



Editorial Board

Editors-in-Chief

Stacey Boulter

Aarun Tripathi

Editors

Eva Adamson

Stacey Boulter

Carmen Gessell

Emma Kuzmyk

James Lee

Rachel Nault

Eleanor Peebles

Sasha Pickering

Devarshi Shah

Julia Stewart

Dea Toivonen

Aarun Tripathi

Suzanne Marie Butas Uy

Sabina Willmott

Art Directors

Dea Toivonen

Sabina Willmott

Secretaries

Carmen Gessell

Julia Stewart

Social Media

Rachel Nault

Faculty Advisor

Sue Goyette

The publication of this journal took place on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. Dalhousie University and the University of King's College are located in K'jipuktuk. The Peace and Friendship treaties in 1725 established the relationship between the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik and British Crown. The treaties did not include the surrender of lands. These treaties are the guide and rules for the ongoing relationship for all nations living in Mi'kma'ki.

The whole Fathom team wishes to extend a thank you to Sue Goyette and Mary Beth MacIsaac for their help and guidance in the creation of this journal.

Note from the Editors

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to the latest edition of Dalhousie and King's creative writing journal, Fathom. We are thrilled to present the exceptional work of our writers. The pieces in this journal truly reflect the creativity and passion that our students possess. They have poured their hearts and souls into their work, and we are honoured to showcase it.

We are committed to providing a platform for students to express themselves freely and creatively. Everyone has a story to tell, and we are privileged to help them share it. We hope that the pieces in this journal will inspire you, move you, and challenge your perspective. We encourage you to engage with the works and share your thoughts with others.

Thank you for supporting your fellow students and their craft. We look forward to sharing more of their exceptional work with you in the future.

Stacey Boulter and Aaron Tripathi
Editors-in-Chief

Contents

Fiction

Aarun Tripathi (content warning).....	2
Audrey Hill.....	6
Michelle Garcia-Burgos.....	10

Poetry

Alex Schofield.....	16
Audrey Hill.....	21
James Lee.....	24
Julia Stewart.....	26
Laura Gilron.....	27
Mariia Lytvynchuk.....	28
Mya Chidiac.....	30
Tessa Hill.....	32
Toby Henderson.....	35
Zia Shirtliffe.....	36



Rise of the Amber Sun

Aarun Tripathi

The clouds hovered over the city, and the light seemed to fade into the darkness as the sun made its descent. The wind blew the clouds in a magnificent race, which was spectacular to behold for someone who loved to remain in peace and quiet. All residences were widely spaced. Very little did the neighbors know what was about to go down in the Nayak household, where I play the wife, Chhaya Nayak. There began the tears, the screeches, the shrieks, and the earth-shattering sounds of exorbitant vases crashing on the furnished floor. One can only assume that the head of the household, my legal husband, Ishaan Nayak, had been deeply hurt by his child, Solana.

"Solana betrayed me, Chhaya! It's all over!" Ishaan screeched his lungs out and dropped himself on the couch with a jerk. He buried his head in his hands and began weeping. All that he worked for was brought to an end upon the arrival of a letter whose sole purpose was to spread joy. That letter merely contained words, but they had the effect of several atomic bombs on Ishaan's mind. Everything that man believed he knew about his daughter for eighteen years was annihilated in a matter of five minutes. In fact, I shouldn't even say daughter anymore. In my opinion, it was about time that the truth boiled up and overflowed involuntarily. I strolled across the hall to look out of the spacious window overlooking the dark driveway, where I believe Mira, who was Solana's best friend, and her mother are pulling into the driveway. She drops Solana off and bids goodbye in haste. It was almost as if the oozing gloom was sensed by everything in the vicinity of this abode.

The child brushed their feet against the doormat and promptly detected the mood of the room. The kid raised their eyebrows and looked upstairs to see Ishaan standing at the landing of the staircase infuriated beyond any explicable means. The letter that he crushed with his firm and fiery infested fists was thrown like a piece of trash on Solana's face. Solana unfolded the

letter and began scanning the contents which led the eyes in an anticipated dejection.

"Read it aloud! Fucking read that aloud!" Ishaan yelled whilst taking his slipper in his hand, all set to throw it on the poor child. Solana remained quiet and chose to look at Ishaan with a stern gaze rather than displaying signs of shame. "You have been accepted into the Bachelor of Arts program? As a result of your application under the transgender category, you have been imbursed with \$5,000, huh?" Ishaan began to rehash the contents of the letter. He had aspirations for his daughter to be a doctor, thus following the familial legacy. To his dismay, life was not driving towards his dreams.

"I have absolutely nothing to say to you! From this day onwards, nor am I your father, nor are you my child!" He screamed as he threw his slipper towards a being of his own flesh and blood and stormed off to his room to further drench in his tears. The child departed to their room without uttering a single word. Meanwhile, I decided to get some perspective. Especially when I have no clue how to address Solana after this... I could only assume that Solana isn't a she anymore. I'm also assuming that a name change is in order, but again, while I did see this coming, there are several aspects to process and many other aspects that I am unaware of. I did pick up on a few traits in Solana that appeared to be relatively masculine. Hence, I am guessing that Solana's preferred pronouns are he/him. Either way, I need to speak with him, to confirm my assumptions.

My eyes widened to see the scene before me. "What in the blazes are you doing?" I asked. He did not respond to me and continued like my voice was a mere whisper of an idle breeze. The lights in the room that once brightened the entire area were as bleak as it could be when a bulb is fused. The clothes were vigorously taken out of the drawers, thus unraveling the folds, and were stuffed into a backpack. I retorted again, "Answer me, young la—... I mean man! Where do you think you will go?" Solana zipped the bag, but whirled around to face me, the stepmother. Tears were wiped and the conversation continued on with a stern tone present in the child's voice.

He responded, "Well look who knew the truth all along that I'm a man?" He gave out a sarcastic chuckle. "I think the bigger question is, where will my relationship with my father go after this? And I think the biggest question of all is... will you take me leaving as a chance to finally admit what you truly feel about him?"

I had no choice but to remain silent. My heart was filled with crippling fear, almost as if someone pulled my feet from the ground. But when I looked down, my feet were in place. He continued to strike the arrow to my soul, with a clear vision to the target.

He took the backpack in his hands and continued, "You can accept me for not being straight. You can accept that I am a man trapped in a woman's body. You can accept your own husband for being manipulative, jealous, and controlling. Yet, you cannot admit that you don't see him as your husband, nor do you see me as your daughter. Name one time you saw him romantically! NAME ONE! Name one time we didn't act like siblings! Even now a normal mother would yell at me! Why aren't you yelling at me? You're my stepmom and my dad's wife by marriage. The same marriage that was never a marriage in the first place."

Tears began to roll down my eyes as I fell on my knees as they were quivering and unable to remain standing up. He did not back down. He went further than I could possibly bear. The mere reason as to why I let him continue to fight is because he was the only one who was strong enough to fight. Ishaan nor I had the strength to do what he was doing.

He piled on his argument, "And as for your question, for a definite answer, I don't know where I am going to go. My father had his fatal flaws even before you came along. But even so, he was the one who raised me. He did not toil away his life just to see a future where I suffocate. If he needs to see me as a true man, I need to act like one. I will make him proud, even if he disowned me today. Because... I'm not you. Not me, but you have some stuff to work out."

He hung one strap of his backpack on his shoulder and began to step towards the entrance door to make a permanent exit. I followed him to the door. He saw a pair of scissors on the side-table. He pushed his hair on the strapless end of his shoulder, dangling. He used his free hand to clip his hair and the other to snap a clean cut. All those years of hair care his father encouraged him to maintain ended instantaneously. He put back the scissors on the side-table but didn't even look down at the fallen hair. The sound of the front door closing resonated with clarity in my mind.

Papa and the Paruparo

Audrey Hill

When I turned 25, my grandfather got sick. I moved home to help my grandma take care of him. My grandpa and I never talked much, but he seemed happy to see me, and I was happy to see him. As happy as one could be, under the circumstances. I spent most of my days sitting next to him on the couch, watching TV, or reading mail my cousins sent him. I could tell he wanted to say more than he did, but he didn't know much English, and I knew even less Tagalog. There weren't enough words in either language for me to say that I didn't mind, so I just sat with him.

Six months later, I heard wood creaking over my head. Begrudgingly, I threw my blanket off and shuffled to the door, peering into the hallway. The door to my grandpa's bedroom hung ajar. He was in the attic; it was his old workshop. He used to be a toymaker in the Philippines, and he would spend hours in the attic each day when I was a kid. I never dared to bother him, but I would sneak peeks into the cluttered room when the coast was clear. I hadn't seen him up there since I was a child, and now he can't even walk on his own. Yet, that night, I could hear the faint noises of him hard at work.

I made my journey to the workshop as quietly as I could, tiptoeing up creaking stairs. I pushed the door open. The space felt like a disorganized gallery. Shelves filled the room, with walkways carved between them. Every inch of open space on the shelves was filled with his creations. From a cardboard model of our house to carved wooden creatures, each creation lit up the halls with the warmth of the past. I even saw the tambourines he would make every Christmas that would fill the house with sounds of laughter and the jingling of flattened beer caps.

"Papa?" I entered, shutting the door behind me. "It's late, Mama's going to be mad if she sees we're awake."

I could hear his hums, drifting between the shelves as I navigated a winding path. I followed the sound of his voice through the wooden jungle, finally finding land in a warmly lit

opening in the room. My grandpa sat at a desk near the window, busy at work.

"Hi, Papa," I said. He turned to look at me. For once, his smile fully reached his eyes.

"Michelle." His voice was gravelly.

"Let's go back to bed, Pa. Mama's going to hear you."

He shook his head, then waved me over. "Come look," he said.

I walked over, taking a seat on the bench beside him. He held up an unfinished sketch and nodded enthusiastically, proud of his work. I nodded back at him with a smile.

"It's nice, Papa." I said. My voice cracked in my throat.

He stopped nodding, raising a hand to brush it against my dampened cheek.

"Why are you crying?" He asked.

I paused, clearing the lump that had grown in my throat. "I just missed you."

He nodded solemnly, then stood up. I watched him shuffle to a shelf against the wall, pulling out a glass jar. When he returned, he held it out to me.

"What is it?" I asked. The light from my grandpa's lamp shone on the creature inside, casting shimmers around the room. It was a tinfoil butterfly, with metal twisting in careful braids along its spine. Even in his shaking hands, it remained completely frozen.

"It's for you," he said. "It's a..." he trailed off, staring fixedly at the butterfly. I tried to think of what to call it.

"Mariposa?" I suggested. He paused, then shook his head.

"Paruparo."

"It's really cool, Papa. Thank you." I took the jar into my hands and watched as he walked over to the window seat, sitting down on worn cushions. He waved me over.

"Come," he said. "We'll set it free."

I didn't wait to join his side. As I began to unscrew the top, his hand touched mine. It was cold; a stark reminder of his frailty. I looked up at him.

"We have to wait for morning," he whispered, then pointed at the window. The very edge of the horizon had already begun brightening, melting into the darkness above. I nodded solemnly.

"Okay, Pa. We'll wait."

So we sat in silence, watching the sun begin to creep above the grey slate of suburbia. There wasn't a single cloud in the sky, and the sound of birds singing their morning cries pierced through the window as clear as day. I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen the sunrise. When I looked at my grandpa, he looked as though he could fly. He always loved to sit on the porch on sunny days.

As the sky grew peppered with swaths of vibrant orange hues, he reached wearily toward the window handle.

"I'll get that," I said. "You can open the lid."

I pushed the windows open, swinging out into the open air. It was warm for fall.

Slowly, he twisted the lid of the jar. He seemed to be taking his time, savouring each moment that passed. As the lid was freed from its last ridge, he held the jar out to me, holding the lid down.

"You do it. Okay?"

I nodded, and lifted the jar from his hands. I held my hands out of the window and carefully lifted the lid. In one swift movement, something emerged from the jar. The butterfly soared outwards, its wings growing by the second. As it did, something became clear. It wasn't tinfoil; it was fractured glass. It cast prisms across the valley in waves, bathing the land in a warm kaleidoscopic glow. I laughed and hugged the empty jar to my chest. I wasn't sure what else to do.

I reached over, searching blindly for my grandpa's hand. As I turned away from the window, the room felt colder. The light had diminished. He wasn't beside me. I turned back to the window quickly, wanting to catch another glimpse, but the sky had grown dark once more.

"Michelle?"

I turned around quickly. It was my grandma. The shelves

were gone; a silence had long since settled over the dusty walls. I felt my stomach sink. I wasn't sure what to say, so I held out the jar. She looked at it, then smiled.

"Tony," she said to the open space, "let her rest. You're going to scare her."

"Ma?" I asked. She held her hand out to me.

"Come," she said, beckoning to me. "You need sleep."

I nodded and took her hand, following her out of the room. As my hand gripped the doorknob, ready to shut the door, I paused to glance behind myself. For a second, I could've sworn I saw sunlight cast across the room in sunset-coloured webs. My grandma clicked her tongue.

"Don't worry," she hummed. I shut the door and followed her down the stairs. "The paruparo will visit again."

Rojita y El Cadejo (The Little Red Girl and The Cadejo)

Michelle Garcia-Burgos

The girl ventured through the village, her white cloak billowing behind her. She noticed the villagers working in the fields farming coffee beans as she walked to the various shops for her errands. She went to la salchichonería, el mercado, y la panadería.

She was buying groceries for her Abuela who lived outside of the village, in the woods. To celebrate her fifteenth birthday, the girl would journey into the forest at night to see her Abuela. She just had to be careful, or she would bump into the wrong person. Like now.

"Where are you going, girl?" A deep voice said, belonging to a man clad in black fur from various hunts. Underneath his hat was a black beard and a pair of blue eyes that struck intimidation into anyone who looked at them. The girl stopped in her tracks.

"I am simply shopping." Technically not wrong. Still, she worried he could see through her with those eyes.

"Hmph. Okay. But remember the rules, no one is allowed outside the village." He fiddled with the rifle at his side. "You're a big girl now, aren't you? You can follow rules."

"Yes, sir," she said, bowing her head. Long ago, once everyone had been moved into the village, they had to farm the land they didn't even own for export. The Hunter kept watch. But her Abuela didn't listen. Abuela's connections with both the government and the resistance meant she could stay in the forest.

At home, the girl and her Mamá packed the woven basket she would take.

"Mira, be careful," Mamá said. "It will be dark and it could be dangerous. Come back if you need to. You can go out another night."

"I'll be okay. I'm a woman now." The girl smiled. Mamá still worried, but kept quiet. She kissed her daughter's forehead and held her.

Once night fell, the girl snuck out of the village and into the dark and foggy woods. She walked in, leaving footprints on the damp ground.

After some time, she saw them. Flowers in a clearing, lit beautifully by the moon. She made her way through the trees into the clearing.

While she decided which flowers to pick, she heard rustling in the trees. Immediately she looked up, preparing herself to run. She watched the trees until something emerged.

It was a large wolf with white fur. The moonlight reflecting made it ethereal. She stared in wonder. The wolf made no attempt to attack. The girl knelt down, not taking her eyes off of the wolf as she picked her flowers. Then she backed out of the clearing and onto the main path. The wolf followed and bowed its head, showing its docility.

In the village, the Hunter had not fallen asleep. He was doing a night patrol when he noticed small, fresh footprints leading out into the forest. He chuckled as he loaded his rifle and journeyed in.

In the woods, the girl and the wolf continued at a relaxed pace. The girl talked to the wolf.

"Yesterday was my birthday. I turned fifteen. That makes me a woman now."

"..."

"That's why I'm here. I'm going to visit my Abuela and celebrate."

"..."

"My Abuela is the coolest person I know. There's a war that's been going on for as long as I can remember, but she keeps it out of our village. She has connections to both sides, my Mamá told me, because she helped heal injuries from both sides when the war got near our village."

"..."

"The Hunter's been here for a long time. He makes sure the villagers farm the coffee beans. As long as that happens, the war isn't brought here."

"..."

When they reached the clearing where Abuela's house was, the wolf stopped. The girl took out a piece of meat. She held it out to the wolf, who ate it, accepting her gift.

The wolf had just finished when a voice called out from the darkness, "Well, what have we here? A girl that can't follow rules. But you're an adult now aren't you? A woman. And do you know what we do with rule-breakers?" He cocked his gun. She gulped, ready to run. The light turned on inside the house. "They can't be allowed with the rest of society. So we imprison them, or better yet-kill them. Just like wild animals." He shot towards the wolf, who dodged and ran into the woods. The girl ran to Abuela's door, which opened quickly.

"¡Ándale, mi niña!" Abuela yelled out. The Hunter lunged after the girl. She sprinted inside and Abuela closed the door, only to be met with the Hunter's rifle jammed into the gap. Abuela forced it upwards so it wouldn't shoot them. The Hunter poked his eye into the opening to look at them.

"My, what a big eye you have!" the girl exclaimed.

"The better to see your footprints with!" the Hunter said, and with that she realized how he had found her. It was her fault that he was here.

Abuela kept struggling to keep the door closed and keep the gun raised up. "What a big gun you have!" she said through gritted teeth. The girl pushed on the door, helping Abuela.

"The better to hunt you with!" The hunter cackled and kicked the door down. Abuela and her nieta both fell to the floor. The hunter aimed his rifle at Abuela's face. She grimaced and stared directly at him. The girl looked on, terrified and crying.

As the Hunter chuckled, he was suddenly attacked from the back. The wolf had come back to protect them. The Hunter shot three rounds, but all of them missed.

The Hunter got knocked over by the wolf. The Hunter flailed at the wolf, but couldn't do anything more. The wolf mauled the Hunter, his cries of pain dying as the wolf ate. The blood splattered onto the girl, dying her white cloak permanently red.

The women stood and watched as the Hunter was killed. Abuela observed, "My, what big teeth the wolf has."

"The better to eat him with, I guess," the little red girl-Rojita replied. "Lo siento, Abuela. I didn't think he would follow me. I didn't want to put you in danger"

"Mi niña, it's okay. I'm here to protect you," Abuela told her, holding onto her arms. "But I should be protecting you! I'm fifteen now, and all grown!" Rojita protested.

"Mi amor, you don't need to protect me. I'm grown, and you're still growing. Don't hurry, nothing's chasing you. Not anymore." Rojita chuckled. Abuela squeezed her.

The bloodstained wolf had finished with the Hunter, leaving only a carcass. It licked the remains one last time and approached the pair, bowing its head.

"Gracias," Rojita said. "For protecting us." The wolf bowed its head once more and walked out as the sun rose.



Butterfly Effect of a Dog

Alex Schofield

So hot it takes away their breath
So close the July air
in the still yard
as the mother and daughter stand, see
their black mountain of a dog
the butterfly effect of her struggling heart beat.

The mother heads to the kitchen to beat
ice cubes into shards like shafts of breath
like sharp pressure moving the pillowed mass of the dog
and the green grass blades also move the air
and cold ice that the dog cannot see
slips into her mouth like a wet surprise in the small yard.

For the first time this summer, the yard
lures a moth, its wings beating
white effort in air
as if it could balance on breath
charting a waypoint past the rooftree
for the labouring dog.

The girl brings an umbrella for the dog
flaps it open as the mother hums songs to the yard
notes lilting in the air
barely making a beat
while the child mingles heat with breath
and love collapses in her play tent, though few will see.

Under the rhododendron they only see
paws digging digging dirt, the digging dog
with her tunnel-spider breath
perennial observer of the chaos past her yard
now only sees through heartbeat
the mother's song to her heart, the change of air

and a resignation for the air
as it will feel and see
Pentobarbital's sweep as her veins bloat and beat
brief ally as the heart parts with its duty to the dimming dog
and the mother kills to be kind in the yard
of such struggle for breath.

And sometimes now, a heap of cloth dark in the yard becomes
briefly Dog
the mother thinks she sees
and it takes away her breath.

Drawing the Death Card

Alex Schofield

If you draw the death card
it's not what you think but it's a good thing!
Have the Grim Reaper smiling—
death doth dath dauthux dod dead
tired of being misunderstood
like Lucifer is really that fiery star in the morning sunrise
the light lux luster lunar lucidity
of Venus mistranslated.
Have your reaper reap roots not skulls
from moist earth. Have it hoist a flag of harvest moon.

When you draw the death card
again, decide the line you'll draw draghen dreyga draganan drag
a soft 2B or a stiff 4H—
pencils run the spectrum.
Use solid paper stock.
Blend greys.
Add highlights by erasing.
Consider symbols: skulls boats flora horses flags
it's never a black-and-white decision.

When you draw the death card
yet another time,
have a good light above you.
Artists like both
kindling their cave in light leigtan licht leuk leuhta
illuminating the dark corners.
Maybe find a pot light
or a chandelier.

When you draw the death card
yet again don't forget the boat. Add
a boatload of provisions
rum and a deck of cards carta charta tarocca Tarot.
The waves should flow from one shore
to another. Make sure the boat is
one you want
to float in, with strong rigging.

When you draw the death card
lastly add two children
wide-eyed children with
carefree feet in a field of roses
or an idle lawn
with an Eidolon escaping from their little ghost selves.
One will look across the sea with longing
one will look at Death fondly
and see gehyrd bhrto bera balm birth
and then see green.

Paul Joseph — A Droigneach

Alex Schofield

In these salting hours, the minutes are scaffolding
To the celestial. Slow breath, sound particles
To the elsewhere as you prepare, unfolding
Body off spirit, as I clutch love's article.

Paul Joseph, your calm self defied diversely
With each false prediction you set to nullify,
Meeting each challenge with a patience unearthly,
Your own sweet version walked well past the lullaby.

Well past the tailbone-first childbirth emergency,
Well past the doctor's fast intimate suggestion
To place you by a cold spring draft with urgency,
As if love's reach and spread could not be a question.

My thoughts slack backward, I was a flawed medium
To you—small elf, rocking in rhythmic uniform
Of back and forth, dangling keys to break tedium,
To spark through the mute, the flesh and bone cuneiform.

My sentry beside you, a tongue-bound evasion
This fluttering effort no longer empowers,
You and your angels a one-to-one equation,
Your lifting to elsewhere in these salting hours.

Anak

Audrey Hill

I have my mother's tongue
but I cannot speak it.
Not because I have not learned
but because my mouth
cannot form the words
in a way that is
correct.

I have recipes from my grandmother
of desserts and dinners
that pepper my memories
like snowflakes on windows
or sand on tile floors.
But they are not mine.
Only in my memories
are they home.

Christmas mornings spent
wrapping spring rolls with my grandmother,
but my hands cannot keep up with her
or even my sister.
And I am reminded of the sand.
I unstick the wrappers
instead.

I have my mother's tongue.
This year or the next
I will speak it.
Even if my lips do not allow it.

Anak.

NEEDLES

Audrey Hill

Click. Click.

Knitting needles echo
in the silent warmth
of the night.

A pattern of rows and colours
splays out across my lap
like the waves in her backyard
as the tide rolls in.

She draped a blanket across my legs
when I complained of the cold.
I didn't understand how it worked
with so many holes.
Turquoise and green,
like the bottom of the sea.

The same blanket sits in a trunk at the end of my bed.
It's been a long time since I've seen it.
It's been a long time since I've seen her.

I wonder
how often I should use it,
if touching it would taint
all that's left to see.

Click. Click.

The edges aren't right.
I was never great at knitting.
It's not long enough,
and I can't seem to make the patterns
Align.

I take it out of the trunk.
It's smaller now,
just a patch in my hands,
withered
now that I can see it
up close.
How frail it has become.

I try not to look.

It sits around my shoulders
as I settle
next to the empty hearth.

It's so much colder without the flames,
flickering behind the glass.
It's not the same.
Click. Click. Click.
I've dropped a stitch.
It doesn't matter.

The edges have frayed,
and embroidered embellishments long since fallen off.
It's not as warm anymore,
not the way it used to be.

But I am warm.
and it feels like home.

Swimming

James Lee

i emerge from English waters
like a poor haddock, who is toss'd
back to rejoin the school as
something changed irrevocably;
hook-gash in lip.
real pain is in vogue,
incensed
 like deep Irish spring.

if i were a chicken they'd tear
my flesh—my family own would rend me to bone.
 or else by men in slacks;
at least they may tip my head up,
gently, and let me see the blue sky.
 the sky that is an endless ocean.
 over America or Indonesia.

but i am not a chicken, i am in water.
down with cod and carp, so-called clarity.
Patience, Cleanliness, Pearl.
i ought to keep my bearing straight,
encompassed in force, substance
fate gliding along my rippled grey.
but see i know no way to live:
now that the big hands have touched me—
 in their realm free of movement's heavy comfort—
decided i'm no good.
will a wound ever really heal?
a prick in the neck festers
 in busy Bombay ports,
 like Ahuitzotl coast.

i want to write something young,
when i am young.
i don't want to be beholden to wit and wisdom.
 sorry.
give me something stupid to say,
let me feel helpless now, and let me
be embarrassed when i recite my days.

The Cards are Dealt

Julia Stewart

I was not taught the rules
now I am made to play but
I do not know the rules

I play a card I know
is not right because I
laid the card and
they stare at me
I know it is not right

I pick up the card
also not right
but
I do not know the rules

And Then

Laura Gilron

Trees were the sensible boots of giants
(the leaves a fancy frill;
you know those most seen
need more reasons to be
eye-catching).
And that was all I could see.

And then I met you.

Trees were mere living things,
subject to thirst and pain.
Living, breathing things
shaking off dead cells
like you and me.
I saw a tree.
And lived and breathed more deeply.

And then I loved you.

Trees were already homes,
and though I didn't know what
to do with hammers and saws,
trees were eaves under which I could kiss you;
floors on which we could dance;
tables over which I'd compliment your food;
bedframes on which you'd complain
I'd kicked you in the hips.
You worry for the critters,
so we'll include a sanctuary in the plans.
I'll plant more trees
And build you anything with my bare hands.

And then we can love completely.

Music of Instruments

Mariia Lytvynchuk

On an enormous stage, worries, in an orchestra pit;
Make a concert of the heart's thief.
Feelings swept the hall, taking every seat.
They play as one, where composer is grief.
Cello became regret, played first notes,
Reaching bitter hearts with an empty hole.
Anxiety became a violin in love's quotes,
Where the bow played the strings of the soul.
Sad harp, mourned tears of loss,
Leaving cuts on tattered fingertips.
Flute sang songs from the tale of OZ;
Flying in story, lined with wet lips.
Piano will stand up in sorrow,
And orchestra will play in endless sadness,
we think; but then it's morrow,
And happiness will come again, will receive gladness.
Loud hum will fall silent on the big stage,
And all instruments will hide in the cage.

The Ode Feet in the Sea

Mariia Lytvynchuk

The sea

was in the
moon.

Dark,

shining,
shimmering
waves.

The feet

were in the
sand.

Sticky,

wet,
tender
toes.

Then,

it was stormy.

Then,

it was nothing.

The Scientist

Mya Chidiac

When I was younger,
I watched the women in my family
dissect themselves
like specimens under a microscope.
Noses too big, too bulbous.
Stomachs too large, too loose.
It was always too much or not enough;
they were always too much
or not enough.

Their insecurity was subject to experimentation,
hypothesizing that if they looked just right
their wounds would surely heal.
They took a scalpel to their sadness,
a mallet to their melancholy,
and promised a 100% success rate;
a second chance at belonging.

When I was older,
my aunt the scientist told me
“Habibti, the risks are minimal”
and I started to believe her.
I took to the laboratory to study my flaws,
kept a record of every defect in need of
repair,
and convinced myself that
if I looked just right,
my wounds would surely heal.

There was no risk of rejection
through assimilation,
no fear of exclusion
if I'd just accept the facts.
But even after the experiments,
the women in my family
would curse at their reflections,
reasoning that they just needed more,
that they were just in need of upkeep.
Each time they returned from the lab
they appeared as perverted versions
of the women I once knew,
no longer familiar,
but an affront to nature.

My nose was too big, too bulbous.
And my aunt, scalpel in hand
would assure me,
"Hayati, it'll be over in an instant,"
but,
fearing that that instant would be my last,
I decided to reject science, instead.

I'm in my trad era

Tessa Hill

I take my morning mug at 1
and the world from there.

He left me, sleeping.
Beauty mustn't wake yet.

By 2, I am encrusted
in intellectual spit-up,

groping for the cookware
and a great coming.

We do make a good team.
Him with his

Trinity,
me with my tricks.

When he hung his name
around my neck I cried

for how beautiful love is
when it's hardened.

By 3, I have varnished ambition
and flung open the curtains

to bathe gracefully
for the peepers and jays

in my own misuse.
The mind is a prison

with that modern feel
and an ache for wood trimming,

but these synthetic sheets
won't survive untangling, I'm sure

there is a method
to deconstruction

called being, becoming,
coming, seeing, beginning

the last descent of man
to the end of animal.

Meditations in stale air
leave you brighter, calmer, captured

by monoxide daydreaming
glimmers in the butcher knife

to make manifest
the unconscious

and strangle him with his
pearls, flee with his black book,

ablaze the names,
emblazon the cry:

Enough with the undiscovered!
I want to be home—body.

For how beautiful tradition is
when you feast on its ashes.

in this harbor town

Tessa Hill

there are four limbs
and infinite pressure points.

I always end up here between

the pines wishing I could explain
 parallel paper cuts on left thumb
 spring seducing sun
 this particular silence and find
words other than these when my hands
freeze
before I make it
to the end of the line.

so

do I go to the cinema alone?
do I say nothing? do I buy twizzlers?
do I leave a note under the seat?
you would not believe the view from here!

I wonder if there has been enough apocalypse,
if we can move on now,
if we can love or something, whatever
I always think I know but the boat is
anchored so the wind is just tugging the tail.
it is not anywhere yet.

I'm no longer really me

Toby Henderson

Like a boat fixed,
constantly,
have I built a new me?
Heraclitus; Leibniz.
Either that boat is and always will,
or, that boat hasn't really been in years.
Cells slip away,
time and time again.

I guess you'd concede, I'm no longer really me.
But what makes up
me
if not bones, teeth, and meat?
Can my thoughts
grow so hefty, as to anchor?
Even in that sub-physical conception of me,
I'm not me,
for my thoughts change.

I guess you'd concede, I'm no longer really me.

there are no chairs and so I sit on the ground

Zia Shirlcliffe

You're a bore. And that's so corny.

— Diane di Prima's response to sexism,
as told by her daughter

take this body

in all its roundness broken up

and stare at it

tell me 'why do you sit there'

(and I would ask you

'why do you just stand there

and do nothing')

stare from the bus window

from the cafe

from the classroom

you are invincible in the anonymity

of the numbered abled masses

and I have already been vanquished

(you think pityingly,

curiously as I think

'goddamn you are corny')

look at me on the ground

next to the unopening door

I dare you to look

I will look back

winter creature

Zia Shirtcliffe

The anti-plant:

Whatever it is I am not.

I thrive, like a cave creature,

In the deepdark of winter.

I wilted in the humid summer heat

And now, like a night-blooming flower,

I unfurl to the soothing cold

That offers salt without tears

And borrows the world:

The wind dries and cracks

As flames stop mid-motion,

The seas turn solid,

And the earth is finally hidden.

Alone, my breath opens in fractal petals

Over a quiet blanket of snow

Holding the earth together

And muffling the sounds of cars.

at the end of it all

Zia Shirtcliffe

stars are falling as I sit at the kitchen table.
I can feel them in my eyes,
their light fracturing off in slivers.
I try to tell people but they don't believe me.
no one listened to Cassandra either.

I am the only person on earth who can hear the black holes
throughout the universe singing,
poems made out of scraps they hide in their pockets,
but no one listens to me
or to the black holes for that matter.

why would anyone think this a gift.
I never asked for it.
I didn't know what type of god I was looking for,
but I don't want one who would condemn me like this.

I watch the kitchen light go supernova
and as it splits so do I, sympathetically
and uncontrollably, my atoms wanting
to mimic it
out of compassion or maybe jealousy.
or maybe another god. another goddamned god.

I look through the ground and see all the stars in the sky
on the other side of the world.
the brightness is unbearable but I cannot die—
gods of surviving don't favour death—
and so I bear it.
not gracefully though.
it hurts to cry now
and the starlight tries to soothe me
but the light catches in the centre of the earth,
the god part, the sun part, and it starts to die.

I feel the whole world choking.
I lose my balance.

no one will believe me:
the sun is still shining.
only the stars know me true.
I sit in the kitchen and watch the world end.

