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Foreword

Christopher Paul Curtis

I must admit, the word “liminality” was a stranger to me when Maya Rounie and Khloe Rowse sprang it on me a few days ago.

I thought it was another one of those newly-minted words that, as I grow older, have become more and more annoying. But Maya and Khloe enlightened me. They let me know that it isn’t new at all, it’s been around since 1901, and, while the word was new to *me*, the concept was an old friend. I simply hadn’t taken the time to learn its name.

Maya and Khloe went on to explain that “Liminality is all about the in between. It’s that moment when you’re not quite in one place anymore but you’re not fully in the next one either. It’s a realm of transition.”

This struck a chord.

I like to think I’ve been a denizen of this realm for decades. (Indeed, if it weren’t for the fact that the word “king” has recently and much deservedly fallen into disfavour, I might even call myself the King of Liminality. I’ll set my sights a bit lower, I’ll settle for being the Duke of Liminality.)

I know this place. I believe that, similar to a pulse, the state of liminality is a sign of life. We’re close to sharks in that we have to keep moving to stay alive, if we aren’t pushing forward, we stagnate then die. Being liminal is not a state of indecision or inaction, it’s the place where consequences and repercussions are considered before movement.

It’s the space where, instead of being oxymorons, the sayings, “Look before you leap” and “She who hesitates is lost” can comfortably co-exist.

As I grow older, I find myself spending more and more time in liminality. I attribute this to both becoming more mature and...dare the Duke sayeth it...wiser.

I also find myself enjoying these moments, as I've come to recognize they are the times when crucial, life changing decisions can be made.

Those are the ramblings of a former auto worker turned author. How refreshing it is to put a word to a concept I've been familiar with all my life, and to be introduced to it from young, very talented writers. Passing this torch, it seems, is its own state of liminality.

Christopher Paul Curtis,

Duke of Liminality

The Ride Back

Persaea Perras

I lean against the glass.

I lean against a static scene of cars, oncoming

whistling with the wind, ongoing

into the tall chalice of oozing zenith night

running past the horizon line.



I just wanna go to school

Joleen Mae Galvez

ICU (Out-of-Body)

Sofia Ellenor

I watch my body misbehave. It bucks and stutters. A machine forgetting its own instructions. My mouth opens, a trap set for breath. The heart keeps time badly, a drunk percussionist. The lungs argue in static. Doctors pull me open with their eyes. They speak in percentages. Hope is reduced to math. I float above, immaculate, untouchable as a thought of death. While below, my body panics, fights like a dog in water. When the monitor screams, I feel nothing and that is the first betrayal.

Trial Period

Heidi Elder

The show settles into its ending credits. It's going to be a long night.

My placating shapes and colours disappear, and my brain decides to throw a tantrum about it. My point of focus spirals gradually inward, until my range of touch is limited to and overwhelmed by the weight of my clothing and my pulse beating drums in my ears.

Anxiety-induced sensory fixation is how they announce themselves: involuntary convulsions caused by a frustratingly illogical traumatic response to both my boyfriend and the impending threat of sleep. These are accompanied by groaning, shortness of breath, and an elevated heart rate—the conscious part of a largely unconscious routine that will conclude only after dancing the dance with the monsters in my bed (this is metaphorically speaking).

As if I were a time traveller, they signify the countdown before being sent back to what is widely considered an insignificant night in Ottawa, Ontario. I become a visitor in both past and present, privacy and memories no longer my own (this, too, is metaphorically speaking).

My left hand seizes midway down my boyfriend's back and contorts into a fist, nails digging into the palm of my hand, beckoning blood to the little crescent moons. It would proceed to do this a dozen more times in the span of a few seconds.

In a practiced way, he reaches across me for the remote and turns off the TV.

“Time for bed?”

I attempt to make out his features—squinting, reminding my eyes they're 20:20. I nod; I'm exhausted. It's only 8 p.m.

The antidepressants are a last resort for a year-old problem. All because some guy took his liberties at a party while I was half-asleep and dreaming. All

because I can still feel his hands when I close my eyes. All because this fundamentally shook my understanding of self and interpersonal intimacy. A week ago, I started convulsing on my drive to work, and my therapist thought it might be time for something stronger than self-reflection and *in...1, 2, 3...out*. Temporariness, the caveat.

Which means I'm in the trial period: side effects include dryness of the mouth, dizziness, nausea, diarrhea, excitability, fatigue, and a general sense of burdening those I love. Three weeks of "it gets worse before it gets better." Then it gets better.

I clutch my boyfriend's arm as he leads me up the stairs, pausing every few steps when I twitch and let go. I'm three years old again, too tired to walk, needing to be carried from the couch to my bed. His patient expression is transparent. He has somehow become accustomed to this ritual flare-up of infirmity.

I settle into bed, positioning the 3 ft IKEA shark between us. Our friend got it for us as a gag gift for the housewarming; now it keeps me from kicking him when that night inevitably infiltrates my dreams. He won't come to bed right away; neither of them will.

He kisses my forehead and whispers that he loves me. I'm skeptical but too tired to pursue the train of thought any further. He says he'll be there in a bit, and I know he will.

Underneath the covers, I cross my arms over my chest—a meagre attempt to protect myself in a fight I lose nightly. But in the space between waking and dreaming, my hands are only my own, and just for a few moments, I am still.

Flickering After | Images

Michelle Yelda

A hush of snow falls, burying the road.

Sirens heard from a distance, red and white kohl under my eyes and their unspent tears.

Drowning in a slush of prescriptions, days orange and white.

I see life in afterimages, a blur of moments lost to melted snow.

The streetlamps flicker, attempting to hide these moments from the unaware.

I too will join this cycle, of individuals who have lived and died surrounded by flatlines and IVs.

The silhouettes fill my veins with ice and saline.

I've walked these familiar steps many times, and will do so until the streetlamp is extinguished.



Portal

Ryan Douglas Daniel

Spaces Between (living for) Life and (living for) Death

L. F. Shubert

March, 2022

in quiet conversation

We are tucked side-by-side into our respective corners of the matching couches. The space where the armrests meet is flattened by our elbows when we're sharing phone screens and low conversations. I've angled my neck down in a gesture that has come to mean, pet my head. Mom reaches over the armrest and obliges while she awaits my explanation.

"I'm just very sad all the time."

"Why?"

"I'm very unmotivated."

She nods slowly.

"I wanna drop out of school," I specify, briefly drawing back to stare at her.

"I think not being able to go to school affects you more than anyone acknowledges. And so far, I think you've been handling it remarkably well."

There's so many unsaid things there, a litany of complaints and clarifications I could vent, but it's not what I've planned to tell her now. I plop my head back onto the couch armrest.

"And then crawl into a hole for a week and die."

Her jaw moves as if chewing her words to test the taste before sharing them. "Well, that seems a little silly." She's smiling gently to ease the comment.

Suddenly I'm snorting a little, and quiet giggles fill the space between our couches.

"Why?" I ask, but there's no accusation in it.

"Well, why prolong it for a week in a hole?" she asks, incredulous but kind.

"You're laughing at me?" My voice lifts in my own incredulity, gently accusatory.

Mom's smile widens sympathetically, reaching out to give a soothing rub against my outstretched scalp. "I'm not, I just—"

"So I can smell the grass and the dirt and . . . stuff."

"Ah, okay."

Locomotive

(adj. self-propelled)

Salma Qureshi Wennekers

The train was already boarding as Sandy descended to the platform. A man on the escalator stepped around her, like she was being too slow. The train wouldn't leave for 6 minutes, and she was in more of a rush than anyone.

She carried only her work bag, having Googled how to get from Toronto to New York via land travel on her lunch break. She bought the ticket at a kiosk and dashed to the platform.

Sandy stepped off the escalator and rushed down the platform. She didn't get far. *Was it carriage 4? Or 14?* She fished her ticket out of her coat pocket, but as she rushed, it slipped from her hand.

"Sandy!" Richard stood at the top of the staircase, and his voice cut through the noise. Every head on the platform turned and looked at him, "Sweetheart, wait!"

He bounded down like a husky. Bright blue eyes, perfect black dishevelled hair, and his coat hanging off his shoulder. He had chased her through the station. Sandy could feel the other women on the platform watching him catch up to her. How lucky she was, to have a man like that chasing her, causing such a fuss. It was a display. Public, romantic. His style. Her cheeks flushed. She bent down to pick up her ticket.

"There you are," he said. He was nonchalant in that way. Water, duck's back. "Honey, you were meant to be home an hour ago."

"What are you doing here?"

"Sandy, what are *you* doing here?" Richard asked. Gently, he took the ticket from her hand.

The night before, Sandy lay awake. Next to her, Richard tossed and turned.

He loved her. He made that much clear. He loved her in a way that was so practical. Poorly made coffee and impromptu gifts. Things she didn't need instead of the things she wanted. A waterproof watch.

Sandy felt Richard roll over in the bed. He loved her. Enough to propose. Enough to accept no answer.

Sandy's father was already in his late fifties when she was born. When he died, she spent the funeral glued to the angel statue next to the mausoleum. Sandy pictured the angel enveloping her father, who died in his sleep, sick and skinny, in its stone wings, then flying him to heaven. She spent the rest of her childhood religious, an artist, and alone.

"When you get married," her father had told her on his deathbed. When, not if. "Marry a man who can take care of you."

Awake, next to Richard, Sandy imagined a man with wings, who could wrap himself around her. Hold her safely, and try his best not to suffocate her. She wondered if she married him, could Richard grow wings?

Richard. The ring. The question.

He tried to envelope her. He loved her.

...

26 hours ago, Richard met Sandy at her office.

"Let's take a walk," he said. "Through the gallery. I love this gallery."

She had loved the Statue Centre too when she was younger, naïve, and first landed this job. Strange, mid-century organic shapes ebbed and flowed across the expanse of the sunlit room. It was astounding and staggering, she remembered saying that to him.

Years later, she found it difficult to be staggered by familiar shapes. She felt something proprietary about the statue gallery, as a fixture of her office, like a water cooler or a kettle.

“Sandy?”

She turned to face him, and he was on one knee in the Statue Centre.

“What?” she said.

“Will you marry me?” He asked. “I love this place: almost as much as I love you.”

Sandy stepped back, and wondered what her co-workers would think of her, and as she looked around at the Henry Moore statues, she saw the angel folding its wings over her father.

...

Richard read the ticket closely.

“New York?” he asked. “Taking a day trip, Sandy?”

Sandy was going to New York, where her father was buried.

“Why did you follow me?” She asked. Sandy was going to New York, to see the angel.

“I can go with you,” he said. “I can help you find what you’re looking for.” He stepped closer and leaned over her, like a shield between Sandy and the train. “I can go with you, and then we can come home.”

He was offering to help her through this. To carry her there and then back home. She blinked, then squished her eyes closed and tried again to picture him: standing at the altar, giant stone wings outstretched.

The people on the platform stepped around them. He was offering to take care of her.

A voice blared: “Last call.”

The train was already boarding.

Spaces Between (living for) Life and (living for)

Death

L. F. Shubert

February, 2023

an alleyway, a hug

Phantasmic episodes aren't usually preceded by a discernible trigger. This time, it comes on in the crook of evening, a couple hours before bed. Sitting quietly, both of us picking at the fantasy puzzle strewn across the wooden dining table, second-hand albums spinning through a thrifted disc player. It always descends top-down upon my body: first, the onset of a mild headache or a sinus irritation; then, a tightening of the chest and a flurry of fear; followed by the acidic sting of dread deep in my stomach. Oftentimes the specific smell is hard to place. It's vaguely reminiscent of sweat and breath I'd rather forget, hot as the water he had me sip when I wasn't worth wasting a teabag on. I only ever know for sure that the smell is fatally familiar because my brain kicks into a survival-heightened panic.

I'm able to rein in my consternation long enough to excuse myself and duck out the side door before any questioning begins. My friend's current basement apartment leads to a sheltered alley that provides enough coverage for me to sob freely. Although I'm alone in my pyjamas, Trinity Bellwoods has always felt safer than their previous downtown residences, nor am I in the headspace to be particularly concerned. I'm not outside for long before my friend joins me on the doorstep. The past few years have been scaffolded by my occasional breakdowns and my friend's ever-adjusting accommodations as they patiently dress different years-old wounds. I expect to be done with my past issues by now — to become more than healed, even well — but every disrupted evening challenges that. Tonight, my friend has brought a blanket to wrap around me. I don't thank them; I can only hope the way I collapse

into their lap expresses my gratitude for both the warmth and the company, but most of all the change in smell. They've just lit a candle inside, something smoky and lemony, which has already woven itself into the fabric of their sweater and blanket.

Since cat owners' belongings are always perforated with the scent of their pets, this familiar itch in my nose persists as well; their laundry detergent lingers underneath. I smother my nose in the blanket and inhale through sobs.

They rub my back and murmur. "C'est d'accord. Je sais. C'est d'accord."

YOU DIE IN THE TELEPORTER

Axel Obersat-Johnson

Thesis: Life will be organised in concentric spheres. Scientist, engineer, astronaut, the world. Fly towards the rising sun for six minutes, then bank west when you reach the large tree. After the hill you will see a field of flowers nearest a ruined wall.

Antithesis: Voltage breakdown problems. A shining apocalypse. In the innermost sphere, all matter will be made organic and conscious. So you've heard.

Synthesis: Asymmetric, unconventional, nuclear. Spectres of sun: what is will be.

Spaces Between (living for) Life and (living for) Death

L. F. Shubert

January, 2024

a TTC bus stop

Our bus left early, and the next one will arrive late. It seems like the majority of university life has been like this—between classes, between transportation, between homes. It’s my girlfriend’s turn to host the sleepover tonight, and I’m grateful for the long, hot shower I can have there without my mother (silently, supposedly non-judgementally) gauging my water usage.

“I hope this bus comes soon.”

“I’m so cold!” I feel justified to complain now that her acknowledgment has practically invited me to.

“I know, hon.”

I’m confused, and slightly offended; I thought I’d been very brave in not complaining thus far. At the quizzical look I give her, she nods towards my winter boots.

“You’re stomping.”

“What?”

“You do that whenever you’re cold. Your little tippy-tappies. Look, try it.”

Tentatively, I shift my weight from foot to foot.

“It feels a little too natural, doesn’t it?”

In fact, it does. I’m flattered that she remembers.



In Between Brussel-Centraal et Midi *Maya Roumie*

Lesbian Fidelity to the Art of Make-Believe

Heidi Elder

Being groped by a pirate at a lesbian Halloween rager and
thinking, wow, could be worse, could be scurvy,
could be cocaine lining the grooves beside your eyes
instead of powdered eggshell so let's
pretend you've got a young soul and I'm too lonely to tell
the difference between self-conscious love and amaretto, that we've
only left our roommates at home and empty beds—look at me
nearly forgetting my Thank you's but it's
a symptom of the lightbulb age when
stoves no longer pump gas without flame, when they
stopped serving Waugh and easy suicides, and
producing vile young bodies because sex
isn't so far removed from the death of grocery store flowers and I'm
on the rebound from two-and-a-half flings,
fifteen minutes free of—
and four shots deeper into—
and five missed calls about to—
and thirteen months out of—
with my best friend's ring on a chain around my throat and
someone else's name snuck up my snatch, sewn tight
into the costume I spent two weeks making, only for hem-tugging little girls
to stop me at the bus stop like: Why have you got teeth on your fingertips?
as if it were a carnal thing—despite the effort we pour
into removing the stomach from its containing because

pink and red are healthy young colours they've got sequined
onto the back of their politic, and it's more of a social thing
that's been in the process since the 1920s with the
return of Eve and the third-sex woman, back when
female was an adjective,
but I'm not sure I'm the right person to be telling you,
so ask your parents and then you'll see,
two weeks is plenty of time to grow out your vulgarity but
to prune it, they extract it at the root so
tuck it neatly away between two pieces of twill and don't
forget to kiss it goodnight like red lipstick on teacup naval although
be warned they stare when you're flirting with the curb
in your homemade bloomers, looking far less suicidal when you're
hanging over a one-way street and it's
hard to tell if you're coming or going, but we're always coming because
this is the type of party where no one's ever going because
I've got a lotus between my teeth and I'm grabbing her hand and she's
grabbing my ass and we're both reaching for someone's angel,
missing her scarlet handcuff, and we'll
squeeze hard until we become molten gold like osmosis because
I've got idolatry in mind, even at a party like this one where
the booze is steep like they're trying to keep the young ones sober because
they know bad things happen when the bitties start drinking because
we're all fucking parched and got parasitic tendencies because
there's a certain amount of thorn-spitting fidelity us young ones got
to keep us ripe and full with the language to correct them when they
say we're not in the club, knowing full-well we're the entertainment.

In Line at 7-11

Sadie Pattison

A girl stands in line at the 7-11. It is 3:30 AM. In her left hand is an energy drink, and in her right, a pregnancy test. Her boyfriend sits in the car outside. She feels the piercing eyes of people in the store behind her as she makes her purchase and asks to use the restroom. The cashier, a boy she thinks she goes to school with, hears her sobbing as two perfect, pink lines appear on the stick and offers to call someone. She tells him that her boyfriend is outside, and trudges out into the August air. She shows him the test. Silence engulfs the front seat, and he drops her back at home. Her messages go undelivered in the morning.

A father is in line at 7-11. Like himself, the girl in front of him is red-faced and puffy-eyed. He purchases a pack of Du Maurier smooths. They're the same as the ones he found in his son's bedroom when they cleaned it out after he left. The cashier is about to say something when the sound of sobs leaves the bathroom. He shares a glance with a woman who's been idling for 20 minutes. A shared expression of parental concern crosses their faces, but neither of them moves to act. The man leaves and lights up a cigarette, hoping his son is doing the same. In the morning, the police will call, asking him to come down to the station. That cigarette is the last thing he shares with his son.

The drunk boys in the aisle at 7-11 giggle at the people crying in front of them, too many stolen beers deep to care. They're 15, it's the end of summer, and they have never felt more delight than being with each other. They take a case of Molson Canadian off the shelf and sprint out, yelling "Fuck capitalism!" At the park across the street, they share a kiss on a swing set. They'll never talk about it again. One of them will move to a school four hours away in Kingsville and will always be

stuck wondering what could've been. The other will remain trapped in Scarborough, followed everywhere by the ghost of the boy he just wants back.

A mother stands in front of the Slurpee machine holding a small cup. This is her first full month back in Scarborough in 20 years. Her children are off in London and Windsor, having moved away for university. Her husband is at their home two hours away, fast asleep. She feels like a teenager sneaking out of her childhood home in the middle of the night, away from her father and younger brother who are too sick from the flu to care for themselves. Two teenage boys run out the door, and she's reminded of a simpler time; the girl in her bedroom window. Following her to the roof of a parking garage. A secret between them never shared.

A mother, a father, a girl, and two boys stand in a 7-11 in the middle of the night, and doesn't that read like the setup of a bad joke? The girl reminds the father of his own son; he only hopes her parents are kinder than he was. The boys see the mother and it makes them hesitate for a split second; what would their parents say? The mother watches the girl wander, dazed, and offers a warm embrace. Their paths cross like ships in the night. The linoleum aisles capture their stories, if only for a moment.

A cashier stands behind the counter, wondering who the next customer will be.

Unravelling My Mind

Giada Lopez

I'm thinking about how I think again. I thumb the ridges of a Solo cup until its grooves feel smooth. While matching my strokes to the tempo of my gum chewing, I chomp into the flavourless wad with single-stitch teeth marks. It's 1:03 AM and I've been here for hours. People chatter and I hide in my mind.

My indigo skirt clashes with the paisley of the couch. The needlework is nice; Mom would appreciate the details. I blink and find myself talking. His hair is moussed – the medium hold kind – nails bitten – a habit he picked up when his parents divorced – and his neck trimmed with a silver-plated chain – he hopes to afford a real one when he's finally loved by someone. "It's insane what six cylinders can do to an F1car." I reply with "cool," so he disengages.

A girl crosses my path and twists her toes to compliment my necklace. She has a mole she picks at – hoping to remove it once and for all, but I don't even peek. She doesn't mix metals – just like her opinions, shiny and polished. Her barrel curls bounce out of sight, and I scan the room. I see faces I could recognize. I notice a girl to my left, and I spit out part of my brain and stick it to her carpeted cerebrum. Once she finishes, I operate on her fibres and get part of my brain back. There's a whole science to it, trust me.

First, you count how many rows per tuft, then you pry and snip through the loops before you find things – like how they only listened to that song once but claim they've loved it since before they could count. It's best to use cuticle scissors, which often leave a jagged pattern of information behind, but they never notice. By minute three, their innards unfurl as they begin to tell you how their grandfather used humour to cope, and now, they do it too. I sneeze and find myself eating Ritz crackers; they're drier than I remember.

I think it's nice noticing details. I find it quite romantic. I collect threads and tie them up enough times that it indents the sulci and gyri of my small, pink gumball. No longer a smooth orb, it's chewed up and disformed, mixed with dust and dead dendrites. Threads wrap around the circumference, creating a spool of loose ends. Leaving no room for grey matter, my brain is an array of colours that don't belong to me.

Surgery #4872 complete. Tonight, I discovered that vodka does not mix well with spicy vindaloo, pink razzleberry blast is the best energy drink flavour, NFTs are going to 'totally rule' the economy, and protein masks are essential for getting rid of frizz. Someone's shoulder brushes up against mine and I feel small again.

By knowing them, I thought they would want to know me.

EUSA sponsored by:

Taloola Café



Levitating in the in between place

Beatrix Stone

Tuck me in and play the music

Standing on the top of the stairs pressing into the walls

Creaking bathroom sliding door

Celery

Dim light on the street

Bright lights on the record player

This song's called *Eugene*—wait, it's *Carrie and Lowell*

Switches up halfway through

Room-temperature jar queso

Modern art

family photos

This room is like living in poetry

Existential experience

liftoff

Matt humming

tapping on his forehead

on the floor

Soft carpet

Lying here

Folding paper rocket ships

Still Night

Keely Boyle

Two weeks before you're to be married, you invite me over to your place. You tell me to spend the night, because "John is working overtime" and because my dog is dead, so wouldn't the flat feel empty? You do not say the second part, but from the crease in your forehead, I am certain you think it. And really, I don't mind, because I think it too.

Neither of us wants Aperol, so we brave the cold for a pack of Yakult. The classic type, with the red tops. They are richer and sweeter than the blue and are likely an awful idea for two who must soon fit into A-line gowns cinched tight at the waist. But sometime between when we abandoned the idea of liquor and began trudging through snow-bastioned sidewalks for probiotic drinks, sensibility slipped from our pockets and caught the tail of a passing gust of wind. So, it will be Yakult with the red tops, and that's that.

At home, we place our purchase on the bedroom floor and set to build a blanket fort.

"Those green sheets you had..." The words, like the memory, come slowly into definition. "With the birds."

You go still. The plain linen you are holding crumples into a pile on the floor. Then, you are making for the closet, mouth twitching by inches into a smile.

"Haven't used those in ages," you say. You ease open the doors and begin sifting through piles of clothing.

"You loved those."

"I know."

I tap my index finger on the cross rail of a wooden chair, one of four I'd carried in from the dining room and arranged loosely in a circle. With Yakult marking the centre, they will be the posts of our edifice.

"John doesn't like green?" I ask.

"No, that's not it." You nudge the closet door closed with your hip and turn to me, balancing upon open palms those sheets from long ago. They could be sacred, the way you hold them.

"Take a corner," you say.

And we are hastening life back into the stiff linen, tossing it high then pulling it wide across the tops of the chairs to erect the walls of our house. To keep them from caving in, you suggest attaching bulldog pins to the hem. It's a good idea, and I tell you so, adding some comment about how clever you've become. Some things are still the same, though. You place pins only in the empty spaces where prints of birds and squirrels are absent. It would be cruel otherwise.

"And, done!"

We slip inside, bringing only blankets and lamps. Suddenly, save the shadows marring the sheets, we are alone.

I tear open the case of Yakult as you begin to tell me about some old Russian fairytale. I down a bottle and peel the cap from another to offer it to you. Then we are lying on our sides, and I am looking into your face, which in this dim lighting is nothing more than a composite of implied lines.

I am looking into your face, and I realize that I cannot tell the time and that I have lost my sense of direction. The door to your bedroom could be in the ceiling, if only I could tell up from down. But as we lie here with our ears pressed into what should be the ground, it feels as if you who are across from me are really somewhere down below, the way stars are above Earth yet not at all. If not for gravity fixing me in place, I would surely descend into you.

I am only half paying attention to your tale. *The snow is falling heavily.* You must know this. *Her father leaves her at the foot of a great tree.* And yet you continue to speak so earnestly. My eyelids are heavy. *But the cold doesn't touch her.* Sleep hovers on my brow. *She's given new clothes and a handsome dowry.* And what a peaceful sleep this will be! *But her half-sister is less lucky.* For your body is beside mine. *Father Frost kills the sister.* And your voice threads my ear.

When we wake tomorrow, you and I will be sensible once again. You will hide away your green sheets and discard these empty bottles, and I will return the dining room chairs to their rightful place. With black coffee and scrambled eggs between us, you will say, "John'll be here by noon," to which I will reply, "I'll be gone by nine."

Her mother, at the sight of the body, cries herself sick.

But it is still night where we are. Let us lie a while longer.

Generation sponsored by:



University of Windsor English & Creative Writing Department





Womb

Sarah Smitherman

Mixed Chicks

Myeisha Dyer

Out I come.

Whitewashed flesh. A hybrid. An in-between.

Curls on my head that my mother has only ever seen between her legs. My complexion a hesitant brown, a weaving of white and black love. My makers hesitate over the forms, pencils gripped in black-white hands, staring at boxes I don't fit in.

Between (Other). Neither (Black, White, Asian). All (Prefer not to say).

Violence lightens me. Brown sugar, toffee, cappuccino skin; they like me because I'm edible. My brownness melts on the tongue. Can you taste it? Chew me like the exotic fruit you claim I am. Culture diluted, my body a tool of assimilation. I bet I taste like strange fruit. Mixed is being Pluto: having a claim to a status. Having it revoked. They decide what I am; am I black or Black? Body politicized, I toe the line; am pulled to shake this hand and that. I am a diplomat. A neutral realm. They ask me if I can say the N word, if they can laugh at this character. The Black boys like me because I'm not too Black. A drop of melanin in a pool of milk. They like their coffee sweet. The white boys like me because I'm not too white. Tan like burnt butter. Consumable. Between.

I decide which skin to wear in the morning, which language to speak, because I am the nothingness of mist over the lake, waning in the sun. Stuck in the waiting room of my being, hoping for a call, hearing the clock tick. Never really there. I float above race, unsure where to land, suspended in the politics of my skin. I split from the cracks between continents—reaching.

KOOL-AID

Liam Croshaw

The

Kool-Aid's

Gone sour.

You expect me to drink this? Never again!

Look, maybe twenty years ago I'd have some,

But this shit has been sitting out in the desert sun for ages!

Not to mention I've acquired a palate of my own these last decades and don't really have the taste for it

Like I used to as a naive and admittedly impressionable patriotic youth. The problem here is that you haven't even stirred it since 2001 and it looks like there's mould growing on the top.

You used to at least try and pull the wool over our eyes; throw in a new flavour packet now and again and give it a stir, but this is just lazy and I'm not quite sure how anyone is still drinking it. But keep on selling it, I guess. Uncle Sam's delicious home brew!

So ship your kids out at eighteen. Buzz their heads. Take proud pictures of crisp-clean uniforms and freshly shaven faces. Kiss them for the last time before they go to kill another parent's child. Let them lose themselves in gunpowder, bomb blasts, tank tracks, and crusted blood – become unrecognizable. Because you gave them a sip. And when again the lies come out, and they find no nukes, and they place a flag, crisp-clean, in your hands, you might start to taste that the Kool-Aid's gone sour.

Unfinished, But Real

Mohiz

I don't think death arrives.

I think it edits.

It sits beside me like a second chair I never bought,
and it watches the cursor blink, blink,

I should be sleeping.

Instead I inventory myself:

breath, pulse, the dumb insistence of my body,
the way my thoughts keep making weather out of nothing.

Across the river the lights refuse to flicker.

They don't flicker like a question.

They don't ask permission to exist.

I envy that kind of unexamined shining.

Sometimes I mistake attention for holiness.

I stare at things until they soften,

until the world almost forgives me for being alive in it.

But the longer I look, the clearer the limit becomes:

the world doesn't want to be *understood* only.

It wants contact.

It wants the humiliating warmth of being chosen
without reason.

I'm not brave.

I'm precise.

A finished thing would be cold.

If I held it, I would stop being human.

There would be nothing left in me that needed it.

So, death, to me, is not a drama.

It's when the inside of a moment stops yielding.

When the day refuses to open its hand.

When the sentence I'm living in ends
and there is no next line.

I try to say this plainly.

The words waver.

Tonight, the house breathes in its own way.

The furnace clicks.

Salt dries on the edges of my boots.

The street outside does its small, dependable emptiness.

And I think:

It will be more like this—

a quiet room continuing,
the river continuing,
the lights continuing,
and my name becoming an object
someone can hold without feeling heat.

I don't want paradise.
I want the stubborn, imperfect earth of things:
a hand on a shoulder,
a laugh that breaks wrong,
a hand that almost stays.

If there's a prayer in me, it's not noble.
It's simple.

Let me be unfinished,
but real.

*Creations from the
Compilers*

my 13th ramadan

Maya Roumie

fog furls over
sky blanketing sunset and
deafening adhan from mosque minaret
it's the tailends of sha'ban and
first fast breaks with sticky dates and
table laid with lentil soup, garlicked steak and
silence as a cigarette drag cuts through today's headache
four chaired family dinner guaranteed thirty something days a year
laughter licks dry throats of your brother and mother and sister
you ask what they missed most today: espresso, tobacco, or morning eggs?
after, you clean the table and collect crumbs in a wet cloth and
shake them into the sink, stack plates for your sister to douse in dishsoap
stretch saran wrap onto leftover undercooked fries knocking elbows with mama moving to the fridge
brew decaffeinato over sugarcubes and cream, roll out your emerald prayer rug, bend in rakat,
resume

anatomical liar

Khloe Rouse

liar you need to remember

remember rib bones ribbon

ribbon wrap babypink pulmonary valves

valves and gummyhot ventricle contractions

contractions rumbling in fleshy chest

chest of cherry aorta

aorta is all it is

is it really?

really just a beat in the redjelly?

redjelly creak crack

crack lungs can't breathe

breathe and bronchioles blister

blister halfmoons red into nerves

nerves run like baby cockroach legs

legs run over muscle under skincover

skin covered in crescentnails

crescentnail covered thighs are fine

fine you need to remember

remember it's called formication

formication or are there insects laying little leggy eggs inside my membrane?

membrane compression crushing brain and sinew

sinew and liquidating ligaments and melting muscles

muscles quiver but you need to remember

remember it's the nervous system

system of sympathetic nerves

nerves like needle threads stitched crimson

crimson waves up spinalcord

spinalcord inflamed ganglions

ganglions puckering on cortisol

cortisol or skin cleaved open?

cleaved open pores spill thin crystalline rivers

rivers of hotsalt choked and swallowed

swallow it down

down and remember it's only anatomy

anatomy of reaction

reaction to heartbeat

heartbeat sent by brain

brain is a liar

liar, you must remember

remember

MAKE ART GREAT AGAIN

Maya Roumie & Khloe Rowse

wrist press soap dispenser, pearly pink splotch in palm
you swing the toilet stall open

say, did Hemingway get an MA?

i dunno, but i got a norton textbook for my birthday

you bump my hip, stand on tiptoes reaching for pearly pink

remember she said it was filled

with all the Greats

maybe if we tear it up and chew each syllable right

if we taste the root of every word between our tongues

and crawl between pentameter, we can measure what makes a Great

you know your therapist might

tell you to focus on less figurative food

while Woolf would say, "one cannot think well,

love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well"

well, i don't have a room of my own

you know your therapist might tell you to focus

on less figurative forms of Greatness

pull droplet dripping fingertips away from sink

the air dryer hums recycled air over my question but still you turn your head

what makes Greats?

geographical luck

got to be born in england – new or old

yeah, God knows

they bomb enough grad schools in the global south

your hands cut through tap stream, bubbles foam

then fall apart on your fingers

Darwish was famous though and he

lived in exile – beirut et paris

why can't that be me –

i'm from the middle east

okay, then i'm Dickinson

wearing white, exiled from outside

you know she was irrelevant
when she died?

well, you know they call her the mother of modernism?

what are we gonna be?

i don't know – how will we escape post-modernism?

that's a question for communism

i wonder what they'll call our coterie

you pull a shiny tube out of your denim pocket

which one is that?

cocoa – you want?

always

i watch as you gloss and lick your top lip, cupid bow shining in spit

i squeeze out whatever's left, soothing cracked lips

but ... what will make us Great?

you snort

creative writing. we're late.

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– **Maya Roumie & Khloe Rowse,**
EUSA Presidents & Project Managers

