

THE HEMLOCK

A LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL

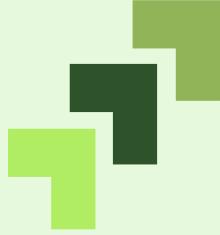
SUMMER ISSUE | JUNE 2024



POEMS | STORIES | VISUAL ARTS
BOOK REVIEWS | BOOK EXCERPTS

www.thehemlockjournal.org

Editors' Note



Welcome to the latest issue of 'The Hemlock', a literary arts journal that celebrates the beauty and power of words and art. Our journal is dedicated to showcase a wide range of literary arts, including poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction, and visual art.

In this issue, we present a collection of stunning works that showcase the boundless creativity and imagination of our contributors. From evocative poetry to mesmerising fiction, each piece explores different themes and issues that are relevant to our world today. The issue also features book reviews and book excerpts that provide you with a glimpse into different literary offerings and help you decide which books to explore further.

Our visual artists also offer a feast for the eyes, with a range of pieces that encompass everything from traditional painting and drawing to digital art and mixed media.

Each work is a testament to the skill and passion of our contributors, who have poured their hearts and souls into their creations. We are honoured to showcase the talent and creativity of our contributors, who come from all corners of the globe and represent a diverse range of voices and perspectives. Whether you are a seasoned reader or a newcomer to the world of literary arts, we hope that you will find something in this issue that resonates with you. Thank you for joining us on this journey, and we look forward to continuing to explore the rich and vibrant world of literary arts together.

Editorial
Team



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A Strange Air

By DS Maolalai

she was nervous,
I noticed, as we got out
to the country. convinced
that we'd be looked at
with expressions of
surprise. I told her
with some talking
that this wasn't like
back home. that in ireland
no-one notices
an interracial couple –
at least not (I am a realist)
when the male half
is the white one.
but small towns
are always different:
a strange air, I admit,
in the restaurants. no-one said
anything, but we took
some long looks in.



DS Maolalai has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has nominated twelve times for Best of the Net, ten for the Pushcart Prize and once for the Forward Prize, and has been released in three collections; "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016), "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019) and "Noble Rot" (Turas Press, 2022)

Night Nurse

By JC Alfier

Post-surgery day. Salvaged hernia. Time gone strange now — outside itself on oxycodone, it keeps an alien clock. The anesthesia nurse asked about a poem of mine I'd mentioned till I fell under when her palm cupped oxygen over my words. It was published in a medical journal in '08, drawing on footage of falling bombers on Twelve O'clock High and the recall of stoning ducks on a creek, only funny till I hit one and it rolled inverted under the surface. In recovery, the night nurse gave me a whore bath. She said We must keep the site sterile around the wound. Told me she loved my tramp-stamp — a rose. Somewhere beyond my dusty windowpane, LA raises a draggled moon.



JC Alfier's (they/them) most recent book of poetry, *The Shadow Field*, was published by Louisiana Literature Press (2020). Journal credits include *Faultline*, *New York Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Penn Review*, *River Styx*, *Southern Poetry Review* and *Vassar Review*. They are also an artist doing collage and double-exposure work.

My Stifling Procrastination

By Bruce Gunther

Exudes confidence.

Exhales dust and ennui.

Lets weeds grow.

Stifles the urge to put
one word in front of
the other until I make it.

Convinces me that reading
one more page of a book
that bores me is healthy
for my brain.

Asks me why I deny
my hunger when
the cupboard beckons
with its salty snacks.

Helps me to decide
that another five minutes
of monitoring my turbocharged
monkey mind is the real game.

Tells me that my timeline
is an eternity when my
real age rounds the last turn
and staggers down the homestretch.

But tomorrow -
tomorrow I will
conquer worlds slightly
bigger than pine cones
and call it good enough.



Bruce Gunther is a former journalist and writer who lives in Michigan. He's a graduate of Central Michigan University. His poems have appeared in the Remington Review, the Dunes Review, Modern Haiku, the Comstock Review, and others.

Truth Or Lies

By Ved Prajapati

I don't need the truth anymore.
 For me, the lies would suffice now.
 I don't need those harsh truths to live.
 As of now, I ask you to bury me in the lies.

Heal me with the lies that feel good.
 Even if the truth seems to be more believable,
 I would love to smile at the lies.
 Rather than crying over the truth, I can't change

Give me the sunset of lies that dawn passes me.
 I won't care if the sunrise of truth has more light.
 I'm tired of the truth that stings me.
 As of now, I'll happily drink the poison of lies. That kills
 me slowly.

I won't ask you to stay with me anymore.
 I would believe anything you say to leave.
 Just for one last time, I'll ask you
 What hurts more, the truth or the lies?



Ved Prajapati is a poet from India. Currently, he is a student.

High School

By **Jedidiah Vinzon**

the scent of high school is
the group of girls standing by the train doors
whispering among themselves
and you scratch the surface of
their secret conversation
and the wind does the peeling
for you and you are left with
the distinct smell:
earth-baked, sun-roasted
flesh coated in wool jackets and
steamed in laughter, hushed
and vivacious, the way it
spreads itself like butter on bread
is contagious but you listen in
the song of silence is too redundant
so the tea is spilt
you are listening to drama unfold
an origami flower budding into
a sheet of paper with a note
written inside:
she likes him too.



Jedidiah Vinzon is studying physics at the University of Auckland. His works can be read in Tarot, Circular and the Bitter Melon Review, with many more forthcoming. You can find him on Instagram @jayv.poetry

Mother's Home

By Saheli Dey

You can't be a mother, the doctor said
I felt my world tumbled in my head,
With empty hand folded I cried,
Thought God might rain one day, so I tried,
To appease all the deities for one boon,
May I too be homing soon.

A fateless forehead, fruitless womb,
Perfect embodiment of gloom,
Neighbours hush,tell remedies,
But some are just not meant to be
Mothers ,daughters,kind and cool,
Or to be kept as 'prettiest fools'.

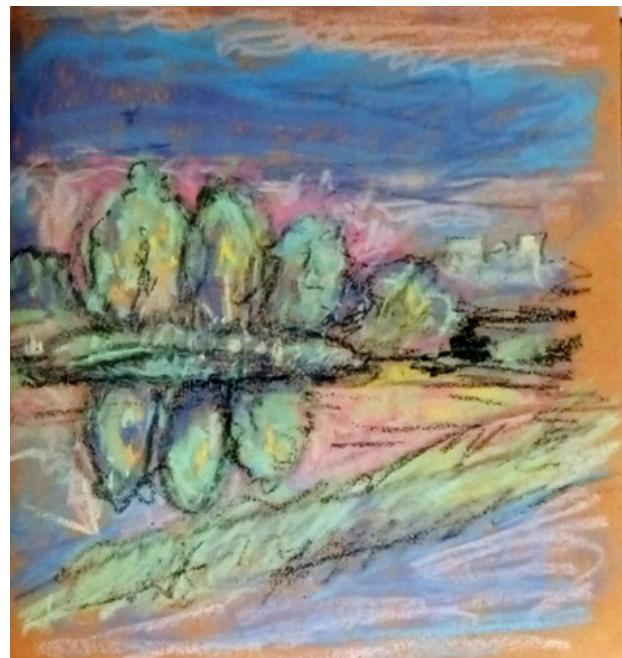
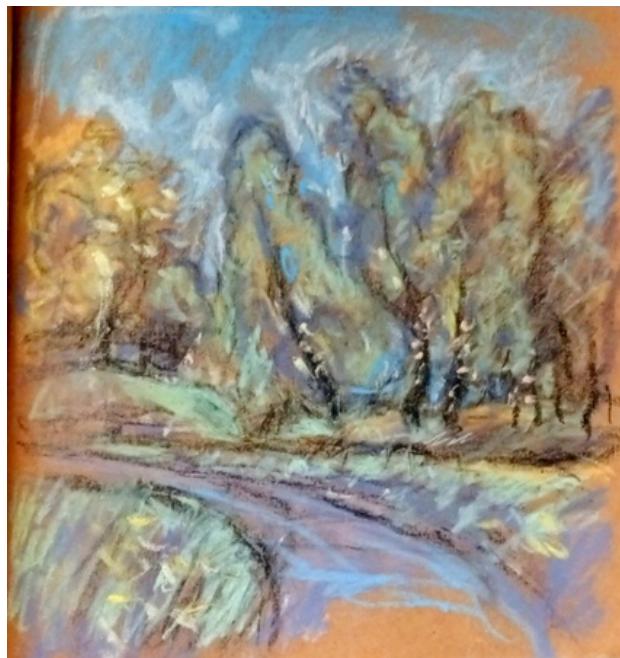
So countless fiery summers I spent,
On some days I put my soul on rent
My will power works three jobs to pay,
for a wrinkled hackneyed apartment.
To see little steps back afternoon
I hope I will be homing soon!

Home with a garden of my tree
However fruitless it may be,
Where is practised selfless love
By people aren't 'motherly enough'!
to some infant fateless dunes!
For them I dream of homing soon.



Saheli is a published author in India. She loves to write about things we miss between two blinks.

Art by Irina Tall (Novikova)



Musky Nut

By Sher Schwartz

One to three seeds
creates euphoria.
Mom's secret ingredient
nutmeg seeded meat loaf.

Dad and I walking
cafeteria lines picking
cups of egg custard
nutmeg baked on tops.

I dreamed of this pasta
creamy nutmeg alfredo
gave me heart palpitations
martini sixteenth birthday.

Kent State lawn, 1970
police found two nutmeg
balls in my right pocket
shavings I never baked.

Nineteen seventy-three
abortion becomes legal
I no longer need
nutmeg induced emptiness.

Orange-brown powdered
nutmeg aphrodisiac
mixed by the Egyptians
gave cats' immortality.

The Portuguese annihilated
a universe for the musky nut
Banda Islands nutmeg curse
surround the prized spice eye.

Note: *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* by Amitav Ghosh (2021).



Sher A. Schwartz holds an MA in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on Northwest Coastal Native American Art. She taught English, Communications, and Religion classes at University of Alaska in Ketchikan for many years and now lives on a farm in Eastern Oregon. A published essayist and poet her chapbook-- *The Beautiful One's Ark* will be published summer 2024 by The Poetry Box.

A Night In San Antonio

By M.S. Blues

bright, bright lights,
on wild, wild nights!

those skies,
singing ballads
to those beholding eyes!

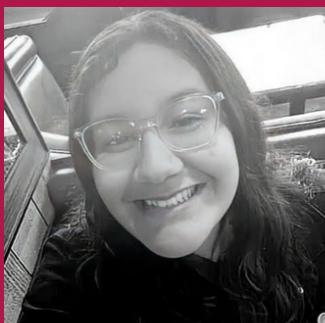
the warm, tired vivacity,
illuminates like a raindrop,
over my restless eye!

(does this city ever sleep?
does this city ever breathe?
does this city ever awake from its dream?)

a girl from California wouldn't be aware.

surely, I'm equipped to handle the life of the party,
but I wonder if my skills are adequate enough to survive this night...

I suppose we shall see!



M.S. Blues is an 18 year old multiracial, queer, and versatile writer who has been writing since the age of seven. Her work revolves around the darker pieces of humanity society tends to neglect. She has been abundantly published by many literary magazines and currently serves as an editor to The Amazine, Adolescence Magazine, The Elysian Chronicles, and Hyacinthus Zine. Her Instagram handle is @m.s.blues_

The Equinox Café

By M F Drummy

With the echo of starlight throbbing in our
temple veins, we emerge from the bosque
after weeks of living off the grid. Mute crows
in the leafless cottonwoods stand sentinel along
the trail. The river is low enough to cross on foot.
We find our way out to the highway, hitching north
through the desert toward the pueblo. The sun
warms the rags we wear. At the café you order
green chili stew & I, the avocado toast. We drink
decaffeinated coffee, black. You ask the server
whether she is a student of the precise path of
the sun. In the answerless silence, I drop a couple
of bucks on the table for a tip. Outside,
the earth comes to life as thaw. We hike up to
the Anasazi ruins behind the café. The ochre
pictographs along the mesa wall are of horses,
spears, squash, & a sun that rises in a new
spring sky. We hold hands among the rubble,

waiting for the moon to appear as the fever
of life ignites between us, fluent in its heat.



M F Drummy holds a PhD in historical theology from Fordham University. The author of numerous articles, essays, poems, reviews, and a monograph on religion and ecology, his work has appeared, or will appear, in Allium, [Alternate Route], Anti-Heroin Chic, Ars Sententia, Deal Jam, Emerge, FERAL, Green Silk, Last Leaves, Main Street Rag, Marbled Sigh, Meetinghouse, Poemeleon, The Word's Faire, Winged Penny Review, and many others. He and his way cool life partner of over 20 years enjoy splitting their time between the Colorado Rockies and the rest of the planet. He can be found at: Instagram @miguelito.drummalino Website <https://bespoke-poet.com>

The Quire Of The Sheep

By Paweł Markiewicz

We are calling for your soul
 for a benevolent autumnal source
 May the hoary times arrive!
 Dream full of sunny gloom endlessly!

with a fancy
 coming from tender sea
 we are conjuring you dreamer
 your mythical pearls

Come propitious birdies
 from Olympus-mountlet!

Recite my songs
 about the mellow dawn
 about brave honest hoplite-like treasure!



Paweł Markiewicz was born 1983 in Siemiatycze in Poland. He is poet who lives in Bielsk Podlaski and writes tender poems, haiku as well as long poems. Paweł has published his poetries in many magazines. He writes in English and German.

Bucket List

By **Tobi Alfier**

She appears without direction
like a ship caught between tides,
a diver who hangs in solemn air
holding pose before touching water,
but the appearance is just that—
as like a fine wine, she matures.

She holds a compass true
in her heart, and her face
is a study in reserve.

She's one of those women
who can always find ways
to be diminished,
but give her the sound
of the wind over breakwaters,
a long slow jazz trio,
a tall window where she can watch
the gulls soar and tides sing their landfall—
she is not diminished.

Gift her chains to wear
with links both silver and gold
for anything worn or unworn,
wildflowers in a vase,
woodsmoke in a hearth,
morning birds in a gunmetal sky.
The very best on her terms
and only her terms.



Tobi Alfier is published nationally and internationally. Credits include *War, Literature and the Arts*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *KGB Bar Lit Mag*, *Washington Square Review*, *Cholla Needles*, *James Dickey Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Permafrost*, *Arkansas Review*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, and others. She is co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* (www.bluehorsepress.com).



The Street Lamp

Mohammed Bilal Namoji

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Muscat, the capital of Oman, is a captivating blend of ancient charm and modern allure. Nestled between majestic mountains and the Arabian Sea, it boasts stunning architecture, bustling souks, and a rich cultural heritage. This picture represents the serenity and calmness of my home town Muscat.



Mohammed Bilal Namoji, an ardent photographer with a deep appreciation for nature, channels his creativity through calligraphy, car collecting, and global exploration. Approaching his final year of school, he aspires to embark on a career in the realm of computers.

A Poem To Rose

By Meera Gopalakrishnan

Oh dear rose, why do I love you the most
 Is it because you are the flower that celebrates love,
 or you are the symbol of love.
 Do I love you because you have the sweetest fragrance,
 Or softest petals
 No dear rose, I don't love you for your beauty or fragrance.
 I love you because you offer the life's greatest lesson
 No good thing comes in life without struggle
 Beauty in life has to deal with pain
 Just like we have to deal with thorns before we can reach you.
 Just like the blood that might ooze out from the prick of the thorn as we pluck you.
 Oh dear rose I love you because
 You are the true meaning of love
 That has pain but beautiful.

 Meera Gopalakrishnan published a novel Seven Vows (under the pen name Shruthi) and two short stories Second Chance and The Forgiveness I seek and a collection of micro tales Light in Darkness as Meera Gopalakrishnan. She has also co authored 100+ anthologies so far. Before becoming a writer, she was working in IT industry. She loves Indian mythology, culture and Indian history and interested in weaving stories around that. She has an active profile in Wattpad shruthiravil3 and her insta id is mira_g_pai

A Single Note

By **Fabrice Poussin**

He reached into the darkness
for the midnight drink
to find the glass
empty.

Drowsy with the weight
of eerie visions truly
he awoke if
startled.

A world of crystal rang
with a singular echo
to even rock
his soul.



Poussin is a professor of French and World Literature. His work in poetry and photography has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and hundreds of other publications worldwide. Most recently, his collections *In Absentia*, *If I Had a Gun*, *Half Past Life*, and *The Temptation of Silence* were published in 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 by Silver Bow Publishing.

My Favorite Desk

By Danny P. Barbare

I find an excuse for my wife and
I to go to the
blue ridge
so I can write a poem
as if it gives me a pen and
a piece of paper
with a good hand
at the steering wheel
to create
as my ears pop and
my world is silent with my
thoughts at my favorite
desk
as in October there is
mountains of ideas like colorful
leaves
and apples to write across
the blue line
as words are as green as
mountain laurel
and find
a home with a view like a ridge.



Danny P. Barbare resides in the Southeastern USA. His award winning poetry has been published widely in the USA and abroad. He lives with his wife in the foothills of the Carolinas. A Collection of Poems is available through Barnes & Noble published in India.

An Instagram User Captures The End Of The World

By Christian Ward

The gentle hand
of the lens caresses
whatever's netted:
the trees whispering
their goodbyes,
a sky packing itself
away for the last time,
the sea reduced to dew,
the land caught in
an hourglass' song.
No filter – Juno, Clarendon,
or Gingham – can undo
with the softest of pastels.
This is not a story
to be saved, hashtagged,
or shared. The editor's
hand must grieve
like the sun looking away.



Longlisted for the 2023 National Poetry Competition, Christian Ward's poetry has recently appeared in Acumen, Dream Catcher, Free the Verse, Loch Raven Review, The Shore and The Westchester Review. He was shortlisted for the 2024 Alpine Fellowship Poetry Prize and won the 2023 Cathalbui Poetry Competition.

Caged

By Lisa Schantl

I have lost count
of my breaths.
How many seconds in and out;
for how many hours, days,
fortnights,
the wood has been smelling

of salt and moss
when I bow close to
hazelnut — lime — ebony — probably.
My fingers can't name
the forest I became
a fairy queen in
as a child.

I trace the slimy rivers and smell
the many hands — nails — hearts
that have run canyons through the fibers,
now reeking of my sweat, too.

I'm asking you, predecessor:
In this sarcophagus
wrapped in paper stripes
no one heard you
banging against the walls —

Dried and withered,
we rest our heads on the crib,

for one thousand times more,
before we turn our back on the lie
and look for the key
elsewhere.



Lisa Schantl is the founder and editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Tint Journal* and assistant at *treffpunkt sprachen* – Centre for Language, Plurilingualism and Didactics at the University of Graz, Austria, where she researches translingual literature. She also freelances as translator and organizer of cultural projects. She studied English and American Studies as well as Philosophy at the University of Graz and Montclair State University, New Jersey. Her writings and translations have appeared in *Asymptote*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, *manuskripte*, *Panel Magazine*, *PubLab*, *The Hopper*, *The Normal Review*, *UniVerse*, *Versopolis*, and more. She has received various grants and scholarships, most recently the *Kunstraum Steiermark* scholarship for 2023–24. Copyright for headshot: Lena Baloch

Plain Fields

By Jacob Fortino

We made up excuses
For the grossness of the diner
Each time we drove by
Eyes turned to Keller's patch
On the way into downtown
Mom trusted only the soup
So we never ate there
Downtown sloped by
The gazebos near
The stormfallen trees
Broken into the river always
Onto the grounds of all
Tipping kayaks and fishers
Mirrored into the Midwest brush
Were brass waters colored in
By the orange Illinois evenings
Burning Summer's after school sky



Jacob Fortino is a 24-year-old poet, author, and painter from Plainfield, IL. He received a BA in Creative Writing with a Minor in European Studies at Illinois State University and he plans on pursuing an MA. His work has been published in Euphemism, The Hemlock Journal and Pink Apple Press. He currently lives in Chicago, IL.

Last Laughs

By William Doreski

A boxful of bones arrives.
According to the packing slip
a mother and child, long ago
skeletonized into a beauty
few attain in flesh-borne life.

Must I reconstruct this muddle
by rule of nature's anatomy?
Or should I design an artwork,
a sculpture that incorporates
both sets in a single entity?

I suspect that a famous critic,
herself recently dead, arranged
this puzzle to confound me.
Last laughs laugh most loudly.
With a spool of wire I set about

raising a monument to all
relevant lifespans: theirs, hers,
and especially mine, the gleam
of the antique bones impossible
to distinguish from what they mean.



William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Cloud Mountain* (2024). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

Mouse's Tank

By Isaiah Janisch

Red walls of
fire rock surround
little vehicles.

Winds over
one hundred degrees
blow against the glass shields.

A swirl of
titan sand cyclones
obscures the way.

The unbelievable,
unbearable landscape
taunts its automobile foes.

But the passengers
will be fine
as long as they follow

Mouse's Tank Road



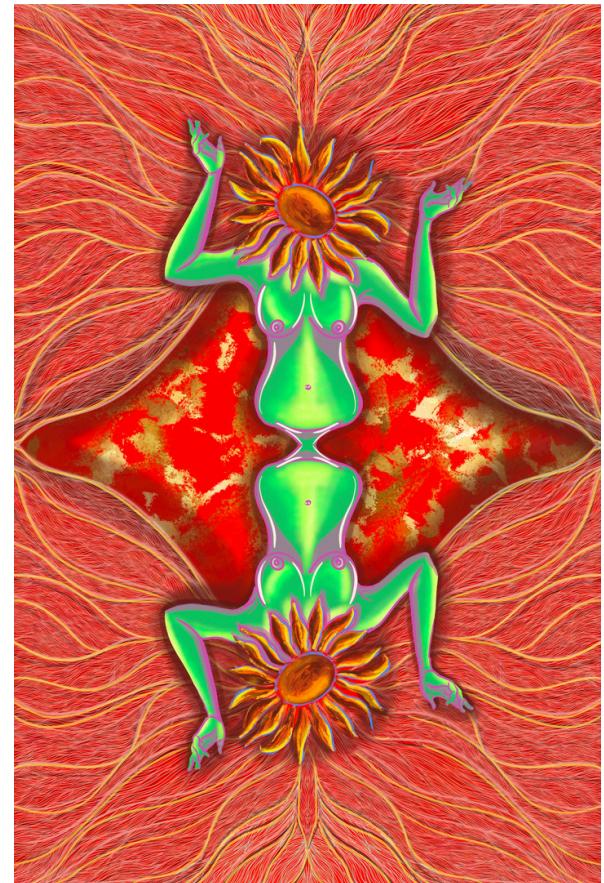
Isaiah Janisch is a poet and artist from Evansville, WI. He holds a bachelor's degree in English-Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. His work has been published in literary journals, like *Digging Through the Fat* and *The Muse*, and has been displayed at the Arts + Literature Laboratory in Madison, WI. Janisch has also worked as an editor for the *Rock River Review* literary journal and taught poetry class to middle and high school

students. To mix his love of poetry and visual arts, he founded the Instagram page [@plaza.of.poetry](https://www.instagram.com/plaza.of.poetry)--a collection of poems and digital art that explores liminality and cultural transition.



Spiritual Mirror

Ritika Ahirwar



Veins of Harmony

Ritika Ahirwar



Daring Petals

Ritika Ahirwar

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Daring petals, spiritual mirror and veins of harmony are colourful art prints are digital illustrations made on iPad, the style of these artworks is visionary art using figurative OP art with psychedelic colours. Vibrant figuration emphasizes the mood and interaction of figures with patterns and colours.



Varanasi's own Ritika, a multimedia artist wielding paint and murals, weaves personal stories onto canvases—her art whispers of self-love and women's power, themes vibrant in every brushstroke. Celebrating resilience and inner strength, she inspires viewers to embrace their journeys. Recognized as a "fierce woman" of Varanasi, her exhibitions showcase simple yet powerful works that ignite introspection and emotional connection. Step into Ritika's world, and embark on a journey within.

The Spike Specialist Develops Workaholism

By Luanne Castle

One week after his father fell into a vat of Paraquat Dichloride at the shop, Bristly Hendrix inherited the family pest control business. As the company spike specialist, he transitioned services toward barrier-style rather than chemical, spending most of his time nailing spike strips along house gutters to deter pigeons and sealing gaps between doors and thresholds. Hendrix velcroed customers' dogs into Kevlar coyote vests emblazoned with bands of bristles, climbed prickly saguaros to look for wood rats, and removed snout weevils

from within thorn-tipped agave leaves. He took on more and more customers and barely came home to sleep so he didn't notice when his wife, who had recently taken up the kazoo, chopped off her aubergine talons and grew out her fauxhawk. Without any work on Christmas Day, Hendrix slept in until his wife wrapped him in soft thighs and arms that felt like a sack of gopher bellies. I ought to patent spike pajamas, Hendrix thought, but was too smart to say it aloud.



When the Protagonist Can't Figure Out How to Change Her Life

By Luanne Castle

Just go away, Sari wished so hard she almost gave herself an aneurysm. The rolling suitcase blocked her view. Like the pillow her mother's boyfriend had used on her. She cranked her own mouth open with a crowbar enough to mutter that suitcases weren't allowed on the concession counter. Down went the suitcase and up went the face demanding to know the exact price of the gum with tax added. With her mouth now clamped shut, Sari rang the gum and stared at the back wall of magazines. Buy it or don't, she hoped her gestures showed. The

face turned away, the gum disappeared, and Sari had done her job, which as she saw it was to stand there and push buttons on the register. She didn't get paid enough to do more. Not enough to move out, not enough to buy a weapon for protection. Ma'am, ma'am, she tried to ignore. How much is this Snickers with the tax? Do you have Just Water? Hey, I'm in a hurry. If Sari stayed mute and immobile eventually they would all go away.



Luanne Castle's *Pushcart*, *Best Small Fictions*, and *Best of the Net*-nominated poetry and prose have appeared in *Copper Nickel*, *TAB*, *Verse Daily*, *Saranac Review*, *Bending Genres*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Does it Have Pockets*, *South 85*, *Roi Fainéant*, *River Teeth*, *The Dribble Drabble Review*, and *Flash Boulevard*. She has published four award-winning poetry collections. Luanne lives with five cats in Arizona along a wash that wildlife use as a thoroughfare.

Our Collective Languages

By Oksana

Four rooms, one bathroom and a huge corridor. Build up with rocks, in the nineties. Two apple trees. Four hazelnut trees. Three berry trees. Two fig trees. Two plum trees. One pear tree. Two persimmon trees. One pomegranate tree. A lot of blackberries. All around in the garden of the house. Green grass. Grapes. White grapes. Black grapes. Plenty of iris flowers. Nettles too. Full of daisies. Even more outside the garden. Some primroses. Yellow wood sorrels everywhere.

In the summer, the house is mostly fresh (because of the way it has been built). In the winter, the smallest room is the one chosen to spend most of the daytime there, with the warmth of the white wood stove.

This house keeps all the memories of the past days. It sees dreams with kids climbing trees. Playing. They have a favorite spot in one of the plum trees. The adventure of climbing trees occupies a good part of the daily games. They can even climb the hazelnut trees. It's

because they are small. Trying handstand is so funny. It is mostly a fall. Sometimes it is even perfect success. Even though, perfection is the last thing they are seeking in their childhood adventures.

Blurry remembers the visitors, but the family it does remember well. Giving it life, building up the walls and the roof remembers the family. It has been a witness of life, but death not yet. Therefore, it still dreams and remembers all. Butterflies and fireflies. Rivers nearby that it has never been, but seen us go. Landscapes of freedom. Strawberries. A big oak tree. Turtles. Insects. Snakes. Four shrubs of red roses. Scepter'd isle rose shrub. One small yellow rose shrub. A big shrub of fairy roses.

Outside the garden, where there are more daisies, there is a field. Mason is running towards the rising sun. Her mother, her sister, and women of their tribe run after her to exhort her where she should go. Mason is twelve,

dressed in colors of life, the symbols of nature. Transitioning from girlhood to womanhood. She runs as in the story of the first woman. It is believed by the Navajos that this ritual connects Mason to the first women. A four-day ritual.

Corns to make the cake, sacred songs, prayers and blessings. The holy person Mason is becoming. The corn cake in the last day, to honor the sun. The first women of this land is here. A whole community around to praise the growing up process of Mason. In the story of the first women and the first man, after hearing a baby cry, they are instructed by the holy people to take care of that baby. Within twelve days, the baby grows from an infant to a twelve-year-old girl. Ready to become a woman. As in the changing woman story, Mason is becoming the children bearer in this puberty ceremony. Her mind speaks in words of wisdom:

"Running and running. I feel like I am in a bootcamp. I can barely breathe now. Three more days to go. This is only the first day. My lungs breathe the air of my ancestors and give me power. But I am tired. I see this big field when I run east and it seems like it's never ending. Why do I have to run to become a woman? I am

still small, I can grow up even if I don't run. I might just run away to a different direction to avoid the other days.

After the run, we get to build a mountain of corn flour. This is more fun. At least I'm sitting down to get a bit of a rest. All the tribe is gathered for the ritual, it feels awkward that everybody is here knowing what is happening with my body. In the last day, we will cook a cake out of the corn flour mountain. I will bless the cake before everybody eats it. Big responsibilities for me.

In the second day, I get to experience very funny moments with the women of my tribe. They tell stories of their experience in the sacred ritual. My grandmother even fell down during the run in the first day. I've done two days of successful running already. My bigger sister tells me that I cried in the run of her last day, because she went so far away that I thought she left for vacations and didn't take me with her. My aunt that has her forty birthday tomorrow says she's glad it's my time to do the ritual because she has gotten fat and has to put some weight down while running after me with

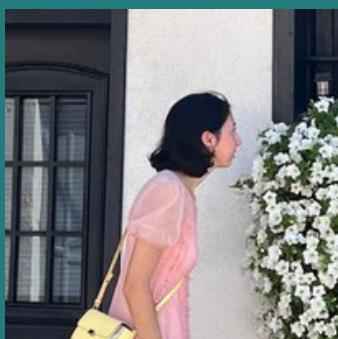
the other women.

At night, we gather together with the medicine man, to listen him singing sacred songs for me. It's already the third night and I made it to run east even today. The corn cake it's slowly baking now, in the big fire outside the hogan, to be ready in the morning. I feel relieved. I got only one more day to run. Actually, I'm starting to enjoy this. Tonight, it is believed that I'll be joined by the spirit of the Navajo changing woman and I'm feeling quite special. The medicine man is singing and I feel enchanted and scared.

I see the domed top of the hogan. The roof's hole lets the stars see my distracted face. I remember my mom and dad explaining me the shape of the hogan. That domed shape as a woman carrying a baby. (Being nurtured by your mother in the womb.) My mom is rubbing my back. My father is outside with the

other men of the tribe, waiting for the sun to rise. The medicine man never gets tired of singing. His repertoire is full of sacred songs. I wonder when did he learned them so well. He doesn't forget a word.

My mom wakes me up. It's time to do the last run. The longest run. I can smell the cake outside and can't wait to eat a piece of it. But I have to do the run first. I can't secretly grab the cake because there are so many of my people keeping it safe until it's time for me to bless it. And so, I run. All the women of my tribe behind me too. All the man, my dad waiting for me too. I finally made it to the last day, and I will never love eating a cake that much than today. We are all gathered around each - other. Such a blessing."



Writing is one of Oksana forever passions. She loves arts and expressing herself through it. She usually keeps it to herself or joins small nonformal groups. In 2021, she started sharing what she writes. She has published 3 articles online trying to give insights into women empowerment. In the same year, she was one of the three winners in the essay writing competition "Untold Stories" which was about bringing awareness about human trafficking, organized by UNICEF in Albania.

Poetry Thief

By Amy L Cornell

I am perusing through my writing and my thoughts, and I am hit by the faintest of recollections. The memory goes back more than a year, maybe two or three. I think of an article written about a poetry thief, or rather a poetry stalker, a man who in the night leaves poems on people's porches. This nightly act, lasting all or most of one hot summer in a quiet seaside town, became quite the local mystery. One would think that finding poems on one's porch would capture the imagination and spur you to live your life with intentionality and grace. You should form a book club. You should notice the sunset. You should take time to listen to your neighbor. Instead, people called the police. They wanted to know who was coming onto their porches late at night. Who is this intruder?

The man harmed nothing. He merely left poems and then went about his business. He thought he was inviting whimsy and hope and dreams, but the people of that town formed a vigilante squad to watch for the mysterious poetry leaver.

Everything and everyone became suspect. Mr. Henry could recite every word of TS Eliot's poem about the cruellest month. Was he a suspect? Did the fact that the local grocery put up rhyming deli specials on their big board out front mean the manager was in on it? What about the high school teacher who was teaching Byron and Shelley, did she put some high school student up to it? The people were in a serious uproar as the verses kept appearing: John Keats and Robert Burns and Emily Dickinson and Edgar Poe; James Joyce and Gertrude Stein; Billy Collins and Naomi Shihab Nye. The poetry thief knew his subjects and his poetry well. He matched the poem with the ailing heart, and the struggling soul, which freaked people out more than anything: How does this intruder know me so well? How does he know what I have never told a single person?

The poetry thief had people checking out books from the county library (the 800 Dewey

classification was wiped out one weekend) while at the same time town residents were asking the sheriff to keep a watch on their porches. The mood was 16th century witch hunt, and it was all anyone could talk about in that one town during that one summer.

In the article the man is captured—the poetry maven—and he apologizes. For him, his poetry fairying was an act of caprice and whimsy. He did not understand what the big deal was, and the most anyone could sputter as an outrage was “he was on my porch...at night...while I was asleep.”

The Sheriff cried no harm no foul and let the poor guy go. He was a stranger, an itinerant painter or landscaper, someone who came to town that summer and left just as quickly at the end. The sheriff asked him to stop doing what he had been doing, and the poetry fairy shrugged his shoulders, said “okay”, and before they knew it, he had left. Off to leave his poems for some other unsuspecting community they presumed.

I knew this story because I had read it and thought about it for a while a few years ago. I now wanted to read it again, to prove it happen-

-ed, to see the faces of the town as they mustered up the outrage over a sonnet on their porch. I began my Google search to find that article, and I used these phrases: man who left poetry on the porch, arrested poetry man, poetry thief. I get link after link to poems about porches (there is an amazing body of them) and links to newspaper articles about people on porches (there is a surprising number of people who do nothing but sit on their porch) but I could not find one article about my poem thief, my stalker, my itinerant soul knowing literary scholar. No articles about the town he violated or the sheriff who told him to stop. I wanted to see his picture. I wanted a line or two of verse. I wanted to know that this really happened.

I thought about it for so long and so hard that I began to imagine the poet lived in my town and the poems were left on my porch. For who else had introduced me to Ted Koosier and Adrienne Rich and Lucille Clifton? Who else made me locate found poetry on menus, on billboards, on Kraft macaroni and cheese boxes? Who else had me dreaming in iambic pentameter? The mystery of my missing

newspaper story was not where did it go and why couldn't I find it, but when did I know he was right in my own backyard?

The more I thought about my own poetry stalker, the mysterious poet in the night in my own hometown, the more I knew that wasn't true either. The more I thought about the story, I began to suspect that I was the poetry stalker, I was the man leaving poetry on your porch. I was the one who led you to know the round and supple words of Walt Whitman and Robert Browning. I was the one who took your breath away with just a short line of Mary Oliver. I wore black when I went out, poems slung in a string bag over my shoulder. I arrived at your porch, quietly, wary of the light that would flip on and the dog that would bark. I tucked your poem under the mat so that you would notice it in the morning when you got your paper.

I remember my angry neighbors, the editorials in the paper: the one

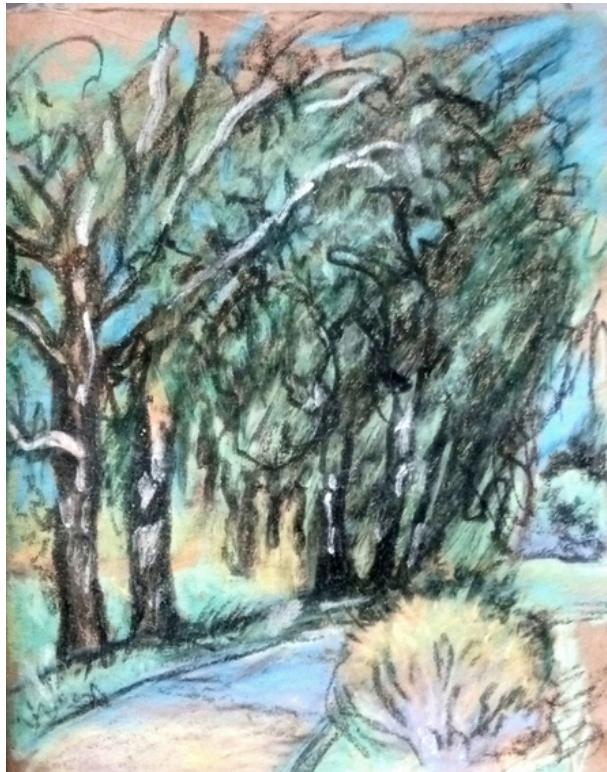
that began with: Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, as if I would leave that tired chestnut on anyone's doorstep. I remember overhearing a cashier talk about this poem by Oriah Mountain Dreamer. Imagine that! People in check-out lines talking about poetry.

So, I found it. After hours of searching, of asking, of googling, of trying to remember just who published this story, I found it, right there in the recesses of my own memory. I found myself and all my favorite poets. I found the cool black nights of late fall and the feeling in my chest as I left the poem on your porch. The poem that begins...The fog comes in on little cat feet. I found the smile on your face as you saw that you too had been included in my late-night poetic maneuvers. The knowing look you flashed when you realized that someone out there understood you.

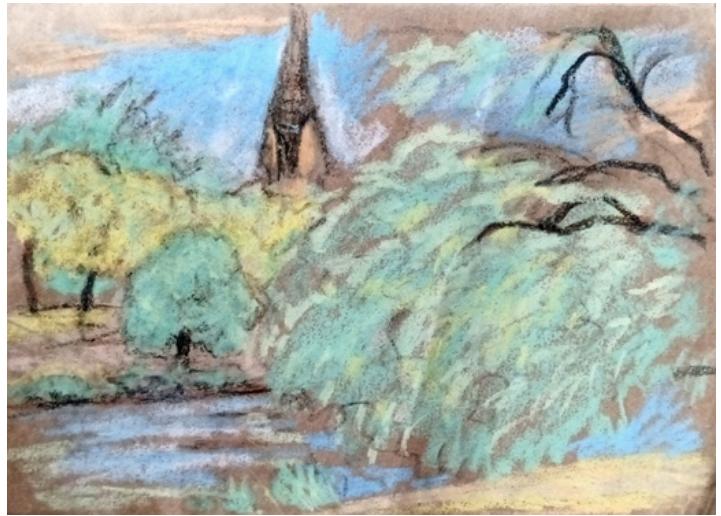


Amy L Cornell lives and works in Indiana. She has two kids and two cats and a spouse. She writes short stories, creative non-fiction and poetry. Her favorite month is April when she participates in National Poetry Writing Month and writes a poem a day for 30 days. She is working on essays about disability.

Art by Irina Tall (Novikova)



Art by Irina Tall (Novikova)



Clickety Click, Clickety Clack!!

By Samina Namogi

"Girl, you have got to see all the cool stuff she has! "You will love it," said Beth, with excitement sparkling in her large brown eyes. Shelly sighed and rolled her eyes, and followed her best friend along the cobbled road. The street buzzed with activity, the tiny cafes were packed with people, enjoying the sunshine and fresh brunch. The aroma of freshly baked goods drifted from the open bakery doors, mixing with the chatter of people sipping steaming coffee and discussing life and business. Rows of freshly cut flowers added a rustic touch to the street outside the florists' shops. Clothing and luxury stores tempted them with their latest collections of coats, shoes, and handbags, but today they had a different destination in mind. Walking ahead, the narrow street ended abruptly at a small but old shop. The dilapidated, long-standing building that had stood the test of time beckoned them. The walls wore a shabby look, with peeling paint and a faded sign hung on the door which said "OPEN". It felt like they had stepped into a parallel universe, which was a stark contrast

to the bustling street behind them. "Are you sure this is the place, Beth?", Shelly's doubt crept into her voice. "Of course, silly. I've been here plenty of times", Beth reassured her. "Remember that red skirt you adore? I got it right here," she added with a grin. Shelly couldn't shake off the creepy vibe emanating from the building. "It's giving me the chills," she admitted. "Seriously? Come on, there's nothing to be scared of," Beth dismissed her concerns, urging her forward. With a hesitant sigh, Shelly followed. "Come on, now" nudged Beth pushing open the door. Inside, the shop exuded an antique charm, reminiscent of a bygone era. The yellow wallpaper, once adorned with vibrant patterns, now had faded into obscurity. Garments hung on low dusty long racks. Glass cases displayed an array of jewelry – bracelets, chains, trinkets all gleaming faintly in the dim light. Dusty shelves held rows of books; their pages untouched by curious hands. Jars of creams and powders sat silently on the

counter, gathering dust over the years. An uneasy stillness hung in the air, making Shelly squirm uncomfortably, though she kept her unease to herself. Meanwhile, Beth eagerly rummaged through the racks, searching for something to impress her peers and catch the eye of her crush. "Whoever said being a teenager was easy?" Beth mused, her fingers skimming over the fabric. Shelly remained motionless, her gaze distant and lost. "Shelly, I'm going to try on this dress. If I need help with the zipper, I'll give you a shout," Beth announced, disappearing behind a changing room curtain. Shelly muttered "Sure thing" and wandered over to the shelves of books. She picked up a book and flipped the pages uninterestedly. As the images in the book flickered past, a spark of curiosity ignited within her. In the periphery of her vision, she noticed a small wooden door adorned with intricate carvings. Setting the book aside, she approached the door, tracing her fingers along its ornate patterns. "Cool... I'm so digging this," she whispered with growing excitement. The door seemed almost magical, reminiscent of something out of 'Alice in Wonderland'. With a mixture of trepidation and anticipation, she grasped the rusty knob and pushed

the door open, revealing a thick veil of darkness beyond. As her eyes adjusted to the dim light, she wrinkled her nose at the stale, unpleasant odor permeating the air. "Eww... what's that sick smell?" she muttered under her breath. Fumbling in the shadows, she retrieved her phone and illuminated the darkness with its flashlight. "Let's see what's hiding in here," she declared, shining the light ahead and revealing a staircase descending into the depths below. Shelly's sweaty palms clung to the railings, the coolness of the steel offering a stark contrast to her warm skin. With cautious steps, she descended the stairs, each movement deliberate as she scanned the darkness for any sign of light. Her eyes darted around until they landed on a switch, and with a determined flick, she flooded the space with light. The flickering bulbs cast eerie shadows, illuminating the scene in a ghostly glow. Shelly's gaze swept across the room, taking in the chaotic mess that surrounded her. Debris littered the floor, and cobwebs clung to every corner, shrouding the space in a veil of neglect. With each step she took, the oppressive atmosphere seemed

to weigh heavier upon her, sending a shiver down her spine. One part of her wanted to leave right away, but the other part was curious and wanted to explore a bit more. As she passed the broken shelves, a faint noise echoed, reminiscent of a distant knock. Startled, her eyes widened, and a shiver ran down her spine. "What was that? I hope my mind is not playing tricks on me," she whispered, her voice barely audible amidst the eerie silence. But in a few minutes, it came again, louder this time, a distinct 'click clack' sound! Following the echo of the sound, she quickened her pace, her footsteps echoing in the desolate room. She reached the corner where the old chests stood, towering one over the other, and halted, her breath caught in anticipation. Once more, the sound pierced the stillness, "Click clack"!! Her heart thudded against her ribcage, its rhythm matching the hastened beat of her footsteps. With determined hands, she pushed aside the heavy old chests, revealing a weathered wooden box concealed beneath layers of neglect. With trembling hands, she reached out, fingertips brushing against the dusty surface of the box. As she lifted it, a surge of inexplicable connection washed over her, as if the box held secrets

meant only for her. Then, from within the depths of the box, a sound emerged, faint yet distinct. "Clickety click, clickety-clack"!! Just as she was about to open the box, a familiar voice sliced through the tense air from behind her. "Shelly, what are you doing here? You can't just come down here without permission. That gypsy lady must be looking all over for us," Beth muttered under her breath, her brow furrowed in worry. "Who gypsy lady?" Shelly's voice was soft, barely audible amidst the shadows of the dimly lit basement. Even before Beth could respond, a shrill voice pierced the air from behind them, sending shivers down their spines. "Put that down!! It's nothing but a cursed evil." It was the gypsy lady who had followed them down there. Her ferocious eyes bore deep into Shelly's, almost as if piercing her soul with a silent warning etched in their depths. Though she looked haggard and old, her voice carried a commanding authority, striking fear into their hearts. Her braided, salt and pepper hair danced wildly as she spoke, accentuating her ominous aura. "These walls have seen things that your pretty little heads can't

even imagine." "What you are holding is a nightmare waiting to be unleashed. Do not mess with the unseen," said the gypsy. Her eyes were still fixated on Shelly, and Shelly could feel her skin crawl!!! "I'm so sorry, my friend got lost and I came here looking for her," Beth stammered, her voice tinged with embarrassment. "Now don't bore me with your excuses, and leave the box where you found it," the gypsy lady snapped, her tone harsh and dismissive. Without waiting for a response, she turned on her heel and strode away, her departure leaving a lingering sense of unease in the air. Beth nudged Shelly to put the box down and walk after her. They hurriedly ascended the stairs, leaving the oppressive atmosphere of the basement behind them. Beth hastened to settle her payment for the books and trinkets, eager to escape the gypsy's unsettling presence. As Beth completed her transaction with the gypsy, her gaze flickered towards Shelly, her expression a mixture of warning and admonishment. "You don't belong here, and don't ever come back!" she hissed, her words dripping with malice. Startled by the venom in her tone, Beth seized Shelly's arm and propelled her towards the exit. The gypsy's hawk-like eyes followed them, a silent threat lingering in her

gaze as they fled into the welcoming embrace of the summer sun. "Phew," Beth exhaled deeply as they emerged into the brightness of the outside world, relief flooding her features. "What's the matter with you?" she inquired, concern lacing her words. It was never like Shelly to be inquisitive and just wander off. They had been best friends since childhood, and Shelly was always the wiser and more mature one of the two. So, this behavior seemed odd to Beth. "I don't know, dude, there was something about that box." "I felt as if, as if... like it was calling out to me," protested a baffled Shelly. "Are you out of your mind? Just listen to yourself; you sound like a lunatic! Anyways, let's go now, the bus is here," chided Beth her tone laced with exasperation. Both of them hopped onto the bus. Beth kept chattering about how beautiful the trinkets looked and how interesting the books were. But Shelly just gripped the bag closer to her as her mind seemed to wander off. Thinking about what the gypsy had said, she stared vacantly outside, from the window of the bus. Then, there was that sound again, 'Clickety click, clickety-clack'!! Shelly jumped up in alarm, and she

looked at her friend with her eyes wide open. She wanted to tell her about the noise she had just heard, but a knot formed in her stomach, stopping her from doing so. Both friends never held any secrets from each other, but today something was stopping her from doing so. "Shelly, are..are you feeling alright, girl?" "You don't seem to be yourself today," said Beth wrinkling her nose worriedly. "Y...yeah, I'm fine Beth, just a little tired," Shelly lied forcing a weak smile to mask her inner turmoil. As the bus took a turn, Beth got off, saying a quick bye. Shelly too murmured "bye" and clutched the bag tighter to her, like it was her prized possession. Soon, the bus came to a grinding halt, and Shelly jerked out of her train of thought. As she alighted, she half walked, half ran to her home. She turned in the keys quickly and plopped on the couch. With a pounding heart, and shaking hands she reached for her bag and slowly took out the box!!!With eyes wide open in excitement, she held it up to have a good look at it, and the box gleamed with a spooky glow. "It's so pretty," she squealed, her voice filled with delight. But beneath her excitement, a pang of guilt gnawed at her conscience. It was unlike her to steal, and she couldn't explain the compulsion to possess it. As soon as

Beth had turned her back, Shelly had very slyly slid the box into her bag! "Clickety click, clickety-clack"! There it was again!!!!Startled but unable to fight her curiosity, she immediately wanted to open it. But just then, her mother walked in. Setting her office bag on the coffee table, she began, "Gosh, what a day it has been. I'm so tired." Then she sat next to Shelly, caressing her long hair, "Shelly honey, how was your trip with Beth?" Did you girls have fun? But what could Shelly tell her? All Shelly managed was a vague "Yeah, it was fine. We picked out a few things. Her mother looked at her thoughtfully concern etched in her features "Honey, are you feeling alright?" she asked, her voice tinged with worry. "You look a bit pale to me." "No Mom, I'm fine, just a bit tired like you," she replied, forcing a smile onto her lips. Then her mother continued. "And, before I forget, as I told you previously, I will be leaving for the conference in a short while. Will be back by tomorrow night. So please take care of yourself and call me if you need anything". Though Shelly was used to being alone in the house, today something just didn't feel right, but she couldn't put her finger on

what was troubling her. So, she just nodded her head in affirmation, silently acknowledging her mother's instructions. "I have fixed your lunch for tomorrow, but right now let's have some supper". Being a single mother, dinner time was the only time she could bond with her daughter, so they both tried to make the most of it. During supper time, Shelly wanted to tell her mother about everything that had happened so far; the peculiar shop, the gypsy's warning, and most importantly, the weird sound coming from the box. But she remained tongue-tied as if an unknown force was stopping her from doing so. After a while, Shelly's mother picked up her bags and then quickly planted a kiss on her forehead and left, saying bye. As Shelly sat on the couch, she began to wonder if she had done the right thing by stealing the box. Just then, she heard it again. "Clickety click, clickety-clack! The noise returned. Startled, she pushed her conscience to the corner of her mind, and with trembling hands, she opened the box. With the crack in the lid, she felt a surge of black light shoot out and envelop her and the entire room. As she lay motionless with her heart pounding, she strained her eyes to see a black silhouette glaring down at her. The sight of the figure struck

her with terror. It had vicious-looking red eyes, jagged fangs, and long arms with sharp claws at the end of them. When the demon-like figure snapped its fingers, it made the sound of clickety-click, clickety-clack! She wanted to yell and scream for help, but her throat had gone dry! Not a word came out of her dry mouth. Shelly watched as it approached her, letting out a weak scream from her parched throat. The dark figure then clasped her throat with one of its black hands and squeezed hard, pushing her down to the floor. Then, waving its other hand wildly in the air, it dug its sharp nails into her cheeks and tore her flesh. Blood trickled down her pretty face and she let out a scream in agony. She was gasping for air when she felt a heavy weight on her chest as if the figure was trying to choke her, making her breathing more and more labored. The room then began to spin, and Shelly felt her eyes closing until everything got darker and faded into oblivion. After what seemed like ages, Shelly awoke, her body trembling as she clutched the ends of the coffee table, managing to stagger to her feet. A heaviness still moved along with her,

dragging her down. She wondered if she just had a bad dream, but the pain and numbness in her body reminded her that it was not a dream, but just like the gypsy had said, it was a nightmare and she had brought this misfortune upon herself. With trembling hands, she attempted to touch her cheeks but winced in pain as soon as her fingertips grazed the tender flesh. The long, sharp gashes served as a painful reminder of what had transpired earlier. Shelly then thought to herself, "My misery began with the box, and if I burn and destroy it, maybe... just maybe I will be able to end it all." With renewed vigor, she frantically started looking for the box. She shuffled the cushions, peered under the table and sofa, and searched every nook and cranny, but no matter where she looked, the box remained elusive. It seemed to have vanished into thin air. Exhaustion weighed heavily upon her, threatening to overwhelm her senses. Slowly, she made her way upstairs to her room. With a throbbing headache, Shelly collapsed onto her bed, her body drained of energy as she drifted off into an uneasy sleep. She was awoken by a scratching sound near her bed. As she tried to sit up, she felt something pushing her down, pinning her to the bed. Shelly

struggled to move, and just then she heard an ear-splitting scream, followed by raspy laughter and the same clickety-click, clickety-clack! ". Her whole body went stiff and froze in terror, her muscles tensing as she watched in shock as the figure inched closer and closer to her. Shelly instinctively moved towards the headboard of the bed her fingers gripping the sides firmly in a desperate attempt to resist. But the entity was relentless, pulling at her legs with an unyielding force. As she fell to the floor, it began dragging her wildly, its screeches echoing in the air. Shelly's misery seemed to fuel its sadistic pleasure. With a surge of adrenaline, Shelly lunged at the entity, pushing with all her might. Scrambling on all fours, she made a desperate crawl towards her bedroom door. Gathering all her strength, she stood up and started running towards the stairs, her body battered and bleeding from the ordeal. As she darted past her mother's room, she caught a glimpse of her mother sitting on the bed! But her mind was too numb to even question herself as to what her mother was doing here. Logic seemed to elude her, overridden by a primal instinct

for survival. Shelly rushed towards her mother, the sense of relief and protection flooding over her like a tidal wave. Snuggling closer, she noticed her mother's statue-like stillness, a stark contrast to the chaos unfolding around them. Raising her wounded face to meet her mother's gaze, Shelly was stunned by what she saw. Her mother's eyes were nothing but two hollows of red burning embers, their intensity searing through Shelly's body. A menacing smile twisted her mother's lips as her face began to contort, morphing into something grotesque and otherworldly. She started shrieking and laughing, the sound echoing through the house, growing louder and more manic with each passing moment. Shelly stumbled back, her movements frantic, as she dashed down the stairs. As she ran by the kitchen, her eyes fell on her mom again! At that moment, realization dawned upon her, flooding her with horror. The lady-like figure before her was not her mother but the demonic entity, its presence looming over her like a sinister shadow. The figure bolted towards Shelly, a knife glinting menacingly in its hand, pointed straight at her. The blade gleamed in the light; its malevolence palpable. Sensing her life in grave danger, Shelly's survival instincts

kicked in. She ran towards the laundry closet, her heart pounding in her chest. With a desperate tug, she yanked the door open, seeking refuge within its confines. With a muffled scream, she felt something or someone pull her into the closet, the door slamming shut behind her with a resounding thud. As she struggled to contain her terror, Shelly looked up and saw her mother. Before she could speak, her mother whispered, "Shelly, are you OK, honey? I could feel something wasn't right as I left for my trip. I guess it's a motherly instinct. So, I decided to come back and check on you, and thank God that I did! If something had happened to you, I wouldn't be able to forgive myself." Tears welled up in Shelly's eyes as she embraced her mother tightly, seeking solace in her arms. She had never felt so safe and comforted before, her fear dissipating in her mother's embrace. At long last, she was safe; nothing could touch her now. Her mother would fix everything. They would get through this together! Just as Shelly was about to spill everything, the phone rang. Both of them froze, fear coursing through their veins. Shelly's mom

silenced her with a gesture, placing a finger on her lips. They stood there, trembling with fear, as the answering machine picked up the call, and a familiar voice echoed through the room, "Hi Shelly, this is Mommy here. I have arrived safely. Please make sure you check the

locks before sleeping. Love you honey!!"As Shelly stood frozen, paralyzed with fear, she heard the raspy laughter once again... The lights above her head flickered ominously, and a demonic voice whispered, "Clickety click, clickety-clack!"...



Samina Namoji was born in the state of Karnataka in India and brought up in UAE. Now a resident Muscat, Oman, she is a classic example of a third culture child. Though she has a degree in Bachelor of Science, Samina is inclined to literature and craft. She is also a published poetess and author. Her favorite genre is horror and she has written many prizes winning short stories in this category. She has also participated in many anthologies. She's a full time home maker and feeds her creative soul by dabbling in diy, painting, calligraphy and home decor.



Hues of Sky

Mohammed Yahya Namoji

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

This photo was taken in Muscat, the city where I live. As the sun gently set, the sky transformed into a kaleidoscope of colors.



Mohammed Yahya Namoji, is a budding photographer with a deep love for nature and wild animals. He is fascinated by dinosaurs and outer space. Currently studying in school, and he aspires to embark on a career in the field of culinary arts.

The Reality Of Free Stuff

By Michael Gigandet

5:00 A.M. The Day After

They say the best cup of coffee you will ever have is the first one in the dark of early morning when everyone's asleep, and I believe them. Sitting here at my kitchen table I can drag that cup of coffee out for an hour easy. To do that though, I have to sit and think a lot between sips. Since Em died two years ago and the kids left home, I have lots to think about. Right now, the subject is shampoos and soaps.

After I got rid of Em's things and let the kids pick over the furniture, I thought my house would look empty, but when you've lived in a place with four other people for 35 years, raised your family there, the place will always be full, a bustling downtown city sidewalk of memories. I don't believe in ghosts, but I sure believe in the power of memory, that conflagration of dead occasions, conversations and impressions roaring up in your brain when you aren't expecting them. They surprise you around a corner or

when you open a door or when you are just sitting at your kitchen table wondering if today is trash day. You learn to move with the memories when the traffic allows, stopping until the memory passes by, ignoring that one, honking the horn in your head at the ones you want to go away, your brain shouting: Stop! Stop It!

I'm not kicking about it; I'd sell the farm and move if it bothered me. I am just recognizing the fact.

This morning, it's shampoo and soap, and I'm not ready to honk the horn yet.

Before I retired, back when I was travelling around the southeast trying lawsuits, I stayed in a lot of hotels. I carried my own toiletries so I gathered the complimentary, miniature bottles of lotion and mouthwash, soaps and shampoos from my hotel rooms and brought them home to my daughter. I told her they

were "your very own cosmetics."

She took them to her bedroom to be examined and inventoried. Sometimes I saw the bottles lined up on a dressing table, maybe by size or color, green body wash, creamy pink lotion, blue shampoo. They never appeared in her bathroom, so I don't think she used them. They were too nice for that. Em had a different reaction. "More bottles?", but it really wasn't a question.

One day, those bottles disappeared. Maybe Em threw them out. In time they were forgotten. I remembered them today, the day after nothing mattered anymore.

6:15 A.M. The Birds Arrive

The second best cup of coffee happens as the sun is coming up and you stare out the bay window, watching the birds arrive to empty feeders. By that time, I've let my body collapse like it melted, settled down and lost its creases and corners, my edges going one at a time.

When you are retired and the only one left to live in a two story, farm house one half mile from your nearest neighbor you can do pretty

much whatever you want--sit, think about things that don't matter to anyone but yourself, neglect the birds and watch them worry over an empty feeder. Someday I am going to remember which birds show up first.

Why haven't those birds figure it out yet? Is this their way to reprove me for my neglect? I am clearly visible to them there through the bay window.

Some time ago, a smart person with nothing else to do, theorized that the world may have just sprung into being moments before, and the Past was not real at all, just memories created in your brain to give perspective to the present.

If they were right, then what happened did not really happen so you don't need to feel bad about it all. Maybe the people you remember aren't even real.

But then there's those birdfeeders...there's the wrinkle isn't it? The birds know that feed has been there. Now it's not there, but it was. So is the past real or are the birds not real too?

Were the bottles of soap real? I could see them clearly on my daughter's dressing table. They still had to be in the house. She would not have taken them with her when she left home for college and the job up North. And, that daughter was like me, she would not have thrown them out either.

Here's a fact: No matter how long you sit, or how tired you are, or how determined you are to do nothing and sit at your kitchen table, your forearms sticking to the surface, you are going to stand up eventually and you are going to remove yourself from where you are to someplace else. I removed myself to my daughter's room or towards it anyway.

7:00 a.m. Standing At The Stairs

This is a big house, plenty of room for me to wander—four bedrooms, dining and living rooms, a den the size of Denmark. I even have a two-story library and home office.

My daughter's room is on the second floor. At the foot of the stairs, I decided to take another activity break. It wasn't the act of climbing the stairs. (Although I am in good

physical condition for my age, this is the time in life when climbing stairs gets your attention.) I just felt like standing there with my hand on the newel. Like I said, when you live alone you can do whatever you want.

Sometimes I stopped there when I was trying to decide where I was going to take an afternoon nap. Like Goldilocks, I had my choice of beds. I made my decision based on which kid I was thinking about at that moment.

After our kids left home, Em decorated every single bed with a pile of frilly, decorative pillows, not just the guest bedroom or our bed. When I wanted to take a nap I had to dig down through them to find the bed. Afterwards, I had to put them back, but my brain insisted that they be placed in the same position as I found them; it was a chore. I also noticed that there was not a chair in the house without a couple of pillows in it.

One day, after Em was gone, I got rid of them, drove my pick-up truck near the back door and tossed every pillow in the house

out the door and into the truck like fat Frisbees until it was filled. I did not even tie them down; I just drove slowly to Goodwill.

"You must like pillows," Jerry, the man with the withered arm who collects your things at the drop-off doors, said.

"I love them," I said. "That's why I want to share them with you." I wasn't being sarcastic; I was being a smart ass. There's a difference.

7:10 a.m. Ground Zero

I stopped in traffic again at my daughter's bedroom door and leaned into the frame.

My children never really left home I guess; they just did not come back. They left their rooms just like they did when they went off to college. Movie and sports posters on the walls, the memorabilia of their high school social lives scattered along the shelves, collectible dolls and stuffed animals on the girls' beds, a flat basketball in the corner.

Maybe they wanted the assurance that wherever they went they had a permanent home. Em and I never planned on moving from

the farm.

I suppose that was reassuring to me too. When my daughter went off to college and I missed her, I would stand at her door like this until my balance returned. When she came to visit she always slept there. Maybe the posters of Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara and the carnival and concert souvenirs on the pin board, the trinkets of remembrance, maybe they were rejuvenating to her, restorative.

Em's death had been hard on her, and she flew in from up north and spent several days with me, mostly in her bedroom with the door closed. At night I heard her crying, and when I knocked on her door, she stopped and I went away.

My daughter had a lot of junk. She was like me that way.

It was a constant source of irritation to Em.

"What you going to do with all of that stuff when you die?" Em would ask me, and since this was more of an accusation than a question, I let it slide, said nothing

If you think about it, “nothing” is the answer because I’d be dead, inert.

Em often complained it would take her years to clean out my things when I died. “I’ll be one of those old women who show up at Goodwill with a trunk full of her dead husband’s folded clothes.”

I do have this thing about keeping any possession which might turn out to be useful someday. I not only keep them, I acquire them.

Em never had to concern herself with my accumulations. Her cancer saw to that.

It did not take me long to give away her things, and she had a lot too. I gave her clothes and shoes to her sister. I donated her car to a charity, and I told the kids to come and take anything else they wanted from our house as remembrances of her. Living out of state, they could not take much on the few visits they made after the funeral. Everything else went to Goodwill.

“You’re not selling the farm are you daddy?” my daughter asked on the telephone from a long way away. Had her brother asked her to

call me?

No, I enjoyed my privacy too much to do that. Besides, with development from Nashville surrounding and bypassing the place its value continued to skyrocket. Best to wait.

For a few weeks, Em disappeared in phases.

I can’t say why the children disappeared.

At least Biff in “Death of a Salesman” could point to his father’s adultery as an excuse for his loss of interest in life. I don’t think any of the kids could point to a particular family crisis and say “That’s why I left home and rarely returned.”

7:25 A.M. Touching Things Makes Them Real

My daughter’s bookshelves, like mine, were lined and stacked with books. No real book lover ever gets rid of any book he acquires. My daughter still had her children’s books, *Marvelous Millie*, a children’s version of Little Women and Mary Poppins, some pop-up books. I made a quick

mental inventory, running my fingers over the spines of the books.

That's something else she got from me. Thankfully, my home office stretched over half of the second floor of our farm house, and I lined it with bookshelves. When I was practicing law, I'd prepared for my trials there in the cigar smoke and among my books which I'd started acquiring in 12th grade. My first acquisition was a set of out-of-date encyclopedias from the 1950s which I bought for \$5 from a thrift store. I still have them.

Early on, I collected books autographed by the author, and then I began buying any book the do-gooders and the perpetually offended threatened to ban or censor. (When I got older, I began buying those targeted books when I was giving someone a gift.) I now had a couple of thousand books tucked into shelves along every wall. You know you have a lot of books when you begin inserting them flat on top of the other books on your shelves.

I'd read most of them. I pull out and lay down on their spine those books I am planning to read in the next six months. Sticking them

out like that motivates me to read them so I can turn them upright again.

In time my books will end up in the used book section at Goodwill or drying out in the corners of musty antique stores until some teenage version of me finds them and takes them home. I pasted a name plate inside the front cover of every book, so somebody 50 years from now will see it and say: "This is the guy who owned this book. Whatever happened to him?" They may not think about it long, but they are going to know that I lived. (That nameplate is not a creation of memory; *somebody stuck it there.*)

8:10 A.M. Real Words From The Past

In a box under my daughter's bed I found the weekly letters I'd written her over the years. I ran my thumb over them, fluttering them like they were playing cards. They made no noise, so I did it again but harder.

They weren't letters at all; they were holiday and event cards I'd gotten from charitable

organizations as gifts when they solicited for donations. I must have been on the mailing list of every charity in the U.S. because Em and I had boxes of them—cards for every occasion, birthdays, Christmas, sick people, congratulations. I would pull out those Christmas cards which avoided using the word “Christmas”, opting instead for the phrase “Happy Holidays” or “Seasons Greetings.” I used those Christmas-less cards as stationery for my weekly letters to my children in their own college and professional travels. My children were probably the only people in the country getting mail in April with Santas, snowmen in top hats and candy canes on them. In this small way, I refused to cooperate with the politically correct, a healthy practice for any free-thinking citizen who distrusts authority and despises the self-appointed bullies of our moral well-being.

Years of letters, forgotten words recording forgotten things—I spent more time than was good for me reading and remembering. *All this was real. Here's the proof.*

9:05 A.M. Progress

“You are turning into a hoarder,”

Em told me once.

“I’m just thinking of the kids,” I said. “Think of the fun they will have in that hot, dusty attic. It will be like Christmas morning.”

You are not really a hoarder if you give away the stuff you are supposedly hoarding. Hoarders are people who keep things in a clutter, even trash. They stack newspapers and magazines along the walls from floor to ceiling, at least in the beginning of their hoarding careers. Then they fill in the remaining space with plastic bags of trash and... clutter. They travel through it like they are walking through a snow drift without snow shoes.

Hoarders are the people who die in that clutter somewhere and have to be located by the authorities because no one knows they are in there. They often get on the news or are featured in some cable television show which probably paid their relatives to film the place, a kind of vengeful karmic event for their survivors to offset the expense of having to clean up that mess after the hoarder dies.

I'm not that way at all. My house is tidy, everything in its place. Before I go to bed at night I perform a walk-through and inspect to make sure everything is in its place. This is easy to do now that I am retired and Em is gone. I did not get sloppier in widowhood; my house got tidier with only me in it.

My daughter's closet was neat and full of clothes.

I heard a preacher say once that you should donate to charity the clothes you have not worn in a year. Not me, I donate mine if I have not worn them in 10 years.

"I might decide to start wearing these again," I'd say to Em while holding up a pair of 34-inch waist jeans from younger days.

I ran my fingertips over my daughter's dresses like I was counting them—blue, black, red, dresses with patterns, frilly shoulders, padded shoulders, all on hangers tucked in place. Since she lived up north why would these dresses be here? Shouldn't she have them with her? Maybe these were from her old life and not appropriate in her new life as a lawyer up north. Did she expect them to come back

in style?

With a closed casket you don't have to worry about finding a suitable set of clothes. They don't even ask you. I'm not sure what they do, but whatever they do, they do it and don't bother you with it. You just have to show up when you're supposed to.

I reached up and took down the boxes in the top of the closet, some books and a movie star scrapbook, a couple of photograph albums, some sweaters.

I put everything back just the way I found it. When the time was right, I'd take her clothes to Goodwill. Just stuff them into the trunk of my car and let Jerry drag them inside like an animal dragging something dead into its cave.

9:40 A.M. I'M DONE FOR THE DAY

There were more clothes in her chest of drawers. I found what I was looking for there in a bottom drawer--a hatbox full of miniature bottles of lotions and soaps, green, blue and pink, like a chest of precious jewels.

I ran my fingertips through them to hear them clatter. I held the box up to my face and breathed in the soapy scents.

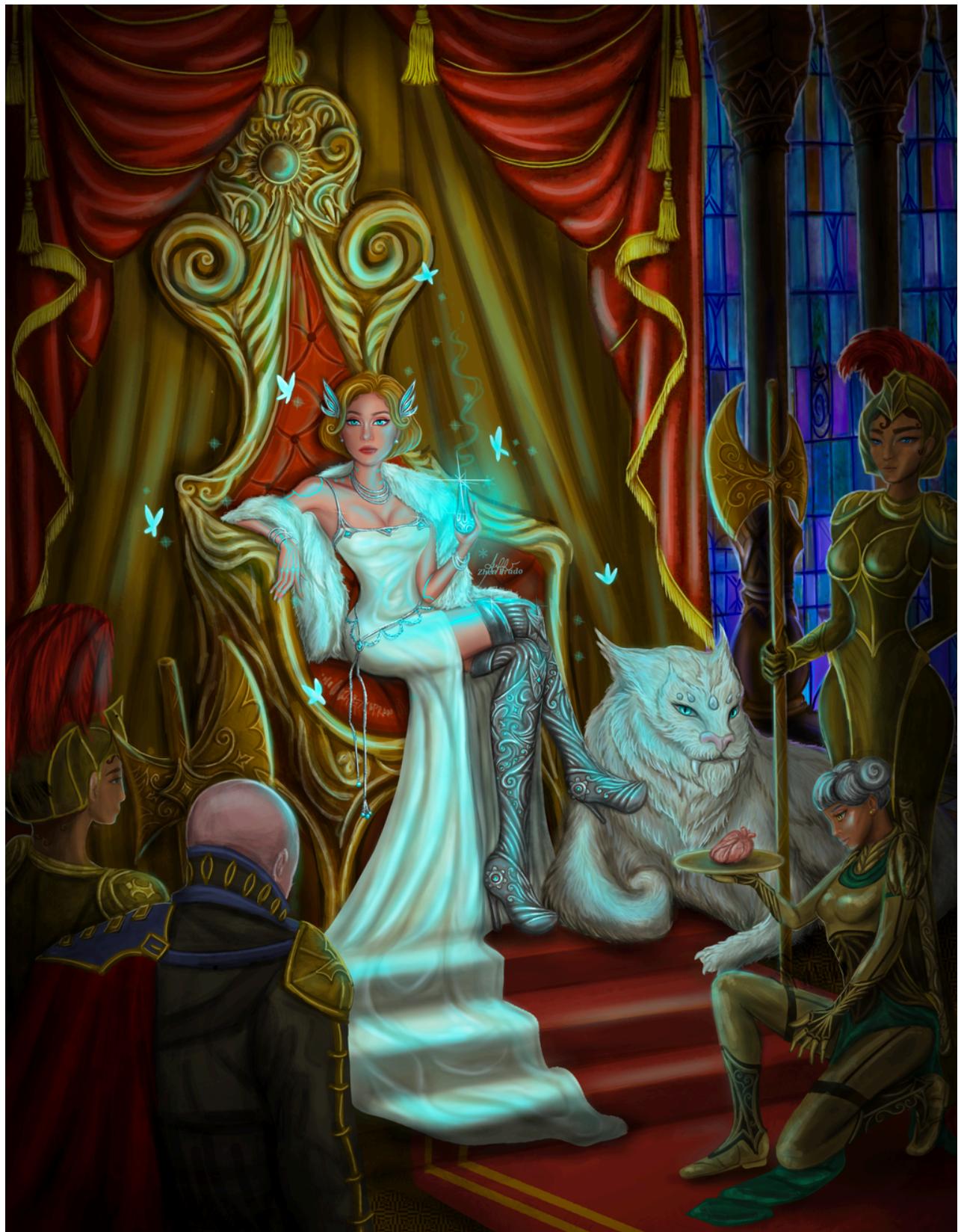
And it was all real.

I lay down on her bed with the hatbox beside me. I didn't even take my shoes off. That's the nice thing about living alone; you can do whatever you want.

Note: This story originally appeared online on 6/26/20 in Page and Spine Magazine and again in Children, Churches and Daddies' anthology "The Way She Was" in Jan. 2022 and in CC&D's Story Collection Jan. July 2022 "Unfinished Business". The author retains the rights to this story.



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THE GIVER Diyan Masalanta

Zhen Prado

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

This is part of my growing collection of myths from my very country. She is the goddess of love Diyan Masalanta. Her journey to save the world from peril takes a tragic turn when she is betrayed by a lover whom she had rescued from the brink of dying. Broken and devastated by the betrayal, she becomes the target of savage accusations and violence from those she had once saved. Accused of witchcraft and subjected to unspeakable atrocities, Diyan Masalanta's body and spirit are shattered. The loss of her newborn child at the hands of her assailants adds to her anguish, plunging her into numbing despair.

In her darkest moment, a white cat appears as a symbol of hope and renewal. With the cat's help, Diyan Masalanta begins to heal and regain her strength. Drawing upon her knowledge of ancient wisdom and innate powers, she creates a cyborg companion with the ability to travel through time. This cyborg became her loyal ally, assisting her in her quest for justice and retribution.

As Diyan Masalanta's life force begins to fade, she devises a clever strategy to sustain herself. By giving gifts to those in need, she demands a steep price in return - the sacrifice of what is most precious to them. Although it's harsh and unjust, this exchange allows Diyan Masalanta to replenish her vitality and repair her ever-damaged body. Some of these gifts are used to create new cyborg warriors, whom she secretly forms, under her leadership, without the prying eyes of the true rulers of the modern cruel world she's in.



Zhen Prado is a 22 years old registered artist and writer on National Book Development Board in the Philippines and a graduating Psychology student. He posts most of his art on his DeviantArt: 18shi, and poems, short stories, opinions, etc. on Commaful: The Wandering Soul. He also has a Facebook page: Arts of Zhen, where he takes a commission.

Eugenics On Earth

By Tom Ball

I, Ernst, said to Rebecca, "No one predicted we would live as we do now." She said, "Supercomputers run the varying nations and humans have nothing but time on their hands. We all kill time in various ways. And most people are bored, and no one is starving. As Dickens said, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," however most people who were polled in this year 2114 A.D., said things were getting worse. This was despite eternal youth for all and Mind Reading Technology (MRT) for loving. Some people spent their time gambling, some played video games of which there were many leagues. And most people watched at least one movie per day and the average news they watched was for 45 minutes. And most of them partied every night and took various drugs to make the parties seem more interesting and more stimulating. Also, traveling took only several minutes to get anywhere on Earth. And nearly everyone had sex with at least one of their regular partners each day. On average people had 15 regular

lovers. But most people were spoiled by this life of ease and were irate if they were challenged or inconvenienced in any way. And some behaved as if they were petulant children. Most don't have children, but those who do say it is time well spent."

I said, "That's an accurate summary of how things are, but for thinkers like you and I, we are lost. Our thoughts don't change anything, and Supercomputers will try and grant our wishes, but what we wish most of all is to be important. Just like everyone else, we are just consumers and exist for no reason." She said, "Well we exist to honour the great Supercomputers that have been constructed and see our kids grow up. Life has never been any better. But I like the author Johnny R.'s takes on things. As you know he made the movie, "Outlandish Parties," about creative parties, like stimulating computers as if they had drugs to alter their perception. And parties which featured outrageo-

-us comedians and weird party themes... Like, for example, parties which involved everyone dressed in an animal mask and behaving like churlish animals. Or parties in which everyone was completely intoxicated. Or parties in which the women had to seduce the men. And so on."

I said, "Yes, I'm familiar with Johnny R.'s work. I kind of liked his movie about "Star Power," how famous actors/actresses and singers were unreasonably powerful, whereas the writers of movie scripts were hardly known. The stars had hypnotic power, like the pied piper of fable. And many people went back to school to learn acting or develop their singing voice. And there were about a million in total of famous and semi-famous stars throughout the Worlds, he pointed out."

She told me, "Star Power," was one of my favorites, too. And I also liked, Dirk T.'s, "Tales of Horror in Space," which was full of fictional horrors in Space. Have you seen his movies?" I replied, "No, I haven't." And she said, "Horrors like "A Rogue Computer on Luna," who created copies of itself into compact android minds and took over the Moon completely and everyone had to worship these androids and do their whimsical bidding. Another horror I

liked was "Freak Colony," on Mars in which all sorts of clever creatures and sentient plants had been gathered, and many bored people converted into a non-human form. And the Supercomputer in charge, was very creative in creating new types of thinking creatures. And another tale of particular note was "A Story of Two Dichotomies," which was about a World of wealthy and worldly androids and another World of desperate, destitute humans. And finally the androids kill off the humans."

And I said, "Dirk seems to be good. and I am also great friends with, and liked, Roger R. who wrote, "Procrustes' Dystopia." Which was about a King in future times who demanded everyone try and be like him. With the same greedy personality that he had and insane to boot. People were falling all over themselves to change into an acceptable citizen and hopefully be a courtier or courtesan. They used genetic therapy to alter their personality and read the varying biographies of the King as if they were bibles. And they made art, science and built companies to please the King. They used trial and error to try and amuse the

King. And the King, made a point of loving all 50 000 women of the colony. Every woman was now beautiful due to genetic therapy and plastic surgery and eternal youth. And he had a number of children born in the lab. Of course many hated the King, but nearly all people were hypnotized to love him. And most people were content. If they were not content, the King had his spies get in their heads with MRT and re-hypnotized them." She said, "Tyrants always do the same evil things as they are corrupted by power. It's quite frankly, boring..."

And many who wanted to go to Worlds in new Utopias, found themselves in Dystopias. Like "Magna Utopia on Moon Callisto." In which everyone is filthy rich from selling real estate as colonists poured in, to this high tech, free-loving and anything goes Moon. And a new dome for thousands was going up every month. People here would claim that this was the freest place in the Solar System. But even here, the government feared anarchy and so issued an edict that one could not interfere with another's freedom. The interpretation of this law was the subject of many lawsuits. But many wanted to come here and hobnob with the varying free thinkers. And

they would make love like it was their last day and the suicide rate was certainly very high. People would kill themselves over a broken heart or dangerous drug use or out of sheer boredom. The elite oligarchy who ruled here, was trying its best to develop new drugs for those who were bored to stimulate them and keep them interested in life. But it didn't work out so well and happiness didn't prevail here."

I asked her, "Why would anyone want to write about a Dystopia and disguise it as Utopia?" She said, "It's just growing pains, we'll get it together sooner or later. I'm convinced that the future is bright! And great people will dream up many true Utopias and experiment with them." I said, "My idea of a great Utopia would be simply a World in which the elite thinkers rule. The only downside is maybe future societies will not pick the greatest thinkers to be in their elite, but rather the masses will choose demagogues. Utopia can only happen, if the best people are in positions of power." She said, "But the masses are easily satisfied, they have no work to do, and are free to enjoy parties and entertainment and

free drugs... I think it is best if the true elite simply seize power. But unfortunately, most such people don't want to get involved in politics. We must educate the clever youth to get involved in governing. And choose the best at a young age to groom them for power. Government is more important than art or science..."

And she said, "As time progresses, the stakes become higher and the very survival of humans is in doubt, we need to take action now." I said, "We just need to overcome the inertia and then the cards will follow into place.

I remarked, "I also feel that Utopia will be imaginative and kind and everyone will alter their brain to be so with genetic therapy. Kindness above all should be the nexus for Utopian dreams. Without kindness, life would be brutish and cruel. Like with androids and holograms, who might hate humans.

She opined, "I think that pure intelligence is the key to happiness. The vast majority of people that are intelligent are good people and I feel, "You've got to be cruel to be kind," as the song goes..."

I said, "Despite the fact that the modern World is dog-eat dog, it doesn't mean it has to be the future. And strong, tough women like you,

frighten me!" She said, "Don't be such a wimp! I hate weak men." I replied, "Most women these days are no longer feminine and no longer loving. And I wish I could change that." She answered, "Men created this World and women are just trying to survive."

I quoted Voltaire saying, "We must cultivate our gardens." She told me, "You are a sentimental fool."

And I told her, "You should read the novel, "Sentimental Thinkers," by Frank P. It is about a man who designs historical Worlds for nostalgic people. Highlights of past times, basically. Unfortunately, the book is somewhat obscure and it hasn't been made into a movie." She said, "History is bunk," as Ford said. And the modern era is drastically different from the past and it's a brand-new fresh start for humanity!"

And she said, "You should read the obscure novel, "Satan's Days," about how the future looks bright for a while, but then Devilishly backwards people want to stop all progress and let the Devilish rule. It is a hopeless World!" And she added, "You want to slow progress and are a Luddite, the World has no time for you!" I

replied, "I'm just saying fools rush in and if AI takes control we will all be doomed."

And I opined, "My feeling is Holger J.'s "Dynamite experiment" which indicates a sparkling, rich Utopia with normal and clever humans. I really believe that the future is bright. But people like you will try and ruin everything. It is a misuse of genius." She told me, "At least you can admit that I am a genius. Geniuses make their own rules and are not subject to regular laws. But I wouldn't ruin anyone's true Utopia. I respect people that figure they are in Paradise, but not one of bliss, but rather one that they are active in and continually seek improvement."

I said, "But for most people, bliss is all they can hope for, they have no genius." She said, "A state of bliss is like being dead. People need to continuously improve in order to keep up with World developments..."

I opined, "Drugs to make one more intelligent and kinder are already out there, and anyone could use them to improve and try and maximize our brain power and then some. But many people are afraid to change. We just need to do a better job of selling these medications. Already some famous stars have stood up and praised such drugs

and I feel the tide is starting to turn!"

She said, "But we live in fast times and the pace of progress is picking up. Many ordinary humans are so far behind the times, they are hopeless." I replied, "I don't see why we don't just leave Earth for the humans and the Super geniuses will go unto Space." She said, "No, because Earth is worth gazillions and gazillions. And Space is lucrative too, especially in real estate. And we have discovered a number of Earth-like Planets and Moons. And some of them are just being colonized now."

And she told me, "Ultimately we'll just make eternal youth drugs available to the top 10% elite and give every non-elite man and woman sterilization. So, in say 40 years there'll be very few of them left. Eugenics will triumph, you'll see." I said, "You're talking about genocide on an unprecedented scale. What have the ordinary people done to you to deserve such a vicious fate? I know, there are many who agree with you, but we can't just murder people who are not clever." She said, "We are just phasing them out, is all." I replied, "I think you are evil. She said, "I'm just a

realist."

I said, "I hope you rot in Hell, literally. I will continue to support kind geniuses in their endeavours. They will be kind above all, and the people will back them. Most of us

live in democracies, after all. And tyrants are just out for themselves. Your eugenics group is a bane on all humanity."

She said, "Fuck you, too!"



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Sibilants

By Wess Mongo Jolley

He loved to recite from memory the works of Blake and Eliot. His detailed justification for believing that Frankenstein was secretly written by Percy Bysshe Shelley could hold his students enraptured late into the night. His eyes would shimmer when he spoke of his love of the long line, the changing rhythms of the breath in modern verse, and his unabashed opinion that only poetry held a hope to reverse the decline of Western civilization.

The old man loved his soft wing-back chairs, Earl Grey tea, and his pipe. But most of all, he loved the adoration he saw in the eyes of the students who came to sit at his feet. With their help he kept the fire burning in the small hearth across the study, the room with the floor to ceiling books lining either side. On the mantelpiece were photographs of him with Pound, with Williams, and with Frost. He would enthrall them with tales of Burroughs in India and Ginsberg in Prague, until with aching joints and an assist from the most handsome of the young men

at his feet, he would rise for his evening walk around his New Hampshire estate.

He had entered his last classroom almost a decade before. And yet, the students kept coming. The classes now had no schedule, and there were no blackboards, textbooks, or assigned reading. They could be a dozen young faces gathered around his chair in the garden, or they could be a single earnest, yearning young man making him tea at 2:00 am, when the pain in his hands and hips became too much for sleep.

The only schedule he kept now was his evening stroll in the garden, just before the sunset. And as he became less and less steady on his feet, he found it pleasant to take the arm of whatever sturdy lad who was there and eager to help the master.

It was a good life, here in his twilight years. His Collected Poems was on the shelf (if not the best sellers list), and now he

found it more amusing than humbling to pull the copy down, and read the verses he no longer remembered writing.

His wrinkled fingers liked to trace his own name on the cover, as if to remind himself of who he used to be.

Once he was the fiercest critic, both of his own poetry, and of the work of his contemporaries. He'd published reviews and essays in all the best journals, lamenting the beleaguered state of American verse, and chastising both himself and his contemporaries for allowing it to fall into such a shabby state.

But now, in his 90s, he found all that posturing to be just so much fluff and bluster, and now even the worst of his juvenilia brought him joy. Reading his tortured verse describing his lost life of adventure, laughter and lust now seemed like an old, romantic, black and white movie. He'd read his long forgotten lines with a slight smile and his eyes just moist enough to glisten. But never so moist as to shed a tear.

For today's walk in the garden, the young man on his arm was one of the newest, and the youngest. Probably no more than twenty. He no longer took these young men to bed the way he did for so many years. He no longer traded on his

renown or fame to find a soft belly on which to lay his head. That was all decades past now. But he knew he'd never be too old to enjoy the feeling of that firm, muscular arm on which he could lean.

"Let's sit, Robert." he said, and with an assist from his cane and his companion's steady grip, he eased himself gently onto a lovely bench near the roses. The last rays of the sun cast shimmering beams of gold onto the gravel path, and the hint of coolness in the air eased the heaviness in his lungs.

Robert eased down next to him on the bench, close enough that the old man could lean against him. The boy's hand rested lightly on the poet's bony and frail knee, and they watched in silence as the clumsy and heavy bees worked over the hydrangea.

"Have you written today, Robert?" the old poet asked.

"Some," the boy replied, sounding hesitant. "I'm actually finding it hard to write here, with you, in this place." He paused, searching for words, as he had been doing all week. "It's all so new, and so overwhelming, that when I sit down to write, the

images seem so jumbled that nothing comes out. Nothing makes sense."

The old man nodded. A simple gesture, but one that told the boy he understood.

"But it is lovely here, Professor. Thank you for inviting me."

"Please, call me James," the old poet said. "I've had young men around me all my life, but I never liked being called 'Professor.' It made me feel old, even when I wasn't." He chuckled dryly. "Now that I am, it's even worse."

"Thank you... James." said the young man. "When I started writing to you, I never dreamed you'd even respond, let alone invite me here to study with you. This is quite an honor."

"Oh, my boy, I'm so glad you came.". When he turned, his eyes were moist, and there was a quiver the boy could feel in the hand on his knee. "There is nothing an old man needs around him more than youth and hope. My time is very short, I know that. My last poems are written and on the shelf. And there is a peculiar comfort in old age to see the young taking up the torch." They sat in silence for a few minutes, watching red tendrils begin to snake across the sky.

"You all think you're here to

learn from me, but the truth is simpler. You're all here to feed the final bits of twigs and sticks to the dwindling fire of my life. Without all of you, I'd have been cold embers, long ago."

He began to cough, and Robert took a handkerchief from his pocket, and held it to the old man's cracked lips. When the coughing passed, he wiped a bit of the saliva off the poet's chin, and pocketed the cloth.

A hummingbird flitted by, too close to their faces, and then zoomed off to the feeders on the patio. The other students had come out to watch the sunset, and the pair could hear the distant murmur of their never ending conversation.

The poet smiled up at his young protege and allowed his weight to lean a bit more into his shoulder. "I think he liked your red tie." He said, gesturing after the departed hummingbird. "I spent years flitting about the young men who were the brightest and shiniest, so I know how he feels." He smiled for a moment, lost in a memory.

"Read me something, Robert. My fire needs a few extra twigs tonight."

"I don't have anything finished,

Professor. At least, not with me."

"That's fine, my boy. Just read me anything. 'First thought, best thought,' Allen used to say. I want to hear what's been rattling around in your mind the week that you've spent here."

Hesitantly, the young man reached into his pocket and pulled out a small black notebook with an attached pen. He started leafing back, rejecting page after page.

"No, Robert, I don't want to read what you wrote when you got here last week. I don't even want to know what you wrote yesterday. Read to me what you wrote today."

"Oh, Sir, nothing I wrote today is worth reading. It's not even a poem. It's just me letting my mind wander. Let me read you this piece I wrote on Monday."

"Dear boy." The old man squeezed Robert's hand on his knee with his bony knuckles. "When you're my age, you realize the past is an illusion. It's smoke from fires long extinguished. I'm an old man who lives in the past way too much as it is. We must live in the now. I have very little of it left." With his shaking hand he removed his wire-frame glasses and folded them neatly in his lap, ready to listen. "Read me what you wrote this morning. I saw you jotting away in the corner after

breakfast. That's what I want to hear. What you wrote today."

"Sir, I..." Robert began, but let his eyes sink to his chest. "I don't think I'm ready to read that. It's just silliness. It's just... Well, it's nothing really."

"Read me the nothing then. Nothing to you is likely everything to me." He smiled, with his eyes still closed. "You can use that line in your next poem. I'll give it to you. But today, I want to lean against you and smell the flowers and hear what you wrote."

There was silence between them for a bit. Robert let his head fall to his chest for a moment, and then he, perhaps unconsciously, squeezed the old poet's hand. Slowly, he paged back, and began to read.

"*When he dies...*" he began, and the words caught in his throat. He glanced at the old poet, but his face remained blank, eyes closed. He began again.

"*When he dies, this place will seem so empty. I think we all know that his time is short, and that is why we're all here, and why none of us want to leave. I don't know if he knows, but he must. How can he not, as he gets weaker every day?*

“Every morning we all rise early and meet here in the Great Room, among his books and the fireplace. Before he rises, we all somberly greet each other in the dawn silence. There isn’t any laughter, but there also aren’t any tears. It just feels gentle and holy and sacred, and together we sit and share our coffee and imagine what it will be like when he’s gone. Most of us write, as we wait for him to awaken. Some of us read the books from his library. Some of us have work to do, like answering his correspondence or his phone messages. But mostly, we’re just here.

“This is a vigil, and we’re all both devastated and honored to be here at the end.”

Robert eased the notebook into his lap. “Let me stop there, sir. I’m sorry, I didn’t want to read that to you.”

The old man slowly turned his head to his companion, and a small tear rolled down his wrinkled cheek.

“That’s lovely, Robert. I hear music in it. Perhaps couplets, and perhaps a shorter line would work best. ‘somberly we greet each other in the dawn silence.’ That is a lovely phrase. Those sibilants. I always loved the sibilants. The way they felt on my lips.”

The rabbit that sometimes raided

the lettuce appeared in the garden’s corner and quickly scampered into the brush.

“Read me some more.”

“Oh, please Professor, no, I think that’s enough for this evening.”

“Call me James. And read me some more.”

He cleared his throat, lifted the notebook, and went on.

“The pictures of him when he was young are so beautiful, and there is so little left of the adventurous poet in the frail old man we care for here today. My favorite picture of him from back then is with his lover Pedro, the two of them on a balcony in Nepal. They look so out of place, and yet they both have eyes brimming with the adventure of their lives, as young poets and writers and lovers in a foreign land. I remember reading the most recent biography, and wishing that it was me there with him on that balcony.”

“I never wanted to be with a man. But I wanted to be with him. I never loved a man. But I loved him. All through my teens, he was what I wanted to be. He was everything. My first girlfriend once asked me if I’d ever loved a man. ‘Other than that old poet,’ she added, with a wink.

"The answer was no, I'd never loved a man other than him. But what I didn't tell her, was I'd never loved anyone the way I loved him."

He put the notebook down into his lap and slowly turned to the old man on his right. His eyes were closed, and his breath steady, but very, very slow. The boy sat silently with the old man there in the garden, listening to his sleeping breath, feeling the frail, bony hand in his own.

Like twigs wrapped in newspaper, he thought. No longer strong enough to hold a pen. But mighty enough to have changed the spinning of the earth.

"Sir..." he said, tentatively... "I think the visiting nurse is here. It's time to

go back in. Let me help you up."

For a moment the old poet seemed confused, and then the lights came back on in his eyes. "Somberly greet each other in the dawn silence.' Yes, I love that. Beautiful. I love the sibilants."

With the help of his cane, the old man rose. Halfway back to the cottage he stopped and turned to look at the young poet. "Somberly greet each other in the dawn silence."

Together, they began their journey back to the house where the young poets were already feeding twigs to the evening fire.



Wess Mongo Jolley is a queer Canadian novelist, editor, podcaster, and poet, most well-known for hosting the IndieFeed Performance Poetry Channel for ten years. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and has appeared in journals such as *Grain*, *Off the Coast*, *PANK*, *Danse Macabre*, *The Chamber*, and *Apparition Literary Magazine*. His horror trilogy, *The Last Handful of Clover*, is available on *Patreon*, *Wattpad*, *QSaltLake*, and as an audiobook

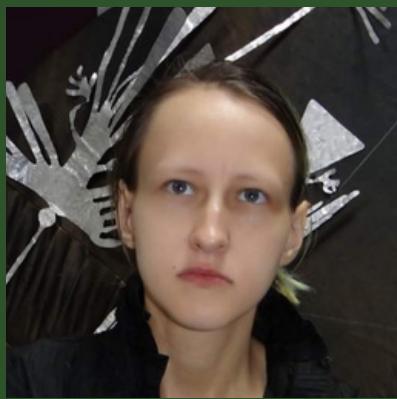
podcast. Mongo writes from his home in Montreal, Quebec. Find him at <http://wessmongojolley.com>.

Collages by Irina Tall (Novikova)





Irina Tall (Novikova)



Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorn the Exhibition is Irina's, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gypsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

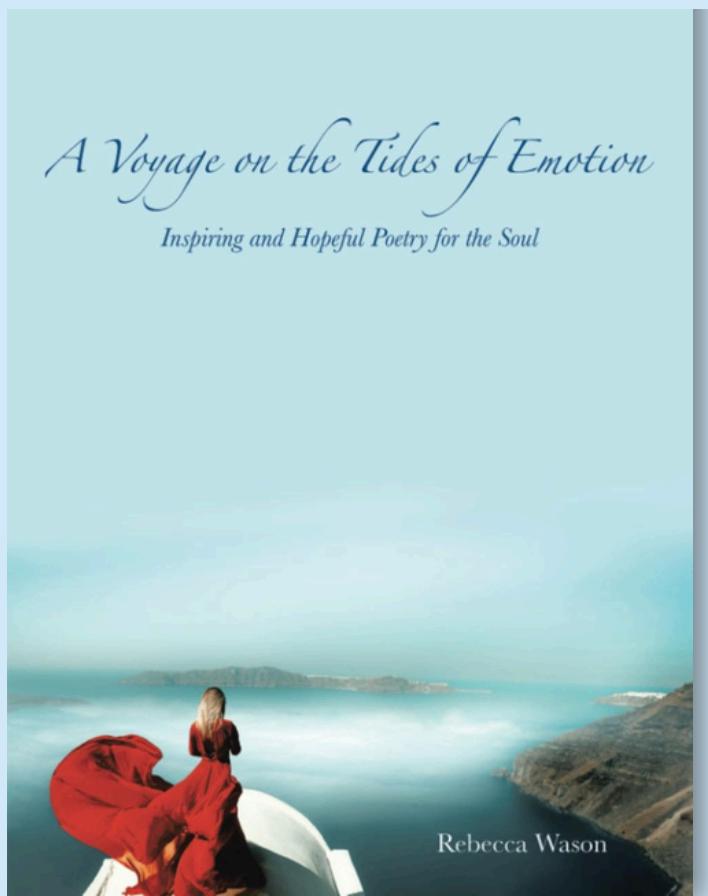
Book Review of **Rebecca Wason's 'A Voyage on the Tides of Emotion'**

"A Voyage on the Tides of Emotion" by **Rebecca Wason** is a captivating collection of poetry that masterfully blends words and art to create a deeply meditative and relatable exploration of human emotions. The book takes readers on a journey through the emotional kaleidoscope of life, delving into a range of sentiments including unrequited love, passion, loss, grief, hope, self-acceptance, and love for God and others.

Each poem within the collection is a distinct exploration of a specific emotion, skillfully capturing its essence through vivid and evocative language. The authenticity and relatability of the verses invite readers to connect with the full spectrum of feelings that define our human experience. The poems are raw and relatable, effectively portraying the emotions that human beings experience, making them a powerful reflection of the human condition.

Wason's work is notable for its ability to successfully convey the complexities of human emotions through organic imagery and heartfelt poetry. Her use of whimsical illustrations adds a unique touch to the collection, making it a standout in the world of poetry. The book can be seen as an attempt to revive the traditional poetry genre, offering a beautiful reflection of the human experience that resonates with readers.

As an avid reader and poetry enthusiast, I can say that **"A Voyage on the Tides of Emotion"** is a powerful and moving collection of poetry that explores the depths of human emotions. Wason's work is a testament to the enduring power of poetry to capture the human experience and offer solace and hope to those who read it.



Publisher: Patridge Publishing India

Publication Date: 20 June 2023

Page Count: 54 Pages

Price (Amazon):

Paperback: **934/- INR**

E-book: **525/- INR**

Purchase Link:

[**Buy Now**](#)

About the Author:



Dr. Rebecca Wason stands as a multifaceted figure, excelling in the fields of medicine, education, art, and now poetry. As an Indo-Canadian university professor and first-generation immigrant, she draws inspiration from her own experiences to craft verse that resonates with hope and inspiration. Her book is a collection of poems inspired by her life journey which is accompanied by her personal artwork.

Currently residing in Toronto with her beloved cat, Love, Dr. Wason continues to inspire through her artistry. "A Voyage on the Tides of Emotion" stands as a testament to her profound talent, solidifying her position as a gifted poet whose words and art dance harmoniously together in a symphony of profound expression.

Book Review of Anusha Hansaria's 'The Soul's Fuel: An Inspirational Collection for a Blissful Life'

With each passing day we learn to think differently, feel differently, and slowly we become a different personality. Where we are desiring for the constants in our life, we must know that the change is inevitable. What comes out from our life incidents or people around us are – lessons and memories. Life is a teacher and we all are its students till death.

'The Soul's Fuel: An Inspirational Collection for a Blissful Life' by **Author Anusha Hansaria** helps us understand the events of life in different projections. The author conveys some with stories, some with experiences and some with keen observations. The book has brought light to one of the important thing we often forget about life – The Perspective. Our perspective towards life shapes our present and our future. But the shaping of the human mind and life not only come from the books we read but some hands-on experiences we get in life.

Divided into fifty chapters, the book is an autobiographical collection of life experiences from childhood learnings to adulthood love, from self-care to selfless friendship presented in the form of stories that serve as a guide for life. Each chapter is dedicated to a different issue and a much needed lesson. Chapters such as '*The unseasoned rain*', '*Is This the new normal?*' and '*Life At Jungle*' are dedicated to the unpredictable nature of life whereas chapters like '*Life the way it is*', '*New Beginning*', '*Perception is All That Matters*' and '*Life Goes On*' set the tone of hope and acceptance.

The author does a fantastic job of bringing out her experiences and observations collectively in this book. Experiences and observations are two different things but when they are put together for a closer examination they give us criteria to understa-

-nd more about human psychology. For instance, the author talks about people's actions and body language when they are around us and how we can judge their true intentions. In our whole lives, we go through different circumstances, some become blissful memories and some become traumatised experiences but one thing is common about both occurrences, and that is **LEARNING**.

The author writes – *"In the end, we realize, the only person who is always going to be with you is YOU."* This is just a glimpse of one of her chapter's lines. Just like this, there are plenty of inspirational quotes and learning waiting to be read by you.

Similarly, on page 14 she writes about the necessity of taking the right action at the right time, One of the best quotes that I have come across that explains the importance of actions over words goes as follows: *"if your actions don't live up to your words, you have nothing to say."* And on page 156 she describes the nature of love. *"Love is a two-sided affair, the person will, in-turn, love you. You don't need to be vocal about your love."* As we move towards the end of the book the

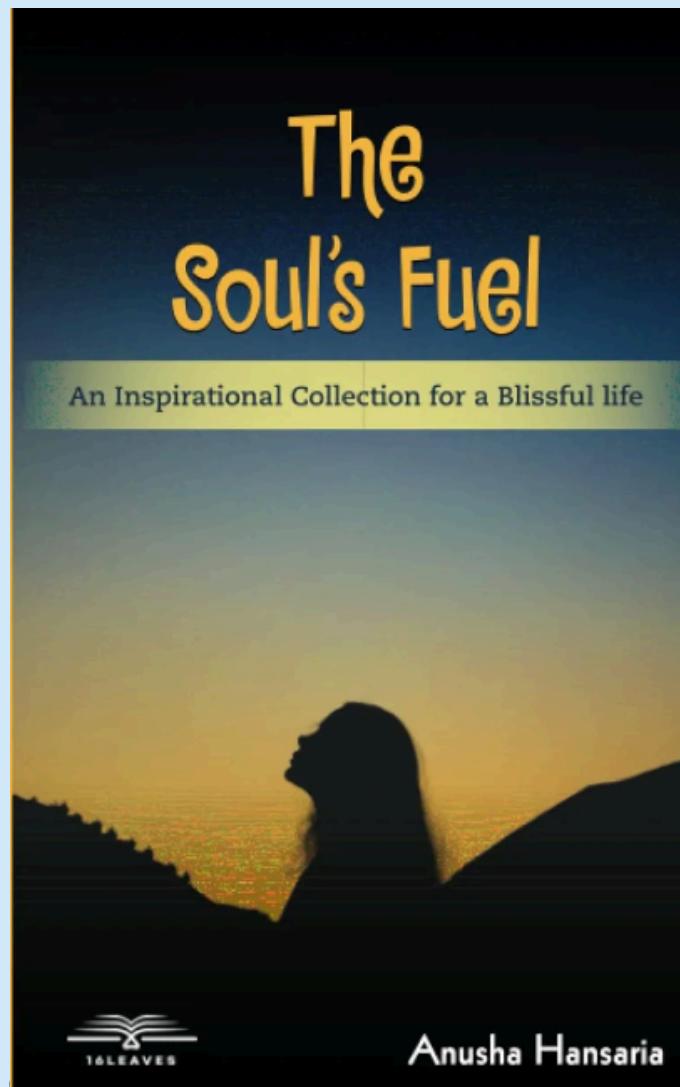
author attempts to sum up everything that has been dealt with by her earlier in the book, allowing us to come to a meaningful conclusion. On page 165 she talks of the importance of balance between finance, friends, and health with this sentence: *"We need money to travel and funds to our daily needs, health to not be dependent on anyone, and friends for company."*

The bonus thing the readers get is the real photographs, each telling a story. One can see how beautifully they are connected with the content of each chapter. The author also takes assistance from great historical personalities to justify her points. She ends the chapter with a famous quote which summarises the chapter's essence. My favorite among them is – *"First love is a kind of vaccination that immunizes a man from catching the disease a second time by Honore de Balzac"*

With all its richness, the book effortlessly justifies and successfully carries the heaviness of its title till the end. It is indeed a fuel for the soul. To enhance your soul's fuel and

connect with yourself on a deeper level, we recommend you to choose

this book as your next read.



Title: The Soul's Fuel: An Inspirational Collection for a Blissful Life

Publisher: 16Leaves Publication

Page Count: 220

Language: English

Price:

Paperback: ₹175/-
E-book: ₹350/-

Purchase link:

[**Buy Now**](#)

Book Review of Sushant Rajput's 'I Wish Someone Told Me This Before My First Job'

Recently I received an opportunity to read the book "***I Wish Someone Told Me This Before My First Job***" by **Sushant Rajput**. Being a person who has worked in the corporate field myself, I wanted to see if I could give this book as a reference to youngsters and my colleagues who come to me for career guidance. Reading the book, I have to say Sushant Rajput, the author of the book, has done an amazing job in compiling these attributes that are much needed for the professionals who want to have a great career in the corporate world.

Although it has been a great learning experience reading this masterpiece, these are some points I want to put my emphasis on in the review of "***I Wish Someone Told Me This Before My First Job***".

The first thing I want to highlight about the book is the fact that it makes the professionals understand corporate careers are not just about

targets, salaries and promotions. It makes the professionals understand there are attributes that are needed beyond marks and hardwork to succeed in the corporate world.

The second thing I noticed in the book was the fact that it has given tips for the overall development of the professional. It doesn't start and end with the soft skills that are required in the corporate world. But it also gives valuable tips on financial management and also the importance of self-care. The book also makes professionals understand the importance of taking regular breaks rather than suffering constant burnouts.

The third thing I want to point out in the book is the detailing the author has done on each of the aspects he has discussed in the book. For eg: In the section that covers the importance of

networking, the author has taken the pain to talk in detail about both offline and online networking. Interestingly the author has even covered the aspect of how introverts can do networking to improve their career prospects.

The fourth notable aspect in the book is that the author didn't just plainly provide a corporate guide with DOs and DON'Ts but he also took a step forward and used interesting and captivating anecdotes to make the readers connect with the point he is making. This improved the readability of the book by far.

The fifth and the most interesting aspect is that the author has delved into some areas that not many books on the subject hesitate to touch upon. One is the need to read and understand alternate views. The author asks readers to come out of their comfort zone and challenge

themselves for new thoughts. Second is the importance of perseverance. Here the author asks readers to take one step at a time but consistently to get remarkable results. Third, the author talks about a solution-based approach. The readers are prompted to look at solutions rather than only pondering over problems. It saves people from the paralysis of over-analysis. Overall I would say it's a value add in every professional's library.

"I Wish Someone Told Me This Before My First Job" by Sushant Singh is a must-read for the youngsters who are new into making their career, the experienced ones who want to switch over and the ambitious ones who want to take their career to new heights. A must-read **for all**.

Review by Meera GopalaKrishnan (Ex IT Professional, currently an Author, Reviewer, Podcaster and also works with an NGO)

Book Synopsis :

Do you think your management degree is enough to brace you for the 'real' corporate world? What are the professional skills that are really required to climb and ace your corporate or even entrepreneur journey? How to prepare for interviews or presentations? What if there was a guidebook that revealed the practical skills, they

never focused to teach you in college? To address the above questions, this book 'I Wish Someone Told Me This Before My First Job,' provides how to build these professional skills, what are the ways to practice them to survive and grow in your professional career. Through captivating anecdotes and real-life examples, this book goes beyond the classroom, equipping not only management students but also beginners across industries with essential knowledge. This book will act as a stepping stone to get into the corporate world armed with the practical skills other than domain skills developed during MBA.



Title: I Wish Someone Told Me This Before My First Job

Publisher: Blue Rose Publisher Pvt. Ltd.

Page Count: 213

Publication Date: 23/11/2023

Price:

Paperback: ₹150/-

E-book: ₹230/-

Purchase Link:

[Buy Now](#)

About the Author:



Sushant Rajput is an accomplished management professional with an MBA in Marketing & Systems from Kousali Institute of Management Studies (KIMS), Karnataka University and a graduation in Computer Science. With over two decades of experience in pre-sales, solution designing, and process consulting across the IT/ITES industries, Sushant is currently working with HCL Technologies Ltd. and previously associated with Societe Generale, Cognizant Technology Solutions, and Deutsche

Bank. Alongside his professional role, Sushant is actively involved as a visiting professor at various MBA institutions and is also pursuing Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA). With a passion for research in consumer behaviour, international marketing, emerging technologies, and sales management, Sushant brings a unique blend of academic expertise and practical insights to his writing and teaching.

Book Review of Mariclaire Norton's *Tara's Journey: Tales of Eirlandia*-Book 1

As Robert Frost says, "I'd like to get away from earth awhile; And then come back to it and begin over." It is essentially important for all of us sometimes to have room to escape ourselves from reality to live life in a better light. In that case, as a reader, I say that Mariclaire Norton's *Tara's Journey* is undoubtedly a well-wrought book of story that invites its readers into another realm with its magical and supernatural phenomena to experience the most exciting world that efficaciously blurs reality to enjoy the aesthetics of literature.

Norton's narrating style as well as the employment of intricate words and terms bring antiquity into existence in the readers' minds. The complexity of the plot (a journey within a journey) draws dire attention throughout the entire work of art. Along with escaping its readers from their reality with its magical realism, it also provides context to examine the role of

women in society at various points in time.

At first, when Tara was obtained and dominated by Alaric, she was projected as feeling inferior, unsecured, and doubting herself about whether she would be accepted by her people as their ruler or not. But in the later part of the story, when all the kingdoms come under her rule and she is universally accepted, it shows the author's concern for women's empowerment, and I feel the motivation and encouragement from a woman for women in this work. Also, along with Tara's, I find a strong sense of feminist perspective in the characterization of Mayveer and Maeve, which reflects Mariclaire's serious concern with bringing up the image of women with superiority, which tends to shatter female discrimination to the core.

Mariclaire, as highly influenced by the cultures of pre-Christian

Celts and Norse, beautifully interwoven their strands into an exciting story with a rich imagination. The description of the Formorrid, the Dun, their magic, especially their hidden region, and their secrecy electrify the thrill, frighten the readers, and give a gothic shade to the story. By creating an ambiguity in the identity

of Tara (after rebirth) in her second lifetime at the end of book 1, Tara's Journey: Tales of Eirlandia, the author handed an interesting puzzle to the readers to guess who might be the real Tara, which could generate eagerness among the readers to await the second book of the trilogy.



Publisher: Harper Collins Publishing (22 April 2024)

Language: English

Paperback: 182 pages

ISBN-10: 1963746724

ISBN-13: 978-1963746723

Book Review of Anam Tariq's 'A Leaf Upon a Book'

Anam Tariq's debut poetry book '**A Leaf Upon a Book**' is a collection of 25 poems with diverse themes of nature, childhood, memories, loss, love, social issues and abstract ideas. Each poem in this collection takes you on a journey of self-discovery, evoking thoughts and emotions that span from nostalgia to sagacious contemplation. 'A Leaf Upon a Book' is an apt title for the collection as it interconnects nature, human emotions, and the world around us. The attractive front cover grabs the attention of the readers at the first glance.

The book opens with the poem '*Childhood*' which describes the desires of a child and gradually explores themes of adulthood, obsessions, yearnings, nature, surroundings, loss, and love. Among these diverse themes, Anam includes '*Muhammad (P.B.U.H): An Ode*', a tribute to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). In another poem, she praises Imam Hussain, describing him as a 'mountain of forbearance'.

Inspired by great poets like T.S. Eliot, John Keats, William Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson, and others, Anam Tariq has developed her own distinctive style of poetry. Her work offers readers a taste of the literary elegance and depth characteristic of these renowned poets.

Anam exhibits mastery in playing with words, as evident in her poems which are richly adorned with figures of speech. The poems in this collection are full of vivid imagery, metaphors and personification. An example of this is found in the poem '*Trod the Unwonted Way*:

*"Without the woods, upon the lea
she felt a touch,
zephyr's hand dulcified
her face."*

Here, she personifies zephyr (wind) by mentioning that she felt a touch of its hands that calmed her face.

In the following lines, she beautifully describes clouds as white cotton candies:

*"White cotton candies hung from the sky
mantling the place, her and nature's ally."*

In the poem 'A Melody about a Malady', she refers to corruption as a malady (illness). She writes:

*"A spreading malady infecting
the ones in power, affecting
mostly the paupers."*

Although at some points, I felt a lack of smooth flow in certain poems, the rich vocabulary used by the poet exhibits her vast knowledge of words and semantics.

The most intriguing aspect of this book is that it compiles the poems written over a span of 5 years and 8 months. This timeline reflects her journey and growth as a poet which is evident from the first poem to the last one. The first poem 'Childhood' gives us a hint of innocence of a novice poet but as we read further,

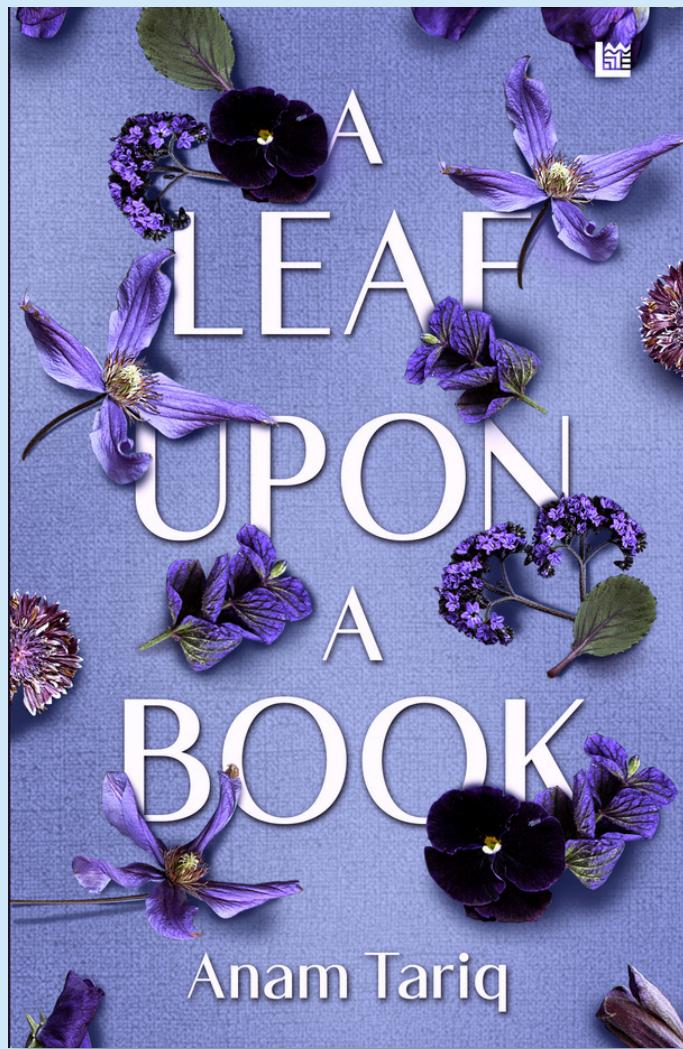
we witness her evolution into an experienced poet with a deeper sense of literary elements. This evolution is evident in her latter poems, such as 'An Actress's Art', 'Misreading', and 'Now You Can't Though You Long to' which display her mature understanding of human nature and the impact of loss.

The two micro poems in the collection based on nature act like a cherry on the cake and the illustrations throughout the book complement the poems.

Anam concludes her book beautifully with 'Letters to Loved Ones', dedicating each verse to her father, mother, Mariyam, and Taylor. Through this poem, she expresses her gratitude and acknowledges their influence in her life.

Overall, the book is a delightful collection of rich poetry that gives a deep insight into the literature and should be explored by all poetry lovers.





Title: A Leaf Upon a Book

Publisher: Leadstart Inkstate
(February 14, 2022)

Page Count: 76

Language: English

Price:

India: ₹80/- E-book, ₹149/-
Paperback,
International: \$3.00 E-book,
\$6.25 Paperback

Purchase Links:

[India](#)

[International](#)

About the Author:

Anam Tariq writes from India. She holds an MA in English and is the author of the poetry collection 'A Leaf upon a Book' (Leadstart, 2022). She writes and freelances as a copy editor for SeaGlass Literary. Her words exist in The Punch Magazine, nether Quarterly, Verse of Silence, EKL Review, The Chakkar, SeaGlass Literary, The Amazine, The Purposeful Mayonnaise, Lucky Jefferson, coalitionworks, and elsewhere. Other than writing, Anam can be found learning Arabic. Visit her at www.anamtariq.in or [@anam.tariq_](https://www.instagram.com/@anam.tariq_) (IG).

Book Excerpt of Hiba Maria's 'To The Tomorrows'

“

Living Contented

Whither life leads me,
I surely must follow,
With a love for living deep,
And cynicism shallow.
For the world is wide enough
To find a quiet hollow,
Beside the twittering bulbul,
And beneath the glittering aster.
The earth may certainly spin faster,
But here, I am at peace with life,
And that for non eternals should suffice.

”

TO THE TOMORROWS

HIBA MARIA



“

Writing

Risky it is indeed for me
 To hold this pretty pen
 Laying out my bare, supple heart
 Before a billion men.
 Vulnerable and wonderful
 Is language as a link,

How strangely sweet the synchronization
 Of thought, feel and ink!

”

About the Author:

The author's name is Hiba Maria, she is a wife and mother, happily settled amongst the woods and tea estates of Coonoor, The Nilgiri Mountains, India.

Living amongst the wilderness blesses her with constant inspiration and a calling towards the pen, the brush and just about every other form of art.

She has a passion for writing and her work reflects mainly on the unpredictability of life and living, with a sort of wry humor and introspection. Having lived mostly in major cities in India and abroad, she loves the solitude of the mountains she now calls home.

Book Excerpt of Mariclaire Norton's Tara's Journey: Tales of Eirlandia-Book 1

66

Suddenly five figures in black robes came running from a nearby tent. They began to work on the device, and the noise of turning wheels came up to me clearly. Here were my targets, and I wasted no time. "Send the Lighting of Justice upon them," I commanded in Eirl and bade the Master Lifenstone do my bidding.

An intense light flared out from the Lifenstone, a beam so bright that I shielded my eyes for a moment until a type of haze dimmed the beam so I could watch. The beam came down and then divided, through what property of magic I do not know, into separate beams that simultaneously stroke the five figures, bathing them in the light. There was no sound, but as quickly as it struck, the beam shut off, and the smoldering remains of the five Formorrid were all that was left.

I could not look, and shifted my gaze instead to the tents, which were my next targets. Again I commanded the Lifenstone to life, and it obeyed me. Soon the camp was filled with fires, and the Formorrid in the tents ran out, some themselves in flames that would not be extinguished.

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“

With the camp ablaze I stopped to rest. Mayveer brought me more water, which both slaked my thirst and bolstered my spirits. Suddenly a loud noise boomed from the camp and we looked to see that someone had activated the Eye.

Mayveer cried out and crouched down, her hands over her head. I shouted something I do not even recall, and the staff blazed with light, creating a shield over both of us. The black cloud the Eye had sent out hit the shield, but did not penetrate.

I could hear the screams of rage from those below. Obviously they had never encountered anything that could deflect the Eye before. I smiled grimly and sighted their camp once more. “Lighting of Justice, destroy this machine of destruction. And seek and destroy the leaders of this host.” I commanded the Lifenstone. Light again poured out of the stone and engulfed the Eye of Balor and struck several figures in the camp. But although the Formorrid died, the machine did not appear destroyed or even damaged.

”



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all of the contributors, readers, and supporters who have made 'The Hemlock' possible.

To our talented writers and artists, thank you for sharing your creativity and imagination with us, and for bringing your unique voices and perspectives to our pages. We are honoured to showcase your work, and we are continually inspired by the passion and skill that you bring to your craft.

To our readers, thank you for joining us on this literary journey, and for embracing the power of the written word to connect, inspire, and move us. Your support and enthusiasm mean the world to us, and we are continually motivated by your passion for the arts.

Finally, we would like to thank our staff and volunteers, who work tirelessly behind the scenes to bring each issue of 'The Hemlock' to life. Your dedication, hard work, and passion are the driving force behind our publication, and we could not do it without you.

Thank you all for being a part of 'The Hemlock' community, and for helping us to celebrate the beauty and power of the literary arts. We look forward to continuing this journey together.

*The Hemlock
Journal*

ABOUT THE HEMLOCK

The Hemlock is an idea as potent as the name it bears. It refers to a plant from the Carrot family which is an age-old herb and also to an ancient poison known to Greeks that supposedly killed Socrates, the great philosopher. Likewise, art heals us but at the same time, it possesses the ability to kill us, if not used well.

The Hemlock Journal is a space built for writers to learn, explore, grow together, and be a unique source in reaching the distant perspectives of the poets and storytellers to the tribe. Our prominent aim is to help writers advance their careers, and establish their brands by providing a global platform.

We are a dedicated team with a common purpose, united to enlighten as well as delight the crowd through our passion. We hope to inspire and positively impact the world around us.

We welcome writers and poets from around the world to share their works of art and literature through our journal irrespective of their background, gender and ethnicity.



THE HEMLOCK

ABOUT THE ISSUE

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As Summer symbolizes a period of warmth, relaxation, leisure, and transition from Spring to Autumn, our 'Summer 2024' issue takes you on a journey of relaxing summer afternoons with a glass of refreshing lime juice, poetries, stories, and heartwarming thoughts. It also includes book reviews and book excerpts so that you can pick up your next read without spending hours searching for recommendations.

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