
EXIST
ERS
OTHER
WISE

EXIST OTHERWISE

A Journal of Cancelled Confessions

Issue #1

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self-portrait by Claude Cahun

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What Face Will You Wear?

Madlynn Haber

Which face will you wear, today
and what will be exposed?
The present moment is heavy
with associations,
laced with memories,
laden with perceptions.
Colors brighten the view.
Music keeps the heart beating
to its own rhythm.
I drive through my life
like a tourist in a foreign country.

Deadname

Sam Corradetti

Stomp pink silk cursive into the dirt with your steel-toe boots and scrawl your new name in all-caps black Sharpie over the left pocket of your Carhartt jacket.

Two grandparents gave me a three-part name that four languages can pronounce in five syllables or less. Fancy and femme like a senior prom dress; not my style at all, but damn, I wear it well.

The zipper broke and the bodice slipped down my chest. It scrabbled for purchase against my breasts, but I had already pried them loose and they all fell together, tangles of tulle and blood and sinew crisscrossing the scratches in the gym floor varnish.

I picked it up, shook the debris off, took it to the dry cleaner and brought it home wrapped in snagged plastic. It lies in my mother's hope chest, heart still beating, breathing sweet dreams of cedar until clever fingers unfold it for repair.

Experiments

Kendra Mills

What cannot make up a body? It was
sophomore year and we were sculpting a replica of the
Acropolis for our history class.
My friend took me into her family's garage
to show me her father's muscle cars. Legally,
she was no longer allowed to see him,
and she had been counseled
against discussing
what happened.

When she came to my house,
we had tacos
from the gas station counter,
between the check cashing joint and the event hall
where our neighbors threw parties
and played Bollywood music until sunrise.
In college, another friend told me
that the entire city of Reno is check cashing counters,
churches, abortion clinics, and bars. Rinse and repeat
on each subsequent block. She
spent a summer there, with a man who cut her open
and sent her to the mental hospital. The best one, where
the celebrities go.

In Harlem, I let a man order for me
at the Taco Bell counter.
This did not seem like a bad call,
though he would rape a girl in our program
and flee the state on a hastily purchased red eye flight.
When I took her to the hospital,
we were sent to the children's ward
and asked a lot of questions about AIDS.
I would not do particularly well that semester,

but I ate overpriced sandwiches from Zabar's
and went to conferences at the United Nations,
getting lost and wishing I was bilingual.

We got an A on the Acropolis project—
it was high school,
so I spent two weeks writing papers
and thinking of the self in future tense,
though we would be shown up
by the two most compelling kids
in our grade.
One sculpted a bust of a Persian king
genuinely more arresting than the Mona Lisa,
Her project partner didn't even read
the Wikipedia page on their subject
and instead made up the term "paranoid charismatic" on the spot,
claiming that both Hitler
and Bill Clinton had been retroactively diagnosed with
the same affliction. The teacher,
who spent every free period painting
in his poorly lit classroom
and probably trying not to kill himself,
took this in stride. Our first ever assignment in his class
was to present a solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict,
so he obviously had a penchant for agony
and a well developed
sense of humor.

untitled

Ivan de Monbrison

There is nothing to give, and there is nothing to take. There is desire and then regret. Desire again and again regret. Always it starts again. We want, we want something, and then we don't want it anymore. You turn right, you turn left, you walk back on your steps, you turn left, and you turn right again. But it was useless. We only walked in the city. We went in circles. We didn't go anywhere. There is the desire, and there is the regret. There is the reflection that falls from the mirror without breaking. There is the exile, inside oneself. There is the absence of the one who died. There is the madness of the one who is in prison. There is the illness of the one who is going to die. I am in pain, I am in pain, and I am going to die... Help me! Help me as you can! I am in pain and I am going to die. There is the desire, there is the regret. There is pain, and there is madness. And there is madness. And there is madness. And there is madness... Madness in its cage, locked up like an animal. Madness speaks to itself. Madness talks to itself. Madness ate its own arm. Madness eats its own head. In the end, there is only a skull, and bones in the cage.

untitled

Ivan de Monbrison

This morning the world is turned upside down. You should not have been born. As usual, the turtle-doves have come to eat on the balcony, you have put on the traditional Egyptian dress that your mother gave you at least twenty years ago. On the walls you have hung a damaged African cloth. There is a lamp, which belonged to your grandmother, there is also a drawing of the painter Mark Tobey, which also belonged to her, and then a bed made of African wood. There is an old Arabic calligraphy, « Thuluth » style, another very old Arabic calligraphy, « Kufi » style. There are two samurais dancing for the moon, this is a Japanese Indian ink from the Edo period. That's what's left of your life, it's a lot and it's a little at the same time. There is also this little lucky pig in the shape of a bell, that your brother brought back from Japan about ten years ago. Tomorrow you'll take the train to see your best friend die. Afterwards, you know, it will be another life, for you, everything will be different, the rain as well as the thought, the trees as well as the clouds, the living as well as the dead, the dreams as well as the nightmares, the eyes as well as the hands. If you come back here, and you don't know when, you don't know why, life will have no meaning. It has however, in general, only the meaning that one can get from suffering, and so I imagine, those that do never suffer, are neither not alive.

Revelation

Helena Fagan

Scene: Autumn 1963. HELENA, age 12, dressed in school clothes, peels carrots at the kitchen sink. MOM, 34, stands next to HELENA washing lettuce. Light pools around them, reflecting the scene in the dark window behind the sink.

HELENA

I read a book that I can't stop thinking about. It's giving me nightmares.

MOM

What book is that?

HELENA

It's called Eva by someone named Meyer Levin.

MOM

What's it about? Why is it scaring you?

HELENA

It takes place during World War II. A girl/woman, I can't remember how old she is, tries to hide that she's Jewish but she is found out and ends up in Auschwitz. She survives, though.

MOM

Where did you get the book?

HELENA

I found it in Dad's den.

MOM

Continues to wash lettuce, not looking at HELENA.

If you want to know about the concentration camps, you can ask me.

HELENA

Making an exaggerated eyeroll.

Why would I ask you?

MOM

Turning to face HELENA, looking directly into her eyes.

Because I was there. I was in Auschwitz.

HELENA

Continues peeling carrots, turning her gaze to the sink and the carrot peels that continue to pile up. The room remains quiet except for the voices of young girls fighting elsewhere in the house.

Collapsing Certainty

The ground shifted under my feet that evening and never returned to the pre-knowing state of solidity. Cracks and crevasses stretched dangerously through the remainder of my adolescence and far into adulthood. As I continued to peel carrots, stunned and wordless, my body knew that I had walked into a deep, deep truth. My life, my vision of my mother would never be the same. My breath would never come as easily. My heart might never crawl back out of my throat.

Placing my mother in the camps with Eva, in those lice-infested barracks, sleeping on wooden planks with dozens of other emaciated women, made my brain hurt. How could this be? She stood next to me, washing lettuce. My childhood slipped down the drain into the garbage disposal with the carrot peels.

I don't remember the days, weeks, months that followed her revelation. I could create memories, convince myself that I thought about it each night in bed, that I asked my mother hundreds of questions, that I wrestled with the knowledge until I could accept it. But truthfully, I don't remember. What I remember is that moment: the shock, the not wanting to believe, and those bright orange curls falling into the sink.

So began my initiation into becoming the keeper of my mother's trauma. Along with the shock came the understanding that this was a secret of sorts, something never talked about in front of other people. During the sixties, the events of the Holocaust (a term not yet commonly used) still wore a shroud of shame and secrecy. My mother had told nobody her complete story, not even my father. "Let's not talk about it," said her uncle who brought her to America from a displaced persons camp in Sweden. She felt like a rape victim might feel, dirty and unreasonably at fault for her suffering. Being a survivor held no honor, no allure. That evening I had no idea what lay ahead.

One of Me is Not Like the Others

Cleomé Morra



Sor Juana Eats Apples in Front of Men, And Laughs

Jonathan Pessant

Have you ever seen a bee
burst with orchard lust?
It's funny how they wobble,
ass backwards away
from their sex food.

Reminds me of 40 somethings
fucking 20 somethings,
each encounter
like the swell before
waves break.

Her eyelids make me homesick
every time she laughs
at her own inside joke—

Gorgias' defense of Helen.
Fucking Sophists!
Erotic and painful
like a lonely library
where rough vellum
waits to be touched again.

Lust. Gimme a break!
She insists we go
see The Graduate.
Her terse,
rhetorically feminine
lips spread

every time Anne Bancroft
lashes out in horny anguish.
She makes another joke,

this one smolders
a crisp hole in the demiurge.

In the dark she uses
too much tongue; it's mean
and tightly sprung like
a bishop reading criticism.

I try to keep up with her
but there's no room
for 4,000 books
in my mouth.

When I say “I long to be Damaged” I mean, way out of the Ordinary

Nnadi Samuel

I command this body to lose luster,
for me to be tainted with wrath.
punishment that I am— dismantling empathy in vows, to harbor a lesser pain.
answerable to only the pleasure of my aching.

I am boundless with dark grief.
you’d know how my woe torches,
how my sorrow laps flame:

a reddish resistance towards whatever twirls supplication into sore throat,
dragging my mutant breath, till my ducts are slacked.

I bear my deadliest darkness like a reliquary.
a bright agony knives my collarbone.

in your spare time, say a prayer for this ruin,
this relic, this rare accident of mud & breath,
knocked down by the craze of living.

I too own my wound in the elegance of a long stain.
here, the stretchmark. here, the hurt shaped into a ligature—
the way ache cling onto the body, the body onto ache.

I tarnish my skin to mold blisters.
if this cost me damage, I consent to the torment that is my upbringing.

I’ve guarded this suffering my whole life.
this body shouldn’t be a yardstick for misfortune.

won’t you pardon me, if I say
I lack the fire to lamp my way through the next minute?

Yet you call all my Poems by the name Grief

Nnadi Samuel

for Deborah & [ ]

when boys who attempted at joy, turned dust on earth's lips.
the rumbling as we know here isn't starvation.
just the belly of a toddler thundering in quiet war.

I'm well surnamed in this version of poem.
in the next, I do not wish to lose a strand of alphabet.
but, isn't life too— a proposal for how much we let go?

when you snatch my pronouns, & palm aggressive on neon lamp
I swear I'd take the heat without a scratch— nameless in blood,
knowing the risk as how we identify.

knowing there are no dirge left for flattened bodies & lavender.
no ritual for lost consonants.

this parcelled grief, gifted to me by a sorry shape lying-in-state:
plank postured. decent in their dying.

I turn eight the way sorrow turns a corpse,
claiming: bodies are fodder for guns & machetes.
nowhere here points to a cop. except, whatever
triggers my lips holds an endless petition. a morgue of sighs.

a Shiite questions me about the afterlife.
except that I do not tone down my religion.
a child, discoloring right in the arms of his mother.
& by jove— I meet her loss halfway.

say, faith is quantified by what you hold onto,
while you let a next-of-kin languish in his slobber.

age filters through me: bright havoc.
a mourning, a bloodied chorus.
grief playlist, unspooling a dead rhythm.
a loin breathless with sound. a body, running out of grace.

an empty stare besieges a heap of flesh,
& grief is not the harbinger of this still life ruin.
just a healthy body tarnished into a last breath.

sometimes, loss festers: spilling like native bile along the heart.
like the carcass of a child, stone dead—
this grief that aggrieves.

Mirror

Jennifer Elise Wang

Mirror, mirror before my eyes,
What are all the lies
I have told myself?

I see you.
You see not me,
But the real you
That you refuse to recognize.
My faults are yours;
My sins are yours,
But you're never punished.
You hate me
Though you really
Despise yourself.
Still you'd rather frame me
Than fix yourself.
Then you try to shatter me
When the sight isn't to your liking,
But my pieces continue to silently reflect
My world of realism among the fakes
Because unlike you,
I never lie.

Convincing myself of epigenetics

Kaydance Rice

after "After" by Emily Pittinos

My mother
is not my mother

because she is not

her own. She belongs
to thrown pots

and the maggots crawling

down my spine, to chewed
nails and unwashed hair. Everything

she touches rots and blossoms

with larvae and caterpillars.
She is of the night

and juxtaposing

the places our minds wander
with the riptide. I am combining

what lasts of the furniture

with the puddles of water
remaining from wherever

we last left

things and waiting.
Watching for the sky

to shift as I realize

none of us were
exactly human.

i jumped off a pier into lake superior

Kaydance Rice

it was cold and my eyeliner ran into
ink stains at the top of the water. the trees

faded and my body crowned itself in algae.
my heels ached as i sank and the torn apart

rocks became my bones. bubbling behind
my half broken, half eaten pupil. there was

something that i forgot to tell you and i think
it's important enough to be in the cabinet. the adrenaline

disappears and all that's left is desperate ice and snow
and carbon monoxide. i doubt we'll stay here long

enough to decompose. pure lake water
swells my lungs followed by the sand. i ran

before i jumped and before i ran i saw god
tear open your skull. the last time i saw you

you were floating on the ice-soaked
sun. it was between what you called me

and the flies. i wish i could tell you what happens
when i find my head above water but we all know

the only thing i will be met with is ice. there's something
poetic in the leaving behind of the grass

but we sit here, abandoned by the rip tide, waiting
for the sun to come up and find myself renewed

Semi-Peeled Orange

Edward Lee



Contagion

Neethu Krishnan

Little details, the least distressing ones maybe, I could utter, would, if my soul quit crumbling, gathering like icicles at the soft of my throat.

Circumstantial or by design, pulsing violent, tight-noosing my heart, this empathy, this cursed mirror, quivering even for strangers with voices sharpened into daggers, the blood misted from their words poisonous aerosol, suspended indefinite.

Till silence, merciful, prickles skin, my heart hibernates, a rusty prune not daring to rouse into ballooned fullness, ever-primed for a hasty, tighter shrivel into a flesh mote for when to my home the contagion sails, infects effortless the susceptible, the already compromised.

My essence, burning, freezing, by then, hunts frenziedly for an exit, scratches the larynx, stoppers my throat. At last, when my mouth is pried open by claws of soundless sobs, out trickle from between my lips nothing but wreaths of ink-black smoke.

In This Poem, Everything Is Up In Flames

Amoye Favour

The early morning clouds witness as I orchestrate my body into a cottage of flames
for what is proof of a man's valor if he doesn't know the taste of fire. I sit in the

backyard ignoring the piercing wrath of the sun's shine as my lighter sharpens
the countenance of the cigar in my hand. It's only the third hour of the day but

it's already my fourth attempt at cleansing the bullet wound in my soul with smoke
And to every one of the previous three- now depicted as bare ashes lying haplessly

on the ashtray set before me, I had lent a part of me. Perhaps this gnarly cough I give
out after the second puff of this is a true depiction of me- Beautiful chaos. Flame balls

like bells from a desolate cathedral shoot out of my mouth and my skin struggles to house
it's fume, if this body was meant to contain all my desires, why then are my lungs the center

of a brewing war. Oh!, It's only flesh. A wilting flower. I hear the rooster's crow loud and clear
as dusk creeps up on me but probably it's only a whisper, probably it's just another one of my

many hallucinations. By this time, my eyes are all blurry but if the world around me would continue to be this fading dream, then I would have it no other way.

Let Me Die Writing

Ivy Raff

Let me die writing, Mother
When you come to take me home
May you find me flowing ink
May you find me impassioned,
with stained fingers and knit brow
Let me die writing.

Let me die in my natural state, Mother,
Writing,
Writing into vast gulfs
Let me drown in liquid pleasure
of line and word and delicious sentence
Let me spend my last moments
licking sticky poems from my fingertips
or smearing cake
battered memoir across a blank page
Let me die writing.

Let me die inside the pleasure of writing, Mother
Your Mother alone knows
why you brought me here, Mother,
surely not for any greatness but
to follow the unravellings of spools
of swift-colored yarn, soft, mine,
following it in faith and in abandon, Mother,
until the words - and Your Mother alone knows what else —
end.

Let me die here, Mother,
writing into the tangle of these things
I must unbury the words to match.

Fantasy No. 3,484

Wherein My Shrink Is My Mother and Jimmy Santiago Baca Is My Father

Ivy Raff

They divorced long ago. Because they never
taught me self-amputation, I cannot deny
parts of them: Freddie wouldn't tolerate

Baca's womanizing for a second. But they'd co-parent
wonderfully. She'd see even during the custody negotiation
he would never shut me down. He'd answer

my questions about drugs and boys with great compassion
lighting the backs of his honeyed eyes. And he'd speak
truth about his panic attacks, alchemize his towering

gifts of language to make me less afraid of the times
he must pull off the freeway to shake the steering wheel
with both hands and scream and scream on

I-45's unforgiving shoulder. I would have
a father with a great glittering mental illness
at the sunken center of the house - nothing new there -

but we could touch it and speak it and trace
its roots with our fingers. And I'd live
on the Upper West Side and in Albuquerque, both.

I'd hold the Rio Grande and the Hudson Rivers
sloshing in my veins, both, except my mother
would gently tap my knee when it threatens to straighten,
to floor the gas just as the wheels tip of the edge of the cliff.

On Not Speaking My Own Native Language

Ivy Raff

I have questions,
questions in the only spoken language I speak,
and so the questions are themselves perversions,
distortions.

The questions are observers
By their limited and limiting nature
they cannot observe themselves.

First:
What does it mean to speak languages
separate from one's roots, and nothing else?
I know that answer, you see, but it lies in me
locked and silent, unable, unwilling to form itself,
rebelling, resisting, giving the shackles
something to scrape against.
That soulsilence has no desire to be heard,
cares not about the ears receiving the fall
of the proverbial tree in its forest – only about the ether
undulating around the spatial shift behind the crash.
Some answers deserve to rest wordless.

Second:
Since, in these languages, every word is the wrong one,
misshapen and misshaping
the language of Touch,
the language of Setting Out a Saucer of Milk for the Strays,
the language of Coming Home After Endless Turns on the Dance Floor
Then Deep Frying Whatever's in the Fridge
Before Making Love Long Into Sunrise, the language of What
They Call Passion and Care, where do these things happen?
Where do they happen?

Dys-ancestral languages translate against the will of direct experience
violate the sanctity of Sweeping the Floor in an Injured Friend's Home.
They lace What They Call Kindness with subconscious
constructs of giver to receiver. Their languages cage and are caged in clusters
of vectors. Their Word for Spiral succeeds "Downward:"
more imposed directionality still.

Sir, This is a Wendys

Matthew Bullen



Freshwater Anemone

Matthew Bullen



Postulation

Samuel Samba

To merit a crisis, we stomach a foreign object,
tide our tongue with grace.
my ribs, lodged into a vessel.
the slow river of my vomit, kayaking.

my tutor says: girls who house girls in their mouth permutates.
the skin— directly proportional to a constant miracle.

girlhood is maths worn sideways.
we're conjuring a heated assumption,
& I take the space between your legs for
an accurate premise.

here, I debunk my father in past tense,
unnaming the ashes.
I've lived his name to a grudge.

I intend pinning you down, purposeful as a bullet.
I intend a lettering:
our loins ruptured into ampersand— the way your head meets my thighs in reverse.

we put the warmth to use.
summer, leaking from our sunned flesh.
this season names you after a theorem alive, but for awhile.
we catch ourselves trailing its bullets to a logical surrender.

mid-solstice, I dug up our passports.
a sweatless migration unsettling the soil.

I Identify as a gash somewhere on the face siphoning your labia region,
to spill a poison that writes our loins in third person pronoun.

your lips on mine reminds me: each wound begins with an opening.
each crisis begins with a mouth.

in the dark, I offer myself as a vista for how women should be perceived.
the gap between a thigh & a thigh is an object going same way into each lively hole.
the ricochet, barking our worths.

your mouth meeting mine is how I learn to spark a flame.
I give off ashes as an aftertaste.
trail how sweat by way of heat landlocks your loin,
rioting to prove our bodies first principle.

Audrey Reyes

When I say love, I say *maybe*

& body & mind & smile.

I say *hands & laugh & rounded mouths.*

When I think *want*, I think

wrists & factual curves & omitted
corners.

I don't count the ways, but I sigh your name.
There is a bridge between us I want to cross.

A decathlon for the *blessed*—I'd do most anything
for a little more skin.

To land fist-first like a heroine in the pocket of your impressions.
To weave a veil from each seize that protrudes from lung & hands & bitten down lips.
To admire the tenacity of skin & break down the skeptic's touch.

It's your face & pleasure & divine. There is no formula
to love like they teach children in storybooks.

There isn't one
want or spell or
body to define
it.

Until it makes sense for us,

there are stone steps worth the trouble.

At the end of the bridge,
a pair of lips cushion a kiss you've bartered off Cupid's bow.

Then,
fingers splayed at the right angles to receive

a love that fits & fits & just fits

regardless,
despite,
in all ways.

Signed, Your PanBi Seagull
named after Engelbert Humperdinck's song, Lesbian Seagull

Litany of the Once-Perfect Child

Audrey Reyes

Sampung mga daliri, kamay at paa/ Dalawang

tenga, dalawang mata/ Ilong na maganda/ Maliliit

na ngipin, masarap kumain/ Dilang maliit

nagsasabi/ 'Wag kang magsinungaling.

Ten fingers and toes/ Two ears, two eyes/ A

beautiful nose/ Small teeth, for eating/ A

small tongue/ That doesn't lie.

How perfect we were/ at birth/ doted on/ Tabula rasa/ grazing on our soft newborn skulls/ *Madami akong pangarap para sa'yo*/ God forbid/ we learn to be/ own persons/ *Sayaw ka para sa mga bisita*/ Speak at length /on wrongs/ in this world, in our homes/ *Sumagot ka na ha*/ God forbid/ they raise a child with a sharp tongue/ and fists raised in defiance/ *Pamamahay ko 'to, sumunod ka* / God forbid some of these tongues/ wriggle out lies/ *Wala akong anak na sinungaling*/ to live in perceived harmony/*Ginawa ko 'un dahil mahal kita*/ God forbid these tongues/ touch/ all you deem unholy/ *Beybi pa rin kita*/ One that says fuck/ to fuck/ and fuck/ Oh, fuck/I'm not/ your angel/ child/ *Ganyan ba kita pinalaki?*

In the Blood

Valerie Hunter

Jenny grows up watching her mother
create magic out of fabric,
a quilt to commemorate every wedding and birth
in their extended family and beyond.
Her mother sews her quilt tops by machine,
a rainbow riot of perfect geometry,
but she quilts them by hand,
her enormous wooden quilting frame
a fixture in their living room.
Jenny watches TV while her mother quilts,
but during commercials she watches Mom,
the rhythmic in-and-out of her needle
creating impossibly tiny, even stitches.

Her mother has only one failing:
an inability not to stab herself
at least once during each quilt.
She finds thimbles cumbersome,
says she needs to feel what she's doing
in order to do it right. She always vows
to be more careful, but quilts are large,
and it's impossible to maintain vigilance
for the thousands of stitches it takes
to bind those layers together—
or so she always claims, sheepishly,
as she sucks the latest bloodied finger.

Jenny wants to be a quilter, too,
until she makes her first quilt, doll-sized,
which turns out crooked and raggedy and wrong.
Mom says she just needs practice,
but practice takes time,
and Jenny has better ways to spend hers.
Even her mother's quilts
have ceased to captivate her,
except for when they're finished
and Jenny can play her new favorite game:
find the bloodstain.

Sometimes it's a ghostly splotch,
faded by Mom's efforts with cold water
and peroxide but still visible;
other times just a tiny dot,
or occasionally a string of them,
a Morse code of dried brown.
Once Mom makes a whole quilt
in blacks and reds, a deliberate
attempt to thwart the game,
but Jenny spends two days searching
and discovers the smallest of dark spots
on one of the red squares.
She crows about it for weeks after,
and Mom admits defeat.

Years later, Jenny's mother
gifts her with a quilt for her wedding,
an array of vibrant rings on a white background,
and Jenny reflexively searches for the blood
even as she's saying thank you,
running her fingers over this
masterpiece of color. She doesn't mention
what she's doing, could surely be mistaken
for admiring the quilt's intricacies,
but of course Mom knows,
stops her with, "Don't go looking
for a stain. I had it professionally quilted,
some woman with a fancy machine.
You deserve perfection."

Jenny assures her that it's beautiful,
while secretly thinking
that she's been deemed unworthy,
given a lesser gift, one without
a few drops of her mother
stitched into it for posterity.

ANTHEM (Tertiary)

Kayla Martell Feldman

Conversation flows with the rapid ease of three people who have known each other for a very, very long time, and are used to interrupting each other's stories to add details or predict the ends of sentences.

DYLAN and KIT take deep breaths in unison.

Beat.

(singing)

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Transition. Time leaps. It sounds like the way a migraine feels. The kind of brief experience that makes us wish our teeth would fall out just to have something else to think about.

An official government announcement on the radio or television or live-streamed on the internet – the BRITISH LEADER is the voice of a woman from the North of England.

Chaos descends. Utter, world-ending, earth-shattering Chaos. We hear phone and internet notifications, phones ringing, snippets of distressed voicemails overlapping:

Etc. Added to the chaos is the sound of sirens, riots, and general destruction. It builds to a crescendo, then abruptly snaps out.

Beat.

(frantic)

(in shock)

(calm)

Beat.

Beat.

Pause. The sound of DYLAN pacing up and down – her footsteps on floorboards.

A door slams.

Another door shuts softly and the sound of a light clicking on. The gentle clatter of hangers.

A floorboard creaks.

(echoing)

A dripping sound.

The muffled sound of an attic hatch clicking shut. The creak of floorboards and shift of boxes.

The sound of a light clicking on.

A gentle tap on glass.

Beat.

Transition. Time shifts.

It is another day. The day before, or ten days later, or last year – nobody seems to know for sure. The sound of a record being removed from its sleeve and placed on a record player. Anyone Who Knows What Love is by Irma Thomas plays.

Beat. The clink of cutlery.

(mouth full)

(mouth full)

Beat.

(tense)

The music snaps down to a low level with a muffled quality.

(slightly muffled)

Beat.

(more muffled)

Beat.

(very muffled)

Beat.

(barely audible)

Beat. Then, the music snaps back to normal. When the song ends, the crackling sound of a record that has finished playing.

(crystal clear, LOUD)

Beat.

Beat.

Pause.

Transition. Time hurtles, jolts, and skips.

Something nasty descends. KIT and DYLAN are heard in one ear, and TEDDY is heard in the other. KIT and DYLAN's voices are soft, gentle, intimate. TEDDY's is confident, possibly even a little arrogant.

Transition. Time tilts. TEDDY's 'Hello?' echoes into the ether, distorting, as if it is being repeated underwater or turning into code.

As TEDDY's voice fades, there is a split-second of complete silence, and when the silence ends, everything is slightly more gooey than normal. The sound of a record being removed from its sleeve, being placed on a record player, and Lippy Kids by Elbow begins to play.

(incredulous)

The song ends and we hear the record crackle.

Beat.

These next lines come whispered, tender: pillow talk.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

A moment of silence.

The sound of a radio being tuned, and then finding a station.

Music happens. Guitar starts softly and a spoken rhythmic voice, M, comes in.

M hums underneath the guitar. One by one, the three characters' voices join in, in rhythm with each other but telling their own stories.

The music touches them as no-one else can. As nothing else can. It fills them. They find themselves, and each other, in it. The music gives them what they need, what we need, what we need them to need. They aren't on drugs, but we could believe that they are. It builds and builds and builds.

The music concludes.

Time collapses.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

DYLAN sighs. Breathes heavy down the line, and then, gently:

The sound of a zip being pulled.

The creak of floorboards, and the rustle of fabric.

The clink of hangers and of clothes being moved.

DYLAN's voice becomes breathier and closer to us.

KIT's breaths become a little shallow, nervous but in a good way.

We can hear KIT start to smile. Maybe he giggles.

TEDDY's voice now comes so close to us that we can feel their breath hot on our ear, even though we know that we can't.

Beat.

Beat.

TEDDY shivers.

Beat.

Beat.

It starts to rain – in the sudden, unrealistic kind of way a downpour appears in a movie. It starts to hail. It gets heavier, and heavier, and heavier, until it is completely all encompassing. There is music underscoring this – something military, erratic and aggressive – but ultimately this is over-powered by the storm. Within the lightning and thunder and rain and hail, we see the shadows of what might be ghosts, or what might be people. The storm is relentless. Just as it is reaching its peak, the ghosts (or people) disappear.

Inside the storm, KIT's and TEDDY's voices are glitching, connection coming in and out:

The sound of someone frantically pulling on clothes.

The sound of a window opening – it screeches.

The sound of a window shutting again.

Boots heavy on the floor. Running.

An attic hatch thudding shut. Heavy and muted.

Boots running downstairs. Keys jangling.

A door slamming. Loud.

The storm tires itself out, and then it stops. After a moment (or a year, or a century, or a split-second), the sound of an attic hatch thudding shut.

Silence.

Beat.

Beat.

The sound of the attic hatch thudding shut again.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

The sound of KIT switching positions. A soft, muted thud. KIT's voice is now muted and muffled:

Beat.

TEDDY thinks.

Quiet – the kind when you are not quite sure if someone has finished telling a story.
TEDDY finds a letter. We hear them open the envelope and unfold the paper. They read it aloud.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

In the distance, in one ear, and so faint we can barely hear it:

We hear DYLAN begin to tap out the beat of S.O.S. in Morse code repeatedly underneath the following:

Beat.

Beat.

The sound of shuffling, the creak of hinges, and a muffled thump. Socks on carpet.

The S.O.S. stops. A second of complete silence, and then, a phone ringing. It goes unanswered, and we hear the sound of an app notification.

Pause. Then, TEDDY begins to sing acapella:

Tentatively, KIT joins in:

Then, we hear DYLAN in the distance singing along:

We begin to hear the other people in the ether – snippets and whispers and shouts and conversations overlapping, comingling, responding to one another, joining in the song. We hear words of other survivors across the planet, trying desperately to reach out, to connect, to find something or someone to cling to.

The song ends as they find each other.

(spoken)

End of play.

Life is Real Then Only When I Am

Cleomé Morra



the literary equivalent to *ikebana*

Abbie Doll

picking thoughts like flowers
prepping my bouquet
wondering is this all
—a poem really is?

composting buckets of trauma
feeding the piggish worms
trying to make better dirt
& make myself fertile

can't manage fickle orchids
(though I'd love to)
dandelions are more my speed
not a lot grows here

even less, blooms.
I'd hire a florist,
but I bet they'd quit
& hunt simpler work

who wouldn't?

if eyes are our spirit's windowpane

Abbie Doll

what is writing?
so exposing
so revealing & confessional
an endless endeavor
to translate the mind
thrusting it on paper
like a naked awakening
in a crowded conference
where you are the gallery's new display
each scratch & scar
every single imperfection
observable by all
surrounding eyes

well,
here I am
so look
(at me)

I can't deny my mind
these toiling brain cells
produced these words
factory-assembled
each blank document
a blanket of crisp snow
a mirror for my nudity
my vulnerabilities
an opportunity
a chance to explore
each other
& all our
tender times

Contributers



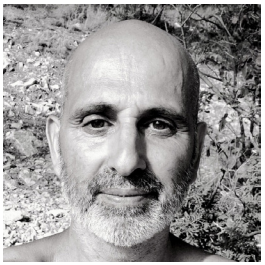
Madlynn Haber (she/her) lives with her dog, Ozzie, in a cohousing community in Northampton, Massachusetts. Her work has been published in the anthology Adult Children (Wishing Up Press, 2021), Random Sample, Buddhist Poetry Review, K'in Literary Journal, Spirit Fire Review, Muddy River Poetry Review, Poetica Magazine and other journals. Online at www.madlynnwrites.com



Sam Corradetti (they/them) is a queer writer in southern New Jersey. Their work has been featured in vulnerary magazine, Scribes Valley, Anansi Archive, and others. They are currently pursuing an MFA at Temple University in Philadelphia where they are an editorial assistant for Tinge Magazine.



Kendra Mills (she/her) lives in Washington DC and Massachusetts. She is a recipient of the Elisa Brickner Poetry Prize and her work can also be found in The Rialto, Moria Literary Magazine, and Mud Season Review.



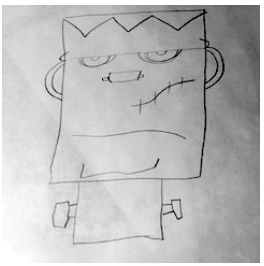
Ivan de Monbrison (me/I/mine) is a weirdo of 53, from France. He writes like a robot in order to survive. Life is empty, soon we'll all be bones after fucking up nature really well. Human beings are but stupid and ugly apes, and it's an. insult to the other apes species.



Helena Fagan (she/her) lives in Juneau, Alaska where she writes on her husband's commercial fishing boat, on beaches, and in coffee shops. Her mother's history as a Holocaust survivor, the grandeur of Alaska, and her long career as an educator influence her writing of memoir, young adult novels, and poetry. Her poetry and nonfiction have been published in Tidal Echoes, Cirque, Alaska Women Speak, Ground, and North Coast Squid.



Cleomé Morra (they/them) is a pseudonym for a photographer who wishes to remain anonymous. They've been making photographs since 1980.



Jonathan Pessant is a Maine poet, and a graduate from the Stonecoast MFA program. He is an Army veteran, and has also served in the Peace Corps and Americorps. His works appear, or are forthcoming, in Pedestal Magazine, Moonstone Arts Center, Warm Milk Publishing, Collateral Magazine, and others.



Nnadi Samuel (he/him/his) holds a B.A in English & literature from the University of Benin. Author of Nature knows a little about Slave Trade (Sundress Publication, 2022). His works have been previously published/forthcoming in Suburban Review, Seventh Wave Magazine, NativeSkin lit Magazine, North Dakota Quarterly, Quarterly West, Common Wealth Writers & elsewhere. Winner of the Canadian Open Drawer contest 2020, & the International Human Right Arts Festival Award(IHRAF) New York 2021. He got an honorable mention for the 2022 Stephen A. DiBiase Poetry Contest.



Jennifer Elise Wang (she/they) is a non-binary femme in STEM from Dallas, Texas. When she's not doing neuroscience research, she enjoys writing, dancing, and learning how to skateboard and snowboard. She has been published in New Verse News, FERAL, and Southern Arizona Press. She can be found at www.facebook.com/jeniversewritings and @ JeniverseAbr on Twitter.



Kaydance Rice (she/her) is a writer from Grand Rapids, Michigan and currently attending Interlochen Arts Academy. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in The Ice Lolly Review, voicemail poems, Cargoes, and Élan Magazine. Kaydance is also a prose editor for Surging Tide Magazine and staff contributor for The Lunar Journal. In her free time, Kaydance enjoys playing the viola, rambling about existentialism, and spending time with her plants.



Edward Lee (he/him) is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including The Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen and Smiths Knoll. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Orson Carroll, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His blog/website can be found at edwardmlee.wordpress.com



Neethu Krishnan (she/her) is a writer from Mumbai, India. She holds postgraduate degrees in English and Microbiology and writes between genres at the moment. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Spectacle, Bacopa Literary Review, Dark Cheer: Cryptids Emerging (Volume Silver), Spoonie Journal, Seaside Gothic and elsewhere. Her creative nonfiction piece "Girl, Sunsplit" also recently won the Creative Nonfiction Award in Bacopa Literary Review's 2022 contest.



Amoye Favour (he/him) draws from vivid Imageries, life experiences, and experiences in his various relationships over the years when writing his pieces. Popularly known with the pen name "The Poetic Newton", his works have been published and is forthcoming on issues of "The Literatus", " Maintenant", "Written Tales", " Masticadores", "Pickles Magazine" and many other publications all over the world . More of his works can be found on his Instagram handle @thepoeticnewton and whenever he is on the blue app,he tweets with the handle @amoyef



Ivy Raff's (she/they) poetry appears in The American Journal of Poetry, Nimrod International Journal, and West Trade Review, among several others. A current nominee for the Best of the Net Anthology, she is a 2023 Alaska State Parks artist in residence, a finalist in the 2021 sweettooth//HONEY Micropoetry Contest. Her work has received scholarship support from the Colgate Writers' Conference. She's studied Zen Buddhist approaches to writing under Natalie Goldberg and Subhana Barzaghi, and was selected as the mentee of Kwame Dawes at Atlantic Center for the Arts. Read more at ivyraff.com.



Matthew Bullen (he/him) holds an MA in creative writing from Lancaster University (England) and is the founder and head editor of Red Ogre Review, an online journal of contemporary poetry and visual art. Matt has poetry published or forthcoming with Arsenic Lobster, glassworks, Harpy Hybrid Review, Rejection Letters, The Daily Drunk (SMOL Fair Zine), tiny frights, and Underwood, creative nonfiction with National Geographic and the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, and art photography with Punk Monk Magazine and Setu Magazine. He lives in Santa Monica, California.



Samuel Samba (he/him/his) is an black indigenous writer of poetry & other works of art. He won the Angela C Mankiewicz Poetry Contest 2022, and was an honorable mention in the recent 2022 Christopher Hewitt Award in Poetry.



Audrey L. Reyes (she/her) is a queer Filipino poet and former early childhood educator whose favorite workplace activity is raising hell. Her work has appeared in several online literary magazines, anthologies, and print issues around the world. She resides in Manila.



Valerie Hunter (she/her) teaches high school English, and has an MFA in writing for children and young adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her poems have appeared in publications including Edison Literary Review, Room, Other Voices, and Wizards in Space. You can find her on Instagram @somanystories_solittletime.



Kayla Feldman (she/they) is a founding member of Sovereign Writers Group and co-hosts Process, a monthly spoken word open mic night. She was a Genesis Poetry Slam winner and has been commissioned by JW3, Canada Water Theatre, Watch Your Mouth, Vashti Media, and The Narcissist Cookbook. Her play WATCHDOG was a top ten finalist for the Titchfield Festival Theatre Playwriting Award 2022. She has had work published by T'Art Magazine, Erato, Fifth Wheel Press, Popshot Quarterly, Derailleur Press, Moonlove, 9VT\5, and been featured on the Dead Darlings and Artists That Work podcasts. Last year she published her debut poetry collection, TIKVA.



Abbie Doll (she/her) is an eclectic mess of a person who loves exploring the beautiful intricacies of the written word. She resides in Columbus, OH and received her MFA from Lindenwood University; her work has been featured or is forthcoming in Door Is a Jar Magazine, OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters (O:JA&L), Black Fox Literary Magazine, among others. Follow her @AbbieDollWrites.



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