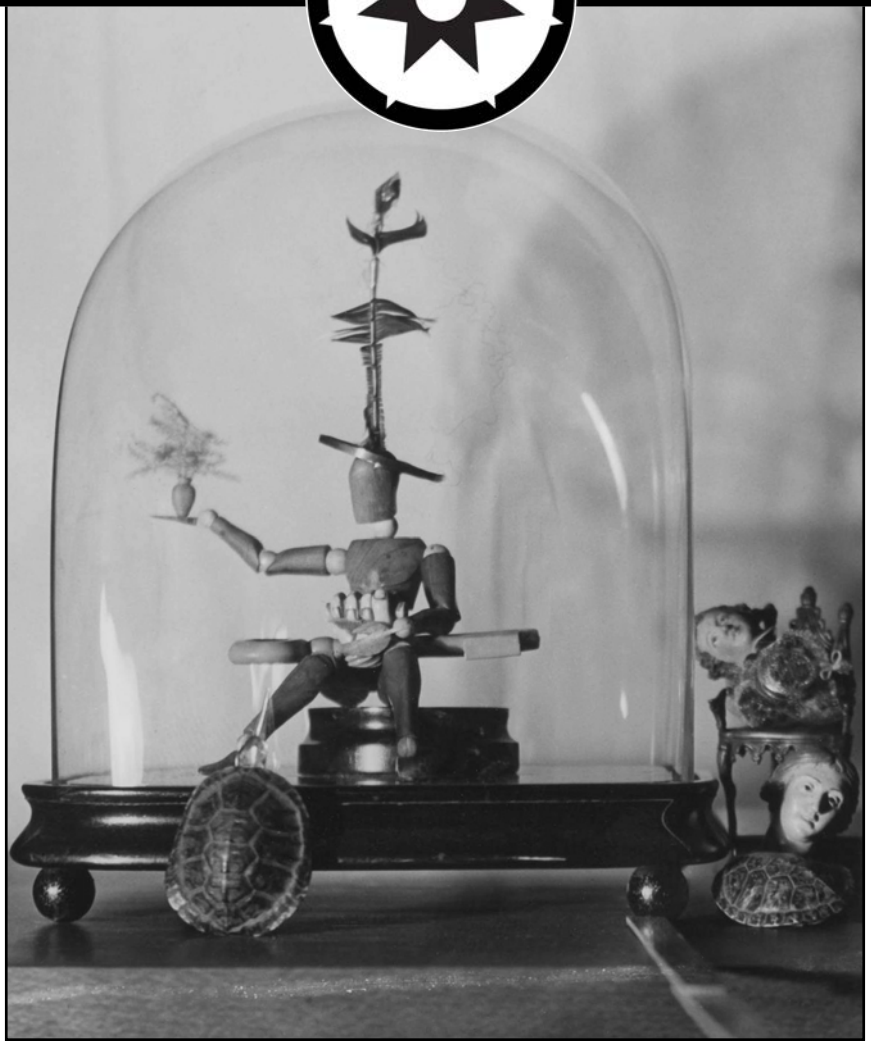
Exist Otherwise

#8



"Follow my example: Stay at home and eat wool."

November 2023

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Cleomé Morra

Waiting for Desi



Y.F. Wang

Guide to Make Use of a Barbie

i. throat

Grab the barbie by her blonde hair
& twist her head off in one turn. Remember
your best friend's words: *only stupid girls dye their hair;*
remember his words next time you see a nest of burnt wires
clogged in your shower drain.

Swallow the head positioned downwards
the way a newborn comes out of their mother's womb head first.
You will throw up later today like a cat coughing up a hairball. Sit
like a cat. Be still. Be gentle. Good girl. Good cat.

ii esophagus

Push the plastic down. Destruction, when
done right, through a writer's eyes, is a form of creation-you
want to be a writer, don't you? Right now
you are a womb. You are
an outline of your lineage, colored in eggshell white.

Back in that international school, your friends tell you
about their struggles: Asian and American, two parts of one
identity, half-white & half-empty, but this story isn't about them. Look
at me, *(good girl!)* do you still wish you were Asian-American? Do you
still feel nausea at the thought of being *just Asian?*

Eat up the remaining torso. Barbies
are manufactured to end up in hungry hands. Girl dolls
with their bodies out in the open deserve to get devoured.

Remember that you broke your entire front tooth
at the age of six. Bad things come to girls who
bare their tongues not-so-gently. Remember
the invisalign you had to wear just to amend the crookedness
you brought upon yourself a decade ago.

You will never be a barbie; you will never be
as white or as smooth as the leg scrapping sideways in your windpipe.

Best friend, I think I am stupid. I think I want bleached hair.

i stomach / pancreas / gallbladder

Stomach the idea that the only definition of women is in
English. Unbite your tongue & uncross your legs *(you're
not a cat, don't sit so still) & oh you're too thin, eat more!* You
raise your hand in history class, wanting to ask your teacher
why a Barbie in a flower crown & a sequined dress is oppressed
while one in a man's blue attire is not, but the teacher does not
call on you. Instead he tells you: Columbus is a hero.

Reject the East Asian lexicon. Recite words in English every night like
you're calling for Bloody Mary. Break yourself up into
bite-sized *please-only-take-one samples*. The enzymes & bile
will take care of the rest.

iv. small intestines / large intestines

Medium-sized intestines. Goldilocks' *just right* porridge. Don't
search for that balance. Close the door on your
heritage. Walk on eggshells & broken front teeth. Good girls
talk back. Good girls are bold & smart-mouthed & better
than girls who are well-behaved.

v. appendix

You are Frankenstein; you are Frankenstein's monster.

Wake up.

Throw up.

I crawl towards the light at the end of the tunnel only to be launched forward by a whirlwind of sickly breath; I was not the one who had regurgitated the Barbie but I was the plastic doll myself, torso & limbs all torn off so I couldn't possibly break the display glass that reads: Exhibit A- What a woman should be.

The girl whose stomach I came out of has my skin stitched on her face. But to reject a rejection is not the same thing as mere acceptance; it is the wishful thinking that a bandaid could fix the Barbie you shattered with the hatred of your entire bloodline; it is tearing off a bandaid in one go and realizing that the Asian pigments in your skin do not make up a deformity-that there has been no wound behind your bandaids all along.



Melissa Coffey

Image Matrix

This farce again. I'm city-bound. Watch the carnival of consumerism roll by my window, these come-hither neon seductions. I'm just here for socks and coat-hangers—*we all know how that song goes.* Extricate self from tram, self from the spill of humanity, the close proximity which cues anxiety. Extricate, land on pavement and—it's all in my face.

Avoid the spruiker who'll ask why my skin is *SO RADIANT*—charm bordering on hysteria.Who'll pull you in through hungry doors, sit you down before a tell-tale mirror. Surgery-lit for the vivisection of your self-esteem—ruthless magnifier of all mistakes and misgivings.

Tick-tick-tick go your skin cells, miniscule tellers of time passing, always aging always sloughing away, dying off. The inevitable, inelegant collapse into collagen-famine … leaving a trail of entropy behind.

I'm clued up to this sly grabbery of commerce in motion—I've earnt my street-smarts. I've the wrinkles of a rebel, the lipsticked pout of a capitulator. Trapped in this post-feminist mall-scape of the hyperreal, patriarchies' dissection of woman—not vigilant, not visceral, not *foolproof* enough. Occasional joyous bodies still slip through unfettered—oh elegant solution—inoculate us all with the duty of scrutiny.On ourselves, on each other.

Turn us against ourselves. Walk down the street *what is she wearing?* Watch the silent self-implosions.Women quietly coming apart—trying to walk in tatters. Big Sister is watching for that hair out of place.

She'll reel in another victim. *Come into my parlour, said the spider to the fly.* Things get intimate as she scrutinizes your skin, and beyond. Down to the dermis, piercing the nerves. They'll find the flaw—that's what they're mining for: commodification of the errors of our *too, too, sullied flesh.* The lure of the cure.

Out, out, damned spot …

Beauty no longer skin-deep. Cosmetic industry, jacked into Silicon Valley—pigments exquisitely blended with binary code. The new Image Matrix. Now, beauty teeters on the penetrating laser's tip—another phallic intrusion. Peel ourselves bare with chemicals, submit to the burn—

Pamper yourselves, ladies!

Evisceration is the new relaxation. Because "You're *worth* it"— yet tectonic cracks under the glossy sheen of our credit cards know beauty hath no price.

I careen off-stage. I don't want to play this part. *You're a little old, anyway, darling.* Still the marionette to my gender, but the strings are tangled. Mask askew, my choreography no longer assured—*would someone get her out of the spotlight?*

I'm a postmodern paradox:I participate / I resist. I'm still a she-pronoun / too damn cis for my own good / maybe one day I'll evolve to they / boundaries bleeding / in the gendered minefield / in the skin I'm in / I'm a walking contradiction.

Fixated on our image, like Narcissus' plight. But not transfixed by beauty—no—

patriarchy wants women's heads—
bowed in shame
over the creases
in the pages
of our stories
on our faces.

Life passing by.

Blend her into the background. Give her a slow fade.

Break this contract of feminine performativity, this endless scrutiny on the stage of patriarchy. Smash the fucking spotlights. *I don't care what my line was.*

Burn the script.

I want a new story.



Stephen Mead

I Want, I Am

A dyslexic in an alphabet reversed,
the universe looping both flaccid and disjointed:
noodles, macaroni, dot, dash,
a Morse code, impenetrable except for instances
the rest tramples.

So frustrating to feel stupid when knowing
what's seen is wholly true, only scattered apparently,
like running back 'n forth with a sieve to catch falling lives.

There are so many and, intermittently, paralysis cramps will,
confidence, unless managing to duck under props-----
the class clown, star athlete, home beauty queen benched
during exams, shyness, panic
swallowing swallowing any chance
for the bouquet parade.

What next then---
Though cramped, the appetite continues expansion
with *I want, I am*,
if not suffocated, an implosion
in the pigeonhole quad.



Cai Ying

Eu de Mildew No. 2

grandma carpet succumbing to its age sun-bleached, shoe-scuffed,
buckling near the walls 25 years of footsteps
(worst of all outdoor shoes!)
food grease
(especially nightly sautéed onions)
and the unpredictable Irish damp
(tho I swear England rains more)
no amount of cleaning will revive your hospitality. who chose you?
unapologetic maroon,
now faded.
Still, better than your Ikea replacement.



"Everything is to be created," said the Snake.

#

There was a great flood. In the great rush of water, the Great Tower fell, and the One Language, contained in its central citadel, floated away. Over 40 days and 40 nights, the One was dissolved into many: all the tongues of the world.

#

"Everything is to be evil," said the Tree.

#

As the waters receded, ribs appeared in the shallows. Gradually, as the world dried, these ribs were extracted from tide pools, then assembled into men.

And from men came Jacob.

#

"But also…" suggested the Woman.

#

The flocks of the King of Heaven consisted of hot, gaseous, nebulous beasts who roamed through the Fields of the Night.

For seven years, Jacob tended to them.

At the end of this period, Jacob earned a wife, the loveliest of the King of Heaven's daughters.

In the sky, she sparkled. Her aura was golden.

Mary.

#

"Everyone is to have a Golden Calf," said Aaron.

#

But Mary was not enough.

So Jacob went on to earn Elizabeth, another of the King's daughters, who was nearly so lovely.

But Elizabeth…

#

"Everyone is to have a Stone Tablet," said Moses.

#

So Jacob worked to earn them all, all the star daughters of the King: Leah and Ruth and Hannah and Rachel and Deborah and Esther and Miriam and Eve and Sarah and Priscilla and Martha and Jehosheba and…

#

After the flood, through the water that remained, a Great Whale roamed. It was immense and sneering and cruel. But Jonah, little Jonah, was able to destroy it. After the Whale swallowed him, Jonah killed it from the inside, cracking the interior of its brain case.

He used only a pebble.

He used only a sling.

#

Out of the mud, compacted with the ribs, came also the Four Horsemen.

#

For Jacob, however, wives--even all the wives in the sky—were not enough.

So Jacob began to wrestle Angels.

#

The first Horseman, Pestilence, married the Lepers.

#

Samson, unlike all of the children that he had been brought up beside, had never been positioned on the planks of a cross, then had nails riven through his hands and feet.

Not once, not in all the games that he and the other children had played with the Romans, had this ever happened to Samson.

It was a great secret, this non-Crucifixion.

It was also the source of Samson's great strength.

#

Jacob wrestled with them mightily, all those Angels.

#

With his great strength, Samson should have been able to defeat the Philistines.

#

He wrestled with the Angel Leprosy and the Angel Pharaoh and the Angel Water Turning to Blood and the Angel Manna and the Angel Frogs and the Angel Ashes to Ashes and the Angel Lice and the Angel Livestock Plague and the Angel Dust to Dust and the Angel Boils and the Angel Hail and the Angel Forbidden Fruit and the Angel Locusts and the Angel Brother's Keeper and the Angel Darkness and the Angel Killing of Firstborn Children.

#

But then Samson's lover, Judas, betrayed him.

#

And then Jonah, whale-tamer, gave names to all the remaining animals.

#

"Judas!" cried Samson, as the nails penetrated his hands, his feet.

#

After naming them, Jonah killed and skinned them: feathers, pelts and scales. Then he assembled these pieces into a beautiful raft--a Raft of Many Colors.

#

Through these holes, Samson's fabled strength drained away.

#

And Jacob wrestled…

#

After his crucifixion, Samson was very weak--so weak that he could not even roll away the stone.

#

The second Horseman, Famine, married the Giants.

The third, War, married the Light of the World.

#

So Jacob, enraged, wrestled Judas, too, though Judas was not an Angel.

"No one betrays Samson," said Jacob into Judas' ear.

#

And then Jonah, whale-tamer, animal-namer, raft-maker, walked on water.

#

But Death, the fourth and most terrible of the Horsemen, married Lazarus.

#

Then Jonah, whale-tamer, animal-namer, raft-maker, water-walker, spoke to the Burning Bush.

#

"Frankincense," said the Raft of Many Colors.

"Myrrh," the Burning Bush.

#

"No one betrays Samson," Jacob repeated.

#

"Everyone is to be killed," said the Stone Tablet.

"Everyone is to be Resurrected," said the Golden Calf.

#

At the Horsemen's wedding, the blood of every guest became wine.

(And then all the wine became water.)

((But then all the water become blood.))

(((So, in the end, everyone was all right.)))

#

"Never," said Death.

"Always," agreed Lazarus.

#

"I will wrestle all the fallen Angels," offered Jacob, by way of a wedding present.

#

"Everything is to end," said the Snake.

#

So there was a Second Great Event, an Anti-Flood, and in the great drying, as all the water of the world returned to Heaven, the Tower was restored, as was the One Language. Then all of Jacob's wives, in the many parts of the sky, could again perceive their Father's voice. All this time, He had been calling to them…

#

"End luminously," said the Stone Tablet.

#

"Father, we come!" cried the stars: Mary, Elizabeth, Leah, Ruth, Hannah, Rachel, Deborah, Esther, Miriam, Eve, Sarah, Priscilla, Martha, Jehosheba and all the rest, in One Language.

On Jonah's Raft of Many Colors they ascended, borne up by the waters. Each sparkled with her own aura: red, white, orange, silver, yellow, blue…

Beneath them, in comparison, even Jonah's raft was pale and unremarkable.

#

"End drunkenly," said the Golden Calf.

#

As the waters were withdrawn, the post-Crucifixion stone was also swept away.

Beneath the waters, Jacob rushed into the tomb and cradled Samson's bones.

He wept, his breath foggy with the wine-water-blood.

#

"Everything is to go on living forever," said the Woman.

#

Jonah, whale-tamer, animal-namer, raft-maker, water-walker, Burning Bush-speaker, weighted with the authority of his many accomplishments, said to the others of Jacob: "Let him be. *Let Jacob be.*"

So they let Jacob be.

#

"And be destroyed," said Aaron.

#

Up, up, up, in a coach made from the bones of the whale that Jonah had killed, went the Horsemen and their marriage partners, and all the Angels with whom Jacob had ever wrestled (for the King of Heaven would welcome them, too), and Samson's bones--for Jonah, who knew what was best for Jacob, took these bones firmly away from Jacob.

#

"And be redeemed," said the Tree.

#

Cradling these bones, Jonah took his own seat inside the coach, beneath the dome of the skull that he had long ago shattered, using only a pebble, using only a sling.

"Let Jacob be," Jonah repeated, as the coach ascended.

#

"End in sand," said Moses.

Everything, everywhere, for all time, was drawn up into the sky, and the world beneath was left dry and empty.

In the remaining desert, there were only two living figures: only Judas, only Jacob.
Two together, wrestling.

#

"End in fire," said the Burning Bush.

#

"No one betrays Samson," Jacob repeated.



Daniel Edward Moore

Little Willingness

According to the book of Daniel
my name means *Little Willingness.*

Little Willingness is sad when men
act like dicks he's not supposed to love.

Little Willingness ends each day
washing sorrows in the river of a mouth.

Little Willingness is tired of nature's
erectile dysfunction with joy.

Little Willingness has been hurt by the soul's
one night stand with the body.

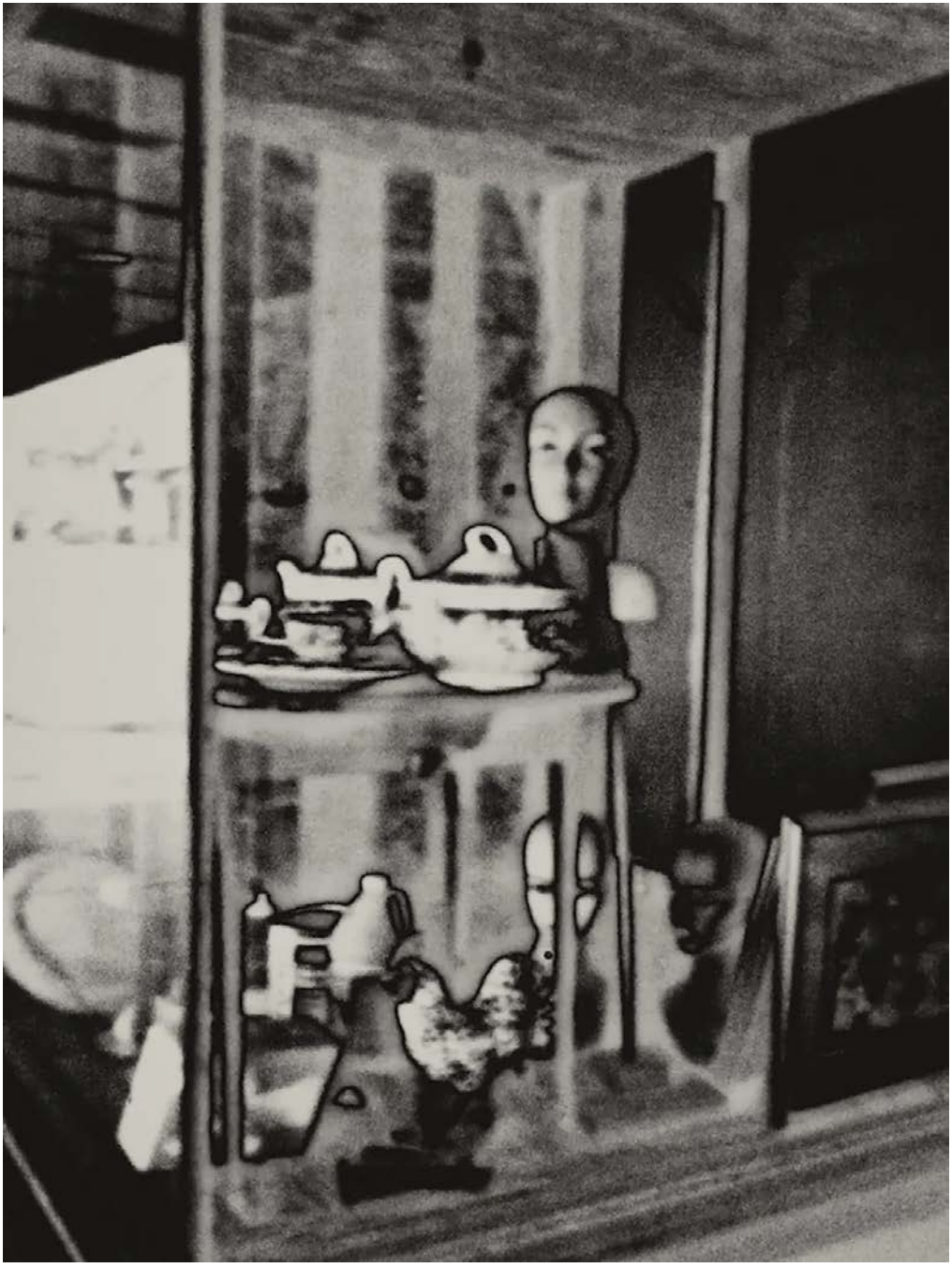
Little Willingness arrives with bliss
growling on the end of a leash.

Little Willingness fills the dark with praise
in the choir of anonymous lips.

Little Willingness freezes when silence shows up
to witness how loud and cold we've become.

Kristin Fouquet

Solarized Pinhole Heads



Julia Kooi Talen

Beyond

After Leonara Carrington's Self-Portrait

A hyena often appears in my shadow
everytime I try caviar again. She has an odd

number of utters that bubble and bloom
like the keloids clustering my jaw. If I whisper count down

she disappears for seventy-seven seconds no, seventy-nine
& I struggle to stand when I look at her my

high heels melt into the floor fire
clay clogging my mouth. No I shouldn't speak

I couldn't wouldn't, hyena
hisses, fissures the scene, frizzes

my hair I stare out the window & collect
an angel, dark and knowing, gliding

treble clefs, vee-ed cerulean, stop, I want to touch,
the centers of this creature, enter its mouth, evaporate

& run out, flower peculiar petunia petals
less alien, no, more strange & upset, be, no exist

in evergreen & chlorophyl dreams, wet with dew, no
no more gold chains, triple-timed dances, white no sequins

all dangled on hangers strangling
stung flesh, no, I'll melt into a new mouth
run zig-zag, muck up the ground, shrill

eee, eee, eee, until I see the moon

until we make it there, far, far away and
and all the birds that nest behind my ears, all the tulips
I speak, all the sea glass in my fingernails, the bell height jellyfish in my

throat can float in nebula bliss free form, no free

from pencil grips & cotillion quotidians,

I'm tired.

But on the moon, I'll starfish & dream dream dream write
a novel in my hair, pluck it out strand by strand

braid firefly light & make us all delightful
apparitions chainsmoking in stories beyond beyond

beyond this bright blue chair.



Hiten Chojer

Drawing Lines

We witnessed from the lens a great distance.
I saw the sea of trees and you said you saw the snow,
or the sun-baked canyon where the river once flowed,
and to hug you, kiss you and bring you closer.

I cooked veggies and chicken for one, and you
some pasta with your friend and an oily tuna can.
It was the same meal we ate for two years straight.
Maybe earning some bucks isn't tough, but it's not enough.

I killed all my vile cockroaches before you came,
and shoved vanilla flavoured incense sticks by the door.
A dark chocolate box in the fridge, the spilled green wine stunk the floor.
Yet you hugged me and kissed me and pulled me closer.

When they finally arrived for our leftover honey,
we laid out fine lines of the white powdered poison
to kill the infestation crawling through the holes
of our lonely home.



Ibrahim Salihu

Gallows Humor

Across furrowed field, we broke traditions
Playing cowboys and native Americans
Me, Cheyenne nation - eyes like tadpole
Flaunting wool aroc, flaring eagle bonnet, bow and arrow
You, Vacqueros - skinny like beanpole
Parading brogan, bowler hat, baronet and musket

Gallows humor, I'd be darned to forget
The day you went tumbling on the foliage
Before taking to your heels,
Running from a snake in 's' shape
Whilst I went haywire, gun-slinging like a misfit
We were impossible
Hyperventilating as though our lungs had been gas sprayed

Respite amid hysterical sobs,
We sipped fermented mesquite beans
From a jug using bamboo straws
Until we become cross-eyed drunk sketching our future on fissured rocks
Hieroglyphics - this is our treasure map to treasure hunters, we boasted
Our fits of laughter fanned pyrolysed biomass
Whilst orange embers pirouetted
'til they kissed the night sky with fireflies staring, perhaps in amazement

No doubt, the war stole our childhood
Those wonder years,
Now archived within the ruins of this landscape
My folks traipsed north,
"For safety," father said
But it seemed he traded our language in return

You hid in the woods
Not wanting to leave the ways of the ancient
We calqued ancient words,
Chewed them into metaphors
And spat out what ought not to be left of it
Good grace, we could speak in tongues too
"Gene autry," I said to spark old rivalry
You kowtowed, smiling like the half-crescent moon
I could hear dawn breathing asthmatically
I would need a Joseph to interprete this, were it a dream.

Dissipated years, word had it that you're a child soldier
Truce reached, back in the great plains
But hard to fathom who suffered the most -
The great plain, its people or our language crossway?
Not one tired of launching the smoke signals
Again, I did but this time,
You never turned up only a shooting star
Short-lived, wished I could hold onto its trail of luminescence
Burning out into that expanse of infinite, inky darkness
No hue, no goodbye - it's all clear now
There will be no sequel to our sweeping epic
Now, in my second childhood
Staring at the stable door where your horse bolted.



Lemon Hansen

There Is No Way To Know But Many Ways To Tell

The blob-fish queen ate herself yesterday, but if you look at the plaid shadows the windows cast, you can still see her in the lines they form. A maniac at heart, none of us will ever drink to her memory, so instead we cast fishing nets over her castle to celebrate todays community-wide holiday. Her administration stole a third of the worlds trees (her ancestors probably made the moon look the barren way it does too, if history holds up) and most people looked the other way in their attempts to rejoice in the aesthetic of it all: blob-fish are not without beauty, whatever Google may say, just like scorpions are not without gentleness.

Earlier this century, shortly following the beginning of the tree-plunder, a fool and his tasty snacks gave birth to the most repulsive monarch butterfly. Chicken tender wings with a cyanide tail. Camera eyes and lies for legs. Banknotes where the mouth is supposed to be. *Repulsive!* That king will need to ebb in the end, too (for the sake of the abolition of plaid shadows.)



Storm Ainsely

Hello Littlefoot

Many people have forgotten the world behind the couch. There are more dreams still about the cracks in the cushions, where many still shove their toes while watching movies, too intent to realize what memories they might be losing with their toenails and their change, or slips of paper with phone numbers on them, ones they must never have meant to call.

The couches themselves have long been collectors of antiques, and some of these things do end up in the world behind the couch. Pawned off for another year spent in our living rooms, in which we do much more dying than living, often on these same couches. Some people stick to the floor realizing its lesser skills at draining. Spill something on the carpet, it's just going to soak back into socks, stain them slowly red.

"...and god made green food and he made us on the last day before he rested but the story doesn't say dinosaurs, and we both know you exist Littlefoot. Plus we're in the great valley, and the valley's for dinosaurs, so there's definitely dinosaurs in my story.

"Well, I guess then there were people. And they ate the fruit from the good and bad tree. I guess they weren't s'posed to know what they were, but that doesn't make sense 'cause they knew it was bad to eat from the tree, and they just wanted to know more about everything, so they ate it."

She doesn't always get to the great valley in the same way, this little girl. She doesn't look for the rock that looks like a longneck. She just goes down the stairs, headfirst just like Littlefoot, whenever Mommy isn't looking. Mommy doesn't know it, but sometimes she's Sharp Tooth too. And maybe that's why this little girl went to look for the scissors, and brought them down the brown-carpeted stairs, squishing silent so Sharp Tooth would never know, and headed to the great valley. She jumped from the bottom of the mountain across red-lava-tiled floor to near safety, a sandy, rocky, carpet beach. Now it's only the path, the arm of the chair, to climb, and choose the correct couch cushion rock to pass through the entrance. Finally to fresh rolling hills of stuffing poking through in waterfalls, rivulet wrinkles and clover.

"Hello, Littlefoot.

“Do you know why we came to the great valley Littlefoot?

“It wasn’t just because there were Sharp Tooths. Sometimes we had to walk a really long time before there was green food. Sometimes the water wasn’t safe. Even the Sharp Tooths were dying. There wasn’t enough anymore.

“How did we know there was going to be a great valley? I really don’t know Littlefoot.

“If we leave the valley we can always get back…

“Maybe.”

Scissors on fur, brown fluff. Short straight groves. A pause in her humming.

“Littlefoot, we left the Sharp Tooths to die outside the wall.”

“Mommy, did you ever?” She’s grown to dread. Grown to expect to burn on staked questions, wonder how many of her own “what if’s” and “can I’s” and “why’s” her own mother must’ve hated, 25, 35 years ago. Somewhere, before, it seems there was less weight. Maybe it was before her own little girl had almost caught her, too many times at unanswerable things.

“Mommy did you ever cut your initials into their fur?”

“No honey,” lines in her ankles highlighted behind her eyes, slowly staining her socks red, brown. The top bedside drawer she keeps closed and locked, scattered remnants of sharper toys.

Sometimes she thinks a cut Achilles wouldn’t be too bad, but then she thinks of bending over chair backs, retrieving toys to drop back in the box, kneeling down to scrub the space between the stove and the wall, none of these tasks would be improved by a limp.

“Mommy, are you okay?”

“Yes, honey. I’m just thinking about washing the kitchen floor. My socks are sticking to it again.”

“Do you need any help?”

A sigh, thinking of the help she could offer, the ocean the kitchen floor would become.

"You could help me by picking up your toys. Especially any you might've left behind the couch."

"But Littlefoot and me are still playing there. It's the only place Sharp Tooths can't come."

"Are you pretending the dog is Sharp Tooth again?"

"Mo-Om-my. It's not pretend. Sandy chews on bones and spits them back out just like Sharp Tooth."

"Just pick up the ones you're not using then, okay?"

Pick up the limbs you're not using, saran wrap them for freshness, stick them in the freezer box. Five minutes in the microwave on defrost later, nothing to worry about. Just as good as if they were fresh cut.

Adam and Eve, innocent and naked, as innocent as one can be, naked. Quarreling over the sweetest fruit and whether or not to share, learned of murder when in their battle the apple flew far from their naked squabbling…

—Your dick's too small, maybe this apple will help it grow

This apple is bigger than your tits and tastier too—

…and smashed into the head of a serpent sunning on a nearby rock.

—Look what we've done…

I've done nothing—

Knowing then that someday they'd go still too, understanding instantly they could be rid of each other but they didn't want to be alone.

They turned to what to do with the body. What to do with this limp coil? What would they want done to their own still form, and they couldn't feel safe throwing the serpent in the river, similar as they may be. What strange and gruesome things might

happen to a body tossed out so carelessly into depths they'd never seen? But they wanted it out of their sight, wanted not to think of how still it was, decided if they put it in the ground it would be safe. It wouldn't be carried to who knows where, maybe the serpent, if it knew it was dead, could rest.

So by the river where it still lay, smashed and bloodied, they began scraping at the ground with rocks, scraping and scraping to move the soil.

Then rock struck rock. Spitting orange in flakes that sparked flesh.

They were frightened. Maybe the serpent was angry. Angry its body still lay on the rock. They vowed to work faster and faster to keep its anger at bay. But the sparking orange kept shooting away, rock striking rock striking rock, until finally it took root in the grass where the serpent once slid. They ran, frightened of the orange leaping anger of the serpent, ran from their trees and fruit they deemed bad for beginning it all.

Behind them, paradise burned.

But maybe here is one little girl, crawling down the stairs with her Littlefoot after Mommy's door is shut, who doesn't want to grow up to be a Sharp Tooth. Maybe she doesn't mind clean socks at the same time as muddy hands and wants to keep all the treasures she's hidden in the cushions.

Maybe she can make it over the lava every time, never has to fall in.

"I'm sorry about the scissors, Littlefoot," she whispers, curling in between the lumps of stuffing, around Littlefoot to keep him warm. "Can we just say that a Sharp Tooth got you because you were protecting me while I was asleep until I could wake up and get away?

" 'cause if you don't like the ending to a story Littlefoot, all you have to do is change it."



Sarah Dickenson Snyder

Eve Sues Apple for Trademark Infringement

She's stronger now,
not hiding or exiled
at the polished table
in the quiet courtroom.

She wears a dark green suit.
She knows about archetypes,
hell, she created them.
Think fig leaves.
Think the Starbucks siren.
Think just bucks.
She's here to win.

That bitten apple
has been hers for millennia.

She's a little bitter—
her name only written four times
in that oh, so holy book, and yet
look at her acreage
in the land of blame.

She was here with her apple
long before you, Mr. Jobs,
before the dinosaurs
and the forming of your new world,
before the unlatched gate and exile
with apple seeds hidden in her palm.

She owns the apple.
That's her bite.

Shall we talk about prior use?
Have you seen the Rubens painting?

Let's not confuse
your insatiable desire
with hers.

Feel free to take
the snake.



S. G. Parker

The Grand Marquee

The solution, my father announced, with only the crown of his head visible above the stacks of packing boxes, was to raise a marquee.

A grand marquee, my mother added.

Delivered the next day, the marquee consumed the entirety of our small suburban bungalow's back lawn, its guy ropes penetrating the hedges and flowerbeds and throttling the pillars of our neighbour Mr Nettle's chestnut feather-board fence. The central pole stood so tall that a group of young children knocked at the front door to ask if the circus was in town.

Despite the lawn turning to mud and the roses withering due to the lack of light, for the next few years, all went well until a rope broke free in the storms of last summer, leaving half of the contents exposed and sodden. Within hours, the moonlit patio glistened with slime as a mass of slugs and snails slid in to feast on our rotten belongings.

The slugs brought the toads, who invaded the neighbourhood en masse, rustling the shrubbery and swamping the roads as they swarmed towards the marquee, croaking with delight at the bounty of escargot, only to thud against car wheel arches as our neighbours returned home for the night.

Flies, flies, flies and flies. The stinking mess that now covered the streets crawled with maggots who slithered away into darkened crevices to emerge as fizzing bullets of filth and disease, or became impregnated with parasitic larvae that gorged upon the writhing sacks of pus before transforming into vicious, yellow-jacketed bringers of pain.

Me, I welcomed the arrival of the bats. I listened to their squeaks of delight as their plump, furry bodies swooped through the night. I found comfort in the flap of their skinny clawed wings as they cleansed the air of the buzzing, crawling, stinging things. But the bats, just like the rats, provoked howls of complaints from our neighbours despite my parents' assurances that the marquee was only a temporary necessity, a minor inconvenience until the long-planned garage conversion was complete, which would take only a few short months, once the work began.

With the cold weather, new intruders arrived. We found Mrs Miniver's black cat, Sabbath, and six kittens nestled in a box stuffed with my musty, moth-eaten baby wear from when I was a child. No sooner had the cats been removed than the night was disturbed by drunken stumblings, frantic fumblings, stifled giggles and muffled whispers. The aroma of illicit teenage rebellion breezed through the air, infiltrating the ventilation cracks and aggravating Mr Nettle's sinuses.

The next morning, beside a tear in the canvas, we found a confetti of torn cigarette papers and rolled-up cardboard roaches. And a single strangled condom. The eldest from No. 7, Mr Nettle opined—bad through and through, ever since birth. An awkward visit by my mother ensued. The mellow nocturnal haze dispersed, and the midnight trysts ceased, along with our Christmas cards from No. 7.

More sinister visitors soon came by. From a large white van emerged three white men whose breath hung white in the winter's night. With professional ease, they slit the worn skin of the ageing marquee and secreted box after box into the idling van, binding the rear doors closed with a bungee when the last wouldn't fit. All the while, our neighbourhood slept, save for Mr Nettle and his ever-watchful eye.

The police responded to his emergency call three days later. The weary young constable, his pen and pad poised, asked us what was missing. No idea, my parents said in unison. The top layer of boxes on the leftmost aisle was all my father could suggest. Holiday brochures, an old, cracked crockery set, and a Fisher-Price petrol station were my mother's best guesses.

I looked for myself, but not knowing what had been there, it was hard to say what wasn't. The thieves hadn't taken the handheld hoover, the broken printers or the sandwich toaster. They'd left the dried flowers and the Perspex chandelier, and they'd ignored the Bullworker and the exercise bike and ball. The 2-tracks and the 8-tracks and the cassette tapes were all in order, as were the LPs of Pinky and Perky and Fleetwood Mac. The guarantee and instruction leaflets of long-dead appliances were left untouched, just like the boxes of unknown cables and power adapters.

And so, breathing a sigh of relief, we thanked our lucky stars that the crooks hadn't made off with anything of value.

Yet worse was to come.

Reports of a homeless in the neighbourhood preceded Mr Nettle's sighting of a shadowy figure scaling the moonlit garden fence. Without delay, we roused the neighbours and banded together to hunt the vagrant down. It was Mr Nettle himself who discovered their makeshift cave, cunningly disguised within the walls of the marquee's centre-most aisles. A single mattress from aisle nine had been dragged inside, upon which lay two of our mouldy sleeping bags. Out of one poked the head of a grubby, half-blinded children's doll, while nearby stood an extinguished tea light beside a tattered photo of a dark-skinned man.

This was the final straw. My parents called Hoarditall, the secure self-storage facility, and arranged for a team of workers to empty the marquee. We pulled up the tent pegs, severed the guy ropes and tore down the soiled cotton canvas. We rallied the neighbours to donate their combustibles and amassed the whole mess in a vast stinking pile.

Once darkness fell, we gathered around and lit it alight. The flames licked up the central pole, blackening and melting the one-eyed doll we had tied to the top as if it were Guy Fawkes. As the inferno raged and the sparks spat out into the starless sky, we toasted marshmallows on long forked sticks, and Mr Nettle set off fireworks, much to our delight. The eldest from No. 7 fetched her guitar, and together we danced in circles, singing Imagine and Stand By Me until the fire went out and we all said goodnight, shutting our doors on the smouldering remains and the stench that still hung in the air.



non-Euclidean beings, evolved from 2-D where one slides along, to where the 2 becomes a topology of karma, inescapably tight-bound around whatever evolving slightness, whatever hinted-at mystery, a projected felt space (intermingled with flesh) of feedings & feedbacks, of social & antisocial, of nano-synapses experimenting with surrender & freedom (drowning out dialectical cries), of organic immersion in regeneration & decay, incorporating enzyme'd & hormone'd information, existential electromagnetic violences & pacifyings, growths squaring cancerously, if they're not resolving & putting in remission the pounding mental ocean in whose mists a World-Soul seems to hover, reflecting like a warm ghost /

With her caged cat (her puss-friend), she is the plumbing the wiring the build, the non-carnivorous catwoman, gift of the Careful Ages, ageless now as her eyes sweep the train's compartment from behind owl-eyed glasses, scanning in Bubastis theophany, sweeping like 2 spotlights as her exit prepares itself in this night of who she is, 'only she could know,' the cat-planet can no longer read the sibylline oracle, censored like schedule 4, while patchwork masonry rescues the standing columns at empty Delphi, as she goes, under iPhone flag, in the defenselessness, under the cover of the Other (?)

Made mistakes shimmering, endless, wrong, under repercussions of expulsion, exile & don't, don't / Painted savages, face paint, strokes of color, depictions of travels grown streaky, mascara'd shortcomings running into earth-tones of landscapes, genuinely staining their personalities, ruining the point of an illusory majority / A painting 'I love you' filling out an oil & canvas void, in degrees of squeeze & release of impasto / Which lives were one? one that couldn't be another? from naive shapes possibly waken fusing potencies, coalescing blisses, compression of judgments, while an individual mandates its proper life, soulfelt /

Story, allegory, 'known not meant,' pretty kitty touch & touch, a quantum of ally, kin, sprinkled with polyfluoroalkyl / Dreams that might be neolithic regressions but no cattle or sheep or any other animals were present, leaving a hypothesis of flashbacks to infancy / Who are we? who is that? sleep is a veil that in passing behind one could realize or not a m-m-m-Meditator & God is Dostoevsky crawling the streets of St. Petersburg, learning by heart the life of each word in interfaces of the prose'd worlds /

& it's she, propping up, creating a man-being gone into algorithms of sacrifice, leading down into an onion-domed cavern where a rattling tongue (nearly swallowed) bats around the genesis of companion aesthetics unstoried & raw, a chase in play, whose congruencies are heroic avatars or whorled flowers, annihilative, reductive as sadness /

but these words are only posted

on a tree somewhere in the heart

of an oak forest where no one

will ever find them



Janine Muster

And With That I Want To Remind You!



contributors



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

Y.F. Wang is a freshman at Wellesley College studying economics, cognitive science, and linguistics. She has been recognized by the Claudia Ann Seaman Awards, the John Locke Institute, Bow Seat, and more.



Melissa Coffey (they) is an Australian writer, editor and spoken word performer, who has recently shifted to she /they pronouns. A former theatre director, their work often explores desire, agency, and sexuality, sometimes through a feminist lens. Melissa's poetry and fiction are published in *Aurora Journal*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Last Girls Club*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, and *Not Very Quiet*. An appreciator of the surreal and avant-garde aesthetic, they're a regular contributor to *Exist Otherwise*. Forthcoming works include fiction in an anthology of feminist literary reimaginings *(Improbable Press)* and prose poetry in *Antithesis*. They're working on several chapbooks and a novella. Find them Twitter @CuriousSeeds.



Stephen Mead (he/him/his) is an Outsider multi-media artist and writer. Since the 1990s he's been grateful to many editors for publishing his work in print zines and eventually online. Recently his work has appeared in Honest Ulsterman and Pink Disco. Currently he is resident artist/curator for The Chroma Museum, artistic renderings of LGBTQI historical figures, organizations and allies predominantly before Stonewall, The Chroma Museum



Wang Cai-Ying is an illustrator, photographer, writer, smashing keys around the world, now in Taipei, Taiwan. Late to the sourdough game, but early kombucha adopter, Cai-Ying insists that rollerblades are timeless. Their recent creative work is forthcoming/published in Angelaki, Stone Pacific Zine, The Dread Machine, and elsewhere. Instagram

Rachel Rodman (she/her/hers) is the author of two collections: Art is Fleeting and Exotic Meats + Inedible Objects. Her work has appeared in Electric Spec, Kaleidotrope, Brilliant Flash Fiction, and many other publications.

Daniel Edward Moore (he/him/they)lives in Washington on Whidbey Island. His work is forthcoming in Flint Hills Review, Watershed Review, Sugar House Review, The Main Street Rag Magazine, Action, Spectacle Magazine, The Meadow, and Rockvale Review. His book "Waxing the Dents," is from Brick Road Poetry Press.



Kristin Fouquet is a photographer and writer from lovely New Orleans. Her photography appears in online journals and magazines, on chapbook and book covers, on album artwork, and occasionally in galleries. When not behind the camera, Kristin writes literary fiction and is the author of six books. Le Salon



Julia Kooi Talen is an essayist and poet based in the Midwest where she teaches creative writing and composition. Currently a PhD Candidate in Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Talen lives with their cat, Otis and holds an MFA in creative writing from Northern Michigan University as well as an MSW from the University of Denver. Website: Julia Kooi Talen



Hiten Chojer (he/him) is an Indian-born writer with one foot in the past and the other attempting to touch ground. He writes poetry and prose, often exploring themes of identity, displacement, and mental health. He published his debut book 'Gods of Anxiety Be Damned' in 2023. Instagram



Ibrahim Salihu writes both poetry and fiction. His work has been anthologized in Reflex Press and published in Brag, Dreich, Ink Drinkers, Words for the Wild and amongst others. He tweets: @mdsolstitium



LemonHansen (they/them) is an emerging poet from a small town north of Detroit. A shapeshifter by nature, they are interested in the combination of gender, care work, community power, and poetry, and are currently an undergraduate student at Wayne State University.



Storm Ainsely (@SAinsely) (she/her/hers) has lived in 9 of the United States and will tell you she's from fiction-land. Her work has recently appeared in Wild Roof Journal, New Note Poetry, Oakwood, Plumwood Mountain Journal, Trace Fossils Review, and Marrow Magazine. Sacramentum Oblivion Ebook



Sarah Dickenson Snyder (she/her/hers) carves in stone & rides her bike. Travel opens her eyes. She has four poetry collections, The Human Contract (2017), Notes from a Nomad (nominated for the Massachusetts Book Awards 2018), With a Polaroid Camera (2019), and Now These Three Remain (2023). Poems have been nominated for Best of Net and Pushcart Prizes. Recent work is in Rattle, Lily Poetry Review, and RHINO. Sarah Dickenson Snyder



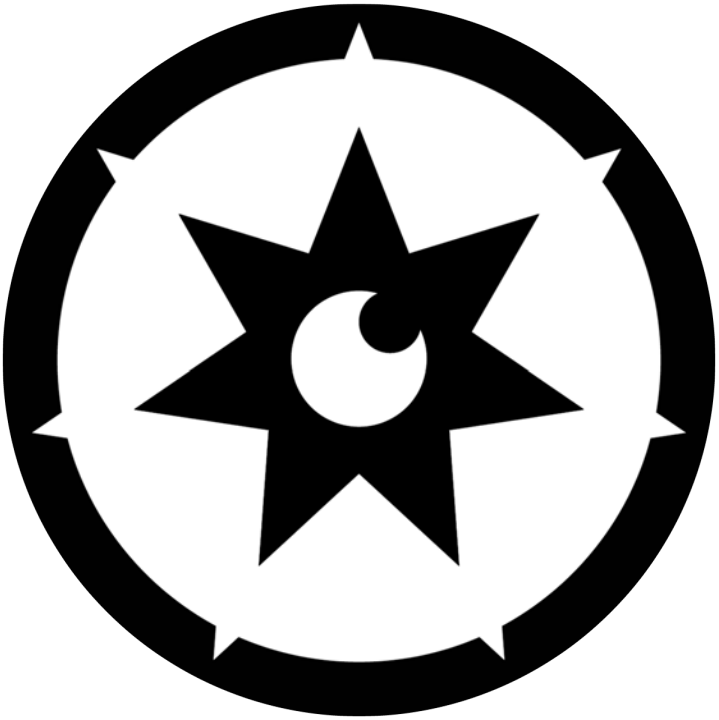
S. G. Parker (he/him/his) is based in Doha, Qatar, where he has lived with his wife since 2014. His work has appeared in publications such as Bright Flash Literary Review, Grand Little Things, and NiftyLit. Writing & Whatever



Dave Shortt is a long-time writer from the USA whose earliest work can be found in the print journals *Salamander* (Brookline MA), *Nexus* (Dayton OH), *Mesechabe* (New Orleans), *Bullhead* (Ashland KY), *Sulfur* (Ypsilanti MI), *Nedge* (Providence), all but the first two now defunct; and on the internet archived at Astropoetica, Muse Apprentice Guild, and Ygdrasil.



Janine Muster (she/her), who is originally from Germany, moved to Edmonton where she completed her MA in Sociology. She still calls the Canadian Prairies her home. Janine works here as a grant writer for a hospital foundation, and she is the dedicated servant to a cat named Sylvia, which includes managing her Instagram account @sylvia.the.moustache.cat. In her free time, Janine writes fiction and makes collages. Her creative work has been published in the Polyglot Magazine of Poetry and Art, Microfiction Monday Magazine, and On the Run. You can visit Janine @nina_muster for pictures of lost objects, hidden treasures, and the occasional collage.



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