

THE BAYOU REVIEW

Fall 2023

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THE BAYOU REVIEW

FALL 2023

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Champurrado

M.A. Dubbs

Abuelita melts
in masa and cinnamon
A pan dulce dip

Second-Generation Garden

M.A. Dubbs

Abuelo holds vine
in palm, tells of childhood grapes
in the soil back home.

My Father's Bicycle

Manoranjan Sahoo

Translated from Odia to English

by Pitambar Naik

I've been seeing that old bicycle, ever since I can remember
 my father's so fond of it and he rides it alone
 when it has some glitch, he overhauls
 till his utmost satisfaction, he cleanses and glitters it
 he oils and greases to make sure it rolls down well
 sometimes he looks at it in such a way that
 it's one of the seven wonders.

One day without his permission,
 I got it painted with a new glittering look
 that none could recognise it was an old one
 I thought I'd be admired profusely
 however, my father was so exacerbadated seeing
 its new avatar, he was heartbroken
 with a colloquial sorrow.

The thing was that his father had bought this bicycle
 when he settled in the village after quitting the
 army of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose
 he was well-rounded and hardworking
 perhaps this was the first ever bicycle in our village
 and it's something that he'd take pride in and would say
 this was of the time of our independence.
 Though the tube, tyre, rim, chain, pedal and
 everything else had been replaced
 the frame of it'd never changed and

it was as before, as if my country's unchangeable map
his anger reached its peak and he's heartbroken
though the colour of the bicycle had faded
the bicycle had a heroic and unforgettable history
as the bicycle was just like his father's face to remember.

Siesta en cerro serrucho

Gilda María Isaac

Mientras circulan furtivas lagartijas
Por las austeras rocas del Motoco,
Espero,
Alimentándome de pasas
Y de manzanas frescas,
Que los frutos morados del sendero
Y el agua helada del río azul
Me conduzcan
Por el boscoso laberinto
De este sueño de verano

Only Sighing

Orland Agustin Solis

*Translated from Hiligaynon to English
by Eric Abalajon*

Sighing is the answer
of the exhausted laborer
while catching his breath
so that the landlord could feast.

Sighing is the retort
to the landlord's promises
sweeter than the juice from
sugarcane he is burdened with.

Sighing is the response
to the grumbling stomach
while raising the sickle
on the way to the harvest.

mona lisa with black emphasis

Aaliyah Norfleet



Sana sana

Sarai Argüelles

Sana sana colita de rana.
No te vi hoy
pero alomejor te veo mañana.
Alomejor a lo mejor—
Quizás—
Ese día llega en una semana.
Tal vez—
El día llega en un mes.
Acaso—
Ese día llega sin mucho lío o asco.
Ojalá te veo
si Dios quiere
si está escrito en las cartas.
Sana sana colita de rana.

Blame It on the Heat Dome

Kathi Crawford

that I don't go outside
anymore; no daily walks
when it's 100+, sun
glaring, cement
storing heat, glasses
rolling down
my sweaty nose;
hair in a ponytail;
my boiled
brain no longer
Texas tough;
the planet is
warming, an
existential crisis
in full bloom;
like an armadillo
I burrow down;
my home an oasis;
a little, green
spot in the desert;
I lie depleted,
dormant in my bed
or laze
in my Relax
the Back Chair;
all the shades drawn,
I don't check
the temperature
knowing today

is a day
just like the day
before; too woozy
to wonder where
a livable space
might be
in a world
that is whirling.

Farms to 5G

Hillary Loera

Somewhere along Becker Road,
a bright red brick casa sits
at the end of a silent meadow, growing
into freshly paved road, where houses pop up
like weeds. Name the streets to honor the flora and the fauna
slashed and burned, for my benefit.
In the distance, I hear gunshots
accompanying gritos from Junkin Barn
where the mariachi band sings into
el tibio sol.

Gone are the cow fields y cultivos.
This once quiet road
sprouted a Dollar Tree
another grew a 5G cell tower.
One buds into a fire station
next to the build-to-rent comunidad
where the sirens fly
down the back road
cutting through the darkest hours of morning, hasta que
un gallo canta. What the hell
kind of neighbor gets a rooster?
We have an HOA, damnit.

That rooster's crow is small
compared to the laughing pack of coyotes
returning nightly to circle el callejón sin salida
behind my backyard fence
with their feral hog friends,

while the neighbor bangs on a comal
to prevent her tiny dog from turning
into a snack for swine.
This is the wild west.
The longhorn on the loose
in the liquor store parking lot, told me so.

Child of Dry Shampoo

Kaili Mora-Duarte

I am
the graveyard of broken chongos,
the mastermind behind
hiding headbands in the
nook between my desk and chair,
the survivor of mentirosa,
of hand and fist.
I was five years old.
I sat in the front seat of my grandfather's car,
the crumbs from leftover
food stuck in between the seats,
the floor mats oily.
He would take me
to Panchos for sopapillas with honey,
and now
without him,
I stand in line,
with a new scar on my back,
with 2 inches grown since middle school,
with the slightest idea of how
to make my mother's fideo and picadillo—
the woman across the steel cage of food
asks me
what I want—
I tell her about the man from work instead,
that he says cordovan like *codafun*,
that I'd like to crawl inside of his mouth,
feel each letter reside
in the cups of his cheeks,

feel the last syllable underneath his tongue,
that he told me his best friend is Dominican,
but here in Texas,
He's Mexican—
The big belly laugh,
holding his belt as he shakes and shakes—
the woman across the line says:
mijo,
qué quieres?
Suddenly,
I move across
the steel cage,
step into the hot enchiladas and tamales,
my shoes covered in grease,
cup her face,
and I tell her:
*my grandfather died two years ago,
his urn is underneath the tv stand
in the house his ex-wife owns,
and he didn't even know my name.*

Waving the Last Flag

Karla Carrillo

When the day has finally come—
 To set down the waving flag,
 I sat in the car while I was looking at her
 She was my home, my origin,
 The flower blooming once in my corridor
 Leading to the old room I once lay

She began to sob,
 Replenishing the mountainous lands
 With her tears, creating rivers
 No llores, amor, I told her
 In the tongue of the men
 Who forced it upon her in her early years

I didn't know what else to say,
 It felt like a betrayal,
 Leaving everything I knew and love
 For a conditional dream on the other side.
 The flag was what convinced me
 The stars shined brightly, creating a gateway,
 To my ultimate desire: freedom.

Nadie te puede reemplazar, mi reina, I remind her.
 Nadie me hacía sentir en casa como tú me hiciste.
 No importa por cuanto lejos me voy,
 Tú siempre eres el hogar para mí.
 No te pongas celosa, mi vida, I continued.
 Tú siempre fuiste mía, pero también ella es mi hogar.

All my family is here, my children, my elders.
The elders who fought for their way here,
And the younger ones who soar from the fought battles.
My life started with her,
But my life continues with another—
For the sake of my family to never endure what I have

So, when I wave the last flag,
It is never the white flag,
But the flag with stars
The woman who gives a smudge of opportunity
No te preocupes, I tell her with tranquility,
Sigues brillando con tu bandera tan bonita
And no matter how far I go,
You will always be my home.

Catch and Release
Conssiah Simon



Animal Voices

LaVern Spencer McCarthy

Coyotes, when they crave a raucous spree,
will gather on a hill and howl away.
Likewise, an alley-cat will often be
verbose with yowls and hisses night and day.
While monkeys gab and gossip in a throng,
a silly message often heard before,
wild elephants will bellow out a song
of triumph as they tramp the jungle floor.
We mortals think our chatter matters most,
superior to lower life's, at best,
but we should realize before we boast,
indifferent, uncaring of the rest,

the animals, unique in range and tone,
regale the world with voices of their own.

Enumerator

Stephen Schwei

Many kids, bored in class,
have looked up
and thought about
counting the holes
in the ceiling tiles.
I did that
and kept counting.

The number of tiles
in the ceiling,
or hooks to hang things from.
Moving on
to boards or tiles on the floor
or whatever else
could be enumerated.
Sometimes just checking
for symmetry or balance
or whether an engineer's design
was consistent and uniform,
like the number of bars
between successive
poles in a fence,
the petals of a flower pattern
preserved in masonry,
or how many windows
were built into a circular room.

Some sequences
lend themselves

to odd numbers,
like decorative facades
or religious items.
Others are even,
such as clocks and a compass,
spokes and supports.

7 giraffes at the zoo,
how many blocks left to walk
or miles to drive
until I reach my destination.
On a Paris Metro train,
a rubber piece between cars,
arranged in a fan,
has 16 folds.
It doesn't really matter,
not really a compulsion or obsession,
but somehow I'm drawn to it.

The number 13
is rarely used
for anything,
unless it's random in nature,
like how many crows
currently rest
on a telephone wire.

Some things are far too numerous,
like stars, leaves,
blades of grass,
or the number of guys I've dated,
while others blend together

like snowflakes
or grains of sand.
Everyone notices
the first few drops of rain
in a slow-starting storm,
but then they only run
when the downpour hits.

If you can count
the number of customers
in a bar, then
it just isn't that busy.

I often count
the number of stairs
as I'm ascending,
but rarely going down,
figuring it will come in handy
if I ever go blind,
allowing me to still
navigate familiar places,
able to get around.
Not that I really expect that,
and I really retain
so very few of them.
It's just the only way to prepare
for such an eventuality.
Of course, I also check
if the number of steps
between each level
is consistent for a building.

Some numbers could be traumatic
like the number of people
who dislike me in the world,
but let's not think about that.

Fortunately, I don't feel compelled
to count every step I take
and I don't expect
a mechanism on my wrist
to do it for me,
or monitor the breaths I take
or the number of times
I laugh in a day.
I could tell you
how many times I cry,
but that's ever so rare.

My word processor
can count these words,
but that's not often relevant.
I count my reps and sets
at the gym, and I imagine
most people do.
For a long time,
my brother, Jacob, and I
counted every night.
Just counted,
trying to reach
one million.
Some nights,
just a few hundred further,
other times

several thousand,
and often losing track
because we just fell asleep.
He got into the 700,000s
and I barely surpassed
half a 1,000,000.
I'm not sure
why we stopped.

I could probably
count my friends,
but then I'd have to
make distinctions
that I'm not ready to make.
Facebook tells me how many
but that's their definition.

Counting is 1
of the first mathematical things
we do when growing up.
And might be
one of the last we do
as our final seconds
tick away.
The number of people
in my hospital room
or how many witnessed
my horrific crash
will have to be noted
by somebody else
as I exit this one life.

Brother Solomon's Stuff (The Things We Leave Behind)

Osasere Ewansiha

Papers

Papers

Papers

It was curiosity that made me do it.
 She poked and prodded me,
 For years, until I did the deed,
 Only to hide her hands after
 She had already dangled the thread of
 knowledge in front of my face.

Books

Tools

A baseball cap

The box followed us wherever we went,
 like a full moon on a night drive.
 It never left its customary place in the garage,
 covered by dust, wedged under cassette tapes.
 Time did nothing to it.
 It was made of cardboard and concrete.

A red coca cola cup

An unopened pair of wrenches

A love letter (that wasn't his)

I touched a dead man's things.
 I scavenged through them.
 I assigned value to it and judged him based on its contents.
 After I was done, as if I never saw the words to begin with,
 I placed the box back in its spot, where it acted as a pillar.
 Scrawled across the top, as bold as the day it was written,
 in my father's frantic handwriting:

Bro Solomon's Stuff.

The Third Goal

Ted Hogeman

Of the three goals, the first is relatively easy to achieve.

It starts with something simple. You want to know yourself better. To learn what makes you tick. In the short term, you find this knowledge useful for the acute aims of curing sickness, harm, the basic work of keeping yourself alive. But beyond that, you also find yourself driven by a larger sense of general metaphysical yearning. To understand what makes you, well, you.

Through study of the natural world, you realize you are of it and yet apart from it. Made from the same basic ingredients as the rest of the universe, but shaped by eons of iterative evolution until the spark of wonder ignited in your nervous system.

To better understand this process, you develop rudimentary models of your body and mind. As your tools and technology advance, so does your ability to elaborate on these models, making them ever more complex. You find yourself able to simulate and explore the structures of your mind and body in greater detail, and you begin to realize that you've stumbled across a new possibility of what you are and what you could be. Fundamentally, you are not simply a collection of parts and chemicals and electrical impulses, but a constantly shifting pattern of information. Given sufficient detail in the models your technology helps you build, you realize that what you've created are not simply a simulation, but an entirely new substrate that you can transfer that pattern to.

The analog to digital conversion frees you from many of your prior constraints. It requires upkeep and persistence, but you improve at both over time. You're able to run duplicates and backups, and your multitude of new shapes are better able to explore the universe, more resistant to radiation exposure from the cosmic wash of distant rays. You spread, first between planets, then between stars, distributed-you being the best possible contingency against anything untoward happening to any one version of yourself.

Along the way, some of you find yourselves missing your original, organic context. Further technological breakthroughs in genetic engineering, biological printing, and pattern download allow you to relive your more squishy youth when the urge takes you. Many of you return to your initial bodies, others experiment with entirely new forms. Some of you come back, some of you don't.

It's not that you end death, per se. It's that it stops being involuntary.

Now, to die is just one possible path among many. Some still choose to end, whether out of a sense of final contentment, spiritual belief, intense curiosity, or sheer boredom. But always as a choice.

You can have as much time as you like.

Sort of.

The cosmos is expanding, even faster than you, and getting faster every day. Faster than the stars themselves can keep up. The world spreading itself thin over all that ever-growing space, the long-term prognosis a very cold, rather dull, eternal night. The heat death of the universe.

Hence, somewhat larger in scope, the second goal.

Eternity's not guaranteed, and all the time in the world doesn't have the same ring to it when the universe itself comes with an expiration date. You've still got a few moves left to play, however, and your vast new playground lets you put into practice all of those big ideas that you could only consider in the abstract when you were stuck to one tenuous sphere. No longer a mere observer watching the cosmos from afar, you become an active participant. You learn quite a bit.

It takes time, somewhat more time than you expected, and involves more than a few loops back to the beginning of everything, dipping yourself into and out of the event horizons of black holes. Reboot, retry, record. Along the way, you find an added side benefit to your newfound chronological fluidity: the opportunity to sneak back and offer all those myriad minds, born and passed before the first goal was achieved, a chance to come along and join the party. Those that say yes come forward at the moment they exit their initial timelines. You're careful not to upset causality too much along the way.

You've been climbing your way up the Kardashev scale this whole time, but this next step involves taking

things up a notch further still. Question some of your fundamental assumptions, including your understanding of the fundamentals of the world itself. It's dangerous, delicate work, true rocket surgery at its finest. But you're careful, and maybe a bit lucky. You defy entropy. Through the subtle tweaking of universal constants, a mastery of quantum field manipulations, and a deft redirection of what was once known as dark energy, you bring things into a new kind of balance.

Like a universal defibrillator, you shock the world itself out of its long gasping death rattle, and into something more like regular respiration. Heat death perpetually delayed. Intricately poised between the big crunch and the big rip.

Now the universe can live just as long as you. Forever, if you like.

It's a rather nifty trick, and you're quite proud of yourself.

Which brings us to the third goal.

The first two goals, on their own, were simply tools to bring you here, to this point. You've been grappling with the third goal ever since you first conceived of the concept of a goal, but it isn't until now, perhaps, all your possibilities unshackled from your prior limitations, that you can truly consider who and what you really are:

You are the universe itself, woken up, equipped with

the power to shape your own destiny. Our ultimate fate whatever you choose it to be.

We've come such a long way since we were sucking on geothermal fumes at the bottom of a primordial ocean. Worked so hard to get here, and keep here around. Fought tooth and nail, neuron, quark, and star. Claimed eternity and won.

So brush that stardust from your shoulders, and ask yourself:

What was it all for?

What now?

Untitled*H. Tenk*

burst

of

flight

bird after

grasshopper

The Boy and the Moon

Amelia Roman

Under the pale
light of the moon
he could not sleep.
A full circle
through the curtains
challenging him
to stay awake.
To think of galaxies
— far away,
eyes wide open,
— to dream
of friends long gone,
of hopes too high,
of all the wrongs
never made right.
When morning came
and people blamed
the full moon for
his night turmoil,
He rolled his eyes
and laughed inside.
when time again
same moon shone bright,
she visited
the boy's late-night.
“I shift oceans from side to side,
yet the thought I
can keep you up
amuses you ‘cause it's a lie?”

He slept soundly
then sometimes not.
when he did not,
he would look up,
he found it amusing
still...
but not impossible.

Emmaus and Kitchen

MK Saye

i am surrounded by fragile things

the white dishes strewn about that
i clean only with the white rag

their conversation pushes up against me
i don't need to hear them

i know they're talking about fragile things too

i can touch everything here

the curve of the vase
the ripples in the bowl
the brush of fabric underneath my hands

if i look at them hard enough,

maybe they'll be real
but no, they're too fragile

but i'm not.

I am real

Go with God

Eric Blanchard

She says it under her breath
as I walk out the door

every day, as if
she thinks I cannot hear her—

half wanting
half not wanting me

to hear her—
because she knows

I am atheist
and she is afraid

I may try to force
my beliefs on her.

She says it under her breath
as I walk out the door,

always in a whisper
to try to save my soul,

a directive,
whether I like it or not.

Go with God, she says.
I will go without.

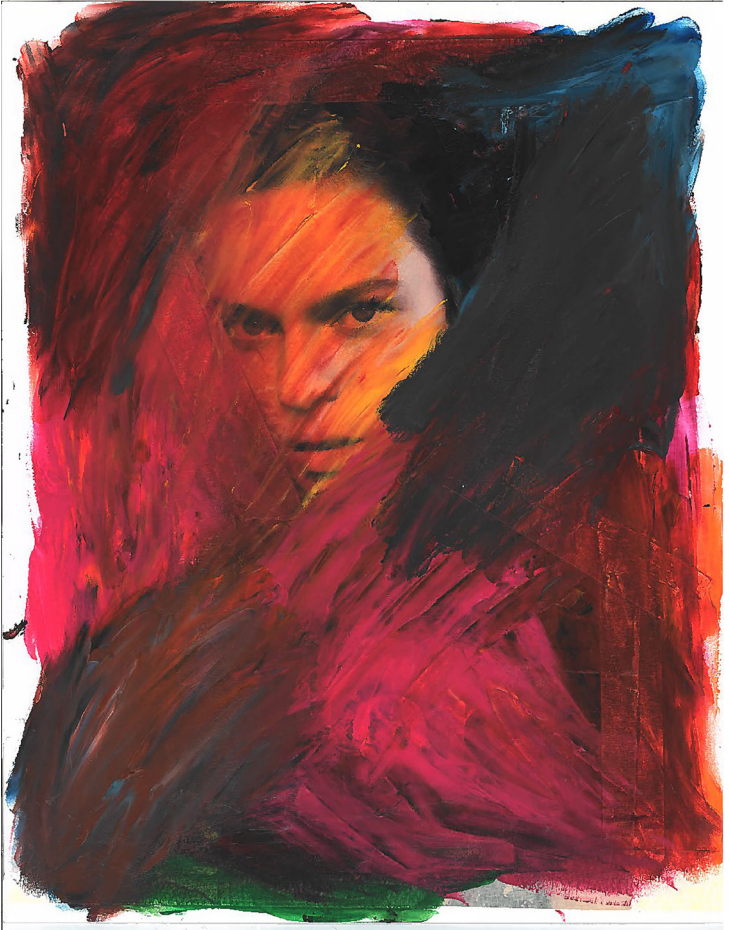
A List of Wishes

Joselyn Arriaga

I wish to change.
Be better than today.
Be happier.
See the world before she
changes.
Watch the stars dance.
Sit on a summit.
Sway with the forest.
Before she changes.
Before she leaves.
I wish to change.
I wish you'd do it too.
Before the world changes.

Lisa

Shane Allison



Ode to the Lady in Green

Desiree Marcos

The lady in green and her sweet siren song greet me each morning;
a melody rich with mystical strength that carries me awake.
A wisping warmth of her wisdom absorb into the pores of my skin,
and with each sip I ascend from a somber abyss.
Crisp amber tones of her gift seep into the rhythm of my mind's eye,
enlightening my soul.
Curls of foam linger on the buds of my tongue,
and they crave the soothing sensation that swirls down my throat;
reminiscent of the lady in green and her sweet siren song.

The lady in green and her sweet siren song are imprinted in every fiber of
my being;
and even the side of my cup.
Her power comes in doses that always dwindle by noon,
and she dances along the ceramic rim of addiction or obsession.
A conjuring force that once sparked your higher self,
now betray you with sickening aches of remorse.
The curling wisps of those crisp amber sips sink me back into the pits of a
somber abyss;
Farewell lady in green and your sweet siren song.

Yo-Yo Ma Plays Bach's Prelude for Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major

Mark Jodon

Strings like straw
rubbing between two sticks.
Not all hands create fire.

Only few are capable
of bringing forth a brilliant flame.
I watch him play: his eyes closed,

torso swaying, passionately entranced,
many delicious things are made
with ingredients we cannot see.

His body becomes the instrument—
transubstantiated. His movement
more resurrection than presence

the quickening tempo, forceful
and urgent, a faint smell of smoke,
incense, ember's glow

notes like fireworks rocket
into the night sky, crescendo,
grand finale bursting open

dazzling radiance
on my tongue the final note
dissolves into silence.

Song to the Waves

Orland Agustin Solis

*Translated from Hiligaynon to English
by Eric Abalajon*

The waves are grieving
as they leave the ocean,
blown by the wind
aside, there on the beach.

You can hear their cries
as they weakly crawl
along the sandy shore, and trying
to reach the leaves of the forest.

I am there, my love, sitting
on a wide rock, away from people
while resentful to the waves, the vessels -
that we once filled with our memories.

kiss of the whip

Rachel Ann Preston

if I drove down to where the sea meets the shanty town
would that silver Sears-catalogue-gate open wide enough
so I could rummage through the boxes underneath the carport?

my car will hum a song against the ocean breeze
windy in that dark hair against my passenger seat
your teeth will show like they haven't in the last year

we can roll the windows down and drive to the end
four-wheel drive through the sand dunes
let's do it until my teeth show too, gritty

like last year and the year before, feet in the fire:
this time let the coast be our new backdrop
life the photographer has a new lighting choice.

Spilled Milk

Samara Gaona

At night, when the sky gets dark and the streetlights flicker, I lay awake and try to remember what you looked like. In my head, I trace the beauty marks imprinted on your skin and picture how your lips curved upward when you laughed. Months have passed and the leaves have turned green, but soon they'll take on colorful hues, and I'll still be haunted by your memory.

Although guilt was a feeling that failed to stick with me, grief soon became my lover. It would caress me whilst contentment flowered underneath my skin. It licked the sides of my body as if it knew I'd never be able to leave. Grief was the only evidence that you were not just a daydream I lived in.

When I walked around campus chasing the things I hungered for, and pretending I wasn't planning on dropping out, I wondered if you ever made it out of the confinement you called home. Were you happy now or did your mask melt into your skin?

My hair has grown longer, climbing down my shoulders, a faux fortress blooming out of my head. I wonder if you remember how much I hated having long hair. Back then, I hated it because of my mother's attachment to it, but now I hate it because of you. My hair is a tangible object that shows just how much time has passed without you by my side. It makes me wonder if you remember what I look like at all.

Every day I try speaking with someone new and the words that come out of their mouth fill me with gasoline. Eventually, I will burst into flames and burn anyone who comes near. Will the heat of the fire warm you enough to bring you back to me? Will those dark, billowing clouds grab your attention like I used to at one point? Would you even spare a second glance?

The weight on my shoulders disappeared, and it took you with it. But, at night, when the sky gets dark and the streetlights flicker, I still think about you. Though it hurts to admit it, I don't remember how your voice sounds, what your family looks like, or even what your favorite food was. But I remember how your eyes looked when you cried and how we were able to talk for hours, and I remember your birthday. Do you still remember mine?

Grief has made a home out of my body, and though it aches, isn't its growth beautiful? After everything that happened, my eyes still light up when I hear that song you once recommended. Every time I see trailers for a movie I know you'd like or when I go through old photos, I can't help but smile because you were sweet. Loving you was sweet, and I blame myself for not knowing how to express what was truly wrong.

When I speak to strangers and find out they have the same name as you, grief showers me with affection. When you meet new people, do you see the shattered mosaics of me in them, too? Do these strangers remind you of me, or should I say, of us? When they talk and share a piece of their dream, do you cheer them on like you used to do for

me? Because, deep down, I know you'll be wondering to yourself, "Is this about me?"

Of course it is. It was *always* about you, wasn't it?

The truth is you are no longer the person I once knew. But, when the sky blooms into a soft, safe pink and the streetlights are off, I'm glad things turned out the way they did. And though I miss your calls, your hugs, and just *you*, I cannot help but be pleased with grief taking your place.

However, when the sun has gone down and the clock hits 11:11, I will always leave room for you in my wish. I wish for you to be treated kindly and delicately, for you to be content in your definition of success, and for you to have all that you ever wanted—because you could never have me.

So, one day, when you achieve everything you desire, I hope you are distracted enough to forget how you were once starving, your body malnourished because of the love I had selfishly stolen back. I hope you forget the last words I said to you, that you forget where my birthmarks lie, and the way my face stayed flushed red when speaking to you. I hope you forget how our teeth clacked when we kissed in your room and the way we laughed it off. I hope you forget what my hands felt like holding yours, and I hope you forget all the secrets I told you.

I hope you forget that I loved you because I'll never be able to.

Because deep down, I *painstakingly* hope you ask yourself, "Is this about me?" and, if you ever did ask, I would say, "How could it not be?"

So, when the sky remains that soft, safe pink, I will pretend that I do not know you at all—perhaps I never did. And it'll be the last secret I will have let you in on, so make it a good one, and ask instead "I wonder who this could be about?"

Prestidigitation

Nickolas Topp

As the night grew dreary, I found myself
 leaving the confines of my class
 Lost in the gentle lights
 it was not long until I saw you on the streets
 Buried in a book, enamored by the text,
 you were desperate to learn
 Intrigued by your milky coat bathing
 in the traces of light, I couldn't pass
 Nodding toward you, I inquired about your study,
 eager to see your feats
 Only then was my world opened,
 no longer strangers, how things may turn

your presence was unlike anything I had known,
 truly a spectacle, magical.
 you illuminated me with things I could never
 dream of seeing, lost in arcana.
 tour each of the motions with practiced ease
 truly you were nothing but swift.
 few could show such skill or precision
 I now see why you called yourself magi.
 within my darkest hour, you lifted my spirits
 showing me the brightest dawn.
 chagrin at the thought, for life without you
 would be nothing but trauma.

More than ever, I can relinquish
 all of that pent up anguish.
 Usually, I am lost with nothing but prayer
 but now, I send fear adieu.
 Reality has been shaped by your magic
 i find this life to be a dream.
 I am with you, you have shown me much
 and I couldn't ask for extra.
 Don't let this magic fade
 i will stay with you in this life we've woven

Kebab Night

Tejaswinee Roychowdhury

I remember the only evening
my father made chicken kebab.
He held high a cautionary stick
to keep at bay a young baboon
attracted to the glow of coal.
I imagine his friends heard instead
of a curious, seductive scent—
burnt bird, capsicum and onion,
entwined in spiced butter
—from his first kebab night.

The Marriage Dance (& Other Committed Thoughts)

Cheryl Farris-Clayton

the daily dance is not
without recollection
of lessons learned ...
each day, she shows up;
ballerina slippers in hand
to dance
and carve her place
of being
without him
while
they are together ...

Blooming
Susan Meeks



An Avid Reader Overreacts

LaVern Spencer McCarthy

It's midnight at the library.
I open the night depository lid,
smell old books, glue and turmoil.

I hear howls, moans, echoes--
the marching tramp-tramp of knowledge;
laughter; a cacophony of birds
from the nature section;

mountaineering magazines hurling avalanches
onto the tiled floor; how-to issues
sawing lumber, meshing gears; geriatric
journals weeping out old men in striped pajamas.

Suddenly I know
what the books do at night.
Words slam into the walls, try to get out
where I am dropping returns.

Galvanized,
I bang the lid shut against them,
streak terrified toward the safety of my car
before they escape
and eat me alive

Alchemist

Sarai Argüelles

I'm not an artist.

I'm an alchemist.

I'm going to water these pages

and make these words bloom

just like I made the stars

shine in their decay.

And so, I will undertake the ultimate transformation

with every single ojalá, hopefully, and inshallah

each "I'll talk to you tomorrow" and "See you later"

every God willing and "Si Dios quiere"

each "How was your day" and "I hope you're good"

all prayers and amens

each "I love you" and "Be safe"

and in every single forever

I will become hope

because despite the grief and tragedy

I'm still too stubborn to be hopeless

and I will always be—

Hopeful because despite the mistakes and insecurities,

I know we deserve all the good things.

A safe place for all creation

because while the opposite of death is life,

hope is the true creator of worlds.

The Death of Mr. Crochet

Lisa Gay Jennings

Drop de fire pon har,
 She tek wey mi man,
 She tink a she alone
 Can ave pretty skin
 And can tun har han.

Mi talk to har bout it
 More dan once.
 And mi tell har
 She nah get him
 Under no circumstance.

But de gal hard a' hearing,
 And she noh have no shame.
 She nuh care wah 'appen to har,
 She nuh care bout har name.

Mi did call Miss Sisilyn
 Fe some madderly advice.
 And she tell me,
 Mi nuh have nuh real claim to him name,
 So me just ha fi gwan play nice.

Den later she warn mi
 Mi ha fi leave Mista Linton Crife,
 Cause she hear from Junie seh,
 Him nah lef him wife.
 But me noh tink
 Miss Sisilyn can penetrate or understand

De whole situation.
Cause a ten years now
Me deh wid da man.

Him did promise fe lef
Bridget
Wen her fader dead and gone.
And him finally get de money
Wey him deh dey a wait pon.

Mr. Crochet
Tek real sick de odda day
An it did look real bad.
So mi did glad
Wen de doctor tell him seh
Him must get him funeralll
Arrangements out o de way.

De doctor advise him,
Any day now,
Expect de worse.
An a de first, me ever get so excited,
Fe see smaddy
Inna one hearse.
Mi heart beat fasta,
An mi secretly rejoice.
Linton now ha fi mek him choice.
But Lawd! Mr. Crochet stabilize.
De medicine do it work.
De doctor tell him sey him can live ten more years,
If him cut out bad livin and jerk pork.

Mi heart an soul
Bingle.
And mi wan gi Mr. Crochet
Bad yeye.
Mi see all mi hopes and dreams
Just a go by.

But mi tie my tongue
An mi kibba mi mout.
Mi nah get noh more young
And mi noh have big money fe flout.

So mi go dung pon mi knees,
An ask God
Please
Gimme a miracle.

Mi know God did hear mi petition.
Mi know Him understand mi desperation.
Far likkle after dat,
Mr. Crochet start fe go back,
A Mrs. Farina pastry shop.

Congruence

Uday Shankar Ojha

Somehow my pen comes
to rest on you,
though I ask only
for a meaningful poem.

Echoes of your sweet thrashes
cool me thrice over,
your eyes, spying,
melt ice to the core.

This year was destined not to
yield the least. Loud was
the land, sapless, insipid yet
rigid, not to be ripped apart.

Yet the air around me
breathes unsparingly,
fumes and fragrances
conspiring adhesive designs.

Contributors

Hillary Loera will be graduating from the University of Houston-Downtown with a Bachelor's in English this Fall. She is passionate about her Houston community, and reconnecting with and preserving her Tejano heritage. Among cherished moments with her husband and son, she eagerly awaits the February arrival of her newest family member.

M.A. Dubbs is an award-winning Mexican-American and LGBT poet from Indiana. For over a decade, Dubbs has been publishing writing in magazines and anthologies across the globe. She is the author of *An American Mujer* through Bottlecap Press (2022) and served as judge for Indiana's Poetry Out Loud Competition. Social Media: [instagram.com/madubbspoetry](https://www.instagram.com/madubbspoetry)

Manoranjan Sahoo earned a Bachelor of Commerce from Utkal University and a Diploma in Pharmaceutical Business Retail and Wholesale from Kendrapara Autonomous College. He has three collections of poetry—*Apadebata*, *Khalihatate* and *Kicchi Kabita Kichhi Nirabata*. He was born and raised in Indupur, Kendrapara, Odisha.

Pitambar Naik is a writer and translator. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *JMWW*, *Singapore Unbound*, *Ellipsis Literature and Art*, *The Dodge*, *The McNeese Review*, *The Notre Dame Review*, *Packingtown Review*, *Ghost City Review*, *Rise Up Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry* and elsewhere. He's the author of *The Anatomy of Solitude* (Hawakal) and *Fury Species*, translation (Rehor Publishers) and currently working on

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Gilda María Isaac is an adjunct professor at UNT, National University of San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina. Isaac graduated from UNT in 1979 and later studied in Houston, Texas in 1985-87 for a Masters Degree and graduated with a high grade point average. She taught Spanish classes at the University of Houston, St Thomas University, Rice University and Houston Community College from 1987 until 2001. Isaac returned to Argentina in 2001 and is currently living and working there. She loves teaching, travelling, poetry and photography.

Orland Agustin Solis writes poetry, short stories, and children's stories primarily in the Hiligaynon language. His works tackle their narratives as farmers in the hinterlands of Negros Occidental. His works have appeared in *TLDTD*, *Revolt Magazine*, *Loch Raven Review*, and elsewhere. You can find him @JLaneria in X/Twitter and @jacob_laneria in Instagram

Eric Abalajon is currently a lecturer at the University of the Philippines Visayas, Iloilo. His translations have appeared in *Asymptote*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The Loch Raven Review*, and *Exchanges: Journal of Literary Translation*. His debut poetry collection is forthcoming from Flowesong Press. He lives near Iloilo City, Philippines.

Aaliyah Norfleet is a visual artist born and raised in Third Ward Houston, Texas. Her artistic goal is to have a positive impact on Black youth, as they were instrumental in shaping her upbringing. Her inspiration for depicting Black individuals in her paintings stems from the lack of positive representation of Blackness within art on a global scale. Through her work, Norfleet centers Black joy, Black beauty and Black excellence. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Houston-Downtown with a concentration in Painting.

Sarai Argüelles is a Mexican-American poet, painter, University of Houston-Clear Lake alumna, and aspiring librarian. She loves plants, books, and her friends. Her writing primarily focuses on relationships, the concepts of hope and home, and her hometown of Houston. You can find more of her work on her Instagram accounts @poetaster_phenom and @sar_a_i.

Kathi Crawford spends her days as a human capital consultant and executive coach in Houston, Texas, and, by night, writes poetry and flash creative nonfiction. She hopes to create dialogue through her writing for the challenges of our time and as individuals. You can find her on Instagram @kathicrawford. Her poetry has been featured in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Ephemeral Elegies*, *One Art: a journal of poetry*, *The Write Launch*, *Imposter: a poetry journal*, and *Equinox: Into the Thicket by Hotpoet*.

Kaili Mora-Duarte is a grad student at UNT and poet from the outskirts of Houston, Texas. He received his undergraduate from University of Houston-Downtown.

He enjoys spending time outdoors, writing, listening and playing music, and finding new places to eat.

Karla Carrillo is a junior at the University of Houston-Downtown, majoring in English with a Creative Writing concentration. She is a writer and editor for UHD's student-run newsletter *The Dateline* and an aspiring author working on a novel manuscript. In her free time, she likes to read, crochet, and play video games. You can find her on Instagram @writtenby.karla.

Conssiah Simon is an emerging artist hailing from the vibrant Houston, Texas. In a relatively short span, Conssiah has developed a distinctive artistic style that defies easy categorization. Her paintings are a fusion of abstract and realistic techniques, characterized by bold brushwork, vibrant colors, and an intuitive sense of composition.

LaVern Spencer McCarthy has published twelve books of short stories and poetry. Her stories have appeared in *Fenechty's*, *Anthology of Short Stories*, *The Writers and Readers Magazine*, *California Poppy Times Newspaper* and many others. She is a life member of Poetry Society of Texas and lives in Blair Oklahoma.

Stephen Schwei is a Pushcart-nominated poet with Wisconsin roots, now living in Houston, and has published one collection, *Bluebonnet Whispers*. A gay man with three grown children and four wonderful grandchildren, he can be a mass of contradictions. Poetry helps to sort all of this out. www.stephenschwei.com

Osasere Ewansiha is a graduate student in the Literature program at the University of Houston–Clear Lake. In her spare time, she enjoys reading manga and watching anime. Her current goal is to write enough poems to self-publish her own chapbook.

Ted Hogeman is a freelance filmmaker, sound designer, and story writer based in Washington DC. The inspiration for this story came out of the Smithsonian’s Futures exhibit in 2022, because there was something infectious about its radical optimism. You can see more of his work online at laughingwiththestorm.net.

H. Tenk received their BA in English with a Concentration in Creative Writing from the University of Houston–Downtown in 2017. They have since written over nine hundred haiku and senryu and plan to continue for long as luck will put time in their path.

Amelia Roman is a writer-painter-interior designer nomad who shares her time between Istanbul, Paris and New York. She studied creative writing and painting at NYU and the Victorian Artist Society in Melbourne and, later, interior design at art school in Paris. Her first novel *Palazzo Rhapsody* is about to be published.

MK Saye is a published writer for the *Mountain Goat Journal*, a literary journal for the University of the South as well as for the University’s newspaper. MK is returning to Houston as a postgraduate and is pursuing a career in human rights law; but finds time between LSAT quizzes to look for the best small bookstores in Houston.

Eric Blanchard is a lawyer, an educator, and an insufferable daydreamer. His poetry has been published in numerous collections, both online and in print. Eric's first chapbook, *The Good Parts*, was published by Finishing Line Press in January 2020, and his second, *Beware of Poet*, was the winner of the 2022 William D. Barney Memorial Chapbook Contest.

Joselyn Arriaga is a First-Generation college student at the University of Houston-Downtown majoring in English and minoring in Spanish. Arriaga is a Mexican American Houstonian who heavily enjoys literature and writing. More specifically, she enjoys connecting to her community with modern literature. Porque le falta sazón.

Shane Allison is a writer and artist living in Tallahassee Florida. Shane's collage work has graced the pages of *Shampoo*, *Unlikely Stories*, *Pnpplzine.com*, *Palavar Arts Magazine*, *the Southeast Review*, *South Broadway Review*, *Postscript Magazine* and a plethora of others. He is the author of four collections of poetry. *Sweet Sweat* being his most recent. His new collection *Turbulent* is forthcoming from Hysterical Books.

Desiree Marcos is an undergrad student at the University of Houston-Downtown majoring in English. She currently works in special education and will continue to do so after she graduates this Fall. Working in education, writing, photography, and being a mother are her life passions. Find her on Instagram @desireearielphoto.

Mark Jodon is the author of a full-length book of poetry, *Day of the Speckled Trout* (Transcendent Zero Press) and a limited edition chapbook, *What the Raven Wants* (Provision Press).

Rachel Ann Preston (they/them) is a poet from Houston, Texas. Their writing focuses on grief, the struggles of mental illness, and the significantly small details of all relationships. Their work has been published in *The Bayou Review* (2017 – The Prison Issue), *The Knell Journal*, *That Gray Zine*, *Bullshit Lit*, and is forthcoming elsewhere. They have two chapbooks published, *Poems for an Empty Ballroom* (Between Shadows Press) and *Some Sunny Day* (Odessa Collective). Find them on Instagram @number1jarulefan

Samara Gaona is a Mexican-American writer born and raised in Houston, Texas. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Houston-Downtown. She wishes to share her writing with the public in hopes of inspiring a plethora of emotions to her readers.

Nickolas Topp, aka, Nicky is a Hispanic that grew up in Houston for most of his life. He is a homosexual fantasy writer who loves to craft fiction and make words in high fantasy settings, aspiring to write for many more years to come.

Tejaswinee Roychowdhury is a Pushcart-nominated writer-poet from India. Her work has appeared in *Taco Bell Quarterly*, *HOAX*, *Muse India*, *Dreich*, *The Chakkar*, and more. She is the founding editor of *The Hooghly*

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Cheryl Farris-Clayton, MFA, is a poet and creative writer who has utilized vehicle of poetry to expand her vision; share observations and express the subtle; yet poignant discoveries regarding humanity through her work. She is a Houston native and Adjunct Lecturer of English at the University of Houston-Downtown.

Susan Meeks' field of study is flowers. Her observations come from walks where she photographs her flowers. The quiet delicate flowers bring her happiness. Meeks believes blooming flowers signify life and the delicate balance in nature. Her goal is to inspire others to look deeper into natural beauty and find peace. You can find Meeks on Instagram @susanpaintsflowers.

Lisa Gay Jennings was born in Jamaica and earned her Ph.D. in English Literature from Florida State University. In December 2022, she won a place as a participant in the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies' (ACMRS'), Mellon-Funded, 2023, First Book Institute. She is an assistant professor of English.

Uday Shankar Ojha is a professor at the Department of English, Jai Prakash University, Chhapra, Bihar, India. His poems are published in *Dreich*, *Outlook India*, *The Bayou Review* (University of Houston-Downtown), *Roots & Resettlement* (Virginia Tech University), *Lit. 202*, *Roi Fainéant Press*, and *Paddler Press* among other places. Linktree: <https://linktr.ee/usojha>

