

A photograph of a notebook page. In the top right corner, a white cup filled with dark coffee is visible. To the left of the cup, there is a large, irregular brown stain on the paper. In the bottom left corner, a black pen with a silver clip and a black pen cap are lying on the page. The page is white and has a spiral binding on the left side. The text "Watch This Space" is written in a large, black, serif font in the center of the page. Below it, in a smaller, black, serif font, is the text "Creative Writing by UCL BASc Students 2016 - 2017". There is also a faint, orange, circular scribble on the page, located to the right of the pen and cap.

# Watch This Space

Creative Writing  
by UCL BASc Students  
2016 - 2017





Welcome to **Watch This Space**, created by UCL Arts and Sciences (BASc) students taking our department's Creative Writing module (BASC2004). Last year's publication, **Work in Progress**, was our first, and with this second newspaper we're now well on the way to producing a lovely little pile of publications which we hope will stand the test of time and posterity!

Over the ten weeks of this undergraduate module we explored long-form and in-depth intensive reading, learning how to identify technical aspects of prose fiction, poetry and creative non-fiction. Weekly writing exercises, both in and outside of class seminars also meant that we were able to continuously practise and hone our own creative writing, with reading aloud our work in class an important aspect of weekly group critiquing.

Some of the writers we read and studied included: *Marianne Moore*; *Joan Didion*; *A. M. Homes*; *Richard Brautigan*; *Anne Sexton* and *Muriel Rukeyser*.

These writers supplied us with lots of amazing examples we can only hope to follow, and provided us with lots of good advice on how to progress our work.

As A. M. Homes notes, "just taking the time to notice both the outside world and the inner states" is an important aspect of a writer's daily work. She adds that we must "stay curious [...] stay open to what the characters bring to the story - don't be overly determined to control the story but rather let it evolve organically. [...] It's not about what you as an author think or want to have happen. It's about what's accurate for the character".

While Joan Didion notes that "[i]n many ways writing is the act of saying *I*, of imposing oneself upon other people, of saying *listen to me, see it my way, change your mind*."

Anne Sexton, meanwhile, found that, as a writer "[i]t's very hard to reveal yourself [...] To really get at the truth of something is the poem, not the poet. [...] What I'm hunting for when I'm working away there in the poem. I'm hunting for the truth. It might be a kind of poetic truth, and not just a factual one, because behind everything that happens to you, every act, there is another truth, a secret life."

We'd like to welcome you, dear reader, to our own inner, secret lives, and our own truths, and hope that in some small way, we may change your minds...

**Sara Wingate Gray**

*BASC2004 module tutor*

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Page 3.....	<b>Casino</b>
Page 4.....	<b>Dear Loved One</b>
Page 5.....	<b>Replace all "was" with "am"</b>
Page 6.....	<b>Teaspoon Chatter</b>
Page 7.....	<b>O</b>
Page 8.....	<b>Love</b>
Page 9.....	<b>A Dark Matter</b>
Page 10.....	<b>Photogenic</b>
Page 11.....	<b>His Promised Ocean</b>
Page 12.....	<b>Cabaret Girls</b>
Page 13.....	<b>Cycle</b>
Page 14.....	<b>Hymn</b>
Page 15.....	<b>Twenty Something Limbo</b>
Page 16.....	<b>Polar Bears</b>
Page 17.....	<b>Edge</b>
Page 18-19.....	<b>Unsaid</b>
Page 20.....	<b>Bladder Control at the Border</b>
Page 21.....	<b>Eulogy for a Library Drunkard</b>
Page 22.....	<b>Credits/Contributor (Six Word) Bios</b>
Page 23-24.....	<b>Epilogue</b>





# Casino

**Will Capstick**

Kaching! Another sigh as a punter loses her stake to the steely, authoritarian presence in the room. Will she try again? What a stupid question. In Northern Minnesota, an area dominated by Native American tribes, casinos can operate openly without federal interference; the right to run gambling institutions is one of the few Native American privileges that has stood the test of time.

Another privilege afforded to these institutions is the right of the patrons to smoke on the premises.

The stench of tobacco seeps out of every sweaty, artificial pore of this windowless room. Unnatural colours and sounds strike me as I wander through a labyrinth of groans and occasional, jubilant cries of joy. It's strange that the majority of the Casino's patrons are elderly. Why would those with the least money, or the fewest means of making money, feel so compelled to waste years of huffing and puffing on slot machines: those faceless tormentors that strangle you with hope and optimism and then spit you out once your few seconds of fame are up. Chandeliers litter the ceiling, transmitting their incandescent, artificial glow around the room and into the gamblers' minds.

Drinks are free here and the people know it. They are stacked on trays and dished out to obliging customers whose optimism shines that bit brighter with every

sip they take. The gin and tonics are reserved for the high rollers, the vagabonds who strut into the casino with a bag of cash and only leave once every ounce of hope, of desire has been drained from them. They start brightly, their face beaming with reverence for the dealer whose next hand will land them that big buck, that college tuition, that mortgage repayment. As the cards are dealt and the frown lines impressed upon the skin of the punters they become angry and accusatory - a war of words breaks out between a father and a silent employee with only one victor.

There is a restaurant in the casino. The buffet is filled with soggy, stodgy food accompanied by sullen servers, I had the beef lasagne and it tasted like water; the glitz and glamour of the slot machines clearly hadn't transcended the fifty-square metre space in the room opposite. The wallpaper is a bright, neon green, the kind you would expect to find in a child's nursery and the chairs resemble those seen on the London Underground, a grotesque shade of blue accompanied by sporadic yellow lines in no particular pattern.

I can't help but empathise with the wrinkled, leathery people who wander this lonely room looking for a quick fix for their problems. Perhaps he wants to send his grandchildren through school? Perhaps she wants to buy her husband something for Christmas this year? There is no such luck, there is no happiness here.



# Dear Loved One

You drink. You know you drink. You watch your hand, tired fingers wrapped around the cold bottle, pouring liquid gold into your wineglass. It rushes in with urgency, waiting to meet your tight, wrinkled lips on the hard edge, swirling as it fills the glass, higher and higher. Filling your body, your head, your heart. What about your liver, my love?

I remember when I was little, you would pick me up and put me on your lap and hug me close to your bony chest. Your warm breath would drench the air around me, filling my nose with the smell. Of course I didn't know back then. I didn't know that smell was alcohol. Mummy always smelt of Diorissimo. Grandma in Spain used to smell of sweeties and Coco Chanel. Grandad wore his Paco Rabanne which I found in the cupboard when I was six and made the mistake of covering myself in it. I thought I smelt lovely. But you, you always had that smell.

I come and visit you now, every once in a while just to check. They say you're doing well but your pale face says otherwise. I remember seeing you sober before you moved here. In the mornings, because you only start drinking at 2pm, I would visit you and you would wander around the cold house, cold body, cold heart. You would pull on your shearling gilet and your navy woollen hat and go outside. Shuffling around the garden, the morning dew drenching your socks through your crocks, as you pick the beans and tomatoes. You would place them in your carry bag and bring them into the kitchen. You would slice and peel and chop. Then you would store them away in the fridge. You'd spend the rest of the morning making tea and reading newspapers. Passing the time. You'd have your lunch. Toast, overdone, basically burnt, with Bovril thinly spread on top. You'd always have this with a large helping of the expensive camembert from Marks and Spencer. Then it would be 2pm and not a second later you take out the wine. It's always the wine.

First glass: all of a sudden a cheery disposition fills you, your head lifts up and you ask me all sorts of questions, about my work, school, love life. You tell me old stories from when you were younger and more beautiful. When you worked in London as a model.

Second glass: you start to pick topics that I was taught not to speak about; sex, religion, politics. You start to argue with anyone and everyone who will listen, just for the sake of it. You shout across the table and cut people off to inject your obscene opinions.

Third glass: normally I disappear by this point. Glass three is when you start to brood. The argument has an abrupt end and you start sulking over your loss or the bitter words exchanged.

Fourth glass: I never understand this one. You become, well, happy. A sort of classic happy drunk. You put on music and float around the room, your arms spread wide impersonating a seesaw and your smile sweet like the little girls who would be balancing on either end.



Fifth glass: I think this is when you start to regret the drink, or regret something. You mutter things under your breath, "oh I shouldn't have, oh I really shouldn't have, oh no, oh no."

Sixth, seventh, eighth glass: these all blend into one. You just sit in your chair, pouring again and again, emptying the liquid into your thin, frail body, desperate to fill the hollow crevices inside.

Glass Nine. In your chair, you drift away, I call your name but no response. You never finish this glass, it's always half empty, half full?

Now I know this doesn't happen every day, you didn't always make it to the ninth glass. Sometimes you'd stop at number three, taking yourself to bed before the drink took you. Often you would stop in the middle of glass five. You'd drag yourself upstairs but instead of going right down the corridor towards your bedroom, I'd see you turn left and into the spare room. You forget, you let me stay in there for a while one summer. I know it's where you keep your brandy and the letters under the bed. These times are gone now.

Now you lie in your white bed with your white sheets and no white wine. You don't have nine lives my love, not like your nine glasses that send you to sleep. In this life it only takes the one.

**Sophie L**





# Replace all "was" with "am"

I was a peculiar child. Who found things around her peculiar. I found them peculiar because I thought they were different. Perhaps it was looking at them through my peculiar eyes that made them peculiar.

I don't know, I guess it's quite peculiar.  
Pe-cu-liar.  
Pe. Cu. Liar.  
Liar.  
Am I lying? I might be.

Maybe I was the normalest child in the whole wide world.

(ha. Normalest)

All I want for my birthday is tv cake, mom.  
Please.  
Thank you.

"Happy birthday to youu, Happy birthday to youuu!  
Happy birthdaaayy to Maaaargheeeeeee,  
Happy Birthday to yooouuuuuuu!"

I got to be the girl from the advertisement for my birthday. I got her tv cake. Quite a pecu-LIAR! present to receive.

Mom is in the kitchen, she is about to step out, the song is starting and all my friends are joining in. If I had super hearing I would be able to hear her lift the plate from the table. Hear her first footstep whilst she carries the cake of my dreams. Please, please have the tv cake, please. I want to be the girl on TV.

Oh. My. Goodness.  
I'm a living advertisement.

PAUSE.  
It's perfect. All we need is background music and it's the perfect still image, everyone smiling, super surprised, someone holding my hand, someone else gasping showcasing perfect white teeth, white walls and clean aprons and all.

PLAY.  
Ahhh the publicity I see it I see it! Get away everybody this is MY cake! Oh gosh goodness, look at that! It's the cake, it's the perfect cake from TV - I can't stop laughing, I mean, it's a thin, warm baguette on an immeasurably long plate (we own a rectangular plate that long? Wow. Anyway cake, yes TV cake) TV cake sliced horizontally covered in luscious, perfect, divine NUTELLA! I want to EAT IT.  
NOW.

Well yes, that's that.  
Those were the very peculiar thoughts that jumped around my head like excited heat particles on my 11th birthday. Not only was I the walking definition of a "hot mess" (quite literally, I was so excited to see it I started going all red and sweaty), but I also made no attempt to conceal it.

I personally think wanting a cake from TV is in itself quite a peculiar birthday wish. Especially if it's a baguette covered in Nutella and I'm still calling it cake.

However, if you're not convinced I was peculiar

enough, you're partly right. I mean, I wasn't *that* bad.  
Pe. Cu. Liar.  
I love that song: Liar liar pants on fire. Liar liar PANTS ON FIRE!  
You are peculiar Marghe, you are.

Well, I saw the baguette, and my friends were gone. *Poof*, disappeared. What is a friend? Who needs a friend? Why in the bloody world are you, my dear friend, STILL trying to talk to me whilst I just want to bury my face in Nutella.  
No, that is not a question. It is a statement. It means leave. Just leave.  
Oh come on, *please*. Please just leave, I can't concentrate on 11 year old socialising if this beauty is in front of me. I don't care about your Tamagochi you immature child. (Did people even play with Tamagochies when I was 11? Check your facts Marghe, at least.). You're not as pretty as the girl in the advertisement's friends any way. Action! Say your lines well, don't concentrate on the beauty that is walking into the room, just say your lines and it will be over soon and the cameras will be off and we can really eat this cake instead of contemplating it without touching it with perfect smiles whilst a lady on the side is describing how "Stannah" is so helpful she can now enjoy life without stress in her family.

"Thanks to "Stannah", (white teeth smile, unnatural pause) I no longer have to worry (sweet, composed laugh)  
Wait for it...  
CUT!  
Yes! Cake time! Can we eat it? Can we?

Well, my life was better than imaginary publicity girls'. I don't have to spend two minutes smiling at the cake without touching it. At least she got to eat it after the take. It would be horrible if she didn't.  
Oh gosh. What if it was fake? What if it looks real on TV but is shiny and plastic-y in real life?  
Is mine fake too? I dip my hands in the Nutella, thank god it's real.  
Hand full of brown sticky stuff, all my friends looking at me slightly confused, slightly amused. Or weirded out?  
I want them to leave. Leave me with my cake.  
Thanks.

**Margherita Messina**



# Teaspoon Chatter.

The turmoil of your flat white  
chinking china black hole,  
sucks me in deeper still  
my cappuccino and I battle uphill

to utter a single sentence  
that is able to mingle  
in your mind of market crashes and tip-toppling pint  
glasses  
and the office girl with those legs and lashes

whose fingertips tap on the edges of your eye,  
we both know she would have made a far lovelier  
bride  
than I, as we stare abjectly across the ash forest table  
in your stock floor suit shaven face and mislabelled

gold band that matches mine stroke for stroke  
its significance now a coffee shop joke  
resting hidden between tightly crossed jeans.  
Profound unhappiness brewing amongst espresso  
screams.



**Shannon Healy**



# O

I grew up in a house where the bubbles in the cooking  
pot

had doleful eyes. They were kinder than some.

I used to lie in bed and watch lace netting being sucked  
to my window,

imagining it was a cloth draped over the round, circle

mouth of a brittle old man desperately wheezing his  
last breaths.

I used to look for the halo of the street light

and pretend it was the moon.

Now I am alone and on a hill and pretending that I can  
see

that same streetlight, picking it out amongst the stars.

My feet are planted like flag poles.

The world is my temperature and I can't see a thing

except those white gaps in the sky.

Darkness is a womb and the moon is the opening-

gateway to new life, entry to being.

**Shayna Kowalczyk**



# Love



Bowls rife with mutton and harissa,  
 lentils and okra and dulcet  
 rose-water, almonds, dates  
 sprawl (as if for the first time in this cold city),  
 offering their steaming centres with the innocence  
 of the daisies on her summer dress.

He watches her grind his dishes, his oblations  
 to her secrets, with her hollow teeth.

She has told him it is difficult for her to keep  
 what fills her up. But she is starved

and his eyes are hungry  
 and that song about eyes like this,  
 hungry eyes,

it must have been playing on the radio  
 (it must have been those days).

She licks up the trail of sticky, spicy juice  
 running down her busy hand.

Their hands  
 (his smell like nutmeg and homesickness)  
 their hands

are meant to turn the  
 hollows and folds and caves of her body  
 into refuges of consolation.

And maybe it hurts him now  
 to see her chew on the tender meat he made

tender with love,  
 with love  
 for such things as girls' honours and

the order of right and wrong.

He doesn't know (and neither does she)  
 that soon she will be cooking for her daughters  
 and life will be a story more easily told  
 but just as difficult to bear.

For now, his money will be enough,  
 enough for her train back to the other town  
 (she will try to find who she is in the passing  
 trees and fields and villages),  
 enough for more summer dresses  
 and for the other man who sent her here,  
 the man she will also make  
 love to.

**Siana Eberle**



# A Dark Matter

Set against an endless off-white sky, a tragedy of the worst kind unfolds.

A large black Americano sits across the table from a frappe mocha latte, a quarter eaten brownie splitting the playing field between them. A gaze, lost in some distant feminine form, wanders its way across the table, instantly regretful when he finds her half-empty eyes expectantly fixed on him. Cough, smile-grimace for a while and look away. Seventeen months, that trick's been working for him. He sniffs his coffee, his face coming closer and closer to the porcelain framed black hole, until his nose pierces the surface and he silently dives away into the darkness.

"Tired?"

"Yep."

She smiles, sheepishly, and with an air of surrender withdraws her phone from her jacket pocket.

She remembers the conception of their uneventful relationship, an accidental bum dial turned booty call which led to his arrival at her flat. She had a record player, in her room, can I see it, I think we should be exclusive. Flinching at the fluidity of it all she returns to her screen.

He and the chair sigh in unison: he hates it when she does that.

"Wyalwaysmmon your phone?"

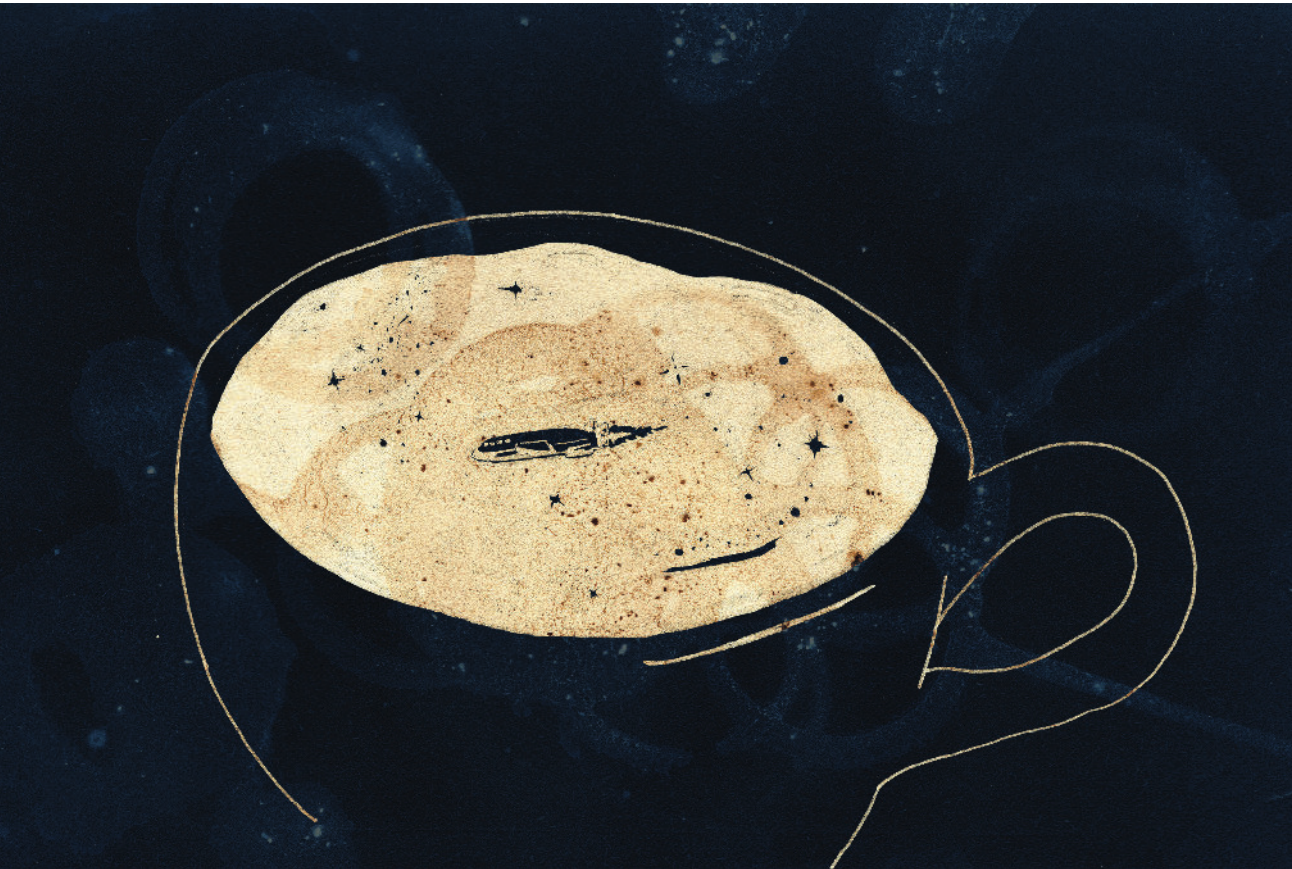
The offending distraction falls back into the jacket pocket; it takes a moment, but the ripples eventually settle and the silence flattens out once more.

She was the greatest fireworks display he'd ever encountered, forgiving blues, marshmallow pinks and a golden Catherine wheel, swirling, glowing right there, ablaze in front of his eyes. Mesmerised, he was in love.

Slowly at first, he became her entire life, and she his. He didn't need friends when he had all the conversation in the world right here, and she, she didn't want to waste time at the theatre when her most captivated audience member would attend her shows night after night if she only turned up. Once the cacophony of explosions was over, no new fireworks flew, for the fuel had ceased to be. Their love had killed the very essence of what it was born from in the first place, consuming itself. They would leave, if they had anything to go back to, and the prospect of loneliness frightened them far more than to settle for less than ideal.

A vessel, carrying the last hope of humanity, journeys across the galaxy. Halfway into their mission they hesitate, with just enough fuel left they can turn back to Earth, or they can venture ahead, dedicating themselves to the hope that something greater hides in the darkness. Leaving it all behind they fly into the unknown, realising their mistake only too late. Past the point of no return, they find nothing but silent emptiness unfolding ahead. Too late for regret, the vessel floats aimlessly into the eternal darkness.

**Theo Merten-Mancer**







# Photogenic

She's not gonna like the picture. I know she's not gonna like the picture even before I show it to her. I know she's not gonna like the picture even before she knows she's not gonna like the picture. I know because I've known her for 12 years (she would say 11 years and 11 months to be exact, I would say jeez must you be so finicky does that one month really matter, she would say yes it does). She'll think she looks fat, but never say it. Instead she'll say that her knee looks like a mix between OJ Simpson and a pug. She'll say she has the arms of a lunch lady. I wish when I looked at the photo I saw her through my own eyes rather than hers.

'What do you think?'

She looks at the picture, sighs, looks somewhere in the middle distance above my shoulder.

'It's nice.'

'But?'

'Nothing, it's nice thanks.'

'Do you want a new one?'

'Do you think we should take a new one?'

'Sure if you want to.'

She smiles, triumphant. 'So you agree, it's a shit photo.'

'I didn't say that! You're putting words in my mouth. God!'

'Relax I'm joking.' (She isn't.)

She assumes her previous position, leaning against the marble pillar. I pause to look at her: chin tilted up-

wards, lips slightly parted, right hip gently cocked. Behind her the Barcelona skyline stretches, covered in smog; it makes me feel as though the volume has been turned down around us.

When we were younger I used to make a note for every time I saw her naked: a star in my diary for every P.E. lesson, every sleepover, every time we got home drunk and I watched in a confused haze as she tried to extract herself from shoes, tights, dress. Once on a ski trip with her family, in the sauna after everyone had gone to sleep. Neither of us knew how to start a sauna so we sat on the wooden bench naked, hunched over the manual, arms covered in goosebumps. She tried to light it, it didn't work, then we realised (I realised) it had to be centrally turned on. She didn't like that, she made fun of me 'wow you really have a future in electricals, Ms Have-You-Tried-Turning-It-On-And-Off', and I humoured her because I knew if I retorted she would be aloof for the whole day after. She suggested we run outside into the snow and I told her she was crazy, were we some kind of Scandinavian strongmen, we would definitely get pneumonia and besides, I wasn't about to go frolicking naked under her parents' window. She went anyway and when she came back giggling, her pale body covered in scarlet patches I felt exhilarated too. The morning after we were putting our ski boots on outside when her mum spotted the snow angel behind the sauna. We avoided each other's eye and I had to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing.

There haven't been any stars for a while, not since the afternoon of our school graduation 4 years ago (3 years and 9 months to be exact), champagne drunk in the school bathroom, a hand sliding under a dress and hovering on a sweaty lower back, another hand pushing against cold white tiles, a suit jacket hastily removed, lips on lips, lips on neck, lips on thighs, suit jacket back on.

'Should we take a selfie?'

She snorts.

'Absolutely not. Are you joking?'

'Fine'.

Humidity has descended on the Parc Güell covering it in a damp glaze and I feel exhausted and sticky. I close my eyes and think of a pool, the ocean, any body of water, even a bathtub would do. I picture myself diving under a cool wave; my ribcage contracting, heartbeat thumping in my ear, hair spreading out like Medusa.

She must realise she's being harsh because she fixes her gaze on me, softens.

'Let's ask someone to take a picture of us.'

I look around and spot a group of English girls, taking turns to pose on the blue mosaic bench.

'Ask them.'

'Or them.' she cuts me off before I even finish my sentence and darts at the elderly Eastern European couple reading the information plaque near us, addressing them in confident Russian.

While they fiddle with the phone camera we arrange ourselves between two marble columns. She places a light hand on the small of my back, fingertips sliding under the waist of my shorts.

'You're a show off' I hiss in her ear.

She digs two nails into my waist.

'Just smile'.

Afterwards she thanks them with an impatient grin then immediately flicks through the pictures. 'You look great. You're very photogenic you know.'

I look at her, pale blue eyes probing me without a hint of a smile and for a moment I have no idea what she's thinking. Then she zooms in on her face.

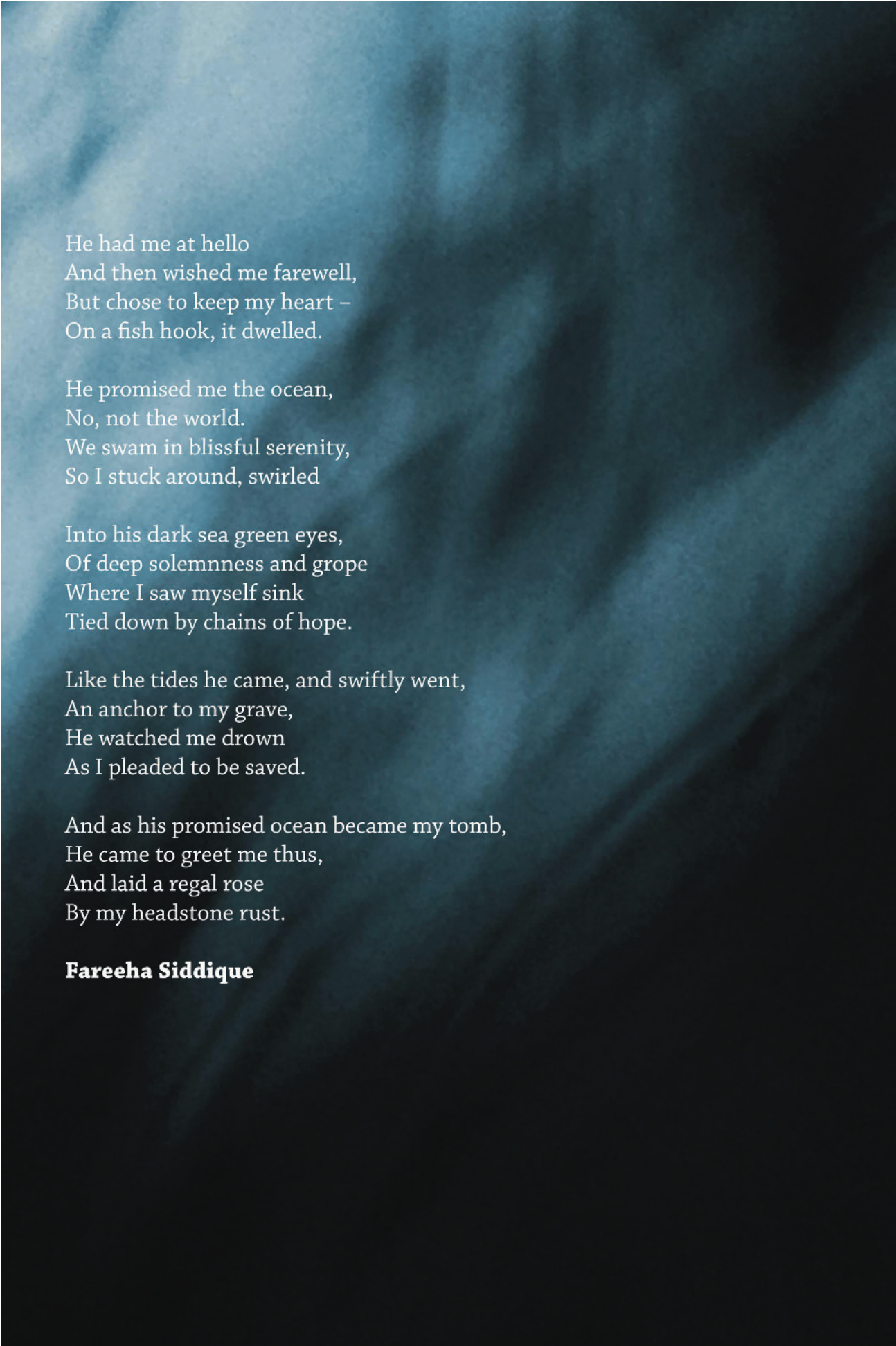
'Oh my god my nose! I look like my dad!'

'You don't!' I say weakly, even though I was thinking the exact same thing.

**Zsafia Paulikovics**



# His Promised Ocean



He had me at hello  
And then wished me farewell,  
But chose to keep my heart –  
On a fish hook, it dwelled.

He promised me the ocean,  
No, not the world.  
We swam in blissful serenity,  
So I stuck around, swirled

Into his dark sea green eyes,  
Of deep solemnness and grope  
Where I saw myself sink  
Tied down by chains of hope.

Like the tides he came, and swiftly went,  
An anchor to my grave,  
He watched me drown  
As I pleaded to be saved.

And as his promised ocean became my tomb,  
He came to greet me thus,  
And laid a regal rose  
By my headstone rust.

**Fareeha Siddique**



# Cabaret Girls

She's got nice teeth and a nice smile, just wide enough, with lips curled at just the right angle. Perfect, as if she sits in front of the mirror and practices. Sometimes at the end of our shifts, when she comes into the locker room with that smile still plastered on her face, it looks like a slug.

She comes in now, work-smile and work-mouth still at the ready in case of any last-minute shift extensions. A winning grin flashes in my direction before she promptly begins to take off her garters. I was awkward right at the beginning, but a few hours of weaving through packed tables in lingerie and my brain's normalisation capabilities were my best friend. Scary how easily we can adapt.

"Lucy. Good shift?"  
The way she states my name to say hello.  
"Hey, Rebecca." My stockings off already, I step towards her and turn around so she can undo my laces. "That one guy on table 3," I sigh. Her fingers brush my scapula and I'm relieved it's dark, and I'm dark, so she can't see me blush.  
"Ugh, god, that one. He was definitely drunk when he came in; I can't believe Stan didn't notice at the door."

My corset off, we spin in sync so I can undo hers. Five years older than me and her skin is flawless. A quick tug on the laces and it slips off.

"Yeah. It kind-of stressed me out for the rest of the shift."  
"They chucked him out pretty quickly, though?"  
"Yeah, I don't know why. I think I was just annoyed. I kept on thinking about the way he spoke to the girls". I reach up behind my back to undo my bra. A cage bra; the straps take an age to untangle. Rebecca's is slung over her locker door, all vibrant lace. It suits her. I hear the manager's words on my first day, looking and nodding: *I'm thinkin' a sort-of, neo-gothic vibe for you? With your slanty-eyes, all sharp lines, I think it would be a hit.* I roll my eyes at the memory. He's an alright guy.

"You get stressed pretty easy?"  
"Huh?" I'd zoned out.  
"Your stress cup - it's not that big?"  
"Stress cup? What are you talking about?"  
"Sorry", she laughs, "I should be clearer. I mean the amount of stress and sadness you can handle at a time. Think of it as a cup. You have a limit to how much sadness you can take, since the cup can overflow."  
"Okay. I suppose that makes sense. Yeah, mine's probably not that big. What happens when it spills over? Something good?"  
"Oh no," her laugh tinkles, "you die."  
"You die." I didn't expect that.  
"Yeah. So you have to poke a hole in the bottom and drain it before it reaches the top."  
"That's..." A terrible metaphor. "A bizarre metaphor. How do you poke the hole, then?"  
"Oh, you know. Taking time out. Me - reading. Music. Thinking about ambition, and feminism, and writing think-pieces on working here, y'know? As a feminist. And enjoying it."  
"That's interesting." I don't sound it but I am interest-

ed. "Can I read them sometime?" I ask, looking at the bra she's just put on. The end-of-shift t-shirt-bras we wear will always be the diametric opposite of 'heavily padded/kinky cut-outs' - comfy, slightly loose, and worn-down.  
"Sure. They're in a notebook, I'll bring it in. What about you?" She tilts her chin up and looks at me from the bench she's sitting on to tug on her jeans. "When you're feeling shit. To poke that hole, what do you do?"  
"I just, I dunno. Never really thought about it. I think. And I don't sleep."  
"That's not exactly a solution, but. Does it help? You think about...?"  
"About schoolwork, I guess. And bills. And tuition. And ridiculous textbook prices."  
"Student loan not helping much?"  
"Ah, no, I'm not technically a British citizen so I don't have one." I do the button on my jeans and reach for my t-shirt, pulling it over my head. Grimacing, she hands me a make-up wipe.  
"That's tough. So it's all about uni?"  
"Well, it's mainly other stuff actually, but school can definitely be a bitch."  
"Other stuff?"  
"Other stuff."  
She pauses mid-wipe to look at me. Half of her make-up on the cloth, she looks more naked without her red lipstick and in her t-shirt and jeans than she did in a corset and thong. I return an anaemic smile. "It's fine, I can get a bit overwhelmed but I get over it straight away." She's reaching for her phone now, so I busy myself with folding garments into my bag. Not that there's much to fold.  
"Here," she says, handing me her phone. "Give me your number. I'll call you so you have mine. If you can't sleep or relax or whatever, text me and I'll send you stuff. Book recommendations, songs, podcasts. Don't know if they'll help but they'll be good nonetheless. I have good taste."  
I take the device and enter my number whilst she packs, and we leave the locker room together, through the kitchens and the restaurant. The lights are on, turning the velveteen richness of the interior harshly gaudy in the yellow light. The few girls wiping up spills wave and call out goodbyes.  
  
Parkas zipped and faces scrubbed, we step out into the 3am cold.  
"Are you working later?" she asks.  
"No, I have classes 'til late on Thursdays."  
"Shame. That you won't be here, not that you have classes. Hope they're good."  
"Thanks. Good night, Rebecca. And... thanks."  
"Good night, Lucy." She smiles. It's clumsily soft, and it's beautiful. "Take care of yourself."

Yawning into the still-dark dawn, we make our separate ways home.

**Amy Czepliewicz**



# Cycle

Spokes click beneath her feet

*Just a ticking time bomb,*

he calls her old bike,

coloured the pink-purple

metallic of girl-hood.

They ride on, her hair streams

behind, a tide rolling.

He remembers the kiss

and how her silk lips left

as quickly as they'd come.

The brush of teeth that came

after, the sheepish smile

that followed, that broke it.

Just a dare, determined

by an empty bottle.

The clock turns in his head

once more. Rage consumes him

and all that came before.

Her laugh is a knife, her

eyes dance with another's.

The universe spins over,

he watches vertebrae

bubble beneath her shirt

as her back shifts with the

bike. *I need to move on,*

He'd said, though she'd not known

then, what from. Now, again,

she remembers how he'd

struggled with the old words,

his hands, and how they shook.





# Hymn

I, watching over city lights, 30 stories high

He, habitually, daily, drawing me to him

We, keeping each other safe as we lie

Once I did not mind the fall, I knew that we could dive;

Through glitter, towards concrete sleep we'd swim

I, watching over city lights, 30 stories high,

When he gets home, the day has pressed him shy

The more he fights, the more his light will dim

We, keeping each other safe as we lie

He does not speak, but once he's dark, he tries

For the first time since youth he sings a hymn

"I, watching over city lights, thirty stories high,

I will sing 'til tongue and heart rest dry"

This last sound brings my doubt over the brim

We, keeping each other safe as we lie

As heavy as I ground him, so lightly he can fly

Could throw him off the ledge, but can I catch him?

I, watching over city lights, thirty stories high

We, keeping each other safe as we lie



# Hymn

One night you walk through the door, straight into the bathroom.

I am not sure you know I am on the bed.

You turn on the shower, you begin to sing.

It is the first time I have heard you

beyond a goodbye in a broken morning voice.

It is a sad song you sing,

but I listen.

When was the last time you used your voice

this freely with me?

With whom did you use this voice today?

If this song makes you sad, I am sad for you,

but I am happily listening on.

As you let the droplets run over you,

each ripping off a speck of your day,

Every word that leaves your mind, your lips

stumbles over my skin and into my ear,

stitching the wound our silence has clawed.

Some sounds heal, while others add salt.

Nonetheless, I can feel an itch.

And I feel spoiled

with a hymn that was not meant for me.

I spied when I shouldn't have,

but heard the person I want to love again.

**Lovis Leu Maurer**



# Twenty Something Limbo

"Okay so I know we've broken up, but let's not speak for two weeks and see how we feel when I get back".

**Day 2**

Today I was working with a girl who looked just like your mum. God, it was uncanny, she had the same poker straight hair tucked behind her ears and the same wide easy smile. Her nose was even that same slightly beaked shape that you two share, and I know you hate me saying that but it was a true observation and so I saw you every time this girl asked for a pen. I wished she'd stopped smiling and stopped talking to me and I wished she didn't have a home counties accent like your mum does, but she did, and so there you were somehow, interrupting.

**Day 5**

Today I watched a French film on my laptop on the Megabus. They were drinking Vieux Papes at the dinner table. I must remember to bring you some of that back like you asked actually. I guess if I never see you again I'll just drink it all. That wine was mine first, I showed it to *you*. It's like everything that's my *thing* is anchored to *you* now - how infuriating. This insignificant detail of this quite wonderful film won't translate so well to anyone else, so I am silenced and frustrated.

**Day 6**

My grandmother asked about you on the phone. Someone in the family told her. I wish they wouldn't publicise things so quickly because now that my gran knows it feels like you're really gone forever. Even if I forgive you, will she? Remember that time she told you you warm the cockles of her heart? That was just excellent. And now I've probably upset her by telling her you're a shit.

**Day 8**

Today I got a text from your mum: "what should I buy him for graduation? And we'll be dining after the ceremony somewhere nice if you'd like to join ". *Good question Denise, however I do not know him anymore; a week has passed and he could have had a complete opinion rewrite in that time. Last week's treasure this week's trash - you know what I mean? And as for the dinner, I am mysteriously not going to be back from Paris in time for that very special occasion that we've had planned for months, I'm sorry that I'm being cryptic but the thing is your son has not informed you of some very important things and I can't be the one to drop the bomb.*

I wish I'd said even a fraction of that, but I suggested some garden furniture and said I had to work.

**Day 10**

I'm stood at my stand in the store, willing someone to come over to break my silence. The only sound comes from an infuriating chart playlist that they think is appropriate to loop eight times a day. I'm sick of having so much time to stand and think about you. Even being able to sit and think I feel would give me a better perspective, but emotional turmoil combined with weary legs makes for a very specific kind of sorrow. I decide to read some of your blog posts, just to forge some sort of invisible one-way bridge over the chasm. Although commercial mining for resources on the moon or a bionic mini-bot that can potentially replace organs doesn't exactly give me a window to your soul, it's nice to see your name on the byline.

I miss knowing what you ate for lunch. Was it falafel? Or did you have to sneak a hog roast into the office and spend half an hour trying not to chew too loud in front of the vegans? Were you almost late to work? Is Omar still moaning about nothing? Did Pam email you about the pitch? It's all so inane isn't it, but for some reason it just matters.

In case you're wondering I was three minutes late today. The fish in the canteen didn't look too good so I just made my own big salad out of loads of starters again. I dropped my last filter down a drain so had to buy more, and my pay is late. We have no customers today but yesterday that Saudi Arabian lady came back and bought that dress and I made 50 quid commission, so that's something. I'm not sure whether I should miss the stuff with substance we talk about but none of that is coming to me right now. Maybe I'm 'coping' because everyone keeps telling me I'm 'so strong' as a means of pepping my spirits.

Do people not realise that sometimes being told you're strong when you're feeling a little crumpled actually makes things a little bit rough. Thank you for now constructing this character that I must step into the skin of, friend, but maybe I don't fancy being Beyoncé reincarnate on this occasion.

I reach for my phone and then place it back down.

**Lucy M**



# Polar Bears



I tread on ice	And confess that I won't always come back home.	Because where lies our current home,
As I head to a new home.	I know I'd make you bleed:	When we jump at each other's throat,
I tread on land that stretches white,		And each time you sink
Cold tightening 'round my throat;	Because we share the blood we bleed.	Your clinging fangs to the point I bleed,
And I drag my feet until they bleed,	And even cubs in the Artic white	My screams become white
As I leave winter to sink	At two years old will leave their home;	Noise; so afraid I am to break the ice.
	As summer dissolves their ground that very soon could sink,	
Down towards summer. And as I sink	Mothers release them from their dens, those wombs of ice	But my kin, from you I don't wish to sink away; a cut-throat
Down in melted ice,	Where their first cries came out their throat.	Killer I won't leave, my white hands covered with the isolation we bleed.
My paws paddling through these pools, which bleed		
The pinkish scales of playful fish, the hard soil of home,		So bless me to leave my childhood home - and let me enter this new age of ice.
As salmon sweet slides down my throat,	And yet, from your caring throat	
Now feels so far away. But before my white	I hear a call for me to stay; I hear it bleed,	<b>Isabelle Bollekens</b>
	And I hear it crack, like the ice	
Coat turned tanned, I let slip out one last white	That shifts beneath our feet, as I yearn for a clean white	
Lie; before my steps would sink	Start, since I began to let sink	
Into snow-crushed ground, while you let out from your throat	In the thought of my own home.	
A force-fed farewell, I didn't wish to sound as cold as ice		



# Edge

The axe dangled in the man's shoulder, its white edge cutting light and air alike as he walked through the woods. His eyes inspected his surroundings without urgency: he wasn't expecting to find something different from what he saw, and that pleased him. The wind danced around him, joyful, to the tune of his whistling. He, too, appreciated the music in his ears: the birds that echoed unseen, the leaves caressing the air, his footsteps crushing rocks and grass like a melody. And he breathed in deep: no fumes, no cigarettes, no laughs. The air was thick with nothing. He could have sworn the pure air was so dense he could have drank it from a cup.

The axe in the man's shoulder was almost as heavy as the stone that he carried in the place of his heart. Finally, he reached the spot he was looking for, and he listened carefully. In front of him, by the edge of the cliff, there was a tree. It did not look old, but then again, tress don't age the way us humans think age works. Every year new leaves were born on it, thrived, and then died; every year some branches grew from the lumps left by those the wind severed come fall. It was just like every single other tree in the forest around it, maybe a bit more bent, maybe taller. Maybe not. Truth is, the tree had been there for a very long time. It was 438 years old, one of the oldest (perhaps *the* oldest) in the forest.

He touched one of its roots, and crawled against it, listening. He smiled. The tree was dreaming.

The tree had a nightmare.

A nightmare so often experienced that it was now just a dream. The tree no longer felt fear, or anger, just a sadness that painted its leafs yellow weeks before the first winds started to incubate in the far off mountains.

When the tree had been born, he had done so between the rivers of ancient roots. It had grown, young and inexperienced, between trees that had seen more years than the leafs the youngster itself could produce. Their roots knew the soil around them better than the rain and the sun. And they had taught it all: how to dance around the wind, instead of facing it: to bend, not to break. How to bury its roots deep in the land, looking for water. How to fend off the floods, how to bow your head when the storm raged so that the lightning wouldn't find you. How to let go of your leaves and see them fly away, fall to the floor, die. How to mourn them in the snow that would bury them. And how to have the courage to birth them again. They had become friends. Together they had followed the quarrels and plottings of the court of the magpies and the owls against the council of crows. They had listened as one the secrets the squirrels mumbled in their sleep during the winters, they had hid their nuts and laughed while watching them go crazy. They had fended the east winds together. They had mourned together their fallen friends. The tree had become one of them.

The birds and the rains had spoken of the quarrels of the humans, for months, for years. And sure enough, one autumn night, screeching man-made birds had soared the clouds and set fire to the town a couple

miles away from them. The animals were scared, the tree was scared. But the old ones tried to ease their fears: everything would be fine, things like this had happened already on the last war. Everything would be all right. But then the east wind descended from the mountains, and taking the flames in its wings, set the forest ablaze too. The animals ran, the trees trembled, the wind had turned scorching. The light was so close, that the tree became blind, the noise was so loud he became deaf, its roots recoiling from the soil that was suddenly sucking the water from them. For one night and one day, the tree was surrounded by a sea of grey nothingness and red shadows, feeling its bark snap with the heat, its leaves and branches snapping and being ripped away, and simply awaited whatever the fire might have in store for the future. And then, the next night, the rain came to the rescue: the flames screamed as the drops slaughtered them where they stood, and the mist settled, warm and asphyxiating. The tree's bark hissed and crackled as water boiled on it. Soon after, exhausted, the tree fell asleep.

When the tree woke up to the sun, the smoke had disappeared. Around him the old ones laid still on the ground, their roots silent in the earth, their bark now turned into coal. But now he could see farther away, and he saw the hills covered in dust and ashen ponds, and beyond them the city the birds used to tell them about. He could see the humans, covered in black, bleeding from the ruins into the unknown. And far away the mountains, who had given birth to the vicious wind. And the view stretched even beyond that, and there the tree stumbled with something he had never dreamt of, something he right then had known he would have preferred to never know: now the only one standing, he could see the fold of the world, the place where the dark skies met the dry earth, where the sun disappeared every day like a glowing leaf stuck in the most fierce of autumns.

Now, alone, he could see the horizon.

Slowly, the tree woke up. It could feel the sap trickling a bit faster within its body.

The human, his ear to its root, took a while to notice. But the tree did not rush him: there was no point in doing so. Things that ought to happen do so by themselves, and trees do not rush things. They don't have to, they don't need to. And while the human noticed, the tree looked at him, intently, carefully.

He had not been the first human the tree had seen, nor had he been the first the tree had taken an interest into. But humans were difficult to like: idly ripping apart grass and leaves when bored, killing flowers to please each other, cutting trees to amuse themselves with mooing, stinking animals, or to replace the perfectly fertile soil with cold, flat black rivers of stone. Most of their actions where beyond understanding... yet some of them did things that sparked its attention: there had once been a couple beneath him that had used a knife to carve something in its bark. It had stung, and they had not stayed long beneath him, so he had mostly forgotten them, annoyed. But then the next year, and many more after, maybe fifty, they had come back beneath the branches. At first the tree had thought it had been to see its bark, and the thing they had cut on him. But as they grew old, the tree had understood: they were there to see each other. He was like the little cues squirrels used in the branches to remind themselves of which particular hole they had stored the nuts into. Suddenly, one year, the male did

not appear, and the female had waited. Then, the next year, she had come again, alone, waiting. Again, it had taken the tree some time to understand, because even a tree could guess he was not going to ever come back. Why would she keep coming? And then, one day, he had understood again. She had come back for twenty years, until one year she did not.

Not long ago, the man in front of him had been a boy, lighter than the axe now by his side. Back then, young roots had started to grow around the tree; the city of the humans had been rebuilt. Soon, kids appeared: they were always the first, either alone and lost or with their parents. They were always aimless, just browsing about and plucking flowers with their mean little fingers, but this one wasn't. He had appeared one evening in front of him, and his eyes had lighted up, as if he had found the exact thing he was looking for. Resolutely, as if he had reached the end of a long search, the kid had sat beneath the tree and started to smear coal on a white, flat four-edged-surface, looking intently at the horizon the tree hated so much. And at first, the tree had not paid attention to him. It was just a kid. But then he had come back, two times a week, sometimes even more; he sat in the exact same spot and did the exact same thing. In the beginning the tree did not understand what he was doing, but upon inspection, the tree saw that, for some unknown reason, the kid was fixated on trying to reproduce the sunset. And the kid had grown up, always coming two times a week, always drawing, sometimes in blacks and whites, sometimes in colours, always alone.

And in time, the attention of the kid, now a man, had shifted to the tree. Maybe it was because the tree tried to shield him from the rain a bit too obviously, or maybe because he had rearranged its roots so that he could sit more comfortably. The tree didn't know. It was almost as if the man knew the tree was alive, that the tree knew who he was and was looking back at him. The young trees didn't believe humans were sensitive enough to notice those kinds of things. But the tree knew better: the man and the tree shared an ob-session.

The horizon was a cut in the world that did not heal, an open wound the tree had to see every single day and every single night. It was an unyielding reminder of the death that had taken place around it. It was like being cut in half, but not enough to fall to the ground. The tree could never ignore the horizon, and horizon would never stop hurting it. So when the man started to speak to him, the tree had answered. And then, the tree had asked for a favour.

It had taken time. Decades; two decades. But now the man understood, he had accepted. What had taken time had been the convincing, the explaining. Because the edge of the axe was another horizon, but one that did not stay steel, and the tree longed for it. The young ones had to learn.... because they did not understand the meaning of disappearance, of a finite death: leaves grow again, but trees that fall do not. They did not understand he came from a world where they did not exist, where there was no flat, jarring horizon.

The man hugged the tree, and in his eyes there was rain.

The axe sang in the air, and cut into the wood.

**Daniel Mantilla Barreto**



# Unsaid

There she was, at her friends' 17th birthday party, wandering alone. Then she caught sight of a handsome young boy, the kind of golden boy that girls will always have a crush on.

She got an instant fear that she was not attractive enough. He was gorgeous. His blonde hair, Romanesque nose, deep blue eyes, and heavy build distinguished him from the crowd. On the contrary, she was average. She knew that because no one had ever told her that she was attractive. Having acknowledged this fact, she literally gave up on getting beautiful. When other girls were busy learning making up, choosing fancy dresses, doing nails, going to gyms and etc., she was having her own moment doing nerdy things. She never had a clue how to socialize in parties and always ended up drinking all alone in the corner. But now she hated herself for being awkward. She wanted to talk with him!



No, she would not do that. Definitely not when she was wearing a huge dress borrowed from her sister. Even thinking about herself standing in front of him in this almost-covering-everything-except-her-shortness dress was unbearable for her. He and I standing together will look like a scene from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and I will be the dwarf, she thought. But even this dress was not the biggest mistake for her tonight. It was her messy hair. She did take a shower before going to this party but she hadn't learnt how to do her hair from her mean sister yet. If there was any chance this everyone's favorite boy ever cast an eye on her tonight, it would not be because that he found her beauty unique but that he was amused by this wallflower in specs.

It was clear that with or without him, she could be happy anyway. It is not a big deal. It is never a big deal,

she thought. She wondered why people had to be together. She was comfortable living all by herself, doing whatever she wanted to do without much concern. She understood that sometimes people just need a little bit of love to take the pain away. But loving someone to her, was suffering. She had been in the mood of love several times before. She would look forward to seeing him, she would think of him all the time, she was in deep fear of losing him, she was not herself anymore and she seemed to lose herself.

She was rational. She did right things like going on a healthy diet, staying away from alcohol and drugs, working hard to earn other people's approval, behaving in a good manner, being kind to friends and family all the time, when she was single. She could be independent. She was strong enough to carry heavy things; she went to all kinds of activities alone; she made a lot of friends, they all liked her very much; she had fun

cooking for herself; she enjoyed a lot of self-fulfilling moments. But she still cannot help rushing in like a fool. If necessary, she would mess up her perfect life to pursue love, to please the one she loved, even at the times when she knew very clearly in the end they would not be together.

With all thoughts going on in her mind, she stole a glimpse of the shining boy surrounded by fancy girls. Uh, I really hate the understanding smile he will give to everyone, she thought to herself. Then a friend of hers came to her and greeted her.

"Hey, Ann, how are you?"

"Fine, and you?"

"Same. Still drinking all alone?"

"Well, you know me."

"Hey, do you see the boy over there? The tall one with blonde hair."

"Yeah, what about him?"

"Gorgeous, right? You know he is in the rowing club of our school. And he played bass in a newly-formed band. Girls are crazy about him."

"Yeah, I know."

"Uh, I really need some fresh air right now. See you, Ann. Try to have some fun!"

"See you." Ann waved her friend goodbye and then sank into deeper thought.

Maybe I should seek some changes.

Learning how to do my hair could be the first step, then I can buy some cosmetics, watch all kinds of makeup tutorials on Youtube, try to do some makeup. Maybe next week I should even ask my mean sister to take me to the department store and buy some fancy clothes. It is not too late to start. Quite soon I will be able to evolve from the "You belong with me" stage of Taylor Swift into the "Shake it off" stage of Taylor Swift.

She laughed at the thought of that possibility. Deep in her heart she knew this kind of effort was futile. She was looking for someone with whom she could share all her trivial life moments, not a golden boy. And she was pretty sure that this particular person should love her just the way she was. To her, all golden boys are like the bright and warm Waitrose she accidentally bumped into on a cold wet winter night. She wanted nothing from it, still, she could not help the urge to go inside and have a short stay. Eventually she would need to go home, where she could be herself and raise a cat.

Then there were her parents, who made her doubt whether she would ever find the right one. Why did they stick together all these years? They were not happy together. No, they weren't. She could tell this clearly from her father's eyes filling with resentment, impatience and contempt at the sight of her mother. Her mother was moaning about her father's aloofness all the time. "Selfish, he is so selfish," her mother would say. For all these years they fought with each other. At first, violently, they would scream so loud that sometimes neighbors would come and complain. They would smash things that sometimes you could only find shattered glass in their home. But later they grew mature and stopped squabbling. They now never talked with each other. Even so, you could tell that they were enduring each other in silent patience. Marriage seemed to have trapped them forever and they could find no other way out other than taking on each other.

They loved each other. She was sure about that. They were meant to pursue happiness together. They were meant to understand each other and accept each other completely. It seemed to be a joke that they had sought to understand each other for all those years but later the only thing they found was that the person they had married was a lunatic. They finally realized that they were the opposites of magnetic poles. Any effort drawing them together would end up push-

ing them more far away. So they did not bother to try anymore. They lived separately, together.

Now the boy was walking in the direction of her. The ineffable half-light shed on his face made him even more attractive. Her heart was itching, but she fought against it. Why are you such a prude, her friend once asked her. She took a long swallow of wine, still unable to do anything. For the moment even raising her head was mission impossible to her.

But he was APPROACHING!

Calm down, she warned herself, be ready for him, smile, do something! Anything! Anything that can catch his attention will do at this moment! You will have a nice chat; you will exchange phone numbers; you will start to hang out together and get to know each other; you will then find yourself deep in love with each other; and, eventually you will live happily together, forever.

That's when she wakes up, again. The dream has been haunting her for years, keeping telling her that there's another way of living her life and blaming her for not going for it.

It is dusk, her favourite time of a day. She looks out of the window, there the glow of the sun is softened and it melts with cold, deep blue sky, knitting a belt of silky, pink clouds. The clatter of dishes, the sounds of cooking, the bustle of people having dinner together all come in through the open window, yet all so distant from her. She is suddenly seized by a sense of loneliness, like she is the only one left in the world.

"Are you alright?" Her husband sits up and asks her.

She must look sad and desperate now. It's not the first time in recent years she has had this kind of expression on her face, but it is the first time in recent years that he has shown his interest in the expression. Or should she say, in her? Maybe it's just because they are on vacation, one of those rare occasions that they can finally leave their three annoying children, monotonous repetitive work, piled dirty clothes and dishes, endless due bills and other adult affairs behind. But she doesn't mind, she likes the tone how her husband shows his concern for her, which reminds her of the old time when they share everything with each other on bed. Thus she decides she will be honest with him this time and tell him exactly what is on her mind.

"Um, yes, I'm fine. It's just that I had a not-so-good dream. Do you remember the birthday party in which I met you?" She said peacefully, without turning her head.

"Yes, of course. What about it?"

"You know, at that time, it's actually not you that I want to talk to. It's Dexter, the golden boy. And I have been dreaming about the party endlessly recently. I don't know. I just feel that something is wrong," She is still peaceful, looking straight ahead, "everything is wrong."

That's something out of his expect.

"I know it's not right, but sometimes I can't help thinking about what would happen if I talked to him, rather than you." She knows that she has to turn her head toward him now, even she is somehow unwilling

to face him.

"Maybe I would even end up with him, you know." She tried to say these words like telling a bitter joke, as if it would make him feel any better.

The light in his eyes flickers. It's true that they are not as close as they used to be. It's true that their life is full of trifles. It's true that many good things have been lost after all these years of marriage. It's true that their life is not as fancy as the life depicted in lifestyle magazines. But it has never occurred to him that there is a better way of living his life, not even at the lowest point of his life, not even now.

"If you married him," he looked directly into her eyes and with a touch of tenderness he slowly finished the rest of the sentence, "your life would be different, not necessarily better."

And she knows that he is right. Everything in waitrose is a little bit more expensive than that in Tesco. Not much, just a little bit. But some people just cannot afford the difference. And she is one of them.

**Jialin Ke**



# Bladder Control at the Border

Flip, flip ... Stamp.

"Thank you," I tell the stamper of passports, as I return the passport to my pocket, pull my hoodie up, and make my way to the sidewalk. I've just crossed over into Austria from Croatia at a tiny border-control booth on this awfully long bus ride.

It's only one hour into the five hour-long commute, though the length of time isn't all that bad. Having flown and bussed my way through four (make that five) European countries in the past month, you get used to the replayed playlists, the tiredness of your legs, and the empty thoughts occurring past vast fields, endless highways, and deep skies. I'm typically considering how I'd utilize the space as if it were mine to own. The uninhabited, cool deserts of Croatia slowly develops into the Wild West with a few intersecting dirt roads, bar saloons lining the walkways, a few boozed-up rangers making their way from yet another quick-draw standoff to the brothels to close the night. Above the clouds I'd give the Skybar's name its real justice, serving drinks on the soft sheet of white fluffiness blanketing the sunset of pink, yellow, and smears of purple.

I'm buttoning my coat as I face the sharp frost of Austria, that's day two of being able to see my breath in the air. There's a mumbling among my group of friends, something about the temperature or how smelly the bus is, but I'm honestly too lazy and groggy from my recent nap to listen. Through the cloudiness of my breath I notice one of my better friends, Griffin, running toward the bathroom a couple hundred yards away. It's a sad looking run, really. I'm reminded of the awkward jog I jeered at in an Uber weeks ago, passing him along the sidewalk, where minutes before he told us, "I'll just run home!" I hadn't considered going to the bathroom before we continue our long journey, and since I realize the bus is approaching us past the border, I almost dismiss the idea. It would be too close of a call.

A weak "Ah, fuck" escapes my mouth and enters the group's mumbling as I begin chasing down Griffin to the bathroom. I'm running pretty fast but my worried thoughts are rushing by even more swiftly. *I can make it, I can make it, I'm pretty fast, I can make it. They wouldn't leave us behind, right? I can make it.*

"It takes Euros," Griffin tells me as I'm fumbling through different currencies in my wallet.

"Really? Hadn't noticed", I say, nodding toward the neon EUROS ONLY sign. 50 British pounds, 500 Czechian crowns, a couple Croatian coins, and even a US 20 dollar bill. Alas, no luck. How neither of us have euros by now is beyond me.

"C'mon, back here", asserts Griffin as he makes his way behind the small bathroom structure, with a bit of a pep in his step. I take a look behind me the same way

the movie stars look below a flimsy, mountainside bridge after being told 'Don't look down!'. The bus already started boarding, yet I find myself turning the bathroom corner too.

As I'm peeing, I can't help but to find the childish humor in this sort-of 'marking my territory' act I'm engaging in, not even 5 minutes from entering a country for the first time. But this humor is coupled with a feeling of impatience: this uncharacteristically lengthy stream gives me a worried feeling, similar to a NASCAR driver waiting for his pit-crew to finish fixing the damn flat so he can get back on the racetrack. Suddenly, as my thoughts rush by, and I'm scanning the dark, forest-like terrain stretched out in front of me, fear overtakes my typical imagination.

My thoughts take me back to just a few weeks ago, after exiting my first bus into Germany. You'd imagine a bus station surrounded by streets, cars, buildings, any sign of industrial life. Instead, it's trees as far as the eye can see, stretched about a vacant highway. With a dead phone, the wrong phone charging adapter, no directions to my hotel, and only a rail station 300 yards away that may or may not be running, I experience one of the worst feelings of hopelessness in my life.

A remnant of that awful feeling hits the pit of my stomach as I'm finishing my business. The possibility of that bus pulling away from me is surely low, but the image of missing it is suddenly hard to bear.

On my way back, as I pick out six or seven people still entering the bus, I realize I won't be left behind. I won't stand sculpture still as the bus wheels by. I won't wave my arms relentlessly, too late, watching the rear lights flicker into the fleeting night. The heavy coat of horror I once wore is hung back up on the scaffold, and under this wash of relief I take my seat, strip off my own coat, and peer at the bus's digital clock. One hour down, only four more to go.

**Jacob Bittner**





# Eulogy for a Library Drunkard

I fold over to the next page once I have read the last.  
I read on, watching the waltz of your words go by.  
Another mastery: wit, rhetoric, beauty,  
And much charm, a quote or two, chosen  
Specially, for some point. Some anger, some hope.  
In another line, a call for revolution,  
A tense, wonderful, unbearable truth,  
Thought of long ago. Believing, I read on.

When you spoke, your words danced;  
When you stopped, they went on in silence.  
Truth or belief? You would know. I don't.  
Taking a moment, I attempt to disagree  
With some of what you say and conclude:  
'No', much sadder than I thought.  
You might have laughed. Reading the end,  
I try to remember, consider, understand  
I try to recognise your composition  
For what it is.

I try to live as you, pragmatically, romantically,  
Often succeeding in theory and in thought,  
Reflecting: what would you do? Reflecting, too,  
That evil will always remain, kept by us,  
Loved as that pulsing maggot  
Which throbs in the centre of our brains.  
It will remain as our unyielding fear  
Of what we ourselves would do.

Or, maybe, as some piece of fantasy  
Which doesn't exist, but is existence;  
A trick of naivety, or simply as  
A reminder that we live without you.  
It will continue forever on  
In superstition, in dogma, everywhere at once.  
Ideas, unlike you, don't have to die.

What remains now you have gone?  
Struggle, false doctrines, deceit, destruction, lies,  
A sameness more horrific every day,  
Morality less recognizable. I daren't think who  
Will be next, or who is now, truthseeking  
The world as it is. One of your followers  
That knows reason and disbelief like no other?  
Some fan, keen to live as you?  
Or another drunk, rethinking again  
On life's various mysteries and secrets and love?  
Will they be as great as you?

Poetic, persuasive, full of knowledge  
Gathered from a thousand books read,  
Through endless drink and talk  
Of every evening spent in a smoke-filled bar.  
Only in reason - not faith, or belief,  
Or death, or surrender to these - are we free  
To think thoughts. Though I know nothing  
Of life or its labours or music or love,  
It pleases me to think in earnest now.

By MateiGheorghiu





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Penultimate~Back page: Sara Wingate Gray

# Contributor (Six Word) Bios

**A. C.** Message may induce your bifurcation. Proceed?

**F. S.** Raving, dancing in fields of music.

**D. M. B.** Living life without map and blindfolded

**J. B.** Juggles opportunity longing to hold one.

**J. K.** Wish there was no way out.

**J. M.** Late to the party, leaves early.

**I. B.** Sleepwalks her way throughout the day.

**L. L. M.** Trying to shake teenage absolutes. Forever.

**L. M.** Trying hard to pronounce more Ts.

**M.G.** Reality is exploding in my face.

**M. M.** Welcoming emotions resulted in desperate happiness.

**S. E.** Dreams of the right size wanted.

**S. H.** Still looking for my place here.

**S. K.** Haven't gotten over size of universe.

**S. L.** Perpetually balancing hope on inevitable failure.

**S.W.G.** Eats, sleeps and lives with library.

**T. M-M.** Trying to be funny never is.

**W. C.** Had enough time until I didn't.

**Z. P.** Said too much, thought even more.





Each week in class we completed a writing exercise. Writing in silence, especially amongst others, can sometimes be a difficult task. To make that silence less constrictive, our module tutor, S.W.G., brought along her handy portable record player, and curated a ten week playlist to go along with writing exercises each week. Find the week by week playlist following and track those vinyl down if you can!

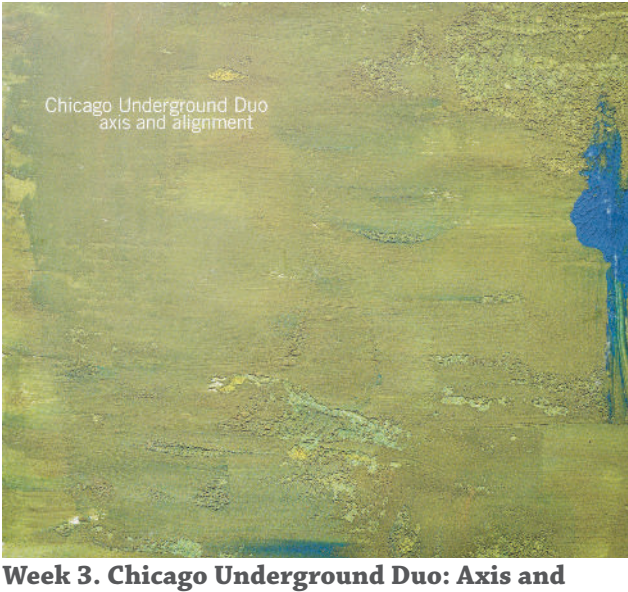


**Week 1. Calexico: Descamino (Blacklight Sketches Remixes)**





Week 2. Rachel's: The Sea and the Bells



Week 3. Chicago Underground Duo: Axis and Alignment



Week 4. VIGIL: Exquisita Decadencia



Week 5. Spoke (Calexico's debut album when they were then known as Spoke!)



Week 6. Colleen: The Golden Morning Breaks



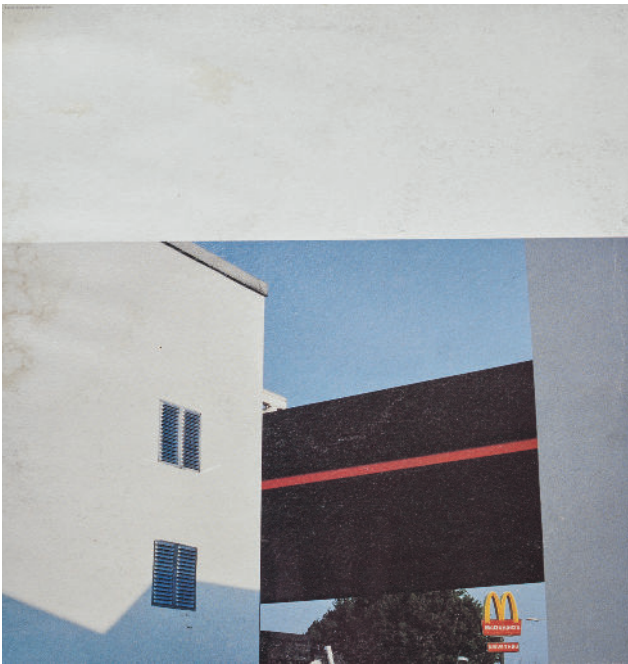
Week 7. Fort Lauderdale: Traces of Places Until The Morning



Week 8. Giant Sand: Chore of Enchantment



Week 9. The Cinematic Orchestra: Remixes 98-2000



Week 10. Manitoba: Start Breaking My Heart

**Watch This Space** was written, designed and produced by students from the Arts and Sciences (BASc) department at University College London, with a little help from their BASC2004 module leader Sara Wingate Gray. :-)

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