

“... he repeated until his dying day that there was no one with more common sense, no stone cutter more obstinate, no manager more lucid or dangerous, than a poet.”

– Gabriel García Márquez

Table of Contents

Hannah Blauer	<i>A Dust Bowl Christmas</i>
Emma Breton	<i>Perfection</i>
Willow Campbell	<i>Bones in the Ocean, Noise, Brown Apples</i>
Heidi Elder	<i>Circus Tales</i>
Emily Ewing	<i>Unravelling Sweater</i>
Nate Fahmi	<i>My Favourite Horror Film is a Rom-com</i>
Vida Germain	<i>My egg timer lover, Endings</i>
Minna Glendinning	<i>Sorrows Swept Away</i>
Levi Johnson	<i>In Which You Talk to the Trees</i>
Damien Jordan	<i>À la sud de Bouchette</i>
Hailey Laliberté	<i>Boxed In</i>
Ella MacDonald	<i>The Sweet Summer garden</i>
Wesley Massey	<i>Writings of an Unknown Soldier</i>
Jenna Mihalchan	<i>How Am I Here?</i>
Yasmin Nowlan	<i>Watch the World End With Me</i>
Ella Pegan	<i>shell of a man</i>
Newt Randall	<i>Before We Walked</i>
Daisy Rubinstein	<i>Today, Tomorrow, The Day After That</i>
Sarah Ryan	<i>The Forest Was Alive</i>
Skully Sullivan	<i>Untitled</i>
Katelyn Topshee	<i>Finish This and Compliment Yourself (For Me)</i>
Ella Wade	<i>The Soundtrack of your Life</i>
Lee Winchester	<i>Even You</i>
Sharon Xu	<i>It is a Curious Thing, to be Loved by Eros</i>

A Dustbowl Christmas

by Hannah Blauer

It was late at night. The four of them sat on the ground in a circle in the middle of a deserted field, a lantern placed in the centre. The dead crops rubbed against their legs and the thin sheet of snow covering the unfertile earth gave them an icy chill they never thought would ever feel so painful. The mother sighed and shivered a little. Under her thin cotton shirt, we could see her bones nearly bulging out of her tight skin.

She got up and went to their wagon, just five steps away, and pulled out a small bag from the back. She sat down again and shook a little bit of snow off the bag. Opening it, she pulled out a loaf of bread. The mother looked down at her three beautiful children. Their big bulging eyes shone bright in the glimmer of the lantern's light. She looked at their sunken faces, their dust-encrusted skin, and their hearts, beating behind their small skinny bodies. Then she started to tear the bread into small pieces. She gave each child an equal piece until there was just one piece left for her.

Their big eyes looked right back at her. Nothing was said. Although their faces were still sunken with sadness and exhaustion, their eyes seemed to shine a little, as if emitting some sort of little ray of hope.

As she contemplated her children's subtle but greatly impacting expressions she broke into a small smile and said: Merry Christmas.

Perfection

by Emma Breton

A pure white marble statue stands in the middle of the room. The carvings of false features and lifeless eyes have stared at me for my whole life. It follows me in silent solitude, lurking behind me at every corner, gleaming a white shine. I thought it was perfection, and I sought to keep it that way. When I was younger, I would tiptoe around it, mimicking its stillness. I brushed off every bit of dust and speck of dirt; I wanted to preserve every piece of glowing marble. It held a never-changing expression of indifference and I wished for it to speak to me, but its lips never moved no matter how many questions I asked.

Yet, who was I to complain, when it was perfect and I was not.

One day, I stood next to my easel. The statue stood next to me, basking in the golden sunlight from the open windows. I was an artist who would spend the rest of my days trying to create something as perfect as the piece beside me. And yet that dream was tarnished by slipping fingers and a full palette. When I wiped my eyes, I saw the statue, stained with a mirage of endless colours. I tried my best to get them off, I scrubbed and I wept and I washed and I screamed, but it was stained permanently. The statue was tarnished.

He stayed like that forever. With so many fading colours it was hard to believe he had once been a glossy white. The statue wasn't perfect anymore, but if it minded, it didn't show it. Its expression never faltered and the curves and angles of its face never diminished.

Willow Campbell

Bones in the ocean

I march towards the long-forgotten beaches, the ones that make my sailor's ends.

I feel their bones beneath my feet, mistaking their bodies for white sand.

Think of all the boots that have ground their limbs into fine earthy mists, and to not call out their names in sleep; to not know that what they walk on is not glass, but dear friends.

This place where my hopes lie, buried with their ruins, do they sleep soundly, as they so surely should?

do their souls cry out like mine in slumber?

Do I stir their sandy ashes into consciousness when they hear me cry their names, begging to join them, for one last sail of the seas that took them and not me?

I long to hear them laugh at my jokes, the roar of their happiness overtaking the fire we make on the shore.

I hear their songs, the ones they sing out on the water, the ones I will always know all the words to, the ones I would sing to my children, if I were to have them.

How the songs of these dead still ring in my ears.

Their laughter like children, their beckoning cheers.

I can feel my boat filling with the water that took them, the same water that holds their souls.

Will now hold mine.

I set sail until dawn, until the time is just right, until the sun has greeted me, its orange ribbons, so far it lies.

I will sail until they wrap around the mast of my ship, taking my sails in its stead.

Until the souls of the dead call me to swim.

Noise

Hearing the heartfelt noise of another, dark but living, living but dark.
Why is your dark noise so sweet?
Unfiltered in sound. Not quite bright,
but the meaning, how beautiful and mild.

Brown Apples

Apples seem to rot a lot faster than they used to.
I'm not sure why, or when I noticed,
but it seems that whenever I need something sweet, it only takes five minutes for my
snack to brown and turn grainy and bitter.
It sounds silly, and perhaps it is, but I long for the days when sweet things could stay
sweet long enough to taste.
I'm tired of biting into sand.

Maybe I should stick to canned fruit, instead

Circus Tales *by Heidi Elder*

*Take my hand; allow me to lead you through the winding maze of circus tents.
Although I ask that you do not pause anywhere for too long; the show ends at
midnight.*

Puppet Master

There is a small black wooden box—concealed behind a miniature stage—in which the puppet master hides. There is nothing to be seen of him, save for ten spindly fingers which dance above the strings of the three chipped marionettes who enact their charade before him.

Their silent production has seemingly no beginning nor end, and when the marionettes sway, they do so in bizarre, jerking movements; their joints squealing from exertion. They've become but shells of their glory days, trading their pristine smiles for ones distorted by the cobwebs in their teeth.

The only one ignorant to this transformation is the puppet master himself, his tunnel vision obscured by the stage. Driven solely by applause—one he believes is meant for him—he has performed for years without repose. Yet there isn't a single soul who thinks to interrupt the show, to break him the news: that his crowd has long since deserted him.

Contortionist

Her glassy eyes bulge, snow globes against her death-like frame. Her sole prop is a pole: vandalised and crooked, standing only due to its rusted steel base.

When the worn-out gramophone begins to play, her face comes alive in time to the crackling melody and the corners of her mouth tug the rest along with it into a grin that stretches from one of her ears to the other. Her teeth are mush amongst her blackened gums but still the contortionist smiles. She smiles as she twists her spine thrice over, treating the audience to a series of clicks and clacks as her bones shriek in protest. As she does, the sequins on her bodysuit catch the light. *Look at me*, they say.

When she becomes still, she becomes easier to ignore; the hesitant crowd applauds then departs. Their departure resembles a hasty circus act of its own. In fact, they run as quickly as they can in search of some hidden corner of the circus, anywhere those hungry eyes won't follow.

Wishing Bones

At first glance, it seems a typical sort of hole, the type not so easily concealed, no matter how you pat the dirt.

Yet, it becomes all but invisible once the sun sets, with a disposition similar to that of a poltergeist. You see, just as some holes are but the remnants of what was once there, this one holds wishing bones. Femurs, and ribs, and a smiling skull. These are curious things that can grant one's wildest desire, provided that desire is a handsome sum of money.

It truly is a mysterious trick; one that requires nothing but the eternal devotion of the subject to its secret and a fortunate encounter with the ringmaster. Without the fulfilment of these conditions, there will appear howling sirens and flashing lights—no money would trade hands and the bones would disappear. However, this rather disagreeable event can be easily avoided if the finder knows to keep their mouth shut about this sort of thing; then the crimson-cloaked ringmaster with the bottomless pockets would be more than happy to grant their wish.

Unravelling Sweater *by Emily Ewing*

My wool sweater unravels.

Yarn coils around my neck and my breath hitches as air escapes my strangled throat.

My shriek, caught and stilled, echos in silence.

Did you notice the stars tonight?
I'll find the big dipper while you scour for Orion. We'll swim in warm waters and exist
for something new. Swim with me till again, we are young, and the flames of life have
not yet licked our skin.
Float endlessly, together, in a heavenly scented bliss.
Hide away with me, hide away from the world's sins.
I want to live only because I'm afraid to die.
My letter goodbye is too short. It's too distant, too soon. One more day, or two more
days.
Until next summer.
I will not survive past spring.
I am too young to feel this old.
The wool itches and scratches and I can no longer breathe. I want to collapse to the
ground and embrace green earth. My lungs will fill with rainwater and my heart will
beat one final time.
Muffled,
straining,
and then;
peace.
My best friend visiting my grave.
Only a little longer.
A last 'I love you'.
Another sunset.
What will it feel like to be a wife?
The clock ticks, the seconds slip, and I am stagnant.
Threads sever, seams fray.
My mother will cry. Could I be half as beautiful as her? The yarn loosens.
The world has lost its sun and I've been abandoned by hope.
And yet there, the sun breaks over the skyline, and I am warm again.
And yet, I love the purr of cats and the smell of storms.
And yet, I stay.
I haven't learnt to cook or sing. I haven't quite mastered my art of hugs.
There are stories I've yet to hear, books left unread. Oh the promises I have yet to keep.
How about those questions, gone unanswered? What's an eternal sleep without
confirmation, where then, is my peace?
I want more kisses in the rain,
I want more memories to be made.
I want to want to live, and maybe I do.
Maybe this sweater can be mended.
It might be worth it, to live a little longer under a sky so blue.
What's a few more stitches to my soul.
Perhaps this unravelling sweater can be saved after all.

My Favourite Horror Film is a Rom-com *by Nate Fahmi*

Thriller, slasher, monster flick, *romantic comedy*. They're not that different when you think too hard about it. The genres overlap like you wouldn't believe, a messy Venn diagram of love, guts, and scary, *scary* stuff.

In the pursuit of a lover, determination is a highly desirable trait. One can't be blamed for going a little too far. The line between hopeless romantic and crazy fanatic is ribbon-thin, the blink-and-you'll-miss-it sort that's all too easy to get tangled up in. So maybe that guy at your window is the shy boy-next-door here to confess his love, or he's a serial killer prepared to make you his next victim. There's no real way of knowing it in advance, but no one ever gets anywhere playing it safe. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, but persistence makes the heart grow mad with desire.

If a boy pulls your hair on the playground, it means he likes you. If he stands outside your house night after night and tracks your every move, he must be ready to propose.

The world isn't big enough for everyone to win, and in a genre like this, only the pure get the prize. To survive, one must be plucky, smart, and creative. Also pretty. Pretty helps. Don't be conceited, though. People don't like to feel threatened. You get it.

One must also be an outside-the-box thinker while taking care not to stray from the borders of the slightly bigger box you've been provided with. Individuality is only helpful so long as it's done how we want.

If you're lucky enough to make it to the end, you'll be met with the life of your dreams, or maybe just life at all. Fate has run low on resources, but one can't fault her for that. Heroes are famously humble, are they not?

The only logical next step is the binding of your souls. An offering is preferred, typically a ring, though you may feel free to buck tradition if you wish. The effect is all the same. Have a third party perform a chant and seal the deal with a kiss. With that, it's done. For better or for worse, in sickness or in health, the two of you are stuck. Good luck!

If moral purity isn't for you, you may be able to find solace in being evil! With goodness being such a small fit, you may feel the urge to just let go, go nuts, or *batty*, if you will. Love makes monsters of us all, so why not let loose all your base desires with someone who's just as awful as you?

Vida Germain

My Egg-Timer Lover

Hands travel over this broken body of mine
Soft feather fingertips
But when my hands find your body
They get stuck on Curves, stowaway clothes
Refusing to wander like they are supposed to

I do not work in harmony
Your mind ticks like an egg timer
Your body climbs pleasure like a mountain
I am stuck on this scratching mattress
Pine needle sheets and your tongue in my Mouth
Wishing I could be numb to sensations my mind worships

If there's another way to love
Mouth far from Mouth, busy hands keeping to themselves
I hope to never know it
You are overwhelming, car alarms and ghosting kisses
It's the sweetest sensation I've ever known

Endings

So when the world came to an end
All the neighbourhood children came out to play
A little grey dog followed them, yapping at their feet
Past the old man's nephew mowing his uncle's lawn
Through the big ladies' raspberry bush
Over their babysitter's garden fence
Into lush fielding
Where early that morning, a fox had become a mother for the first time
And they climbed the big oak trees
And they rolled down the dirt hills
And they were wizards, dragons, princesses and knights
And none of them paid much mind to the end of the world

Sorrows Swept Away
by Minna Glendinning

As long as I could remember, my grandmother would sit on our front porch for hours on end. I never understood what was so interesting about our property, and it was until many years had passed that I decided to go and sit outside beside her.

Even as I sat in her presence, and looked past our porch, to the trees at the edge of our fence line, the lake behind it, and the crests of the mountains peaking out above the trees, I couldn't help but question why she had spent so much time staring at the same thing.

She must've sensed I was confused and impatient with the way I restlessly fidgeted beside her, waiting to realise I was in fact watching something too. "Listen," she said. Were there birds? Had that been what she'd been sitting out here doing this whole time, listening to them chirp? I couldn't hear any, no matter how hard I focused.

After a while she spoke again. "It's the wind." I raised my eyebrow at her.

"The wind. It whistles from time to time." Her voice was raspy, but it all the while held a tone of fascination within it. I listened again, and to my surprise she was right. Every few seconds the wind would whistle, each tune different from the last.

"That's what you've been doing all this time?" I asked. She let out a laugh, shaking her head as if it was a foolish question.

"I've been watching it too."

"Watching the wind?"

"Look closely, Anna. Watch how it makes them dance." I looked out from our porch. The wind was tossing fallen leaves around, throwing them across our lawn. The trees were thrashing about. I almost worried one of their limbs might break off. "It's beautiful, isn't it?"

From time to time, I would go out onto the porch again and sit beside her. I never stayed as long as she did, but I would still try to take my time to see how the trees may dance from her point of view. Maybe their dancing was supposed to look like the crowd at a punk rock concert?

She came outside less as she grew weaker. The doctors said it was best for her to lie down, so she spent most of her time up in bed, only able to occasionally sit on the porch.

I found myself drawn to there more than ever, hoping to see whatever she could before it was too late. I would go out there by myself, only finding frustration in the same answers. The trees seemed to feel the same way. One day while a storm was brewing, they thrashed around, throwing their limbs in all directions, and swaying so viciously I thought their trunks would snap in half.

After the storm had come and gone, I tried again. She could barely stand now, and with the burden of having lied to her, I set out with her words in my head. *Look closely, Anna. Watch how it makes them dance.*

I tried to focus on each detail, how the twigs would begin swaying first, and then the branches; but something I had never noticed before, was how none of them seemed to crash into each other. Sure, the branches were flying in all kinds of directions, but they were doing so almost in harmony, careful to avoid hitting the others, in tune despite all doing their separate styles of dance. While the branches shook, the leaves would fall, each one seeming to have its own distinct colour as a snowflake with its pattern. Before they could hit the ground, the wind would pick them up again, high into the air, sweeping them off to who knows where, so they could continue their dance for as long as the breeze permitted.

As I watched them, I felt a sense of relief, my sorrows and guilt from not understanding my grandmother being swept away along with the leaves. I understood now, and while I was filled with the satisfaction of doing so, I wondered if they would still dance when she was gone.

In Which You Talk To the Trees *by Levi Johnson*

You are laying in the forest among the grass, trees surrounding the clearing. Soft light filters through their branches and birds call out to each other above.

YOU - Where'd everyone go?

THE TREES - They're all gone.

YOU - I- How long have I been here?

THE TREES - Long time. Long enough for them to forget all about you.

YOU - Could I leave? If I wanted to?

THE TREES - You wouldn't recognize the world you went back to. You're too much like us
 now.

YOU - Too much like you?

THE TREES - You stayed to look at the stars when all the others left. And then you stayed

to watch the sunrise. You stayed to watch the clouds and the birds and
the
flies. You stayed so we took you back.

YOU – You took me back?

THE TREES – You take from us but in the end we always get it back. We get you back.
You
always come back.

YOU – But does that mean I've lost it now? Everything I was?

THE TREES – It never really mattered, what you were. Because in the end, this is all
you
are. You are a home for the moss and the snails and the fungus. You are
food for the soil and nutrients for me. You give it all back. You are only
ever
this, a part of everything green and good. I'm sorry we let you forget
that.

YOU – Will I be missed?

THE TREES – No. But you'll be cherished. Every part of you. Is that enough?

À la sud de Bouchette
by Damien Jordan

Les temps ont changé à la sud de Bouchette
Petites pattes en gazon aux jours jeune de juillet
Sous le bruit de silence, tête doucement embrassée
par les feuilles d'un arbuste tout caché du soleil

En dessous des nuages, à travers l'autoroute
Elle s'endort près du lit de la rivière, douce,
écoutant les abeilles et les oiseaux qui chantent
Elle s'endort en toute paix, avant vient la silence

À les vagues de l'aire frais elle se lève emballé
en serviette, en regardant les prairies passés
par la fenêtre d'une auto qui traverse la campagne,
dans les mains d'un enfant, gardé chaud par son âme

Les semaines viennent si vite, et les soirs passent si lent
À la sud de Bouchette ils réveillent à printemps
pour les chansons dans l'aire. Elle repose pas si loin
sur la vieille sofa jaune baingé dans le soleil

*[The seasons have changed in the south of Bouchette
Little paws in the grass in the young days of July
In the deafening silence, a head gently kissed
by the leaves of a bush hidden well from the sun*

*Underneath the clouds, across the highway
She sleeps by the riverbed, soft,
listening to the bees and the birds singing
She sleeps soundly, until silence falls.*

*In the waves of warm wind, she wakes up wrapped
in a towel, watching the pastures go by
out the window of a car passing through the countryside,
in the arms of a child, kept warm by her soul*

*The weeks go by so quickly, and the nights pass so slow
In the south of Bouchette they awake in the spring
for the songs in the air. She rests not too far away
on an old yellow couch bathed in sunlight]*

Boxed in
by Hailey Laliberté

Anyone who's ever staged a coffeehouse knows that the setup and cleanup are both difficult tasks. Most people think that the setup is the harder of the two, but they wouldn't be necessarily correct in that presumption. The cleanup has to take place in less than half the time, which seems impossible, and yet, miraculously, everything ends

up where it's supposed to be before 10:00. Trust me, I know from last time. No thanks to COVID, the last time is now more than two years ago, but as you'll see, my memory of the event isn't going to fade any time soon.

I'd like to think that the grade ten coffeehouse went pretty well. Afterwards, I was feeling rather proud of myself. I was talking to my friends, putting my coat on, and completely ignoring the fact that my red hair dye was rubbing off on absolutely everything. I'd just about reached the door, and my waiting family, when I realised that I had forgotten my backpack in the library. I ran back, hoping I wouldn't be given yet another task that would keep my little sister up any longer past her bedtime. But, of course, there was one last task, and one last unoccupied Lit student to complete it. It was a relatively simple job: deliver a mysterious black box of unknown function to the basement cafeteria. Shouldn't take too long, right?

The box turned out to be bulky, but not super heavy, and fortunately was equipped with wheels, so I started rolling it towards the elevator door, just opposite the main floor library. I'd never been in the elevator alone, but I didn't think it would be a problem. It took me a few moments to figure out how to open the door, which was probably a bit of dramatic foreshadowing I somehow managed to ignore.

So I managed to roll this box, and it is *not* a small box, into this tiny elevator. There's enough room for me to squish in, so I do, and hit the button that supposedly lowers the elevator. The doors close with great finality, and the journey to the basement begins. The tiny universe I'm in vibrates, then slowly settles into silence. I look at the doors. The doors don't open. I've been on the elevator before, so I know how long it takes for me to reach the basement. I should be there. I wait a minute, and nothing happens. I check my watch. Five minutes have passed since I entered the elevator (of course, since I didn't look at my watch before I entered the elevator, this is speculation). I stare at the doors, willing them to open. They ignore me.

Now I'm getting worried. One of the lights overhead is sort of flickering, and I can hear this creaking noise, and I have absolutely no idea where it's coming from. So I do the logical thing, and start completely panicking. For another solid five minutes, I just stand there, frozen, pondering all the possible terrible fates that could befall me, then realise that "fall" might not have been the greatest choice of word in my current dilemma. I should add that I have mild anxiety, and it's always at its worst when I'm stuck in a situation that's out of my control, and I can't immediately come up with a way of solving it. I also don't really do well with small spaces, and let's just say when it comes to this particular elevator, I've seen larger linen closets.

The walls seem to be closing in around me, and I'm struggling to catch my breath in the hot, stuffy, little world of metal walls and mysterious buttons. The box is

taking up all the room, so I can't sit down, even though I feel like I'm going to pass out, so I'm only managing to stand by holding the railings. Suddenly, my phone beeps, reminding me that the newest episode of my favourite podcast is out and snapping me out of my anguish. It hits me: I'm in here with my phone. *I can get help*. Before I completely lose it and call the police or something, I decide that calling my grandparents, who are right here in the building, might be a better idea.

At first, they don't pick up, and I am terrified. The five seconds it takes my grandma to reach into her purse for the phone are the longest five seconds of my life. I explain the situation, and she promises that rescue is on the way. Rescue arrives sooner than I'd anticipated, because in less than a minute, the doors are opening, and my grandfather's standing there. I jump out of the elevator, take a deep breath of fresh air, then realise that I'm standing in front of the library.

Understanding and embarrassment struck me both at once. I had hit the button for floor one, which is where I already was. I hadn't even moved. All I ever had to do was hit the "open doors" button. Why the doors decided it would be a great idea to close when I was clearly already *at* the location that I'd accidentally hit the wrong button for is beyond me. While someone listening to this story may not fully appreciate the gravity of my situation, I can honestly say that it was the longest twenty minutes of my life that I *didn't* actually spend stuck in an elevator!

The Sweet Summer Garden

Ella MacDonald

The fresh flowers in the garden, a sweet scent filling the air. Hydrangeas, peonies, roses, black-eyed susans, all of them blooming together. They are well cared for when spring comes. The seeds are planted with mulch and watered every day until they bloom midsummer. The dreamy sound of wind chimes floats through the air. It's hot in the garden. The sun beats down, there's nowhere to hide from its rays. The summery sound of bees buzz and echo through the air, the fuzzy little black and yellow creatures searching for pollen in the large bushes of flowers. Someone is mowing the lawn next door. It's loud, but doesn't disrupt the peace.

A birdbath sits next to the hydrangea bush. The water sparkles; it's warm from the hot sun. Occasionally, a bird will come bathe in it. Usually a small robin. I sit and watch as it plays in the water and tweets happily. The stone pathway leading to the front of the house curls around the side. The stones, placed intentionally, lined with flowers and grass, that brush against your shin as you walk alongside it. In the patch of

grass in the garden, not a single weed present, each one plucked as soon as it grows tall enough to be seen. The grass is a vibrant shade of green, their blades almost glowing in the sun. The occasional summer breeze passes through, ruffling the grass and making the flowers sway in the wind.

A small square of concrete, worn from many years of footsteps, connects to the stairs leading up to the back door. On the concrete patio sits a glass table, complete with a set of four chairs and an umbrella. It's slightly cooler when you sit underneath it, the only place to hide from the afternoon sun. As the summer day turns into a summer night, the sky turns from a bright baby blue into a sweet cotton candy pinky purple.

The garden changes in the evening. No longer is it hot, and the sounds of the next-door neighbours have diminished. Most have retired to their air-conditioned houses. But not me. I sit outside underneath the umbrella, although there isn't much need for it on nights like this. A pitcher of lemonade on the table. The Minute Maid kind from a can. It's too sweet, the icy syrup isn't fully mixed with the water. A bowl of cut-up watermelon is placed next to the pitcher of lemonade. The perfect dessert of summer. My cheeks and hands are sticky from its juices.

The night is cool, but not too cold. The perfect night to sit outside and enjoy the weather. The occasional mosquito lands on my arm, quickly slapped away before it can bite. The itchiness of previous bites still present on my body.

The garden is still alive in the evening, though the colours of the flowers seem more muted without the bright sun to light them up. The charm of the garden is still there, underneath the starry night sky. Throughout the night, it will stay silent, almost as if it fell asleep along with the people in the house connected to it. Perhaps it needs its own rest. It will stay that way until the sun rises and the garden comes alive with bees and birds, and all the light of day again.

Writings of the Unknown Soldier *by Wesley Massey*

In the pools of eyes which no longer see
I'm reminded of spilt ink on my desk.
Gaze now stuck looking back into my own,
Mouth wide, scream forever at the ready.
I waited too long for peace to arrive
And touch those harsh features, put them at ease.
But the dead had no respite from worry.

All mortal suffering borne turned frozen.
All meaning robbed from scars, scabs, cuts, and sweat.
Its remaining purpose is for myself.

The end allowed no time for final words,
Perhaps they would have been laced with power,
And they'd create profound understanding,
A life told in the recipients hearts.
Alas, nor was it mercifully quick,
Preventing dignity from fleeing too,
Or pitiful screams mistaken for squeaks,
And final acts being soiling itself.
In these moments, I saw control was lost.
No say over the last of anything.

I knew instantly this just would not do.
Writings of battle must be different,
With meaning to chaos, points to the deaths.
Folks will cheer at songs with valour imbued,
They'll recount tales with glory all throughout.
Great last stands and noble sacrifices,
These truths will be honoured and desired.
Warmth they offer, in cold worlds without light.
This soldier shall be lost to time and dirt,
Reborn on the page, a hero of old.

*Copy of letter found with unidentified soldier on roadside, discovered and translated
by poet Edgar Dufas and used as inspiration for Wartime Writings Collection.*

How Am I Here?
by Jenna Mihalchan

How am I here? On top of this mountain, looking over the edge both of us were
too scared to jump. Should we jump?

We're staring up at the sky rather than each other, but it feels right that way. Her silence does not mean she is not there. My silence does not mean I don't love her. We are just right.

The sun kisses my skin with colours of beet and grapefruit; I see her in the sunset and I feel her in its touch. She shines the same way, at certain hours and in some conditions. Not on cloudy nights, not when a storm is about to form and encompass her. She is radiant. She is explosive.

Does her silence mean the same as mine?

What happened to the days where we would talk and talk and never run out of things to say? She had so many things to say, stories to tell, webs to spin. It entangled me. I was caught by her words, though they were never the ones my chest begged to hear. So many conversations exist in my head. Replayed. What could I have said differently? If there was anything. I often wondered if there was some meaning I always seemed to miss; behind her eyes. Behind her lips.

I can't say that I'm lucky. It's so hard to tell with her when she has me grinning like a devil, but all too soon curled in a ball, as I lie, restless, salt dripping, then streaming across my cheeks.

She has soft skin. I remember that. From the hugs. From the arm laced through mine. Did her skin electrify with my touch? I remember the feathery brush of her fingers. She liked to tease. She has a sweet smile, sometimes, other times it's cruel; when she laughs, but not *with* me. But that sweet smile, the one that slowly spreads across her face, constantly incites warmth in my chest.

I was the one afraid to jump. I'd fall.

Watch the World End With Me

by Yasmin Nowlan

"What would you do if the world was ending?"

I lean back in my chair. It's a heavy question, but it's 3 a.m. on a school night so what else are we supposed to do? I wonder, briefly, what you looked like when you asked me that. Were you staring at the ceiling? For some reason, I always imagined you in blue light, even though I've never seen you like that before. Not that I've seen you much at all.

"I think..." I think of pillow forts and faded faces, "I think I would like to see my friends. One last time."

"Not family?" You ask, not accusatory, just curious.

"My family all has someone to be with," I say. "My friends... I would at least like to give them another option." You hum in agreement. "I would find a park or something to meet with everyone. We could make a mountain of blankets."

"The sky would probably look pretty if there was a meteor." You say, and I agree. I once watched a movie with a breathtaking opening centred around a meteor. We both aren't big movie fans, but it would be fun to watch it again with you. Maybe one day I'll ask.

"What would you do?" I look back to my computer screen. Your profile picture stares back at me. A raccoon, after I, half asleep, had compared you to one. There's a brief silence before you answer.

"I think I would like to be alone." You say. Not a surprising answer, by any means, but I'll admit when I said I would like to see my friends I also meant you. "Go to a roof somewhere, with a blanket and sound-cancelling headphones."

"Sounds nice," I respond. We both take a moment to sit in silence. There have been more of those lately, those silences. When we first started talking it felt like I couldn't get enough air for all I wanted to say, but now things have slowed down a bit. Not that our calls have gotten any shorter. Yesterday we spoke for five hours, and we're getting close to the seven-hour mark today. The quiet is comfortable, though.

"If all of my friends," I begin softly, selfishly, "had other places they would rather be, if they were all alright... I think I would like that too. To be alone."

"I have an extra pair of sound-cancelling headphones," You say. I see it in those hazy ways dreams are remembered. Me, tired as I always am and never used to be, climbing up to an abandoned rooftop. Who would notice who first? Maybe we would see each other at the same time, although you might be a little easier to spot. I would greet you with a smile. "Although we would have to sit back to back, I don't want you to see me cry."

I laugh, "You've already cried on call with me. How different would it be in person?"

"It just would be. Take it or leave it."

Of course, I would take it.

"We would watch the world end together," I say. "Not bad at all."

shell of a man
by Ella Pegan

life was weary and tiring, but it was not a matter of her feeling like a “shell of a man.” quite the opposite, actually.

she is stuffed to the brim with *personhood*, forgotten lunches and secrets like ink stains and the messy business of going in and out your front door. shoes go on the plastic mat, and if you hand me your coat, i'll find a spot for it in the closet.

she is in a sudsy cycle of cleaning and being clean. she has a streak-free shine. her clothes are warm and loose, and she's able to melt into the couch in the evenings. fresh sheets don't feel as good as she thinks they will, but she won't deny the excellence of sleeping in a cold, cold room under a fat duvet.

she washes her hair in the bath, sitting in the ceramic tub and remembering when she used to be small. she steals lavender shampoo from her oldest sister and she rubs rose oil onto her legs, making them smooth and decent. she sits in the water, steeps herself, like a cup of tea or a bowl of soup desperate to be shared.

this is perhaps what makes her human. that, or baked sweets. she hasn't decided yet.

she has 100 pages left in every book she has started and not finished and she doesn't know how to convince herself to read when all she wants is to be a reader. she is not a singer, a dancer, or an actor. she is a student and that is about to stop being enough. she calls herself a writer, but she doesn't write. she doesn't know how to end this paragraph in a way that's honest but still hopeful. // she still has hope. she knows nothing is over.

she is looking at the people on the bus and she is judging them and it is making her sick. she has swallowed the ocean and it sloshes horribly in her stomach as the bus takes her to her next stop, which takes her to her next stop, which might eventually take her home. it's a gamble.

when she's home, she will sit down and not get up for many hours. her phone drains her battery, and her lungs deflate and lie dead. *personhood* seeps out of her, oozes. the seams of her body are struggling to contain how much she is alive. she is bursting, overflowing, flooding. her library books are a week overdue. someone has to take out the trash. her prom dress has slipped off the hanger in the closet. the snow falls more than once. she's never seen a sunrise properly.

it's exhausting, the push and pull, the give. but what else could it possibly be? what else would you want it to be? nothing will replace the humanity of aching, hurting, hugging, sleeping, and waking up, grateful to do it all again.

Before We Walked
by Newt Randall

before we walked we ran
over hills and through forests
too quickly to think and too young to stop
because stopping made us weak
and stopping made us think
and we were too young to be this old
so we ran

before we limped we walked
wading through rivers and walking empty streets
and our thoughts tried to catch up
but we couldn't let them
and we chattered while we walked
we carried each other's hearts in our hands
they were delicate

before we crawled we limped
past caverns and abandoned towns
and we wonder how the world got to be this way
but only in the moments we couldn't shut out
and no one could talk anymore
there was no more room for noise
the world was too small

before we died we crawled
into the dark and under the stars
and one by one we stopped
something inside broke
and before we died we thought

why the world would let this happen
we were just kids

Today, Tomorrow, the Day After That
by Daisy Rubinstein

sometimes everything feels
terribly

wrong, but how can it feel wrong at the same time as it feels like I've lived this exact day already, like I always know what's going to happen next? It feels foreign and familiar at the same time.

try

as I might nothing feels real. I know it's a new day but I'm sure that

tomorrow

I'll have barely any memories of today. I can never hold onto them for long. They wash away like footprints on the sand of a beach, one moment they're

there

and then, when the wave recedes, they're gone. I used to hope I'd awaken to find this was all a dream, but I've given up on that, and most other things too.

today

has been indistinguishable in every way to all the days before it, and I know all the days after it will be the same. The nothingness makes me feel like an empty notebook.

Discarded, forgotten, unimportant.

time

feels like it's slipping through my fingers, like sand slipping through an hourglass.

There's nothing I can do to stop it.

the

day all feels wasted somehow, as do most days. It has ended, before it even began. A

tiny

grain of sand, identical in every way to all other grains of sand, completely irrelevant.

No one would notice if it simply ceased to exist. If my memories of yesterday disappeared I would not notice, and if I did, I wouldn't care. I

tell

myself there's nothing I could've done to make the day feel any different, and I hope that one day soon I'll finally start to feel alive. Like I'm

truly

living, not just drifting aimlessly from one sand dune to the next, hoping to see an oasis.

The Forest Was Alive
by Sarah Ryan

The forest was alive. It normally sat stagnant, collecting birds and butterflies, but tonight it collected people, and it was alive. Velvet couches, bright in colour, framed an aisle lined with a rich coloured mismatch of rugs on either side, all leading to an arch of branches wrapped daintily in lights that seemed almost like fireflies floating in place. As the people collected, the sun dipped deeper and deeper into the horizon, and the forest was alive.

A groom made his way down, standing as a guest of the leaves and tree trunks. He looked as though he had been waiting for the moment he was in his whole life. Perhaps he had. The forest trapped the words spoken to him and stored them in their leaves, taking sentences apart letter by letter to savour the taste.

A bride had been prepared. There was no one else the groom would want, and no one else the bride would accept. Her hair was loose, and her dress was white and it appeared to move at her will. The flowers in her hand were the same pink as her cheeks and ears. The bride turned to her bridesmaids and spoke. The forest listened.

Dragonflies zipped from shoulder to shoulder; her lips pinched together and her eyes filled with tears. One teary eyed bridesmaid gently took her hand. Another bridesmaid began to cry. The bride let out another choked sob and wrapped her arms around the second bridesmaid's shoulders. They both tried desperately not to let their tears drop, even though the forest greedily drank everything that fell.

Not more than a minute later, the soft humming of a lone violin began to play, and the bride turned towards the aisle she was destined to walk down. She took a deep breath, and the trees absorbed every emotion that came with it. The swallows sang, the people stood, a tulip grew into full bloom, the groom looked up to the canopied sky.

The bride and groom were married, the Forest was alive.

Untitled
by Skully Sullivan

Object:

I passed the sword between my hands, its shiny metal reflecting my face perfectly. I could see every blemish, every pore.

The handle of the sword was perfectly carved, fitting in my hand like it was made for me. When my father passed it down he told me to only use it when I knew I had no choice. His voice still rang in my head every time I held this sword, it was like having a conversation with him all over again.

I wondered if now was truly the time.

“Elijah, they're coming.” Aileah yelled to me.

I took a deep breath, looking down at the sword once more. It was roughly the size of my forearm, nothing special. Fear radiated through my body. This wasn't a fight I thought I could win. I looked back at Aileah once more, memorising every inch of her face. No matter what I had to protect her, I knew she would die for me.

I ran into the fight, swinging my sword. The second it sliced the air, it was as if the earth had an open wound. Large black goo started dripping out of thin air, and quickly the wound grew larger. Dragons, giant, dark, mean looking dragons started pouring out of the portal the sword had created. I looked on in awe. Aileah didn't move.

If I had any idea this was coming I wouldn't have hesitated so much.

You should have mentioned the dragons, dad.

Place.

“Wysaiya.” Aileah pointed to a door, seemingly in the middle of nowhere.

“You're joking.” I replied. It was a small wooden door, the handle was rusted and almost falling off.

“I never joke.”

“This is the magical door to save us?” I pointed in exasperation.

“Yes.” She replied. I looked down at Gilbert who shook his tiny head in confusion. Sometimes I wondered if he could speak english, though I knew dragons couldn't. I was glad he was here, though, because this was going to be scary.

“This is a joke.” I said, pulling the door open and walking through it.

“See? Nothing. I thought this was a portal.” I turned around to look at Aileah who hadn't yet gone through the door.

“Oh my god.” She was right.

The sky was a dark shade of purple and black dragons flew through out the sky. It was like our world, only much, much more terrifying. There were mountain so huge I couldn't see the top, and they were everywhere. The ground was covered in grass and a substance like snow, but not so cold. The trees looked like they were on steroids, three times as thick and four times as high. I got this looming feeling like I was in constant danger, like the world was going to consume me at any minute, like it was sucking the soul right out of me.

And those dragons man, they sure are terrifying creatures. Long and tall and down right God like.

"Why is it always night?" I asked.

"Dragons hate sun."

"Gilbert loves sun." I said, pointing to the tiny green dragon at my side.

"Gilbert is not a dragon. He's a fyrebird."

"Whatever he is, he loves sun."

"Well if that's the case, he'll hate it here. The sun never rises, not unless you kill the moon."

"Excuse me, what?" I asked in shock.

Finish This, and Compliment Yourself (For Me)

by Katelyn Topshee

I look in the mirror and I realise that I am alive. I stare at my reflection, and my pieces come together: this is my skin, those are my eyes, this is me.

Am I happy about it? Depends on the day. I like to say I am, usually I am. But if I'm being realistic my perception of myself is a touchy subject. As it is for everyone; we're taught to be harshest with ourselves.

I found some old photos, and I realised how much I didn't care as a child. I was smiling so wide, blissfully ignorant of my own appearance. I didn't care how I looked, I just posed for the picture; mom said "smile!", so I did.

The women in my family have an interesting relationship with their own appearance, as do so many other women around the world. My mother, my grandmother, my aunt, whomever would never criticise my looks. In fact, I'm sure they all truly believe each woman in our family is beautiful. But they've never been able to say the same for themselves.

And as much as they told me my whole life that I'm gorgeous, it was hard to believe. I watched as the most beautiful women in the world meticulously picked apart every bit of themselves until it was no more. And if their beauty isn't there, who's to say mine is? If Aphrodite is insecure, what does that say about you?

So I grew to hate my reflection, as so many have before. Started wearing makeup, comparing myself to everyone I met. I'd cover myself just to spite my own body, my smile darkening and disappearing from every photo. Not because I was told to, but because I thought it was necessary.

But when I found those old photos, I found the more recent ones too, and I criticised them just the same as I would have when they were taken. But with that

criticism came a wave of guilt. *What right do you have to pick her apart? She's just thirteen. She's just a child.*

So I stopped hating my old self, at least the photos anyway. And with that, I started to hate my present less too. Started dressing how I liked, regardless of the attention it drew. Complimenting myself, and others along the way. Even compared myself to people less, if you can believe such a thing.

I'm not going to pretend it was easy. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done. There were nights where photos felt like wounds, and my reflection felt like a mockery of how far I'd come. But slowly, very slowly, I felt the harshness begin to fade. My appearance became less of a burden, and more of a fascination.

I still feel insecure occasionally, I'm not above humanity. But it's manageable, and it's not my default. Allow me to put it this way: I am so much more than how I look. Everyone is. Your appearance is by far the least interesting thing about you, and the same goes for me. Why judge yourself on a standard you set for no one else?

I will never think I'm perfect every hour of every day, but I'll smile more for photos now.

The Soundtrack of your Life *by Ella Wade*

You were raised on the music of the forest. Chirping birds and rustling leaves and snapped sticks were the soundtrack to every wild memory. Mosquitos were your tormentors in the summer, cold was the silent killer in the winter, spring and autumn brought mud. Whether it was frostbitten toes or bug spray hair, you didn't care. You and your friends still went in to see who could build the best fort, or climb the tallest tree. The forest was a kingdom of tall green canopies, free from boring adults with rules and responsibilities, home to imaginary games, bruised knees, laughs, and lessons learned in tears.

As you got older, the play crescendoed into different competitions. You and your friends wanted to see who could bike the fastest to the ice cream place, or drink the most beer without throwing up. Even when the music of the forest was exchanged for iphones and headphones, you'd still go in every now and again to walk your dog, and take a deep breath of fresh, clear, air.

Makes you wonder, where did the time go? One day you were searching for worms in the soil, and now look at you... decaying. Even after the job, the kids, and the shiny new soundtrack of the city, the forest stood, waiting for you. The soft music continued on, quieter every year. While you were caught up in the deafening pitch of

old brakes and sirens and making money between Friday night parties, the trees seemed to shrink. The animals that once roamed freely beneath the shade fled to somewhere that could not be found.

The new world created by people like you caused the forest to die out, slowly, until all that was left was the quiet whisper of decomposition and forgotten memories. Around the same time you were contemplating coming home to retire, some rich developer bought the forest and bulldozed it to build a golf course. The soundtrack of the city is rising to a deafening pitch, spreading over the earth like the tumour invading your chest, and you know soon, all that's left will be silence.

Even You
Lee Winchester

It was dark and rainy outside. The heater in my house was broken which had me sitting on my bedroom floor, huddled in on myself for warmth. I needed a distraction so I called you. I'd been listening to whatever you wanted to tell me about, but I didn't say much in return. My day was nothing special, so there was nothing to talk about. It was too mundane, too normal, too real. I held my head in my hands and tried to stop myself from crying, why did I need to stop myself from crying? I had no reason to feel so upset over nothing, though maybe that was the problem. Silence fell over the room, leaving only the dull buzz of mechanisms in my phone. You stood outside my window, watching me.

Your voice came, hesitant and caring, through the speaker when you asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. Everything's wrong. I don't know," I said.

"Everything? Even me?" you asked. I had to pause. Rain fell down harder outside and drummed against my window pane.

"Yes, even you. Now, come inside and sit with me. It's pouring, you must be soaked." You climbed through my window one foot at a time and walked towards me. "Please, close the window. It'll be far too cold if you leave it open."

"What's the point?" You asked. "It's nearly as cold out there as in here and the floor is already wet since I've not dried off yet." Crackling behind your words made it hard to hear your tone of voice. The pools of water grew with rain pushing its way into my room. You grabbed the towel I left on my bed. "Oh, it's damp," you said, beginning to dry yourself.

"It is," I agreed. The breeze pushed its way into my room and I huddled a little tighter. "I had to use it since I went to school today."

"That's good."

"It was wet," I said. "I mean, of course it was. How long has it been raining?"

"A long time," you said, bringing the towel to your face. "I think it's been three days."

"Please don't rub the towel too hard, you know it sounds awful." You nodded, patting it against your face a bit before you made your way across the room. Sitting next to me on the floor, you hardly dripped any water. "Has it really been raining for that long?"

"Yes," you said.

"I hope it stops soon. It's been so cold lately, too." I pulled at a loose thread in my pants. You took my hand away and looped your fingers with it. We sat in the comfortable hum of devices plugged into the wall. You leaned your head onto my shoulder and I shivered.

"I don't want to pry, but I'm curious." You rubbed your thumb against the back of my hand, and only then did I notice how shallow your breathing was. "You said I was wrong."

"I did."

"Did you really mean it?"

"Yes. I still do."

"You do." You turned your head to nuzzle into my shoulder. A scratching noise clawed through my speaker. "Why?"

"You can't ask questions like that and expect me to have the answers," I said, reaching up with my free hand to hold you closer. "These things simply are. For as much as you love something you must let it go."

"Will you let me go?"

"Yes," I said, "but I will call you again tomorrow."

"Tomorrow may never come," you said. I shook my head. Your hand gripped mine a little tighter and I squeezed yours in return.

"You have to go."

"I know," you said. I waited for any sign that you'd show me you're ready, but you stayed holding onto me all the same. Fingers shaking and stiff, I picked up my phone and pressed the end call button. Looking up, the window was still open and water seeped into the creaky floorboards. I was alone.

It is a Curious Thing, to be Loved by Eros

by Sharon Xu

Some days, I am a hollowed-out piece of wood— a marionette with its strings wrung high, dancing at the whim of my puppeteer. There is a sense of tranquillity that cannot be replaced, as I go through the everyday motions. I laugh and smile and skip; I pirouette through conversations and sing until I can no longer breathe. I write and write about love, but words cannot replicate a feeling. I have never experienced it, so I wait patiently for mine to come.

I can only speculate that when it happens, your mind is filled with ecstasy. There are wings that unfurl from your back, and you become an earth-bound angel. Your eyes fill with tears that roll slowly down your cheeks, blurring the realities between joy and grief.

Perhaps that is not love, but suffering. I imagine love to be an orchid flourishing through the cracks of a rusting train track—its petals scalding in the heat and wilting with the frost. He hands me a singular blossom, and we walk together through the narrow alleyways in comfortable silence. I imagine that it is unconditional and pure. Something that is both simple and layered with comfort.

I have been told that love hurts, but if it brings so much pain, why do so many willingly hurl into its depths—drowning and drowning again? Your lungs fill and expand with murky seawater. It implodes your body and engulfs your brain. Your throat is dry and saturated with salt—you are choking on coal and soot. Their heart harmonises with yours as though there is a metronome wedged within your souls, and it ticks away until you can no longer differentiate between yours and his.

They say that love is blind. They say that you have a better chance of gouging out your eyes and feeding them to the crows than to see clearly. They say he'll rip your heart to shreds and strike a branding iron to your chest. Your flesh will char and melt, but your mind will continue to be muddled with nectar and roses.

If love is so cruel, then I must say I prefer death.

“I think I'm quite ready for another adventure.” – Bilbo Baggins