

# HOME



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ObindoMagazine

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Obindo Magazine.

This first issue marks more than a beginning; it marks a return. A return to the questions that root us, the stories that insist on being heard, and all the places and people we call home, regardless of whether we are running from or to them. Obindo was born from a desire to build a space where imagination, memory, resistance, and renewal all live under the same roof. The name “Obindo” comes from my grandmother’s appellative, it is an Igbo word which means a place of rest and comfort. And she, my grandmother, really embodied this sentiment. She was a graceful dancer and a remarkable storyteller. She told my father and his siblings many stories, most of which trickled down to me. So when I co-founded a resting place for beautiful stories, it only made sense that it would be so named.

Our theme for this issue is Home—a word that arrives already heavy with meaning. It can mean a place, a person, or a wisp of a dream. For some, it evokes warmth and shelter; for others, a wound or a longing. In these pages, you’ll find writers and artists circling around home like a fire: some warming their hands, some watching it burn, some walking away, and some finding their way back to rebuild what was broken. In fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and illustration, this issue asks: What does it mean to belong?

Every contribution here offers a glimpse into how home survives in memory and reinvents itself in language. There is both ache and celebration here, stillness, movement, the sacred, and the inexplicable.

As editors, we are deeply grateful to those who trusted us with their stories, and to you, our dearest reader, for walking with us on this journey. We hope this first issue offers not only beauty, but also kinship—a reminder that in a fragmented world, the act of telling and listening is itself a kind of home.

With an open heart,

**Amara M Ujumadu,**  
Editor-in-Chief,  
*Obindo Magazine.*

# TEAM MEMBERS



**ADEFEMI FAGITE** holds an MFA from Miami University and is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of South Dakota. He is the recipient of several awards, including the Gladys Hasse Poetry Award, the Wolfe Scholar Award, and the Jordan Goodman Prize in Poetry. His writing explores themes of displacement, post-colonial identity, grief, and migration. It has been featured in *The Kalahari Review*, *Brittle Paper*, *Parousia Magazine*, *The African Writers Review*, *Apex Publishing*, *Ebonylife Media*, and the *Oriki Podcast*, among others. Adefemi serves as an Associate Editor for *Frontier Poetry* and *Iron Horse Review*. Outside of his literary pursuits, he enjoys long walks, observing the natural world, and cooking for friends and family.



**AMARA M. UJUMADU**, Co-Founder and Fiction/Non-fiction Editor at *Obindo Magazine*, is a Master of Arts Student at the University of Saskatchewan. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in English Language and Literature from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. Her research interests include trauma, gender studies, transnational flows, and identity formation. She is the editor of several award-winning pieces like the Awele Creative Trust Prize, Quramo Writing Prize, etc, and currently holds the position of Associate Editor at the *Fieldstone Review*. Outside of reading and editing, Amara spends her time watching true crime documentaries and solving puzzles.



**HALLIE FOGARTY** is a poet, teacher, and artist from Kentucky. She received her MFA in poetry from Miami University, where she was awarded the 2024 Jordan-Goodman Graduate Award for Poetry. Her poetry has been published in *Poetry South*, *Hoxie Gorge Review*, *The Lindenwood Review*, and elsewhere. Her art has been published in *Tulsa Review* and *Harper Palate*. Her debut chapbook *CARAPACE* is out now from And Then Publishing. She is currently a PhD student at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and you can find her online: [www.halliefogarty.com](http://www.halliefogarty.com) (<http://www.halliefogarty.com/>)

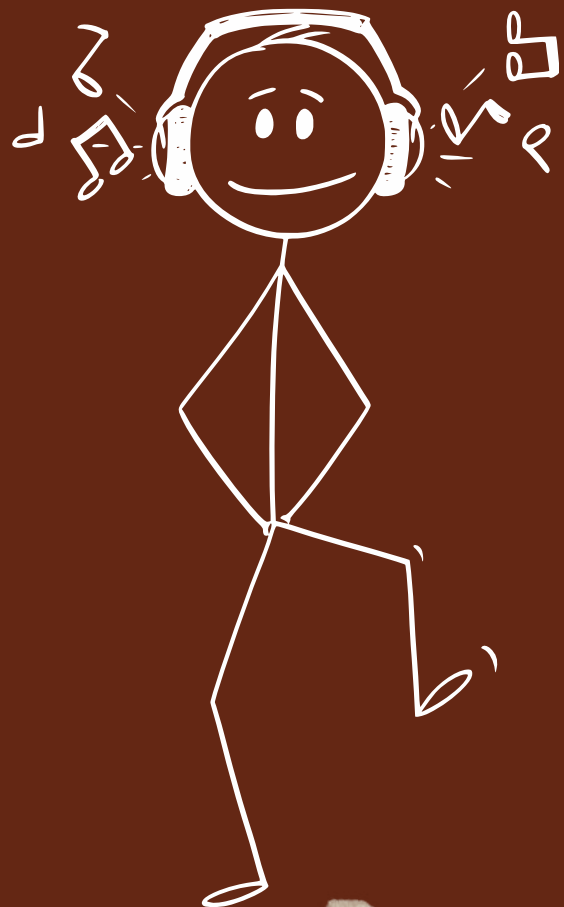
# Rhythm & Reggae - Ojo-Fakuade Tomi

*"Chastisement is a strange type of love" -Joel Òyélèkè.*

She sings Marley in her Hostel room,  
Spoon clutched to her mouth,  
Dancing, humming;  
*"I wanna love you, and treat you right"*

Three cities away,  
The dance continues,  
Pa sweeps Ma off her feet,  
Caresses her with his boots.  
Ma puts Baby in his cottage,  
His cry, only two weeks old,  
adds a tune to the dance.  
Ma's belly soon kisses the floor,  
Pa's fists follow;  
One stroke, two strokes, three strokes  
He is massaging her lovingly,  
*Chastisement is a strange type of love.*

Soon, the neighbors will ring Stella's phone,  
Quote the scripture,  
Tell her God comforts the motherless.  
Marley will keep hollering just as loud;  
*"I wanna love you, and treat you right"*



## A Good Day - Ojo-Fakuade Tomi

starts with you cooking your favourite meal,  
Humming your favorite song in sync:  
*"I miss you like an idiot misses the point"*  
You dabble meat into sizzling onions,  
Smiling, swerving, stirring,  
Till your little boy points out the kitchen window;  
*"Look!"*

Across the street, all is burning,  
Two cars, three houses, someone's father.  
Suddenly,  
You smell burning onions,  
look to your parlour to see fire gulping down your  
curtains,  
Then your chairs.  
You shower the increasing flame,  
Sweating, shouting, cramming your son out the  
bathroom window.

If you would not survive, at least your name would  
live.

# Safe as Houses (Excerpt) - Emily Corwin

I gather myself in the St. Augustine grass and remember: There were houses and houses.

Who said this, where and when? Only that there were houses, which could be anyone, anywhere, anywhen. I copy it down, collect for later, like a magpie steals, saving silver.

But the internet says that magpies don't collect "shiny objects", as common knowledge would have us believe. They prefer sticks, leaves, hair: human or animal.

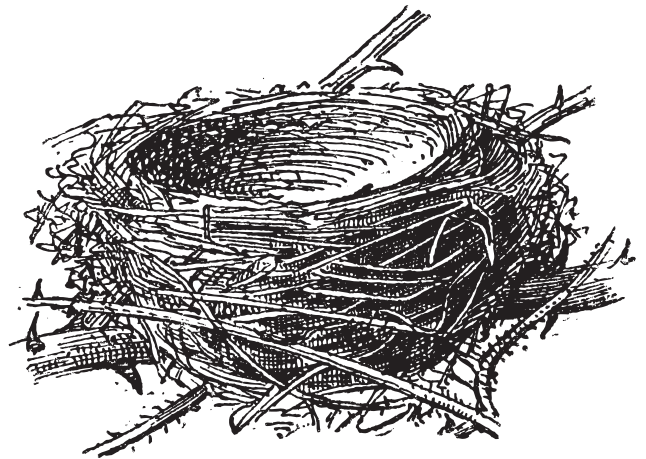
One spring, I discovered a nest assembled inside our door wreath. In a crook of artificial flowers, I recognized my own hair, raveled with plastic eucalyptus.

One spring, I took the wreath down without checking and a nest fell across our foyer, the cuticle of the eggs split and spilled.

An eggshell is made of calcium carbonate—as are seashells and pearls. Our door collects with pearls I long to keep intact, in safety.

The house of my childhood is square. When my ex visited for the first and only time, he said it was too much like a box: tight and oppressive.

As a child, I used sticks in the backyard to make blueprints of houses. I created an entire village back there. Here is the church, here is the steeple.



As an adult, I have only lived in apartments and townhomes, never houses. Never have I ever paid a mortgage, never have I ever owned a room.

For years, I dreamt about this picture-book I had as a child but could never remember its title; the pages folded out, showing the interiors of three houses, like cross-sections or “exploded view” diagrams. Last Christmas, the book reappeared in a box from the basement: *The Cottage at the End of the Lane* by Elaine Mills.

Peggy Doll goes looking for a home: the first house is too crowded, the second—spacious but too pristine, but the third is just right: quilted bed, wood-stove and a kettle, jam jars and a milk pitcher, lanterns and wicker, even a dollhouse for Peggy Doll, her own miniature. The third house is called “Plum Tree Cottage”, and indeed, there are plums in the fruit bowl, plums in Peggy’s picnic in the field. Peggy Doll wears white smock dresses and a straw hat, two ribbons in her hair.

She walks around Plum Tree Cottage in striped orange socks and I imagine that I am Peggy Doll, that Plum Tree is my house. I answer the door and there’s a velveteen rabbit, in a raincoat with a basket of carrots. I invite the rabbit inside—we read together, beside the bowl of plums.

Tonight, they sold my grandmother’s house. I never got to return, not since before the pandemic—visiting my grandparents after work one day, eating shortbread cookies, the gloss of suncatchers in the kitchen. At the time, my grandmother’s memory was precarious, at best, but still, she knew there was a virus, could gather that much from the news.

My grandmother had a tin dollhouse. And a spoon collection. And ceramic cats, a wall of aluminum jello molds, an old treadmill, a costume box, a pantry of stale cookies. She had a bird-bath and sunflowers, a tire-swing, a candy-dish, a dining room with walls desilvering, mirror rot.

Trick-or-treat, Christmas ham, Easter egg hunt. I played Pretty Pretty Princess on the blue sofa: clip-on earrings and you wear the tiara if you win.

We married on Sweetest Day, in October. Our venue in Leonard, Michigan—the Addison Oaks Buhl Estate—is an “English Tudor-style manor home” with “dramatic willows and surrounded by a formal flower garden”, flared eaves and half-timbered. The air was chill; I held up my substantial bouquet like a knight’s shield.

My favorite wedding photos are in front of the carriage house: brick and mansard roof, cobbled path. I stood in my beaded cap-sleeves, Joe's green wool around my arm.

We spent our wedding night at the Royal Park Hotel in Rochester Hills—Scream was on TV and I took a shower, rinsing the hairspray out of me. In the morning, I was a wife.

For our honeymoon, we will see my ancestor's house in Salem, the Witch House: "Despite its name and decidedly witchy exterior (actually a pretty typical First Period mansion), the house's only real connection to 'witches' is through previous owner Jonathan Corwin, who was a Salem Witch Trials judge. It's the only original building left standing in Salem with any ties to the trials" (Walking the Witch Trials: A DIY Tour of Salem History). The house currently stands at Essex and North St, an "icon of America's tortured past" (Baltrusis 59). It was at the Witch House that "preliminary examinations occurred in a second-floor chamber" for The Court of Oyer and Terminer, a court "to hear and determine" in these proceedings (Wright 7-8). My ancestor signed many death warrants.

Historian Chadwick Hansen calls my ancestor a "silent partner" in the trials, not as visible as the more vocal Judge Hathorne. There are few written records directly from Corwin, and certainly no documents expressing his opinion or attitude on the proceedings in 1692. But silence does not excuse culpability.

The Corwins descended from "a noteworthy English family", the Curwens, who "hailed from the northwest part of England, near the Scottish border, in Workington, Cumbria, also called Cumberland. They were descended from Sir Gilbert Culwen II, a knight with King Edward I" (Goff 30). The Curwen family "occupied the site of Workington Hall since the early 13th century," which served as a safe house during Mary Queen of Scots's last flight from Scotland before her imprisonment and execution. She gave to the Curwens "a small agate wine cup as a token of gratitude" for giving her shelter (Goff 30). This wine cup, now named "The Luck of Workington", has been on loan from the Helena Thompson Museum and currently resides at Workington, where it was first gifted.

In a similar royal flight, after the Battle of Worcester in 1651, Charles II escaped to the White Ladies Priory and then to Boscobel House in Shropshire. In Boscobel House: a pallet bed in secret, the priest holes in the attic gallery. The White Ladies Priory a mile out and a cattle-shed and smithy, a hackney stable for many carriage horses. The house paneled in plasterwork, the Squire's Room, with green breeches, leather doublet, a posset of small beer. While soldiers searched the woods below, Charles hid himself inside a pollarded oak tree, later deemed "The Royal Oak" ("Boscobel House and the Royal Oak") a name which became, centuries later, the name of a city here in Michigan, just ten minutes from our apartment, a city where I seek rental houses after our wedding.



A sound like a glass marble dropped from a great height. It woke me and nothing there but 3 A.M. Joe still slept and I thought about ghosts. “The rooms down the hall are calling/ all night long,” says Sexton, “while the night outside/ sucks at the trees” (57).

I come home and the front door was ajar, blown open by the windy day. Nothing touched or stolen. I don’t know how long it was that way.

Last night, a plastic bowl smacked to the floor, somewhere downstairs— either ghost or cat.

And last night too, a child’s laugh and feet running.

Near December, I fall ill, I fall asleep on the mid-century velvet loveseat, and my husband builds a fire in the grate, removes the ashes. All the Sudafed keeps me foggy, blurred as a chalkboard just erased.

Honeymoon and I drink ghost tequila on our first night. Chocolate bread pudding. We enter the “undercroft” of Trinity Church in Boston. At the New England Aquarium, I love the white-spotted rose anemone and the garden eels. Crème fraîche and wine-soaked pears that taste like communion. Nasturtiums in the palace courtyard of the Gardner Museum. Blue Room, Gothic Room, MacKnight Room, Dutch Room, Spanish Cloister, Little Salon.

After three days in Boston, we head to Salem, to the Merchant Hotel. Unbeknownst to me at the time of booking, this boutique hotel was the former house of my ancestor, Sheriff George Corwin, during the Salem Witch Trials: “The Merchant has become a popular site on the ghost story circuit due to its location atop what was once the family home of the infamous George Corwin, High Sheriff during the Salem Witch Trials” (Walking the Witch Trials: A DIY Tour of Salem History). George died prematurely a few years after the trials and his corpse was held in the basement before being interred in the family plot on Broad Street.

No one in my family had ever been to Salem, not even my ancestry-obsessed, history-teacher father. As Joe and I planned our wedding, I knew I wanted a New England honeymoon. When we came to Salem in the first days of April, I realized I had planned our trip to the Salem “off-season”: the town is most popular during the summer and, of course, September and October, when Instagrammers flock to the Witch House for selfies, for a chance to see inside.

Baltrusis explains that “[a]ccess to the house was denied for years. Members of the Parks and Recreation Commission thought it would be in poor taste to investigate the Corwin dwelling. ‘We have to have respect for the gravity of the injustice that occurred in 1692,’ responded board member Chris Burke. ‘This is sort of a touchy subject,’ said Elizabeth Peterson, director of the house. ‘We want people to be aware that we’re not a Salem witch attraction.’ ” (Baltrusis 60).

Elizabeth Peterson was my contact for our visit in April. In *Wicked Salem*, Peterson explains: “There were eleven deaths in this house up until 1719... Enormous amounts of human drama unfolded in these rooms. My son thinks he’s seen things, and I think I’ve heard things.” There have been reports of a “child humming” in the Witch House, a phenomenon explored on an episode of *Ghost Adventures*.

The history of the Witch House itself begins with the Davenports, “a prominent Massachusetts Bay Colony military family”, who built the earliest parts of the Witch House (Goff 24-25). In 1675, the Corwins acquired the Witch House and hired contractor Daniel Andrews to remodel the home (Goff 29).

Reverend William Bentley described the patriarch, Captain George Corwin as “rich. He was often engaged in town affairs and commanded a troop of horses...He had a fine round forehead, large nostrils, high cheekbones, and gray eyes” (Goff 32). The remodelings of the Witch House in 1675 were inspired by the Captain’s son, Judge Jonathan Corwin, to cater to “the high-class tastes of Elizabeth Sheafe Gibbes,” the beautiful widow whom Jonathan had married.

On our last morning in Salem, we are given entry to my ancestor’s house, the Witch House. Elizabeth Peterson, the museum director, wrote me the day before:

Carol will meet you there at 8:00. Go to the gift shop entrance in the back of the house. I hope you enjoy yourselves. I am happy to follow up and answer any additional questions you may have.

The house is painted black to approximate the dark lacquer of linseed oil, a common varnish used to protect the house against the harsh New England weathers. The front path of oyster shells. Batten door, casement windows, and three gables. I see an asterisk carved into a wooden beam by the staircase: “That’s a counter-magic,” our guide explains.

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“Many dark clouds began appearing in the Corwins’ lives starting about 1684,” writes Goff in his book on the Witch House. These clouds “were potentially signs of displeasure, if not something worse— a curse...Jonathan and Elizabeth had five children between 1684 and 1690 — all of them died young” (37).

In July, in Ireland for a week, we visit so many abbeys and castles and friaries and forts: Kylemore, Clonmacnoise, Powerscourt. I love best the fort at Caherconnell: a medieval ringfort in County Clare. Within the ring, you can observe the old foundations of various dwellings: a circle house here, a square there, a rectangle at the center.

During their excavations of Caherconnell, archeologists have discovered glass beads, dress pins, board game pieces, as well as “the earliest pen found in the British Isles”: a 10th-century ink pen made of a swan’s leg bone, the ink in the barrel made of oak gall mixed with oil or water. Our guide says, “I’m so excited about the pen,” and I say, “I am also so excited about the pen.”

In the library, I find a colossal book: *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia Savage McAlester; it is over 800 pages of architectural history. Awake last night at 3 a.m., I skimmed the pictorial key at the front, trying to identify my own house.

From Chicago, I call my husband this morning, ask him to go outside, to remind me what our roof looks like. “Okay, so that’s side-gabled,” I tell him. “I think we have a Colonial Revival?” which fits its date of construction, in the mid-1950s. The identifying features of the Colonial Revival include: accentuated front door, a facade of symmetrical windows, composed of “simple, two-sided rectangular blocks”, “an American four-square” (McAlester 409-410 and xxv). The hexagonal window at the front of the house and in the attic also marks it as Colonial, as well as the clapboard siding.

I delight in the architectural diction, features I have had no expertise to identify with the naked eye:

mansard, gambrel, balusters, drip mold and hood mold, fascia, entablatures of cornice, frieze, and architrave, Queen Anne Medieval and Chateausque, American Vernacular, flush and concave mortar, tongue-and-groove joints, saltbox and cross-hipped, purlins, fishscale shingles, bitumen roofing made from tar and asphalt, insulation of cork and horsehair.

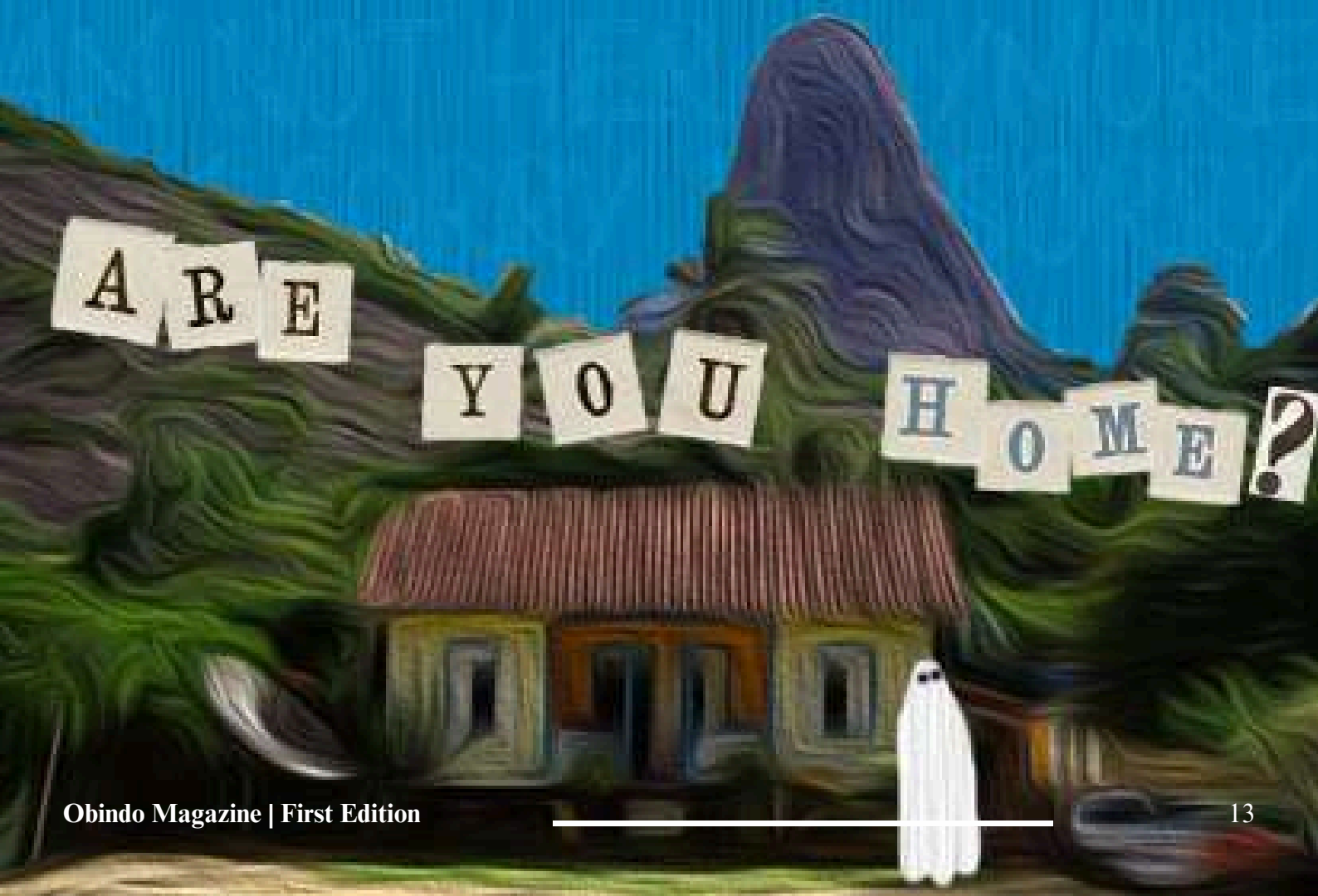
I turn the library book open to a page on neighborhoods and find an index card, a note left by a previous reader: “I am holding the ink hot”. I imagine the pen in their hand like the pen made of swan’s leg, the ink warm as blood cells.

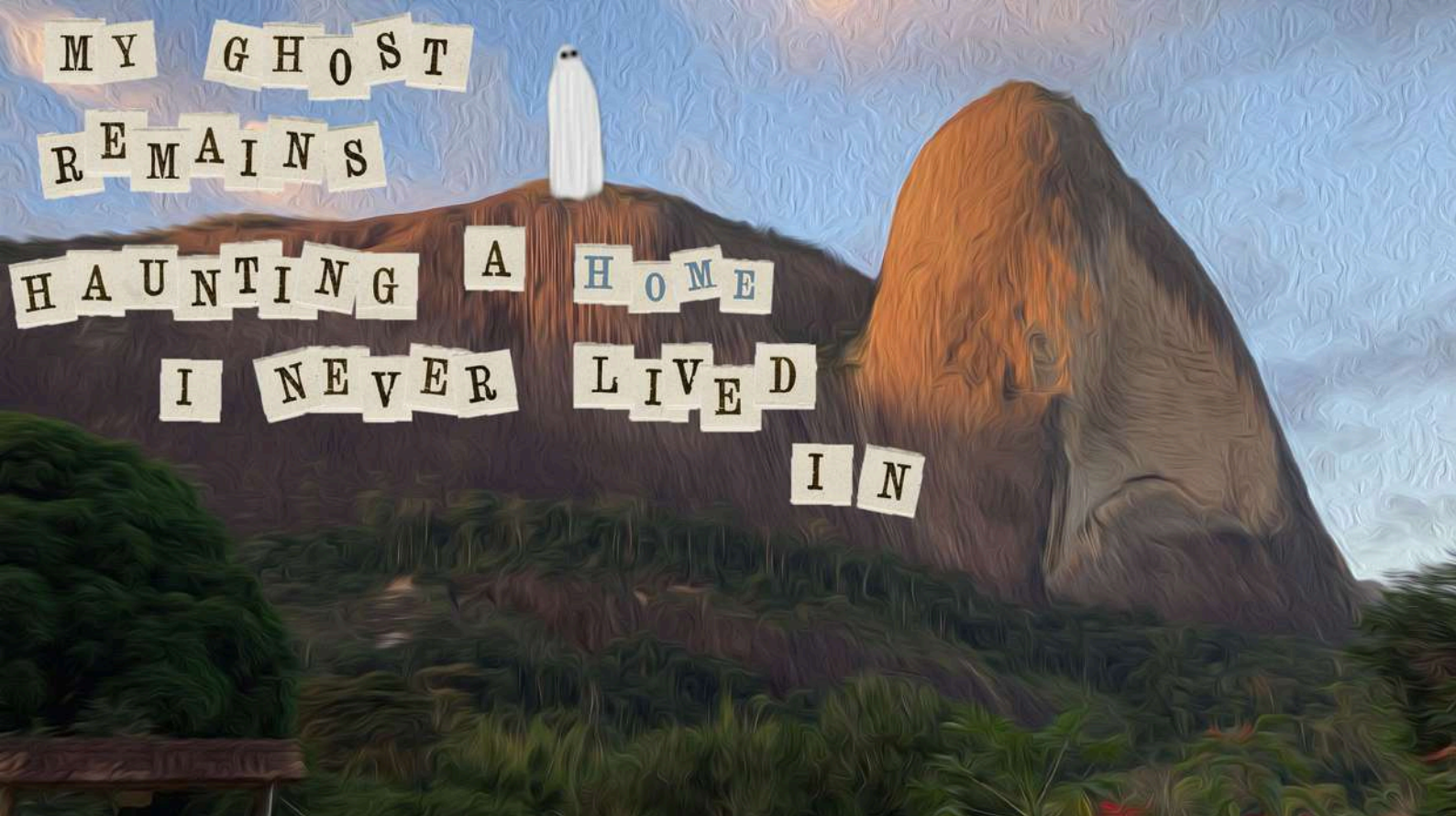


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## Haunting a Home - Maraya Franca



## Keep Playing - Maraya Franca

# Waiting - Keith Manos

At the open window, the crisp rush of air cooled Kevin's warm skin. He checked his reflection and wondered if all husbands looked like this, whether all men shared that perplexed expression that labeled them as married. Kevin exhaled. His breath misted in front of his face on the window, and for a brief, panicked moment he couldn't see outside. In quick desperation, he rubbed the fog off the glass, and relief washed over him when he saw the neighborhood street was still empty.

He hadn't missed her. He always waited for Sheila, always unsure these days when she'd return. Kevin pressed his face against the windowpane and enjoyed the brief chill against his cheek, concluding that husbands should wait for their wives to come home safely so they could share the amusing and troubling events that had happened during that agonizing time of separation. Kevin acknowledged their love was certainly different before – Sheila naked beneath him, her heavy breasts swaying as he lurched into her, trusting each other to complete their lovemaking without theatrics, and afterwards, Kevin massaging the swell of her back, the cooing she did as his hand journeyed up and down her spine. Not like now – because now he had to remind her where to put her hands on his body, and she demanded he stop all that spastic pushing. He hadn't missed her.

And Sheila didn't moan anymore, turning her head away instead, her eyes closed, waiting for him to finish so she could slide out from under him and go into the bathroom where she ran water into the sink and brushed her teeth.

Last week he remodeled their bathroom, updating it with new towels, faucets, and a shower door. Those first years they'd shared stolen moments in the bathroom, giggling as they urgently undressed each other. They ignored the damp rug against their skin when they collapsed breathlessly to the floor, their sweaty faces pressed against each other's hard shoulders. Sheila locked the bathroom door now, making him wait until she finished. She refused to let Kevin see her naked.

If the shower was on, he would move back into the bedroom and open the dresser drawer where Sheila kept her panties and bras. He would fondle the fabric, remembering how they looked on her when she undressed, enjoying the feel of lace and satin against his fingertips, how just gazing at her that way aroused him.

Now he waited for her in the empty living room, standing next to the open window, his eyes on the street where little pools of light from street lamps fell on the gray pavement. He viewed his pinched face in the window again and worried he had always looked that way to Sheila – eyes that blinked too much, his blotchy cheeks, a skull-like mouth. What did she see in him? He decided he would ask her when she returned, in a casual way of course, maybe as they sipped herbal tea and munched on crackers at the kitchen table.

Actually, Kevin blamed Charlie, the dog, for Sheila's current lack of affection. The damn yorkie used to hop onto the bed and sniff at their groins whenever they made love. Charlie had even bitten his ankles twice when Kevin moved on top of Sheila, making him wonder if she had trained the dog to do that. He'd come home from teaching English literature at the community college, and Charlie would start growling whenever he walked in the door.

When the credit card bill came at the beginning of the month, however, Kevin had asked about her spending – only about what she had purchased, mind you, when she'd gone shopping without him; he'd gladly pay any bill; he was only curious.

"Does it matter?" she had said, making him feel guilty for asking.

Kevin recognized this as rhetorical and didn't answer. Her need to have the upper hand.

He had caught her lying only once when he had called Thompson, Schmidt, and Crane asking for her, and he'd been told the paralegals had the day off. He never asked her where she had gone that day. He simply wrote down the date on a steno pad he kept in the nightstand drawer next to their bed, waiting for the right moment to show it to her.

And when Charlie died after he broke from his leash, dashed into the street, and was flattened by a car, Sheila blamed Kevin because he had been walking the dog. She demanded they buy a new dog, another yorkie, but Kevin resisted. Caring for Charlie had been too much.

They had resigned themselves that they couldn't have kids, and after a while, neither of them cared enough to find out why Sheila never got pregnant.

Rain splattered the window now, and he worried about Sheila driving that evening on the slick roads. True, she'd been driving for over twenty years but still he was concerned.

"I'm going out," she had said.

Where? Although desperate to know, Kevin had learned not to ask anymore. It only started an argument, and Sheila had the advantage: She could slam the door on her way out.

The rain reminded Kevin of last year when he'd suggested they go on a cruise, either Alaska or the Caribbean, and showed her the brochures. They could travel over his winter break or during the summer, whenever she wanted. Sheila glanced briefly at the brochures and dropped them without comment on the kitchen table. No, he decided then, we should at least talk about a cruise, so he left the brochures on the table, giving her another chance to examine them. When he came home from the college the next day, they were gone.

"Maybe we need counseling," he responded, trying to catch her off guard.

But Sheila seemed prepared for this. "What could a counselor tell us about ourselves that we don't know already?"

Again, Kevin recognized Sheila was right. Still, Kevin had tried. He made reservations at The Abbey, the kind of restaurant where young men scoot back their heavy chairs, get on one knee, and ask their dates to marry them;

where classical music plays from hidden speakers and dim lighting reflects elegance and high menu prices.

Sheila ordered the seared salmon, while Kevin struggled deciding between the filet mignon and the pork chops. She waited impatiently until he finally chose the steak, and afterwards as they waited for the check, he suggested they get a hotel room. For fun. He smiled mischievously and reached for her hand across the table's white linen cloth. Sheila accepted his hand, declined the proposal, and did not smile back. They drove home instead, pausing at the door to disarm the security alert.

He checked the street again. The rain came in misty sweeps over the driveway and lawn. Kevin thought about calling her cellphone, but would that reveal his desperation? Anger her? What are you doing, Kevin – Checking up on me? Jesus!

Over beers at a tavern one Friday night months ago, Kevin had lamented about his marriage to his brother Michael, who told him to try harder, to get counseling, to do something – anything, man. Michael even went on to say that it might be good if they broke up because then Kevin could date a hot college coed. He winked at Kevin and grinned.

“And lose my job?” Kevin stammered. “Are you serious?” He turned his eyes on his Heineken bottle, as if it was a student's paper he had to grade. “I took her to The Abbey. I suggested we go on a cruise.”

Michael leaned back and studied his brother's face. “Yeah? And how did all that work out?” Michael was being rhetorical too, so Kevin kept twirling his Heineken bottle.

His brother persisted. “Are you thinking about a divorce?”

“No, of course not,” Kevin had said, waving a hand in front of him as if he could swat the word away.

“Then take a long vacation together. Go somewhere,” Michael advised, but his face showed even in the dim light of the corner tavern that he was growing bored with helping Kevin.

“Where?”

“Jesus, Kevin. Figure it out.” He finished his scotch.

At the living room window Kevin craned his neck left and right and admitted to himself he missed Sheila. He especially missed her laughter. That was when she was the most intimate really – how she lifted her chin to the ceiling as if her giggles needed more space in the room. When had she laughed last? Sheila still smiled, but they were those functional smiles, the kind diners give their server at restaurants when they bring them their drinks.

Kevin had witnessed that smile when she opened the felt box that contained his last birthday gift to her, a gold necklace with a heart-shaped pendant, her initials etched on the back. She politely thanked him, placed the necklace back in the box and set it on the dresser while Kevin stood behind her and waited to see if she was going to say anything else. She didn't.

The sudden glow of a car's headlights bounced on the wet pavement, and Kevin leaned closer to the window, his breath coming quicker now, making little circles of fog on the glass.

He groaned when a station wagon came into view and passed. The rain slowed, and Kevin considered what he would say to Sheila when she returned.

Was there a new show on television they could watch together? Kevin decided to let her buy another dog, even if it was a yorkie. He'd find those cruise brochures or get other ones, maybe for the Greek islands. He went into the family room, turned on the television, and checked the program menu to find their new show. Kevin, of course, realized he would accept whatever she wanted to watch, so he turned off the television and returned to the window. Once again, the sharp air cooled his warm skin.


Kevin finally moved to the door, opened it, and stepped out onto the driveway. He abruptly discovered he was shoeless as the moisture from the rain soaked his white socks. His eyes widened. Sheila's Toyota was parked in the driveway. When had she come home? He touched the hood of the car. The metal was cold.

Kevin shifted to search and rescue. He stepped closer to the street and scanned their neighborhood. His eyes fell on the Schoner home. Last summer, he had spied Sheila stroking Pete Schoner's arm on the patio during the neighborhood block party, a look of admiration in her eyes – no, it was adventure. Her eyes gleamed, and Pete's had darted from her face to her chest.

Had she come into the house without him knowing it? He went back inside, and his feet grew cold as he padded in wet socks across the linoleum floor of the kitchen and into the carpeted dining room. Even in the semidarkness of the room, Kevin could tell she wasn't there. He reversed himself and walked down the hallway past the empty guest rooms to the master bedroom. He paused at the door, which was closed halfway and listened. Was she sleeping?

Kevin opened the door, turned on the light, and saw the empty bed where the mattress still sagged from his body's imprint and the sheet and covers were still thrown aside – the way he had left them this morning. He checked the bathroom, but Sheila wasn't there either. Nevertheless, he turned on the shower so she wouldn't hear him surreptitiously open the drawer where she kept her panties and bras. Why not? He loved the way they sent an electric surge through his blood, the memories they summoned. Kevin's fingers searched the drawer, even into the corners, but felt nothing. He stared into the empty drawer for a moment and then checked her closet, which was vacant too except for a row of plastic hangers across the bar. Had she left again?

Back to the window, Kevin decided with an air of finality. He'd wait all night if he had to.



## Bear Statues - Noll-Griffin

Everywhere you turn a bruising heel in this city

there's another fiberglass bear statue,

a shell to lock in imaginary friends,

with a niche theme stretching its aged skin across

a shrug of flat paws and lofty project burdens,

and all their eyebrows stuck bewildered.

One's some football player, half-transformed

with a splash of spray tan, stuck between mutated mammals

fighting in the same square of jersey squiggled on,

same startled expression under neon smile paint.

There was one shifting weight in the garden behind me,

hoping giggles in hunting caps wouldn't find it

behind a tired resident's curtain shade of sunflowers

growing out organic icons at the fence.

# My Home is a Flower Field - Athena R



Anyone who has met me—either in person or virtually (shoutout to my internet friends)—knows that I stutter, struggle, overthink, and over-explain when asked a question as simple as: “Where are you from?”

My boss once asked me if I’m happy—which was somehow even harder to answer. But that’s a story for another time. Moving on...

As someone who has moved every three years, I’ve always struggled to answer that question.

Even before this constant crop rotation of cities began, I didn’t know whether to say I was from Delhi (where I was living at the time) or from my native town in South India. People often raised an eyebrow when I said Delhi. I spoke the language fluently, but I clearly didn’t look like I was from there. So came the follow-up:

“Do you speak Hindi at home?”

“No,” I’d say. “I speak Tamil and English at home.”

Then came the classic: “Ohhh... so you’re Tamilian?” Or worse, “Ohh, so you’re a Madraasi.”

That question—often led to an unnecessary, exhausting conversation. It was especially difficult for someone as introverted and shy as I was back then (don’t worry, that changes by the end of this essay). The truth is, I never felt North Indian enough, but I also never felt South Indian enough. It’s the same way I didn’t feel Canadian enough to ever bring myself to drop the second ‘t’ in Toronto.

In Delhi, I was the girl who spoke Hindi but didn’t quite belong. In my native town, I was the city-bred kid who spoke too much Hindi and English, forgot Tamil words, and was always treated like a guest. A tourist. The designated “tour guide” when the family visited North India.

Eventually, I moved down South—lived with my grandparents, attended boarding school in a hill station, studied pre-med in another city, and then went to university for something other than medicine—in three different cities. And so on, and so forth.

Ironically, the easiest place I found to answer “Where are you from?” was during my three years abroad in Canada. I could simply say, “Oh, I’m from South India.”

End of conversation.

Sometimes, people would respond with: “I love India! I’ve been to the Taj Mahal. I love butter chicken and naan!” And that was that.

But when I met someone from India—even there—I’d still pause before answering. Am I supposed to say I’m from my native town? The last city I lived in? The one my parents now live in? It’s... a lot. When people ask me where I’m from, what they don’t realise is that they’re also asking me to name which version of myself I’ve had to leave behind.

Some people even joked that I might be a spy—which, honestly, would’ve been a cooler explanation (which I also think I’d be incredibly good at). Instead, I’d lie for fun and say my parents were free spirits who liked moving around for fun. Either way, people were confused—and a little weirded out or worried by my history of constant moving.

I’ve even made up stories—claimed I was from a completely different country—just to dodge the exhausting backstory. But no matter what I said, one question lingered: Where is home for me?

I remember our first move. I was devastated—I had to say goodbye to my first-ever friend. I cried, I thought I would never recover from it. Where was I going to find someone to watch *Finding Nemo* and *E.T* on repeat?

Our new house didn’t smell familiar, but I eventually grew to like it. I even kept the packing boxes to make a little cardboard home of my own. And I made a new friend there too (shoutout to Neo, who’s most definitely reading this). Things got better, and our new house slowly became a home. Our home once again had the fragrance of Mum’s incense and the attar our former neighbor had gifted us. Mum had these beautiful rattan blinds set up—so it felt like we were going to be there for a while. This is the place my brother took his first steps and bobbed his head to Harris Jayaraj’s music. This was where I had discovered Backstreet Boys and danced to VengaBoys and Aqua. This was where I watched *The Madagascar* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* on repeat. The house where I learned to ride a bicycle for the first time (with support wheels, though I can still only ride a bicycle straight or in circles—completely unperturbed).

In that new school, I made exactly two friends, got straight A’s, and was known as the topper Tamilian kid trained in Bharatanatyam. Classmates tried to make small talk by saying how much they loved idli and sambhuurrr, but I took paratha and ketchup to school. It felt like I didn’t belong anywhere.

Then came a poetry recitation competition. I had a blinding stage fright but had memorized Daffodils by William Wordsworth.

I remember feeling sad about the way the poem began:

“I wandered lonely as a cloud.” It must be so lonely, I thought—to be a cloud drifting with no place to land.

Later, my brother and I moved to our maternal grandparents’ house for three years. Paati’s (maternal grandmother’s) house was fifty years old—she had a grinding stone cemented in the kitchen counter and would grind the paste for her signature fish curry fresh. The smell of dry red chilies, peppercorns, and coriander seeds is still fresh in my memory. In the mornings, she’d use the grinding stone to make the ingredients for Chukku Kaapi (dry ginger coffee). She had a small pestle and mortar which she used to grind garlic or ginger occasionally. I imitated her and used to mix my own spices, forming extremely fatal blends of spices and leaving them as such, annoying her. I was a total menace as a six year old.(oddly, I am still a hot mess in the kitchen) But having a grinding stone secured on your kitchen counter meant permanence—something I couldn’t come to see in my life just yet.



Whenever I visited our paternal family, they'd say I spoke with my mum's native dialect—and vice versa. I never fully belonged to either place.

It was confusing when I was younger but I've come to accept that it's okay not to feel entirely at home in either place, even though I love and cherish both sides deeply.

If there's one thing that's brought comfort to me during all the moves, it's my shoebox of memories. I still collect memories like people collect stamps or fridge magnets(which I also collect BTW):

Movie tickets, plane tickets, keychains, notes passed in class, phone numbers scribbled in a pre-cellphone-era phonebook with friends' birthdays and phone numbers, birthday cards, friendship bands. What started as a tiny shoebox eventually became a full suitcase of memories. Every three years, I'd box them all up and carry them with me—souvenirs from past versions of myself I was not ready to leave behind. Sometimes, I wasn't even around for a moving day. I'd anxiously hoped nothing I loved was left behind—my turtle soft toy, my water bottle, my cardboard house, my Bratz doll, or a pop-up book I had read constantly. I even missed the secrets I'd left behind—like a doodle hidden on a wall, drawn just cleverly enough to escape my parents' notice. Ironically, it was a doodle of a house with a white picket fence and a pond with lilies.

For as long as I can remember, I've always had a blueprint for my dream house—always designed on MS Paint.

I think it came from the stories I grew up with: Goldilocks and the Three Bears, The Candy House from Hansel and Gretel, the castle from Barbie and the 12 dancing princess—they all featured the most adorable houses. So naturally, my dream house had room for everyone—my cousins, both sets of grandparents, and all my friends. There was space for everyone. I imagined hosting friends over for home-cooked meals, grinding fresh ginger for tea with my own pestle and mortar. It would be my home—a permanent address where friends could send postcards and letters, knowing I'd be there to receive them.

But the question always remained:

Will I ever achieve that permanent home? Where would that home be? Or would I keep mailing postcards from different pin codes?

And then came the time when I was ten, I desperately wanted a treehouse(once again, designed on MS Paint— I am sensing a pattern here, should I have become an architect?)—a little hideaway where I could read books and hang out with friends. The concept was very foreign to my grandparents, and they were bemused by their ten-year-old wanting her own space and privacy which was a very absent concept in our household.

But all I wanted... was a home which was a place to store my toys, read my books in silence or host my friends like Winnie the Pooh did with his friends!

By our third move, something shifted. I became more extroverted. I learned to make friends—and, more importantly, to make others feel included. I knew what it felt like to be the outsider, the new kid.

So I made sure no one around me ever felt that way.

Eventually, I simplified my answer too: “I’m from South India, but my parents live in New Delhi.” End of discussion.

But sometimes, when people mentioned cities I’d lived in, I’d blurt out, “Oh! I used to live there—I know so-and-so from there.” They’d be astonished. The world started feeling smaller and smaller. Friends of friends turned out to be someone’s cousin. My brother had gone to school with their cousin. My middle school classmate knew a second cousin of mine. The webs were endless.

Still, the question lingered:

Where is home for me?

It used to make me sad that I didn’t have a single, permanent room to show my friends and say, “Welcome to my childhood bedroom.” I never put glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling. I never had the luxury of hosting friends because they lived in far-off cities, my older homes.

Sometimes, I’d walk into a new house and be struck by what was missing: the familiar scent of mum’s attar, Paati’s herbal oil, or even waking up to the aroma of coffee my roommate used to brew, or the lingering trail of her perfume.

Small things that reminded me—I was in a new home now.

When I was in boarding school, it smelled like an old book and candle wax. It was surrounded by eucalyptus trees and tea estates, and always carried an earthy smell of wood, must be the century old wooden flooring. I used a certain perfume then, and till date, when I’m on the subway or walking past a crowded area and someone passes by wearing that same perfume, I would abruptly turn in their direction because it brings back so many memories from that time. We were all away from home so often that we started calling school our second home. In a way, it was a second home, because I still miss my time there—my chosen family, my friends from then, just like I missed all my other homes. Despite all the moves, the times I had spent in each place, I had the best time. I left with a bittersweet goodbye—saying “bye for now,” wishing the curse of moving every three years would end. Maybe this is the last time I move. Maybe this is where I’ll set my roots. Maybe this would become my corner store. Maybe this would be my go-to florist. Maybe this is the city where I’ll call home forever. I longed for that.

It makes me sad that each time I moved, I left behind someone I loved, I left behind a favourite hangout spot, a favourite stationery store or just a favourite bus. When a friend had a bad day, I couldn’t just show up with their favorite food. Meeting them meant planning, airport hugs and good-byes, and long-haul flights. My old friends became modern legends to my new ones—people they’d only know through stories. But thanks to the internet and the evil luxury of constant communication, I’m still connected. So when we reunite, there’s no awkwardness—just joy. Conversations begin with “So good to finally see you!” and end with “Wow, it doesn’t feel like it’s been over a decade at all.”

By the fourth or fifth move, I’d made peace with the constant uprooting.

But I still felt homesick sometimes—until I realized what I missed wasn't a place, but the people. So I changed the meaning of home.

Home, to me, is my people. Sometimes, it's a person.

Sometimes, it's a smell.

Sometimes, it's a song, a street, or a familiar food.

Sometimes, it's the way someone says your name(or misspelt it).

Home became a mosaic. A patchwork quilt of all the places I've been, all the versions of me I've been, and all the people I've loved—each one stitched in, a little worn, but still warm.

And if you count the people I consider my home, then I'm a very wealthy person—spoilt rich by their love. Sometimes, I feel like a celebrity, with homes scattered across the world, each one filled with people I love.

I see them like daffodils—rooted in place, steady and still. And I am the (not lonely) wandering cloud: always on the move, watching from afar, offering warmth or shade as needed. I may not always be there in person, but I'm present—virtually—like Talking Tom (the OG ChatGPT), or maybe Siri, Bixby, or ChatGPT itself.

All the places I've lived in feel like vast daffodil fields—each one a memory, a connection, a chapter. Places where I once rooted myself and received nourishment.

That makes me feel rich. Content. Happy.

I might not have a permanent home just yet—and that's okay. I've embraced the role of the wandering cloud: one with purpose and freedom, carrying the fragrance of each daffodil I've loved. I bring those scents, those smiles, and stories to every new field I move to.

The sound of popping bubble wrap and the sight of moving boxes no longer scares me. Packing up years of my life into a suitcase keeps getting easier—because the promise of keeping in touch now always exists.

I may be a kite without a string, but that no longer frightens me.

Because wherever my kite lands, it lands in a daffodil field— A familiar home, with someone I love waiting with open arms.

And when that happens, I will go home.

So, if you're like me—someone who never quite knows how to answer that question—maybe it's okay.

Maybe you're not lost. Maybe you're just layered.

And someday, when I find myself rooted in one place—when I become the daffodil—I'll have a pestle and mortar, a secured grinding stone on the kitchen counter, glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling, a tree-house and a warm welcome ready for any kite that finds its way into my field.

My childhood home once swallowed me whole, part  
of it always lives inside of me now - Jennifer/Myth



# Where my Heart is - Beth Butler

Home is where you often feel the safest. It was where I felt the safest, I could shut everything away and be myself.

It's dark in here. For weeks, or months maybe, I can't remember now, all I have known is darkness. I have forgotten what the sun felt like on my cheeks. The ironic thing is, outside was never my favourite place, I would rather have spent my time locked away.

Down here, I could work on my hobbies. The darkness helped me to think, as I tinkered away. I created my best work when I was alone, and now it seems I have gotten my wish.

Now, however, I cannot work on anything. I can't move my muscles, not even an inch, and it itches me to move. Ever heard the saying 'The grass isn't always greener on the other side.' I think this explains my situation.

I was never a people person, that was obvious from being a child. Even then, after school, home had been my security blanket. School felt too loud, too public for me to spread my wings. My own room felt safe, away from judging faces, eyes that would stare and look at me if I brought my passions into school.

As I grew, my room became less practical. I needed room to breathe, to concentrate. I moved to the basement. Less bright, less of an uplifting atmosphere but I liked it. I was away from the distractions of the outside world and my open window.

Away from prying eyes, I grew and developed, along with my passion. Once my exams had been completed and education was dusted, I could fully focus on it.

People called me selfish, but covid was a Godsend to me. Without human interaction, I could thrive, I may have become obsessed, but it kept my brain occupied. Government officials were begging everyone to stay inside. For me, this was all I had dreamt of.

Alas, now I find myself this way. A wish granted, but now look at me. I wasted away, a former shell of what I was, and I can't stop looking at what I have made. Like me, they are trapped. I longed for this, but this is not what I wanted. We have no movement, no way to cry out. How come I long so much for something I despised my entire life?

The grass calls to me, even though I have no eyes to see. I feel it under my nose, tickling. I can no longer be a part of what little sunlight shines through. My pathway is blocked. Hidden deep down, where no one can hear my call. The smell of must and mould creeps in, and I feel suffocated. If only my creations could acquire the autonomy to walk and think on their own, then I could be free from the place I used to be safe.

As the wood around me crumbles, my notion of time is not what I expect it to be. Weeks I thought I had been stuck here, but judging by the damage around me, perhaps it has been years. Alas, there is no way of knowing. The last time I felt the sun on my face, I walked around with a Walkman.

I'd wake up early, brace the outside, with its unfamiliar smells and loud noises, of people chattering and dogs growling, to rush back home to my basement, after rushing to quickly complete chores. Bank transfers, errands such as food shopping, trivial things.

The hot sun I now crave, is the thing I used to scorn. Whenever it was Summer, I'd shut my brain from the world, as I did what I must out in public. The second the front door was shut, the minute my feet touched the carpet, I knew I could relax, take my earphones from my ears, and bask in the silence of my home.

Now all I ever hear is silence. Not a mutter, or a bird cry. Just emptiness and it scares me to know this could be forever. I was the only one to blame. I had made this happen, this was apparently what I wanted, until forever felt like a lifetime.

Even inside my home, inside my basement, I was disturbed by the noises from the outside world. On this day, I couldn't handle it any longer. Before, I would never have believed in magic or wishes. Tired by the day's antics and the constant buzzing from the neighbour's lawnmower, I made a wish, up to the skies. Kneeling upon my hard, wooden floor, I looked towards the clouds.

"I wish for solitude. A lifetime of silence and quiet, I wish never to be disturbed!"

I woke, not in the bed I'd gone to sleep in. As my eyes opened, I realised no light was seeping from my curtains. I thought I'd turned blind in the night.

Using the tips of my fingers, I felt my way through the darkness. No clues were given, until I reached up high. I was laid down, as though to rest, and felt pieces of wood trapping me inside. I hadn't meant to wish to be encased within my own wooden coffin, and although I felt alive and at peace at first, my breathing started to become slower. I had nothing to do, everything I loved was out there, while I had been ceased and locked up inside.

What felt like many struggling hours ticked by, as my energy came to a halt, my sense of time soon ended. I wasn't hurting anymore, but I didn't have the ability to breathe either. I still have no knowledge as to whether I am alive or dead. Will this wish, cast upon me, last forever, never moving, always stagnate. My home was always my safety zone, a place to be who I really am, however I never wanted this, boredom, without being able to move. The grass really isn't greener on the other side. I was so foolish to want peace inside of my home. My home, after all, is the one thing that has secluded me from it all. The only thing I feel lately, is my own heart pounding, I wonder if others can feel it too.

## The Art of Being Home - Beth Butler

Caught a black cat yawning from a corner doorway,  
Seemed she was tired of handing out bad luck  
And wanted to leave a positive contribution  
Before her ninth life expired.

Well, I empathized with her plight  
As a doorway dweller myself  
Who memorizes the shape of a welcome mat  
Then steps away so someone else can cast their shadow.

A wanderer is always at home  
And never at home,  
Finding neighbors everywhere  
Yet belonging nowhere.

Home cooking is the street vendor,  
Warm bedsheets are kernels of sand  
Where he attempts to cast his footprints  
Ten minutes ahead of the sunset tide.

Still in all his lack of stillness  
He wonders what it's like  
To lean back on a rocking chair  
Petting a black cat that ain't going nowhere.

# Going Home - Amy Fox-Angerer

*Late June 2007, Al Taji, Iraq*

The soldiers in First Cavalry from Fort Hood, Texas, talked about going home today. They spoke about mid-tour vacations plans and the delicious food back home. I hope they make it home. My friend marks the days on the calendar until his unit leaves Camp Taji for home. My other friend can say how many days he's been on the ground in Iraq. I can say neither.

I do not think about going home. I can not think about going home without thinking about those who can never go home.

There are 6,655 Iraqi linguists who worked for the United States Army under the L3 Communications Titan contract. That's the badge number I gave a new one today. I recruit and hire Iraqis to be interpreters for the U.S. Army. I mask their identity to keep them safe. I send them to a unit where they might be killed. I lost 10 in month. Recently, I cleaned up a database and more were confirmed dead than working.

Badge number 6655 became Kent and his new life began today. He will be a linguist for the U.S. Army; he will live, sleep, eat and breathe with American soldiers. Whenever his unit goes in Iraq will be his home. It might be outpost in the triangle of death or a mission in the north. It could be working at the front gate of the camp. He will work with a particular platoon or team; if he's good, they will treat him like they treat their own. There are thousands like him, embedded, protected. There are hundreds that could not be protected from a sniper, an IED, or a mortar.

Casey was kidnapped went he went on his four day vacation in February to take his monthly pay - \$1050.00 American cash - to his family; he returned to his job, but he shakes. I took pictures of his bruised purple body. He is different now.

Fox came back from his cousin's funeral Saturday; his cousin was kidnapped and murdered for being Sunni. When Fox learned about his cousin's disappearance, he requested leave from his job as a linguist to help locate the cousin. Fox found him in the morgue four days later.

Chris moved his family to Syria and left the linguist job to join them. Chris is fluent and sounds like a naïve speaker. He once told me he was going to go to America and join the Army. He said he'd knew he'd pass boot camp after all he'd done and seen.

The first time I met Jane she stood in full battle rattle, complete uniform and a 50-pound to 75 pound vest, gear, duffel bag. I thought she was private in the Army, but she was E-1 rank to help her blend in. With dark hair and eyes and her uniform worn correctly, she could pass as a private to anyone. Her father put a price on her head. She can never go home.

Later it was rumored that her unit trusted her so much that they gave her a weapon and put in the four-man stack to kick in doors. Her unit had been working north of Taji, and someone she knew from her village recognized her; this endangers every soldier in her unit but they are now leaving for home and she is being dropped off at my office so she can be assigned a new unit, a new home.

Dodi receives text messages that threaten his life every week. He asked me today how to get rid of nightmares, and all I could give him were sleeping aids, because it never goes away. I heard that he carried the head of a dead soldier on his lap after a mission to find a downed aircraft just a month or two before I met him; I'd have nightmares too. The long-haired interpreter has an old badge number, and he no longer knows where his family lives or has their contact information, which makes it safer for them. He suspects his childhood home was set afire. He wonders if he will ever see his mom or brothers again. Camp Taji might be his home forever.

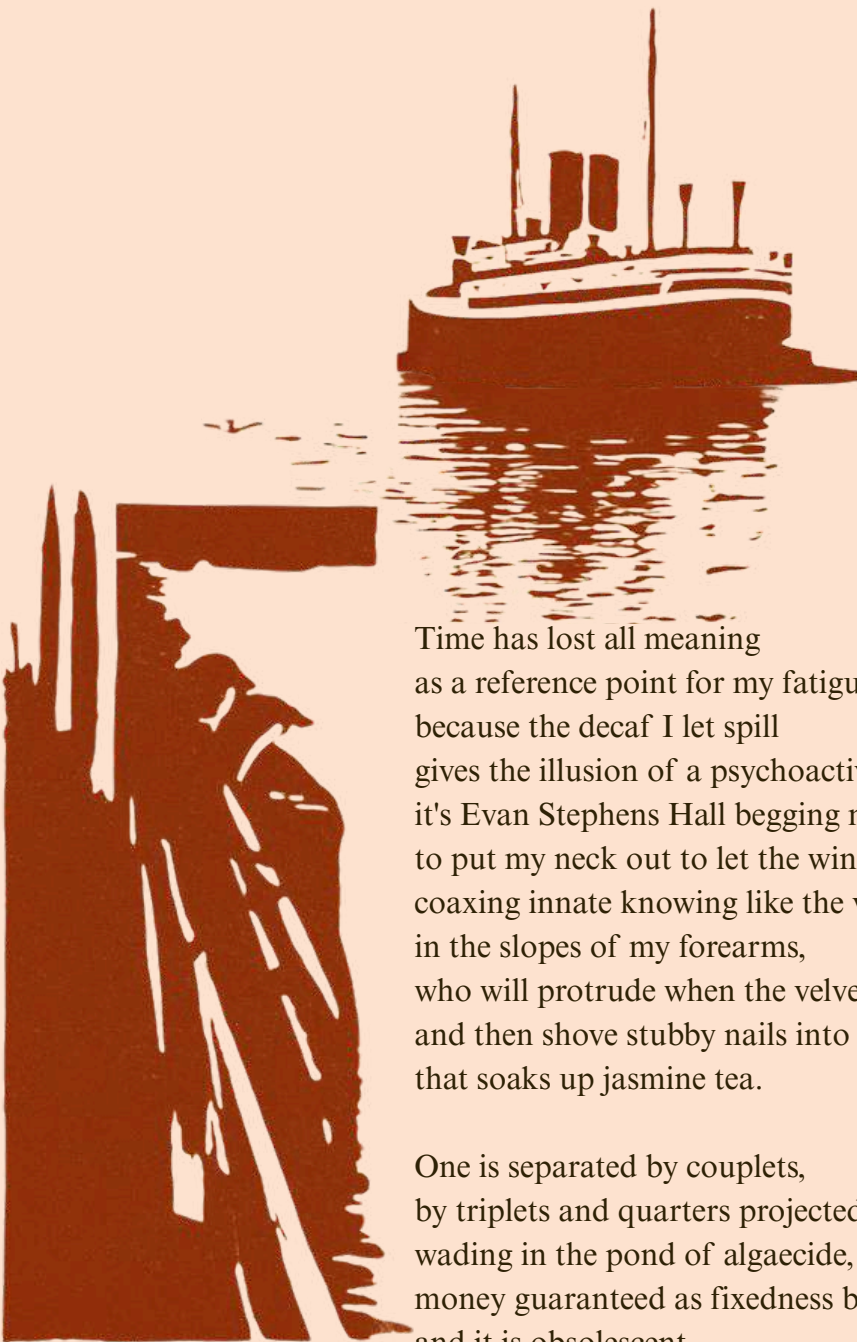
What happens to these linguists or the thousands of others when all the Americans do eventually go home? I have asked myself this question every day for months and I know it might be years but I also know that we won't take them all back with us. It takes so much paperwork to get asylum and it takes a lot of money to support oneself in the U.S. for several months until an eventual green card.

There are other countries and they can take a few. The Aussies run a medical training facility on the far side of Camp Taji where linguists translate and help teach the Iraqi Army to be medics and patch up the wounded. Another country's contractors run the latrine cleaning business. It's possible that each country will take a few people with them home but there are more than 400 Iraqi linguists at Camp Taji alone; there are hundreds at every base.

I told many linguists to look me up back in the states; they know my real name and many ask for me by name at the front gates of this huge base. Not long ago at the Gate a mother asked for me. I employ all four of her sons as linguists. With a straight face and no tears, I told her that her youngest son, age 18, code name Eagle, had died and his body could be picked up in Baghdad. She wailed. He is at his forever home with Allah.

When Americans leave Iraq, it won't just be Sunni against Shite, Shiite against Sunni. It will be both against anyone perceived to have worked with the U.S. The only home they will have when all the Americans leave Iraq is with God in heaven.

# Highland House - Ross Marshall



Time has lost all meaning  
as a reference point for my fatigue,  
because the decaf I let spill  
gives the illusion of a psychoactive substance,  
it's Evan Stephens Hall begging me  
to put my neck out to let the wind whip me rosy,  
coaxing innate knowing like the veins timid  
in the slopes of my forearms,  
who will protrude when the velvet repository in my throat says "go ahead"  
and then shove stubby nails into the whimpering wood of a table  
that soaks up jasmine tea.

One is separated by couplets,  
by triplets and quarters projected past,  
wading in the pond of algaecide,  
money guaranteed as fixedness bobs to the surface  
and it is obsolescent  
but I'll never remember that until it's too late to grow up again.

# The Volunteer 2883 - Judith B. Cohen

“Can I help you Sir? Let me carry your bags up the hill.” Martha spoke through her open car window to an old guy struggling so much he could have been lugging bags of lead. She’d had a busy morning, first babysitting for her handicapped four-year-old grandson, then leading an exercise class for seniors with dementia. She loved making those poor old codgers smile and they loved her back. Though she was looking forward to a quiet afternoon when she spotted the stooped over, elf-like creature making his way up the street, she couldn’t help herself. When she stopped and pulled over, he acted as if he hadn’t heard her. She repeated herself, louder this time.

“I hear you,” he said. He stood still, hugging his bags as if he needed to protect them from theft. Martha got out of the car and reached out, offering to take one.

“Who are you anyway? His voice was strong, more powerful than she expected given his diminutive size.

“My name is Martha Nelson and my kids live just a few blocks from here.”

“Ok,” He said, swaying to the right as if he might fall over. “I’m Dr. Herbert L. Stinson, retired, and my house is just up that hill. I do this all the time, but if you really mean it.” He let her take his packages.

His bags felt nearly empty to her as she followed slowly behind the doctor, who, step by step, gingerly covered the short distance to his place. His large, shingled colonial house had probably been desirable once, but with its peeling paint, broken window shutters and weathered porch steps, it looked to be in worse shape than its owner. When she offered to come inside, he refused.

“Thanks, but I’ve got it from here,”

Do you live alone Dr. Stinson?”

“Yes, I do, for twenty years since my wife died. Why does that matter?”

Martha set his bags down on a back stoop littered with junk. She noticed rusted tools, broken flowerpots, and overstuffed stuffed trash cans. She wondered if he might be a hoarder or something worse. The place looked like a firetrap, ready to ignite, not safe for a man his age. Though he’d refused to let her inside, she insisted on giving him her phone number. “Please call if I can help you,” she said, unaware that their relationship would soon nearly dominate her life.

A week later he did call Martha. Though she was surprised when she heard his voice. “Dr. Herbert Stinson here, Mrs. Nelson—if you’re still free and want to give me a lift, well, I’d very much appreciate it.” Free or not, Martha couldn’t refuse.

Caretaking was a fixture of her life, posing hurdles that she’d grown used to mounting. As the only girl with three brothers and a working mother, maternal roles often fell to her. She’d tried nursing school but dropped out when she couldn’t handle the math.

Then she raised two kids of her own with a husband too busy with his real estate business to help much. Martha had always worked, even with small kids. She’d been a nurse’s aide, then a medical secretary. After her divorce she’d bought her own place, a cute cottage looking out at a salt marsh. Still slender blond and attractive, she had no trouble in the romance department but those relationships didn’t last.

Before she dropped him off on a freezing February afternoon, she asked if he had enough warm clothes. She'd noticed that he'd dressed in layers, his neatly assembled outfit abandoned for a shabby sweater, pulled over some kind of vest, making him look like a stuffed toy. Herb admitted that his furnace wasn't working well, but he wouldn't call for service since they'd charge too much and wouldn't fix it anyway- -he knew because it happened before.

When he complained about a sore leg the following week, she asked if he ever went to the doctor. "Sure" he said, "the guy I see took over my own practice—in fact I have an appointment with him next month, You can take me if you're not busy."

At the doctor's office, Martha pretended to have a personal medical question so she could speak to the man privately. The fellow seemed bored by her concerns. "He's a harmless, quirky old guy I've known for years. More stubborn than a dozen mules. I've tried to get him to move to assisted living, but you can't force him."

What about his daughters?

The younger doctor sighed. "I've never met them, but judging from the little he's said, there's no love lost between them."

"But is he safe in that rickety old house—he won't let me inside. I worry that he'll fall or pass out. He must be what? Eighty-something?"

"More like ninety something and pretty healthy for his age. I think he'd rather die there than move. It's very sweet of you to be so concerned, but really, there's nothing more you can do."

After hearing the doctor Martha convinced herself to stop worrying about Dr. Herbie. Her own daughter strongly advised her to quit chauffeuring him around. "You don't need this, Mom."

Indeed, there were others who did need her. She heard from a mutual friend that her ex, the brawny marine, was suffering from cancer and his latest girlfriend had left him. Though she'd been furious with him, she couldn't help herself—she texted him a get well greeting with a smiley face. It made her feel better even if he never responded. Then, to add to the growing list of sorrows, she got a phone call at four a.m. Brenda, the high school pal she'd met for lunch a few days earlier, sounded desperate. The man she'd been with for three years was missing and had left a suicide note. "Could you come?" she sobbed. Martha drove forty minutes to her house and sat with her for hours, waiting for news.

"He was so sweet when he left last night. Kissed me and told me I was the love of his life. Not a hint that he was planning anything like this."

Hours later the police called. They'd found him in the woods, shot in the mouth with his own gun. As she drove home, Martha couldn't imagine what would make a healthy man with two teenagers kill himself.

Even with a cancer diagnosis, she knew that her ex, who'd survived Iraq, would never end his own life. Brenda's guy was still legally married to his kid's mother so she wasn't even involved in his funeral arrangements. Martha began spending so much time on the phone comforting Brenda that it was harder for Dr. Herbie to reach her.

When they finally spoke, she told him that she had some personal problems to deal with and would only help him if he agreed to let her contact his daughters. "Unless you do, I won't drive you again," she said, and he complied.

She'd fallen for an ex-marine fifteen years her junior. Thanks to her, he'd gone back to school and was on his way to a bachelor's degree. Martha admired his devotion to the two screwed up kids he'd had to rescue from their drug addicted mother, and she'd even befriended his parents. Martha loved the guy, though he sometimes seemed more like a son than a peer. After eight years of sharing her bed, her house and glorious sex, he'd broken her heart with a text. "Really, sorry but I've met someone else," he'd written. Until that message, he'd given no hint that things were over. Her dear friend Brenda, always a comforting voice on the phone, reminded her what she'd said when the affair began. "There will be tears."

"I said that?" Martha wondered. "Honestly, I don't remember. After all these years, I thought we'd grow old together, or at least I would."

Now that she was in her sixties with her own kids married, settled, raising their families, she had time to volunteer. So much pain in the world—she could barely watch the news anymore—helping this old guy might add a drop of goodness to a depressing universe.

Growing more and more curious, she set a time to pick him up and, gradually, these trips became a weekly appointment. He'd be ready and waiting, dressed neatly, tie and jacket. At the Stop and Shop, he bought the same items every week: a can of tuna, a loaf of bread, milk and a couple of frozen dinners. If she suggested vegetables or fruit, he refused. .

Answers to her unspoken questions about his family leaked out slowly. His wife, a nurse had died of cancer. They were Catholic but he didn't go to church anymore, since that had been her department, and he did have two daughters, no grandchildren

"Don't you see your daughters? Do they live far away?" she pressed him.

"They don't drive," he said, "but they call once a week."

She was amazed when he finally admitted that his middle-aged, single daughters lived in the next town, probably a fifteen-minute drive away. When she asked him for their phone number or address. He refused. "They're very private," he said. "They wouldn't like it." What could be up with those women? She wondered if they were hiding from creditors, ex-husbands or the old man himself. Even after months of driving him around, and calling him Herbie, he still wouldn't let her inside the house. What was he afraid of?

"I'm worried that you're not safe," she insisted. "If something happens, like you fall and can't get to the phone, no one will know."

"You worry too much Martha," he said. "I've been on my own here for more than a decade—I'm doing just fine. I just don't like guests—I'm not prepared for company."

To change the subject, Martha filled him in on her grandkids and her exercise classes. He listened politely but never asked any questions.

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When she reached them, Martha wasn't accusatory, she simply expressed her concern about their father's safety. Harriet, who explained that she was the oldest, spoke for them.

"We call him once a week, but it's too hard for us to get over there." She insisted.

Martha asked to meet them and Harriet resisted. "We're both awfully busy. Since we retired, we volunteer. We do a lot over at our church." Martha said she'd come to them and wouldn't take much of their time.

They met at a Diner, one of the rare places that still looked like a fifties railroad car. Two women who could have been twins, sat across from one another in a vinyl covered booth. They looked as if they'd also come from the 1950's in their faded rayon cardigan sweaters, and heavy oxford shoes. Harriet introduced herself and her sister, Virginia, who hardly spoke. Martha wondered if she might be mentally challenged, with Harriet, the caretaker. That would help explain their failure to visit Herb, but no, they'd both been elementary school teachers.

"I'm just so concerned about your Dad," Martha said. "The place is in such disrepair and I think he has no heat. I'm really too busy with my own family to do anything, and even if I could, he won't let me in the house.

Without giving too many details, a dark picture slowly emerged. Their "sweet" little old doctor had been a mean and miserable father, and their dead mother was an obsessively observant Catholic. When an angry priest had left bruises on Harriet's arm, their mom instructed her to cover it up with long sleeves and tell nobody. Their father wouldn't call a plumber to fix a broken toilet. Instead, he flushed with a pail of water and probably still does.

"When we finally moved into our own apartment, we didn't know how the shower worked since we'd never seen one," Harriet laughed, bitterly. "Now we won't go near the house—too many bad memories." She looked at the floor, while her sister seemed to be searching for something in her overflowing fabric bag. Reluctantly, they gave Martha their email address so she could contact them in case of emergency.

Martha left them suspecting there'd been more abuse than they could admit: terrible acts by priests, or even their own father, injuries they'd never disclose. She tried to imagine what it had been like to grow up in that house: freezing cold, no showers, broken toilets, what other horrors might those girls have endured? She was torn—he'd been so gentle and agreeable with her. Could she just cut him off? She thought about contacting social services or even the local priest but she didn't want to bring the authorities down on him.

She tried the daughters again. "If you can't help him, is there another relative I can contact?"

"Stop harassing us!" they replied to her message.

Reluctantly, Martha still took him to lunch and shopping. He seemed to be more appreciative of her, actually asking about herself and her kids. She even invited him to accompany her on a visit to her grandkids, thinking it might soften him more, but he declined. When two weeks passed with no call from him, and no answer when she phoned his daughters, she rang the police and asked for a safety check. As she'd feared, they found the doctor lying on the floor at the bottom of the basement stairs, badly injured but alive.

When Martha visited him in the hospital, he was in intensive care, hooked up to many machines, but he opened his eyes and smiled at her. The nurse wouldn't give her much information since she wasn't family—only that his status was stable. Over the next several weeks, he improved enough to be taken off the machines, but he couldn't walk and was still pretty drugged. During his third week in the hospital, after she'd been visiting once or twice a week and had encountered no other visitors, she got a call from a nurse asking her to come as soon as she could.

"Is he nearing the end?" Martha asked.

"He's still stable—it's just that he has no visitors and I think he's lonely."

She sat next to his bed, greeting him in a loud voice.

"How are you feeling, Herbie? I think you're making progress. Soon they'll send you to a rehab so you can get stronger."

"That's why I called," He muttered, his voice weak, barely rising from his sunken mouth. "I want to give you my power of attorney—no rehab for me. I can die right here or back in my own house."

"I think it should be your daughters, not me," Martha pleaded. Since he named an attorney that she should contact, Martha intended to refuse. He'd had to find someone else. When she identified herself to the lawyer he was delighted to hear from her. Martha explained that she was just a volunteer helper and couldn't do what Herb had asked. The lawyer told her it was too late.

"Before he went into the hospital, he changed his will and left his house and all of its contents to you"

Martha's first impulse and to slam the phone down.

"I know it's no big favor, the lawyer said. 'The place is a pile of junk—he's ignored many notifications to clean it out, and there are liens on the property, but as a tear down it could be worth something.

"Can I refuse to accept it?" she asked

"Not unless someone contests the will or he changes it"

Martha couldn't think of anything to say.

"I think we're finished here, the lawyer said, then added. "Maybe he'll live another decade and you won't have to worry about it."

Martha spent sleepless nights trying to think of a way out. She knew it was no use trying to get Herb to change his mind. Maybe her ex could find some real estate solution like selling the place and giving the proceeds to the daughters.

She decided to visit the house while Herb was still in the hospital. She found a key under one of the flowerpots and slowly entered expecting the worst. Instead, what she saw surprised her.

The kitchen was clean and neat, cupboards intact, counters clear. The living room was orderly, though the furniture was shabby, there was no debris anywhere, nothing out of place, pleasant landscape paintings and images of the Virgin Mary on the walls. She wandered through the other rooms, looking for signs of hoarding, for unopened packages or plastic bags of trash, but she found nothing unusual, just old, sagging furniture, faded flowered wallpaper and stained carpeting, as if the rooms had frozen in 1960 and never thawed.

Herb probably used only a bedroom and kitchen, never touching the other rooms. All the place really needed was some carpentry, paint and updating. She pictured brightly painted rooms free of carpeting, smooth wooden floors; no old drapes, just sunlight streaming through polished windows. Martha knew she could do most of it herself. The idea inspired her—maybe if she cut down on her classes and brought her grandson along, she could manage it--a complete renovation.

# Sometimes, Death

## - Anna Dimatino

Sometimes, Death tips his hat  
in passing— a car wreck on the highway  
where everyone survives, changed

and grateful. Sometimes, Death  
puts a heavy finger on the scale, a glutton  
in a pastry shop, such an assortment,

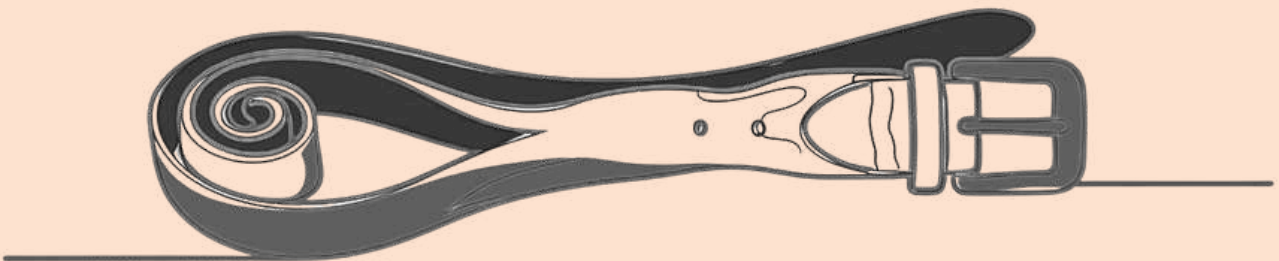
too hard to choose, so he samples—  
your friend's dog, your neighbor's cat,  
a young man drowned at sea.

And those who survive are changed,  
and for a moment, cradle life in their palms  
like a fragile hummingbird's egg.

# Ode to His Belt

## - Anna Dimatino

**T**he way it hung with a sway  
from the peg, as if  
the shape of his hips  
was ingrained in the leather, supple  
the way he took the end tip  
in one hand, coaxed the strap  
through each denim loop,  
then, brass buckle in his other hand  
snugged it up, the rigid prong  
penetrating the notch  
the way he gave the strap one last tug  
before securing its position  
then slipped his hand into his pants  
along his waist to smooth his shirt—  
what I would give to watch this  
one more time.



## Marital Advice - Anna Dimatino

Even if you want to, don't.  
The hundred times you dream of leaving,  
stay. Because what you think you cannot bear,  
you will, and more.  
You could be married  
to a man named Mud,  
he lives in the brownstone  
at the end of the block—  
owns the only plow in town.  
He sits in his shorts all day,  
sucks down his Schlitz,  
a bag of pretzels on his belly,  
cracks back tab after tab,  
stacks the empties in a pyramid.  
When he calls to you  
to bring him the remote,  
you do it so he won't get mean.  
You've never been religious,  
but you start to pray  
for snow, a blizzard, something  
to get him off his lounge  
long enough for you to grab your bags.  
And now your man doesn't seem so bad,  
that smacking sound when he chews his noodles,  
less revolting. You convince yourself  
that the drone of his voice is more of a lull,  
and maybe tonight, when it's time for bed  
and you're dreading the brush of his hand  
against your breast, instead of turning away  
think of rain,  
think of snow  
think of mud.



# The Valley - Macey Shofroth

I watched Anna's face break into tears as she collapsed into her mother and sister.

Walking through the tangle of teen girls laughing in the middle of the cabin, I crept out onto the deck where the trio stood. I gingerly closed the door and introduced myself as Anna's counselor.

"She doesn't want to stay," Anna's mom told me.

Anna had just arrived for her first week at Camp Hertko Hollow, a summer camp for kids with Type 1 Diabetes. I dug through my internal rolodex of camp counselor training to find a way to make her comfortable. I asked her a few questions about herself. Where are you from? How long have you had Diabetes?

She remained tight-lipped and tense. A sixteen year old girl; I understood her fears. I softened my eyes as much as I could. I told her to stick with me, we'll have lots of fun.

She reluctantly hugged her mom one last time, who slipped me a pile of envelopes labeled with each day of the week behind Anna's back. I nodded in understanding.

I looked once more at Anna's mom, and then at her. "She's going to have the best week. I promise."

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In 1968, Dr. Edward Hertko gathered 37 young people with Type 1 Diabetes at a summer camp situated in a ravine just outside of Boone, Iowa. He had watched his mom and brother struggle with Diabetes their entire lives. He understood that children with the disease needed a place to feel safe, have fun, and learn how to care for themselves. That summer, Camp Hertko Hollow was born.



Thirty-six years later, my parents packed me up and took me to Boone.

I had been diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes two years earlier. It had been two years since I wet the bed every night and begged for water for two weeks straight. Two years of blood draws and insulin shots, making hundreds of decisions my body was supposed to make for me. Camp meant a respite from the constant reminder that my body was different.

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I met my best friend Emma at camp when we were 12 years old.

I was the second person in our cabin to arrive that year, after Emma. She sat in her top bunk along the right side wall, her legs draped over the ladder, a delight of curly brown hair and huge hazel eyes. She never stopped smiling. We had been attending camp at the same time for years, but somehow had never truly met. I knew she sang in the talent show and dressed cute and always had a date to the camp dance. She had the most enigmatic laugh that filled the entire valley. I remember a tightening of my stomach, nervous to spend my week with this girl who was clearly cooler than me.

We quickly became obsessed with one another.

It started during lunch early in the week. We sat by each other on a wooden bench in the dining hall. She turned to me and spoke in a Russian accent, telling me she was in disguise. I gave her a quizzical look. She explained she no longer wanted to go to the camp dance with her usual date. Now she had become Sven, a Russian spy, wearing her sunglasses and thick accent in disguise.

I decided her covert mission needed support. I pulled my own sunglasses down and declared that I was her British friend MiMi, arriving from across the pond as her alibi.

We were two femme fatales who had more important things to contend with than the boys across the dining hall. We were two pre-teen girls giggling behind our hands. We'd lower our sunglasses whenever that boy walked past us. We'd call back to those names for years, long after our time at camp and well into our adulthood.

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After a few years, camp moved to the Des Moines Y-Camp, just down the road from its original location.

It's one of the few places in the world I can get to without Google maps, down a nondescript dirt road, past the house on the left with junk strewn across its lawn, deeper into the rurality of woodsy Iowa.

The gravel edges lower into the valley and curves past a ranch-style house that always brings me into my body, a tickle in my stomach of what's to come. I feel inches from Eden when I come upon a sign that simply says "HILL." To a random passerby, a silly sign stating the obvious. To us, a portal into our world. Coming down that hill, through thick covers of oak and hickory into an expansive valley where sun seems to shine a little brighter and every color seems to have its intensity turned up 15%, feels like leaving an alien world and returning to everything you know. Camp and my diabetic body are of one another. I came down that hill for the first time at age 7 and this giant mother opened her arms and welcomed me home. A home where I could experience the purest form of friendship I'd ever know.

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To be at camp was to be encased in that purity. It quickly became everything to me. Belonging was in the air I breathed at camp. My eyes darted toward the arms, legs, and hips of everyone around me. They were all occupied, medicalized, scarred just like my reflection in the mirror. A chorus of insulin pump beeps sounded no matter where I went. I was a kid seeing myself for the first time. My body was finally understood. I stepped out of my world of school tests and organized activities. I awoke from my bunk and walked onto porches bound by light dewy mornings, giggling through the slow burn as they transformed into thick and weighty July afternoons. The days were drenched in sunlight as I walked through the valley arm in arm, hand in hand. I splashed through the creek, sweat dripping down my back with the smile of a prom queen plastered across my face. Most of us spent more time outside that week than we did the entire year.

My identity at home ceased to matter. I laughed with people who may never have looked my way if I met them in the school hallway. I ran across verdant fields, shimmied up the rock-climbing wall and poured dye over white t-shirts and clapped along to the same silly songs I sang every year since I was seven. Soaked in sunscreen and bug repellent, I explored nearly every inch of the sprawling valley. An intensity came with feeling the sun on my skin all day, a clarity in unblemished air that opened my heart to believing in the safety surrounding me. Deep in the valley, you were a kid in the purest of ways.

And if you had to pause an activity to eat a snack because your blood sugar was low? No worries.

There were at least three other kids who were low, a friend who came to sit with you, and a counselor ready with all of the answers. Every person understood you had to take care of your body first because they did, too. We were children managing the function of a vital bodily organ; we needed fifteen minutes to ensure we could spend the next eight hours in motion. Your body was the least interesting thing about you at camp.

Twenty years later, my camp role has shifted and yet everything still breathes the same. We move through the valley in our units, 7-12 children and 3-5 adults, a familial mythology forming around each, inside jokes and names of crushes floating into the breeze like ticker tape.

Nearly every counselor has diabetes or knows it in some way, role models for campers on how to grow into the disease. A team of doctors and nurses monitor every child's blood sugar and insulin levels and answer every question imaginable. When the existence of diabetes is so normal, so wholly cared for, it stops being this omnipresent thing hanging over our heads. We no longer have to think about our bodies every second of every day.

The valley creates a space safe enough to let go of the comfort of believing in your strangeness and to open yourself to the truth that your body is whole as it is, that other people can love you as strongly as your grandmother and you can love them back.

It takes vulnerability to detach self-worth from your body, to choose to love something when hating it is so simple. Camp makes that vulnerability easy because it never stops showing up. It opens its arms to you and says you are safe and seen and understood. This place filled with goodness exists and you belong there, too.

A child at camp is finally no longer a number to be recorded or a name called out at the doctor's office every four months. They belong to a group of 200+ people from all across the country, who play different sports and sing different songs and walk different streets but who awake to the same lives every morning. When you feel that week of freedom from shame, it makes any shame you feel the other 51 weeks of the year irrelevant.

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During that first summer we became friends, Emma announced to our cabin that she knew how to hypnotize people. We gathered around her bunk that night, teetering around the edge in the dark. Our counselors laid in their bunks, cicadas and giggling filling the spaces they could not see.

Emma placed herself at the head of Kiki, who lay in her bed. She began to massage slow circles around Kiki's temples. Her low, even voice asked basic questions.

"What's your name?"

"Kiki."

"Where are you from?"

"Des Moines."

“What’s your mom’s name?”

“Connie.”

“What’s your name?”

The idea was that Emma’s calm, repetitive questions would lull Kiki into a malleable trance. She then could start asking the sillier questions we hoped for.

“What’s your favorite school subject?”

“I...don’t know?” Kiki replied dreamily.

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“I wish!”

“Will you ask someone to the dance?”

“Hehe, there’s BIRDS!”

We all giggled. One by one, night after night, we took our place in Emma’s beds. Girls shared their camp crushes in more detail than they would in daylight, carrying on nonsensically about their favorite colors and the animals they wished they could become.

I later asked Kiki if it actually worked; she said she was mostly just playing along, but some of the things she said just slipped out. That feeling made sense to me, even if I was the only girl who couldn’t be hypnotized. We believed in the comfort of our pretend freedom bleeding into reality. In between hilarity, we learned about each other; who had siblings, what sports we played. That bunk is where I learned that Emma’s mom had died. It’s where darkness and joy intermixed. It’s where I learned about giving myself over to delight.

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Emma has been in my life for more than 15 years. We laugh constantly when we’re together. We talk about television, books we think the other would like, moments from our shared history, like when we vacationed together in West Hollywood or got yelled at for giggling too loudly in an Olive Garden.

The first thing anyone notices about Emma is her laugh. It’s deep and it takes up space. It’s generous, a staccato brimming with sublime, impossible to deflect. It’s the same laugh they remembered in her mother’s obituary. It’s a laugh that transcends heartbreak, a laugh that grows in tenacity with every generation.

Laughter is our score. I hear her laughter lying in her bed in the dark as she spoke in hypnosis. I see it bounce around the valley, hit every tree and rustle through the leaves before landing in my lap. The HILL sign before camp brings me into my body; Emma's laughter brings me home.

I recently asked Emma if she remembered her first impression of me. She thought I was confident, the "cool girl" who was sure of herself.

Not the girl who walked through her life at home with a deep awareness of her body. How it didn't function. How it grew faster than everyone else's. How it was the first thing to draw criticism in the wake of someone's ire.

But the comfort of camp and my friendship with Emma meant I could forget that my body existed. It was no longer a problem to manage, it was one in a sea of many, understood and intentionally cared for. My body became a vessel with which I danced with my best friend, dunked into the freezing pool water on a hot afternoon, clapped as she sang in the talent show. It carried me up hills and across trails and let me try new things and stop thinking about the space my body took up. I forgot my body and remembered joy. That was the me that Emma knew.

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I struggle with how I might share Emma's story about how camp saved her. It is not my story to tell, and yet it's inherent to how camp has shaped her. Has shaped us.

We talk a lot about how we think we're soulmates, because had we not met at the perfect moment at the perfect place, we probably never would have become friends. We knew that from the beginning. Emma lived loudly, bound for more. I was comfortable where I was. We have always moved at much different paces, meeting together in the middle.

We also experienced incredibly different childhoods. I will never be able to comprehend the pain Emma experienced at a young age. I've just tried my best to love her through it.

I asked Emma if these dichotomies in our experiences felt like they had an impact on our friendship from her point of view. It was an uncomfortable question, to ask my friend to think about the ways she struggled when I did not.

She told me it's impossible not to notice those who have more when you know you have less. That she always understood that leaving camp was easier for other people, who were ready to go home, when home was the very last place she wanted to be. She never faulted me for it, just wished different for herself.

“As someone who did not have a consistent home growing up at all, camp is the one place that was always a consistent home that I could come back to year after year after year,” Emma told me. “Camp was the place I felt fully safe.”

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We went back to camp to volunteer together for the first time in 2018. It had been over six years since we were there at the same time. We’d visited each other so many times over the years, but once we both descended into the valley, we were Sven and MiMi, 12 years old once again.

We sat next to each other at staff training just like we did on that dining hall bench those years ago. Midway through the training, I looked past Emma to the tall, goofy counselor who had been helping lead orientation. He had a palpable excitement to be at camp, knew everyone’s name. He had gone out of his way to ask me about an article I had written months earlier.

“Do you think he’s hot?” I whispered in Emma’s ear, attempting to discreetly point Matt’s way.

“Oh, yes.” she replied with no hesitation.

“Oh my god, okay, me too,” I replied, feeling the Des Moines River running underneath my chest.

We’d recall that moment many times over the coming years, like when she’d come stay at the house I’d eventually move into with that tall goofy counselor, when he proposed to me, when she stood as my bridesmaid as I married him.

Emma is ingrained in my blood, the very fabric of my family. She is the essence of camp for me, a physical representation of the sign hanging over camp’s entrance that declares it the place where “you don’t have to make friends, they’re given to you.” She is my constant. She is the person I leaned to the moment I unknowingly fell deeply in love, years of her friendship and camp opening a deliciously tender valley in my soul receptive to every potential good that exists.

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Each session of camp culminates in a Friday night ceremony called Honor Point.

The ceremony dates back to the beginning of Y-Camp. The entire camp gathers in a forest clearing under the stars. Campers say goodbye, reflect on how they’ve grown over the week and the people they hope to be when they return home. Cabins form circles and embrace as they sway to the music. Most children cry, even the teenage boys.

This past summer, Anna looked at me as we walked to the ceremony.

“I don’t want to leave,” she said.

As dusk settled in, the Y-Camp Director, Alex, led us with his guitar through the same songs we’ve been singing since I was 7 years old. A silly one, filled with fish puns, I lobster/and never flound-her...

Then the air slowed down, the melody turned sentimental. We sang about lingering a little longer, the family we built this week, This is goodnight, but not goodbye...

We reflected on the week. Stories were shared. Campers who embodied the camp’s four core values were honored. Alex invited Matt, who is now camp’s Programs Manager, graduating from tall, goofy counselor to the person responsible for making camp a place in which children with diabetes continue to find solace, up to speak. He asked the campers to take the memories they made that week and feel them in their body, to let those memories lead them when things at home got tough. To remember the family they had found at camp.

We all stood up as counselors passed out short, white candles. This is how the ceremony ends every year. We form a big circle and hold our candles in front of our hearts. I always look around at the stuffy eyes, a reminder that I am not alone in my inability to let camp go. I saw Anna with her head on another camper’s shoulder, heard her ask, “can I just live here forever?”

We sang our final song.

*Hertko Hollow, Hertko Hollow*

*Shall we tell you how we feel?*

*You have given us friends, fun, and knowledge.*

*We love you so.*



**They broke my heart, I lost my home, 2025,  
textile, 150 x 170cm - Katharina Büttgen**

# The Wings of Silence - Alice Baburek

The old woman's fingers curled around the faded photograph. She had broken the wood-grained frame just a few days earlier. Her cloudy eyes blurred with tears. It seemed like just yesterday when she had climbed into the airplane and taken flight high above the clouds, where the blue sky reached out and touched the horizon.

"Miss Carol? How are you feeling today?" Jessie Walker, the youngest volunteer, set the tray on the round table near the unmade bed. "Time for your medication..." her voice trailed off as she glanced at the yellowed picture.

"Is...is that you, Miss Carol?" whispered the young woman. Carol Burrell gave a slight nod. "But...you're sitting inside the plane."

"Not just any plane...it is a B-24 Liberator bomber. Carried bombs to Germany during the Second World War," stated Carol in a raspy voice.

"You were a... pilot?" asked Jessie. Her eyes were wide. A tiny grin crawled across the old woman's face.

"One of the best. I and other women made up the Women's Airforce Service Pilots--WASPs. We were the first licensed women pilots in the United States," replied Carol in a shaky voice.

The young volunteer slid the empty chair and sat down next to Carol. "I didn't know there were women pilots during World War II."

Carol closed her eyes briefly as her mind swept back in time. "We relieved men pilots for combat." Her throat was suddenly dry. With a trembling hand, she reached for the single-sized container of orange juice. She sucked the paper straw.

Jessie helped the elderly senior set it back onto the tray. "Please, Miss Carol. I would love to hear more. Are you up for it?" Her smile was plastered across her young face.

Carol took a deep breath. It had been decades since she talked about her time as a pilot. Her heart skipped a beat.

"There were twenty-four of us. We wore Air Force uniforms but were considered civilians. We trained in meteorology, navigation, seamanship, airplane and engine maintenance, morse code, and the medical field." Carol rubbed her gnarled fingers.

Jessie watched the elderly woman's excitement grow as she reminisced. "The US government leased a privately owned airstrip outside of Dallas—The Stan Foote Airfield. It was 247 acres with four caliche runways, concrete, and tile hangers." Suddenly, Carol began coughing.

The attendant rose from her chair and handed Carol the orange juice. The old woman slurped the cool liquid. After a few minutes, she slightly nodded and continued with her story.

“Barracks were built for the WASPs and Airforce personnel. They even built a café!” Carol chuckled.

“You lived at the airfield?” asked Jessie. She gently sat back down.

“Yup...we trained every day until...it was time to put all we learned to good use. A few of the WASPs tested new planes right off the assembly line. Many of the women pilots towed targets for anti-craft target practice. My job was to train the male cadets. The majority came from England. We had a few American pilots.” Carol reached over and grabbed a cookie from the tray. The shortbread cookie melted in her mouth.

“I sure do like these,” commented Carol. She began to hum. Jessie waited patiently for Carol to continue.

“It seems the risk factor would be extremely high for the WASPs.” Jessie eyed the old lady. “Did anyone die while training?”

Carol instantly stopped chewing. Her eyes clouded. A single tear slipped down her wrinkled cheek. Her head dropped to her chest.

“I’m sorry...I didn’t mean to bring back sad memories,” said Jessie in a low tone.

Carol’s head snapped up. She hesitated. With one quick movement, she shoved the rest of the cookie inside her mouth. Tiny crumbs covered her sagging chest.

After sipping at the little remaining juice, Carol wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

“Death is inevitable,” said Carol, “but...it should not be predictable. Yet, all of us WASPs knew no guarantees when volunteering for what seemed at times like suicide missions. The dangers were just as real as if we were flying over Germany, only here in Texas.” The old woman motioned toward the top of her dresser.

Jessie followed her shaky hand. “Would you like the picture?” The young attendant walked over and picked up the fragile photo.

Open the top drawer,” said Carol in a raspy voice. Jessie pulled it open and glanced down inside. It was filled with socks and dingy underwear. A round, tarnished frame sat gently on top. Jessie carefully picked it up. Without a doubt, it was a much younger version of Carol Burrell standing close to a handsome male pilot.

“You were beautiful...” Jessie’s voice faltered. “I mean...not that you aren’t beautiful now, Miss Carol.” The aged senior chuckled.

“It’s alright, Jessie. You’re most kind. And that attractive pilot next to me was my late husband, Raymond.”

Jessie’s eyebrows scrunched together. “Miss Carol, I never knew you were married. Your intake papers never mentioned a husband. I’m confused.”

“It was a long time ago. He died in the war. His body was never recovered. I taught Raymond to fly. He learned quickly with efficiency and accuracy...well, he became the top bomber pilot.” Carol’s eyes clouded once again. Her hands trembled in her lap.

Jessie moved toward the grieving woman. She sat down and held out the framed photo. “Is that how he died? Bombing Germany?”

Carol gave a slight nod. “We spent a lot of time together. It would only be natural for us to find comfort with each other. After several dangerous missions, on his return to the States, he asked me to marry him. And there was no doubt in my mind. The chaplain assigned to the barracks married us. We had four glorious days together before...” She didn’t bother to finish.

Jessie could figure out the rest. “Raymond was called out for another mission. And this time... he didn’t come back, did he?”

Carol tried to hold back the tears. She gripped the worn frame tighter. “It was supposed to be a simple air raid. Drop his payload on a railroad depot. Somehow the Nazis got wind of the attack. And this time, they were ready. Anti-aerial attacks were non-stop. Many of those I trained were lost during the night. And Raymond was one of them. Out of twenty-five bombers, only six came back.”

Jessie swallowed. She could not imagine the horror of losing one’s spouse so soon after being married for such a short period of time.

“I’m so, so sorry Miss Carol.” The young woman’s hand felt cool on Carol’s forearm. As Carol stared through blurry eyes at the aging picture, she could only imagine how wonderful her life would have been if Raymond had survived the war. But because of his death, she could never love another—and she didn’t. Carol remained alone. She lived her solitary life, counting the days until they could be together once again.

Jessie knew she had spent too much time on one client. Fortunately, Carol Burrell was her last patient on her shift. And as late afternoon turned into evening, she knew it was time for Carol to get ready for bed.

The elderly woman was emotionally strained. Carol placed the small frame inside her pocket. Both women stood up. Without saying a word, Jessie put the walker in front of Carol. She also placed a cotton nightgown on Carol’s shoulder. She forced a half-grin.

“I got this part,” murmured Carol. “It’s time for you to go home. I am still able to put myself to bed. Goodnight, Jessie.” She slowly pushed the walker forward and then stopped. “Thank you...it was wonderful taking a trip down memory lane.” And without waiting for a reply, Carol inched into the tiny bathroom and closed the door.

Jessie waited for a moment. How incredible was it that one of her clients, a woman yet, had played such a crucial and instrumental part in World War II? It would seem all the women who made up the WASPs were unsung heroes.

She straightened up the area on the dresser and folded down the old woman’s bed. While Carol brushed her teeth, Jessie slipped out of the room.

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The darkened room was still. Carol’s bedding was clean and fresh. It had been an emotional day. She could barely keep her tired eyes open. Images of Raymond skirted in and out as Carol drifted into a deep sleep.

It had been years since she had allowed the past to creep in, reliving wonderful memories. Now that the door had been opened, she gladly stepped in.

Dressed in his uniform, Raymond smiled as he leaned against the sleek silver plane. His handsome face glowed as he waved for Carol to join him. It was then she could hear him calling out her name.

How she wished she could join him. Even if only in her dreams. She could feel herself being drawn to his angelic image. Raymond's voice grew stronger as Carol drew closer.

"Carol, my love, I've been waiting for you." Raymond's hand touched her outstretched fingers. Could this truly be happening?

Carol stepped into his tender embrace. Her heart fluttered. Suddenly, a peacefulness surrounded them and consumed their very souls. Carol was finally home.

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Jessie placed her tote bag into the locker. Her shift started in minutes. But she wanted to check in on Carol first. She could hardly wait to hear more about the unknown WASPs.

As Jessie passed by the dining area, she slowed to look for Carol. Many of the residents were busily eating breakfast. But Carol was not one of them.

Minutes later, Jessie was tapping on Carol's door. "Miss Carol? Is everything alright?" The young attendant shifted on her feet. "Miss Carol...I'm coming in." And without waiting for a reply, she hurriedly entered the dark room.

Jessie's eyes struggled to adjust to the unlit area. Then, she saw the shape of Carol lying still in the bed.

"Miss Carol!" shouted Jessie as she rushed to the old woman's aid. But when she touched the woman's cold hand, she immediately felt for a pulse, but it was too late.

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Jessie had been tasked with packing Carol Burrell's few items. According to the senior home records, Carol had no living relatives. Her will clearly stated that anything of value would be sold and donated to the Veteran's Memorial Fund.

The young woman's eyes filled with tears as she wrapped and placed the few antique trinkets in the box. As Jessie began to empty the worn dresser, she held the yellowed photograph of Carol and Raymond to her chest and closed her eyes.

Instantly, she could feel a warm breath near her ear. "Don't cry, Jessie. I'm where I belong—right beside Raymond. I'm finally home!" whispered the familiar voice.

Jessie's eyes opened wide. She glanced around the empty room. She thought for a moment she heard a voice—a familiar voice. But she was alone.

Without hesitation, Jessie placed the framed photo into the box with the rest of Carol Burrell's things. It was then that she noticed how vividly the aged picture had suddenly come to life.



I arrive at the event thirty minutes early and soaked. I catch up briefly with The Gallery's executive director and proceed to the visual art installation accompanying the sound art exhibition. My favourite piece is a sculpture displayed by Maria Chaves, tonight's main performer. It's a marble sculpture depicting the blown-up image of a vinyl record groove, and for whatever reason I find myself returning to it again and again as I move around the gallery. I don't know how to talk about art, but if I dig far enough back in my memory I can hear snippets of vocabulary learned from the only art history lecture I attended in undergrad. I can say, then, that this sculpture evokes the physicality of sound - its ridges and crevices, further demonstrating the accessibility of sound as art.

Is it university that I miss so much? I still spent a year with my friends in Montreal after graduation. Did I miss university then? I don't think so now, but I think I might have then. Why do my friends all seem to miss it as well? Everything is mostly the same. How do you quantify change? How do you prevent it?

A loud crash reverberates around me, and I find that I am back in the main listening room watching Toronto composer Debashis Sinah in the throws of his performance. It's a unique sight; he's placed a silver dish on the surface of a base drum, producing sounds ranging from low vibrations to the crashing I mentioned above. It's a jolting juxtaposition, and I can tell I'm not the only spectator abruptly brought back to reality. While all this sonic experimentation is going on, Sinah is also looping and layering his sounds.

This technique captures these sounds, preventing them from dissipating as soon as the next sequence is introduced. It immortalizes them but also gives them room to evolve with the composition. I focus on his form - Sinah has built this current piece into an infectious, repetitive rhythm, and everyone around me is nodding their heads in unison. Soon things mellow out again, and we're once again listening to the slow circulation of metal on polyester.

Maria Chaves has taken the floor. She is so sweet and earnest and begins her set by showcasing the students of her Abstract Tableism workshop. Abstract Tableism is a technique pioneered by Chaves herself - it involves snapping records and placing the shards on a turntable, resulting in a mix of static and small snippets of audio cutting in and out of each other as the needle briefly connects with the vinyl. Chaves' students went up one by one, overlaying shards to manipulate the audio, creating their unique mix before it is inevitably taken over by the next layer of shards. Unlike her marble sculpture (or even Sinah's looped percussion solo), the effervescent nature of abstract turntablism is such that you will never hear these unique snippets of sounds again. The audio is always evolving, and yet each new iteration is informed by the last. Everything is connected even as sound is warped into something unrecognizable. One must accept this evolution and embrace its forward march.

At 17 I had no issues moving across the country for university. So many people were moving around at the same time, so it felt like the right thing to do.

At 24, moving to arguably the next closest city to Montreal has felt so destabilizing that I'm shocked I was ever courageous enough to move anywhere at all. I often think about the past as something I can return to as if the only reason I can't is that I'm procrastinating buying a train ticket. I need to go back. I'll do anything I can.

One more March of being 19 or 20 or 21, running around the city my friends and I believed was only ours. To be hungover in the park on a Tuesday. To be freezing because we thought we could wear crop tops in 7-degree sun. None of the people I was 19, 20, or 21 with are 19, 20, or 21 now. What does going back accomplish? They are also navigating their post-grad lives, all listening to mostly new playlists, all working varying degrees of fulfilling jobs. Does location matter? Can we ever go home again? How deeply will I one day miss this night at The Music Galley? How deeply will I one day miss being 24? 30? Even 50?

Without me noticing Chávez has finished her performance and the evening is over. I hang around for a bit, feeling an unusual wave of confidence that allows me to mingle with the strangers in the crowd, asking them their thoughts on the night and if they have been to shows here before. I compliment someone's shirt. Someone else compliments my skirt. I say goodbye to the organizers and brace myself for the walk home. I think about my old apartment, how I could almost guarantee that one of my roommates would have made daal to bring extra comfort on the stormy night. We would all grab a bowl and sit on the couch to watch TV. I hear the memory of us laughing overlaid in my headphones. I'm listening to a new playlist I made just for this walk. It's still raining as I walk home, and, for better or for worse, it's still March.



**Finding a new home - Lara Paulussen**

## My Mother's House - Kate E. Lore

My mother's house is covered cluttered and coated in sunflowers, little porcelain figures, and dead men. I notice this as I stand in the living room. It's an awkward linger of goodbye. She is just around the corner in the kitchen cleaning out the birdcage. I can hear her. I really don't know what I expected nor what I am still lingering for.

I notice candy in the dish, decorations on potted plants, and dead faces around every corner. There are several dead men in the hallway. There is one on the wall next to the recliner, one watching you from the little side table. There is one on the wall behind the TV. There is at least one in each of our bedrooms, although, our refrigerator seems designated to pet cemetery for some reason.

There is even a dead man on the fish tank and actually, I'll call that my own.

Trapped in frames preserved behind glass the dead men are regular residents here. The sunflowers are fake, not alive, occasionally dusty, these are found throughout the house all year round. The porcelain I spoke of would be the pepper and salt shakers. Her collection is vast, and honestly impressive being at over 300 pairs. They line the walls on little wooden shelves. Each must share this platform. If you look closely you'll notice the spider web line work across each shiny surface. About half of her collection has been glued back together after a tragic fall and break, while many are left missing their match. In the summertime, my mother grows a garden in the backyard. She gets sunflowers sometimes that reach up past six feet tall.

Inside the house, every window is lined with live foliage. She has several spider plants which are decedents of the one my great-grandfather brought with him when he first came to America. Descended from Germany. She has a house plant that sits on the floor in a huge pot and reaches all the way up to the ceiling. It touches that crack in the plaster, the break over the kitchen, a weakness from the attic. The sky is too low, it's begun to hunch over. It won't stop growing. This plant is going on forty years old. Mom got this plant from her first husband.

When Grandpa died my mother used the money to buy a burial plot next to Scott, the first. As far as Mom is concerned that is the best thing her father ever did for her.

Somewhere between here and there had been Chris. This man who seemed to know everybody, to be known by everybody, but me, like some joke I wasn't in on, he knew that Frank guy and he knew my dad too, was actually staying with him when he started talking to Mom.

I remember my mother hurrying from her bedroom to the bathroom. Back and forth, back and forth she moved swiftly bouncing like a puppy with her face flushed pink. I remember inhaling her sweet sharp perfume through my nose as she leaned down to meet me at my level.

“Which one?” She asked. On each earlobe hung a different twist of metal with a different little charm.

Not used to being asked my opinion on anything I stammered.

“They’re both good mama.”

“But if you had to pick one?”

“Um,” I quickly pointed to the one of my preferred coloring. “That one.”

She disappeared around the corner only to change her outfit and earrings three more times before Chris’s arrival.

I was in elementary school when they started that turbulent stormy thing. Mom had just put herself through career training. She was stumbling through job after job as a receptionist and still going out on weekends back then. She’d dance and drink, laugh, and have fun. I went into more bars the year I turned ten than the year I turned twenty-one.

Chris’s integration into our family was far from smooth. I remember a glass of milk sailing through the air across the living room to explode against the TV screen in a grenade splash of white objection. I remember people screaming at each other, throwing things, the sound of a slap. I remember Chris tearing the internet cords right out of the wall when Gretchen wouldn’t get off the computer so he could make a phone call.

But things were good at first, things started off great. We went on a trip together as a family to a cabin by a lake, he spent holidays with us, he moved in. For over three years that man was a more regular part of my life than my own father. It had been ten years since my mother had a partner.

Ten years since she felt that kind of love. When they were together she seemed so excited and alive, as if his presence charged her full of energy.

Mom is known to add salt to everything. Chris was known for pepper. It became a running joke that they were the perfect pair, salt and pepper.

I remember going to his parent’s house which had a hill perfect for sledding and sledding and running and sledding until ready to collapse from exhaustion. His parents gave us hot chocolate and smiles too warm to be real.

We figured that out by the end.

I was in middle school when it finally ended. About to start eighth grade. Our cohabitation with Chris was going on four years.

Scotty found him locked inside a big blue van parked out in front of our house. My brother found him unconscious. He told me later that Chris's pants had been soaked in urine and that he'd shit himself. The overdose didn't kill him. The overdose put him in a coma. A coma that lasted for a month. Thirty-one days. Four weeks. Just a fraction of a season, less than a tenth of a year.

Mom went to see him every chance she got. Every single day for the first two weeks. They had to ask her to leave come the end of visiting hours. She invited Gretchen, Scotty, and me, every time, but we all always said no, I never went. It just felt like too much, and yet, I didn't realize what a big deal it really was. I figured he'd wake up eventually.

Chris's parents chose to pull the plug after exactly one month. I have a hard time imagining how anyone could do that, especially to their own son.

I guess they meant to beat the start of the next billing cycle

Maybe it's like jerking the cord out of the wall to your television set because the cables out and you're tired of listening to static?

Maybe it was hard for them to see him like that?

Mom invited me to the funeral. I said no.

Maybe it was hard for me too.

I remember being in middle school. I remember reading Harry Potter. I remember reading books instead of going to the funeral, instead of going to the hospital. Instead of being there for my mother.

I remember how I found out Chris had died not because of anyone directly telling me but because one day Mom came home and collapsed in the middle of the living room.

She was in the center framed by a loveseat, recliner, TV, and a cluttered coffee table. I had been sitting in the back on the couch with a book. She'd walked into the house and then just fell down like all will to keep going had gone and suddenly left her body limp. She collapsed into the carpet melting like water and from there she started just screaming and screaming.

You know when you're not prepared for something. Like when a porcelain salt shaker falls to the ground but the whole house is silent so it seems like an explosion and maybe you jump? This startling noise too loud and out of place. This breaking that unnerves, that makes your pulse race. This breaking that breaks the silence.

This was my mother screaming only it doesn't last only a mere fraction of a second. It goes on and on and on. It rings so loud your ears warp the pitch into an almost ripping sound. It hovers in the air and all the sound vibrations create a terrible heat in the room and it's a sauna where she adds moisture to the air via tears pouring, snot streaming, and saliva dripping from her open, screaming agony, gaping hole of a mouth.

Nowadays Mom goes to work from 9 to 5. She is the hardest working most underappreciated person there. On the weekends she tends to her plants. She cleans the fish tanks, cleans the house, and always makes a good dinner on Sunday even when there's nobody home to eat it. My mother is a woman of choked words. It's like the emotions below her surface have drowned her too far like she couldn't express them if she tried.

I never met my uncle the same way I never met my mother's first husband. I know that he had gassed himself in a car. I know it happened in the garage of a Herron Heights standard brick home. I remember playing, rolling around in my dead grandfather's wheelchair in Grammie's garage completely unaware that I once had an uncle who lived in that very spot and died in one just like it.

Sometimes I think when Mom's drinking it as though it's not the beer she gulps down but instead some opposite thing, like maybe her buried emotional waters are able to seep out and into the glass.

Maybe it's all just playing in reverse; she's really spitting liquid into that glass and not actually drinking from it.

Aided by alcohol the water level lowers and the pain she has carried for so many years maybe numbs a little. Alcohol is stronger than aspirin just about all of the time.

Only when drunk does she tell me how Freds skin was blue from lack of oxygen. Her breath was heavy with a bitter stink and her eyes were glazed over as though covered with a film of the past.

"The funeral home covered his face in makeup. They had to paint it on to change him from blue. It was thick like a spread of butter," she told me. "I think he still looked kind of green."

On other occasions, she tells me about how popular he was. Several times a year she'll run into one of his old friends at the grocery store or the library. Aint that the trouble of spending your entire life in the same town? No wonder she can't escape the past she can't even escape Dayton.

As you might imagine our holiday family gatherings are quite small now.

My mother is last to the table every Thanksgiving and every Christmas. She is constantly preparing up until the very last second and like a well-oiled machine. Outside of holidays, she visits my Grandmother at least twice a week. She brings her a copy of the newspaper and some food in a Tupperware. She is the hardest-working woman I know.

Our kitchen table (since Mom got a job) is a small round wooden thing sprinkled with stains and cat hairs. On special occasions like holidays, you'll find our table all stretched out with a wooden insert making it longer more oval, a little bigger, and it will be wiped clear of cat hairs though we can't do anything about the stains and the scratches. There are three matching wooden chairs here instead of four because one had long ago been broken.

When my sister and I were young we'd both had an assigned seat. I sat before the back door. I'd once carved my name on the armrest with a fork. 'Katy was here' it said and nothing more. It took Mom years to notice.

"Katy?!" Her voice rings sharp with irritation.

"Eh mama?" I call out from the other room, my usual response.

Somewhere behind my mother are walls lined with salt shakers, sunflowers and dead men. Fixtures here more permanent than myself. The sunflowers are fake though they do make the place look brighter. Salt shakers, of which there are so many, sometimes fall to the ground, and parts of them shatter too badly to ever be mended.

As always we do what we can. Some of the porcelain figures are glued back together a little lopsided. Sometimes you put the pieces back together like a puzzle, one little shape connecting to the next, but no matter how good you are at gluing the small character will never be the same, from that point on there will always be a little gap in the glass. A missing portion; broken, shattered, gone, lost forever.

"Did you do this?" Mom asks motioning to the chair I disfigured.

"Oh yeah, I did that forever ago."

She is silent in consideration for a moment, and then, exhale, letting go of much more than carbon dioxide.

"It doesn't matter if I try to keep anything nice in this house."

# The Crumbling Nest

## - Kiran Ashraf

Loneliness chews my means of survival  
Unshed tears flutter in aching eyes

Home, a ghost story  
of grief and mourning

The agonizing landscape of overwhelming misery

Fragile memories pamper my existence  
I clumsily weep for comfort of a place

Deceitful noise of household closing the distance  
Bruised fingers digging out rotten familial ties

Choking on rancid affection and belonging  
My scars pay homage to mockery of love



I've Got Five Shampoos But I  
Don't Know Which One To Use  
- Vishwa Patel



## Aubade for a Death and Blue Pyjamas - Ottley

Her body is untethered  
like a child's balloon. She can feel herself deflating.

As the morning mist burns off  
new day revs its engine, shifts gears, prepares

to overtake. Beyond the gleaming hospital doors,  
the A30 is waking. Birdsong,

the thrum of the tarmac. After the dumb shock  
of his still open mouth

the day's small hubbub overwhelms. Now  
she must go back to the bed she left early

a tangle of troublesome linen, his blue pyjamas,  
husk-empty on the floor, the telephone, urgent

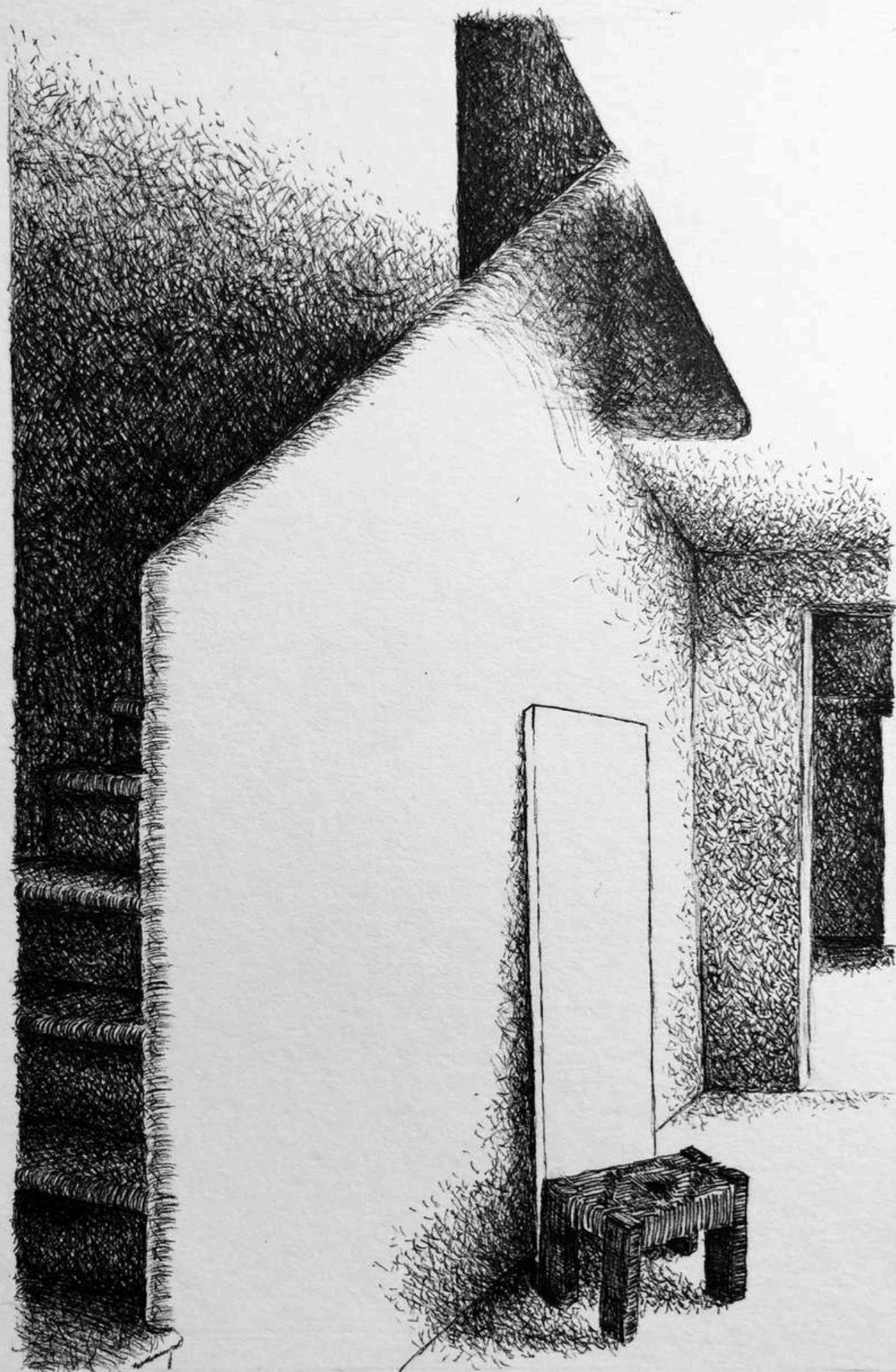
in her ears. Yesterday was sirens, blue flashing lights;  
tomorrow is a ring road with no exit.

She will forget it is Monday. Tuesday, too.  
Neglect to put out the bin.

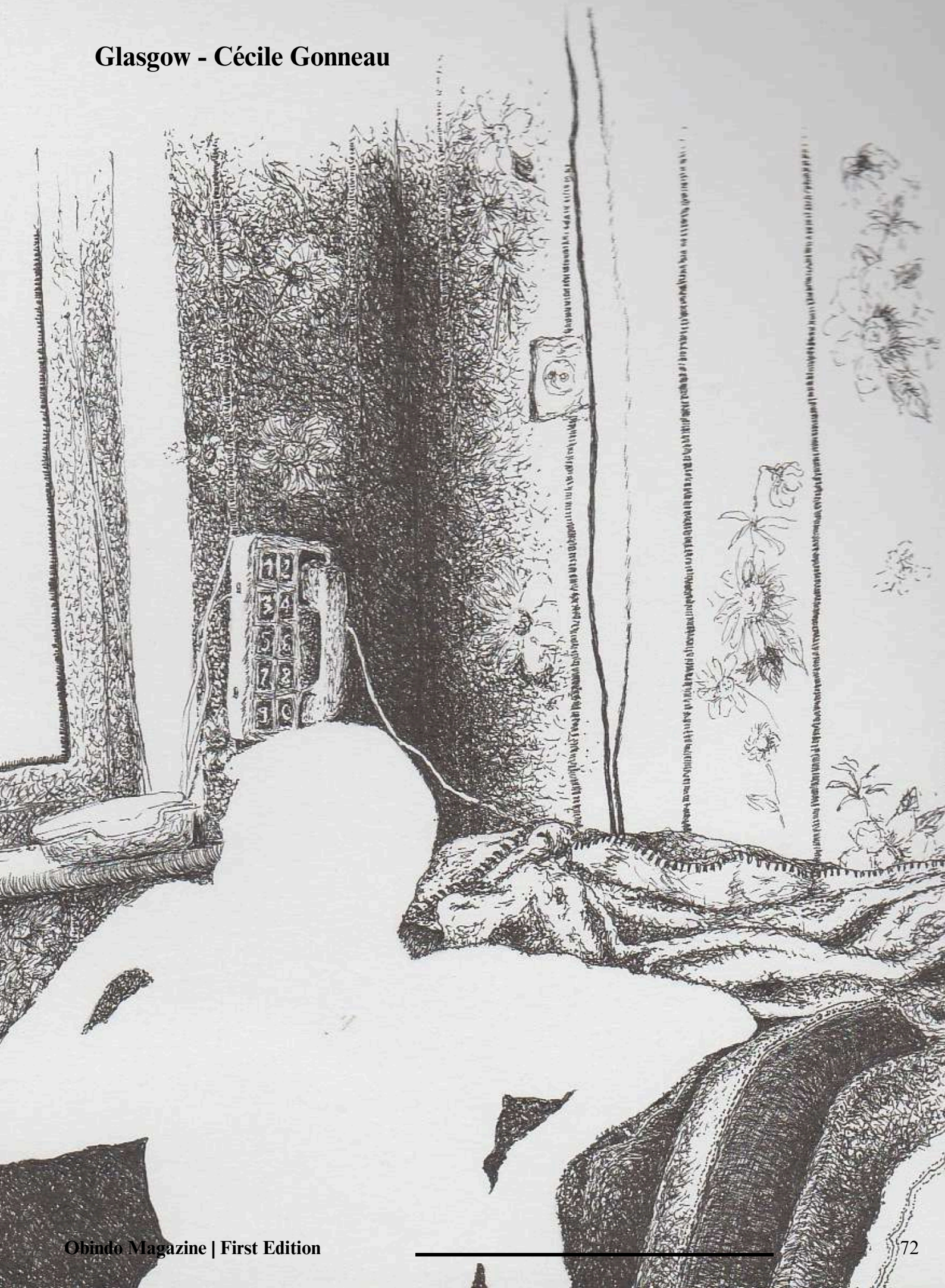
# Miroir - Cécile Gonneau



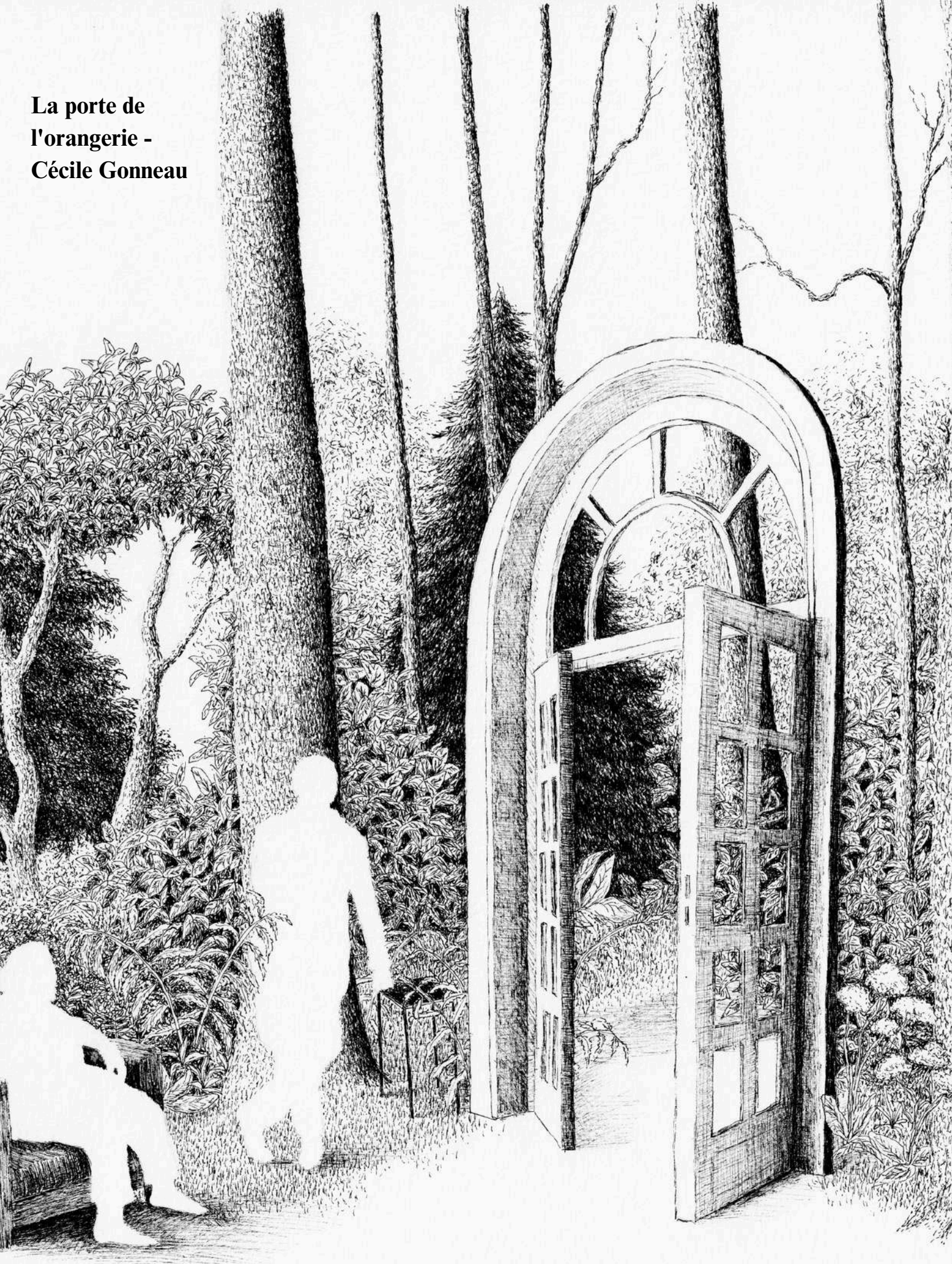
## Couloir blanc - Cécile Gonneau



# Glasgow - Cécile Gonneau



**La porte de  
l'orangerie -  
Cécile Gonneau**



## To the Filipino - Xavier Roncesvalles



*From Jose Rizal's 'A las Flores de Heidelberg'  
or 'To the Flowers of Heidelberg'*

He plucked us out, stem and bulb  
and fostered under his lips, a whisper  
of history from a world new to ours  
our language infant to his tongue

there he shared a longing  
a command, a pleading  
to sheath his love inside petals  
'til we reach his birthland, then sow

He sang of a foreign sun  
whose rays now fade upon  
his forehead, once ablaze upon  
the islands who harbor his soul

but why us, we transient buds?  
why burden us with longing  
when we ourselves hope no more  
than a bed of loam, a passing of seasons

we illiterate of your history  
we who only understood your  
song in the warmth of your breath  
in blades of frost from your tears

we protest in silence, we plead  
that you lay us back to soil  
so that we'll await our death  
untimely, in this heat of spring

as if in cognizance you say  
that we'll retain our colors  
but not our scent, we die on  
earth yet flower in memory

how you yearn for the skies  
that cradled your youth, how  
now years of yore arrest your  
heart as you have seized ours

as we wither on dirt by a  
road unnamed in Heidelberg  
we understood the foreigner  
then man, now fog in the distance

for when Earth reclaims our hues  
the roots will remain, farther  
deeper underground, a sprout of  
new garden where we'll belong anew

then bouquet awaits by his window  
may the winds court the bloom  
deliver the man who longs for home  
sing about us who warmed his call

# How to Name a Country

## - Rial Maria Riak

tonight as i wrap myself  
with headlamps of survival

i asked my friend  
how to name a country drowning  
in the vessels of war

how to scatter the people feasting  
to be grateful  
and tell them to write history in dots

tonight my life ends  
the journey of thousand stars  
and seek to be remedied when scars  
become where to hide

tonight is one man raising  
his flag  
and woke up chanting to glories  
of oneness

and he is told to forget  
what transpires in his head  
and he is told to lick  
the barrel of a decaying gun

tonight as i wrap myself  
in dark entrance of quiet river  
the body can't forget the last time  
it asks forgiveness from home

and home gave him restlessness  
when light in my eyes become  
sporadic and dimming away

i will ask these boys crying in my head  
how to name a country  
even without fire

and they will run to resettle in me  
and i will find lasting peace  
and they will name home, forgiveness.

# CONTRIBUTORS



**Jennifer Myth**

My artist name is Myth, I am Kanien'kéha:ka (Kanehsatà:ke Mohawk), Brasileira, and Settler. Wolf is my clan and art is what I love to do! I am based on Unceded Algonquin Anishinaabe Territory (Ottawa/Gatineau). My artwork draws upon the woodland style of painting, latin american folk art, and designs from Indigenous pottery and beadwork. "My childhood home once swallowed me whole, part of it always lives inside of me now" is a reflection on the OCD diagnosis I received 5 years ago and its unraveling. My relationship with my childhood home, a chaotic and often violent "hoarder" home, largely informed my mental development and patterns of behaviour.



**Katharina Büttgen**

Katharina Büttgen is a visual artist working at the intersection between identity, memory and politics. She is a belarusian-german artist currently based in Germany. Her practice is shaped by experiences of migration, protest, and cultural repression. Through embroidery, drawing, and photography, she explores themes of loss, belonging, and ecological connection. Büttgen has a Bachelor of Arts and is currently studying Fine Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe. Büttgen has exhibited across Europe, including Berlin, Cologne, Zurich, and Riga.



**Cecile Gonneau**

Cecile Gonneau is a french illustrator who tries to express the beauty of the woods and nature in general, and really enjoys enigmatic and fantomatic atmospheres.

# CONTRIBUTORS



**Maraya Franca**

Maraya Franca (she/her) is a Brazilian/Canadian artist and creative currently living in so-called "Vancouver", BC. Her practice ranges from theatre to film to visual and digital art pieces, mostly focusing on self-discovery and the unraveling of existence. Lately, a lot of her work has been made from her immigrant ether, holding her inner child's hand.



**Lara Paulussen**

Lara Paulussen is a freelance illustrator based in Düsseldorf, Germany. She studied illustration at HAW Hamburg and creates atmospheric, playful illustrations for books, magazines, animations and brands. Besides drawing she loves live music, botanic gardens and going for walks.



**Vishwa Patel**

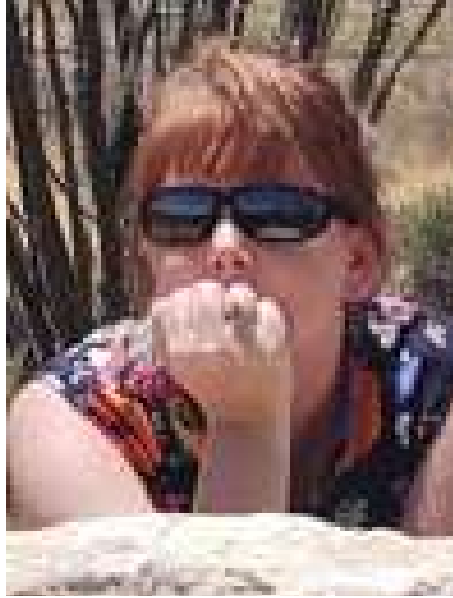
Vishwa Patel is an emerging interdisciplinary artist and curator based in Toronto, working primarily in embroidery, textiles, poster colour, and oil painting. Her current work is influenced by her heritage where she explores sacred geometry, environmental issues, the home, and fluid cultural identities — bridging Western and Eastern philosophies. Vishwa aims to create a dialogue between traditional techniques and contemporary issues, offering a fresh perspective on cultural identity and the world at large.

# CONTRIBUTORS



## Abigail Ottley

Abigail Ottley's writings have featured in more than 300 publications. In 2024, she placed second in the International Plaza Prose Poem Competition and won the Wildfire 150 Flash Award for the second year running. Commended in the Welshpool, Dark Poets, and What We Inherit From Water, she placed third in the International Patricia Eschen Poetry Prize (2024), going on to win the Metro Poetry Competition on the theme of 'care'. Her collection, *Out of Eden*, launched with Yaffle Press in 2025. Abigail is a founding member of the all-female Mor Poet Collective. She lives in Penzance, Cornwall.



## Amy Fox-Angerer

Amy Fox-Angerer is a composition professor in Kentucky and the current editor in chief of *The Heartland Review Press*, a literary journal. Fox has worked in Iraq with linguists, taught college onboard deployed navy ships, and worked as a transition counselor for soldiers leaving the Army and entering the workforce. She has taught ESL, GED, & English composition in Texas and abroad. In June 2025, she was published in *Syncopation Literary Journal*.



## Anna Dimartino

Vishwa Patel is an emerging interdisciplinary artist and curator based in Toronto, working primarily in embroidery, textiles, poster colour, and oil painting. Her current work is influenced by her heritage where she explores sacred geometry, environmental issues, the home, and fluid cultural identities — bridging Western and Eastern philosophies. Vishwa aims to create a dialogue between traditional techniques and contemporary issues, offering a fresh perspective on cultural identity and the world at large.

# CONTRIBUTORS



## **Athena R.**

Athena R is a screenwriter and filmmaker whose work explores themes of identity, grief, resilience, and radical self-expression. She wrote and directed Unavil Uravu for the 2024 Mighty Asian Moviemaking Marathon (MAMM), hosted by the Vancouver Asian Film Festival. She also writes on Substack webpage 'emotionally inconvenient', where she shares reflections, hot takes, and the occasional illusion of hope from her little corner of the internet.



## **Beth Butler**

Elizabeth Butler is a disabled writer using a wheelchair. She has a Masters Degree in Creative Writing and has featured in a poetry anthology and has a collection of children's stories published online. She has self-published several books of poetry and winner of Prose Contest at The Atkinson writing competition. She has gained recognition in her local area and has performed at local events.



## **Emily Corwin**

Emily Corwin's works have appeared in Salamander, Black Warrior Review, Passages North, DIAGRAM, Ninth Letter, New South, and elsewhere. My books include Marble Orchard (University of Akron Press, 2023), Sensorium (University of Akron Press, 2020), and tenderling (Stalking Horse Press, 2018).

# CONTRIBUTORS



## Judith Cohen

Judith Beth Cohen's novel *Seasons* was published by The Permanent Press of Sag Harbor, New York and is still in print. Excerpts appeared first in Ted Solotaroff's quarterly, *The New American Review*. The book was originally published in German translation by Rowohlt of Hamburg as part of their international New Woman Series and has been reissued as an eBook. Her short fiction collection *Never Be Normal* (2021) is available from Atmosphere Press. Her stories have appeared in numerous magazines including *The North American Review*, *New Letters*, *High Plains Literary Review*, and others. In March 2023 she was the featured writer on [\\_Alphabetbox.com](https://www.alphabetbox.com).



## Kate E. Lore

Kate E Lore is a neurodivergent and queer she/they, born in poverty to a single, widowed mother. Youngest of four, second to graduate high school, Kate is the first in their family to receive a bachelor's and master's degree. A jack-of-all-trades they split their time between fiction and nonfiction, screenplays, flash prose, full-length novels, painting, and comics.



## Kiran Ashraf

Kiran Ashraf is a Mass Communication graduate from Karachi, Pakistan. As a writer, editor, and spoken word artist, she channels her love for literature into every piece she creates. Passionate about animal rights, Kiran's work often delves into poetic melancholia and the intricacies of human experience. She currently works as a content writer and strategist at a humanitarian aid organisation.

# CONTRIBUTORS



## Madison Palmer

Madison Palmer is currently a 25-year-old living in Toronto, Canada. She is a poet, writer, and above all, a lover! Her poetry has been published in the inaugural issue of Milk Bag Magazine. Find her running around the city or hiding out in various TPL branches.



## Noll Griffin

Noll Griffin (he/him) is a visual artist, writer, and musician based in Berlin, Germany. His first chapbook titled "Tourist Info" is available through Alien Buddha Press. His poetry has been featured by Querencia Press, Vagabond City, Folklore Review, and Lighthouse Poetry among others.



## Riak Marial

Riak Marial Riak is a South Sudanese poet and writer. He hails from Yerul, Lakes State. His poetry is seeking to answer questions of depression, life, death, nature and freedom. His works have featured on Kalahari review, African writer, Ngiga review, Nthanda review, BNAP, Nationalism, Eunoia review, Spillwords, Eboquils, Songs of the Nile and Brittle paper. He's the author of Poetry book titled Broken Maps. He's accessible at the following email: [riakmariald@gmail.com](mailto:riakmariald@gmail.com) and available on tel: +211921448876

# CONTRIBUTORS



## **Ross Marshall**

R.J. Marshall (they/he) is a writer and social worker who grew up on the borders of Ohio and Kentucky. They received their Master's in Social Work in 2021, and since then, they have practiced as a sex and relationship therapist. When he isn't working, he delves into music, meditation, and meaning-making. His writing explores themes of intimacy, connection, impermanence, trans-formation, and isolation.



## **Xavier Roncesvalles**

# CONTRIBUTORS

## Sam Hendrian

Sam Hendrian is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker and poet striving to foster empathy through art. Every Sunday, he writes personalized poems for passersby outside of Chevalier's Books, LA's oldest independent bookstore. You can find his poetry and film links on Instagram at @samhendrian143.

## Ojo-Fakuade Tomi

Ojo-Fakuade Tomi writes from Ilé-Ifè, Nigeria, as a student of Obafemi Awolowo University. His poem has appeared in Brittle Paper.

## Macey Shofroth

Macey Shofroth is a writer born and raised in Iowa. She is a graduate of the University of Iowa and lives in Des Moines. She manages a Substack called "The Midwest Creative" and works as a Creative Associate for Business Publications Corporation. Her passions lie in showing the world that untapped beauty of the Midwest. She's been published in Anti-Heroine Chic Magazine, Witch Craft Magazine, Bettendorf Magazine, Fearless, dsm Magazine, the Business Record, and College Magazine.

## Sonia Nicholson

Sonia Nicholson's work has appeared in Inspirelle, Literary Heist, Pinhole Poetry, Heimat Review, Rivanna Review, and others. Her writing explores themes of identity, family, and place. A first-generation Canadian who grew up in a Portuguese immigrant household, she was born and raised in Osoyoos, British Columbia. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in French and Spanish from the University of Victoria and continues to call Victoria home. Her debut novel Provenance Unknown was published in 2023 (Sands Press) and 2025 (She Rises Studios) and she has one book forthcoming from Okanagan Publishing House (2025).

## Anna DiMartino

Anna DiMartino is a writer, artist, teacher, and editor of Jackdaw Press. Her poems have been published in Whale Road Review, Atlanta Review, Lake Effect, Slipstream, and other literary journals. Her collection of poetry, The Last Bite, is forthcoming with Main Street Rag. Her non-fiction has been featured on Dimestories and in Sneaker Wave Magazine.

## Keith Mano

Keith Mano's stories have appeared in both print and online magazines like Aethlon, Storgy, October Hill Magazine, Wrestling USA, New Reader Magazine, and Attic Door Press, among others. He has also published twelve books to date, including his debut novel My Last Year of Life (in School), which was traditionally published by Black Rose Writing. Keith has been recognized as one of Ohio's top writing teachers by the Ohio Council of Teachers of English/Language Arts.

## Adeola Oke

Adeola Oke is the Project Designer at Obindo Magazine. Contact her at [aadeolaoke@gmail.com](mailto:aadeolaoke@gmail.com)

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