape.  
Current is too angry at the people after they turned her beach red.  
How dare they!  
Suad, as a child, swam for hours.  
She believed she and the sea were comrades.  
But today is a day a friend no longer knows their friend.  
A brother no longer knows his brother.  
A sister no longer knows her sister.  
A day where a mother no longer knows the child she bore.  
A day where everyone who lived it vowed to not speak of.  
Suad, who gave her son to the spirits of the ocean, vowed.  
Her tragedy is one no one will hear of.  
The sea: the holder of all secrets.  
After all, the sea must keep her secret.  
Her friend and her least judgmental friend.  
And no one will ever know.  
The secrets that lay in the heart of this sea.  
Her child and her secrets are embraced in the bosom of this sea.  
A man's most loyal friend is a dog, supposedly.  
A woman's most loyal friend is the sea.  
The sea, the most beautiful, loyal, strong, and the keeper of her sanity.

## **The Stars are Whispering**

*Hannah Montello*

Does true enlightenment only come with death?  
Cast my gaze down upon my descendants,  
When will I know humanity?  
Understand complexities;  
war and famine and depression;  
Hate and pain,  
Love and ache.

Does universal knowledge come with the absence of breath?  
Cast my gaze down upon a burning earth,  
A soul needs no eyes to see,  
Questions born in the same moment as first breath,  
Answered only in its last.

## **The Darkness**

*Salina D'Agostino*

What lies out there,  
beyond the navy-blue sky and shadowed black trees  
that goes far beyond what my eye will ever see,

past the wind, and the twinkling stars,  
is a darkness so vast,  
it mocks and it laughs,

only it knows  
where the black sea goes,  
a realm far beyond,  
a world,  
a day,  
all that reside in the whining darkness,  
worlds left astray.

## **A Shared Razor Blade**

*Sofia Ellenor*

The secret festers like an open wound,  
bleeding in the silence, too deep to stitch.  
It crawls beneath the skin, slick with shame,  
unseen but always there,  
gnawing at the threads that once held us together.

It rises at night, sharp as glass,  
piercing through the quiet with the weight of its truth.  
I can taste it in the air between us,  
a rancid sweetness that clogs the throat.

You touch me like you're drowning,  
your fingers trembling,  
but I don't know if you're reaching for me  
or pulling away from the secret that has grown inside of you.  
I see it in the way your eyes flicker,  
avoiding mine,  
and in the way you swallow hard,  
as if the truth could choke you.

I never asked for this wound.  
I never begged for it to split us wide open,  
but now it stains everything:  
the way you kiss me too hard,  
the way your hands are cold when they brush against my skin.  
You're holding something back,  
and it's breaking us apart,  
one word at a time.

The secret is a razor,  
cutting us down from the inside.

## **How to Write Poetry**

*Callum Duncan*

If someone were to ask me  
how to write  
a poem,  
I'd probably give them  
a piece of my mind.

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