

A DALHOUSIE & KING'S
CREATIVE WRITING JOURNAL



-Fathom-

2020-2021

This Year's Theme is...

SELF & IDENTITY

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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 and Wolastoqiyik and the 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. We stand in solidarity with Mi'kmaq fishers.

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

Darshana S Saravanan: Co-Editor-in-Chief

This past year has been unrelenting on all of us. We have been forced to adapt our lifestyles to better fit harsh realities. We have found ourselves dealing with stressors we've never come across before. However, despite all adversities, our team has come to embrace these new challenges to make sure that we can bring you another edition of Fathom this year as well.

Our authors have continued to deliver brilliant pieces while our editors have continued to work on the journal to the best of their abilities and I would like to sincerely thank each and every one of them for their hard work and their dedication. I would also like to thank Mary Beth McIsaac and the English Department for their continuous support, and Sue Goyette for her wonderful guidance. Their advice and assistance have been a source of great comfort during these times of uncertainty.

To our readers, we are grateful for the time you take to read our journal and thank you for your support.

Devarshi Shah: Co-Editor-in-Chief

I felt daunted taking on this responsibility at the beginning of this year because I went in knowing everything would be online and didn't know how it would work out. I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to make any connections with the people contributing to this magazine but throughout the year, this fear has been proven wrong time and time again. I enjoyed and truly looked forward to having meetings with other editors; listening to everybody's opinions and engaging with the submissions was tons of fun and was part of the reason I got involved in the first place. I am especially grateful to Emmy and Shana, the friends I have made on this journey, the people who allowed me to stay on top of it all. Although some things are bound to be more difficult online, I am immensely grateful for all the editors, writers, and other contributors that made this year's experience memorable and enjoyable. I am excited to (hopefully) see everybody in person in the coming year. Finally, thank you to the readers of Fathom. Without you, none of this would be possible. Happy reading!

Emmy Sharples: Co-Editor-in-Chief

The past year and a half has been an incredibly challenging time for all of us. Between quarantine, isolation, and fear, we have had to adapt to work, school, and life online. With everything being online, the Fathom journal, and everyone contributing to it, also had to adapt. I am extremely proud of our talented and dedicated Fathom Editorial team for quickly learning how to create this journal without ever meeting in person. With everything in life-changing for all of us, we decided to make this year's Fathom have the theme of Self and Identity. Our contributors and artists embraced this theme with astonishing and eye-opening pieces that our editors were grateful to edit and collaborate on. It has not been an easy ride for any of us. However, with the collaboration of everyone here at Fathom, our outstanding faculty advisor Sue Goyette, Mary Beth MacIsaac, and the English Department, who have dedicated their support and time to us, we are proud to print the 2020/2021 copy of Fathom.

Thank you to everyone who took part in Fathom and thank you for reading and supporting us. We encourage all future writers to be inspired and to keep writing.

CONTEXT

POETRY

Alex Affonso.....	1
Kamaakshi Meera Baabu.....	2
Janet Brush.....	7
Sarah Carruthers.....	8
Amber Chinn.....	9
Wynne Clark-Squire.....	11
Cora DeWitt.....	12
Audrey Green.....	13
Kavita Krueger.....	14
Janik LeBlanc.....	20
James Lee.....	21
Tiffany Leung.....	22
Trisha Malik.....	23
Kassandra Moriarity.....	24
Alex Schofield.....	29
Devarshi Shah.....	31
Emmy Sharples.....	33
Emile Weber.....	34

FICTION

Alex Affonso.....	36
Angus Cochran.....	39
Claire Henry.....	42
Kavita Krueger.....	47

NON-FICTION

Tarini Fernando.....	51
----------------------	----

CREATIVE WORKS

Trisha Malik.....	54
Emma Skitch.....	56



POETRY

ALEX AFFONSO

Sonnet 18 000

I wonder why, in times like these, when words
Are old, and songs are sung and poems read
A thousand times, and every verse has birds
And flowers, flickering beneath the red
Awakening sun, and many maidens' might
Are praised—their beauty told in tales as old
As daylight, dusk, the darkness of the night—
A poet would add sonnets to this world.

Maybe because the world is more than
Majestic birds and beautiful maids;
More than sunlight and the silver gloom under the moon;
More than rhyme schemes and metre and words
Making sounds as songs softly whispered in your ears;
More than having fourteen lines because, well,
I have fifteen.

KAMAAKSHI MEERA BAABU

A RUN FOR HAPPINESS:

We are walking down the street.

Hands moving front and back.

Panicky steps we take towards our destination.

Where you may ask?

The place which will bring us closer to our happiness.

It can either be bright like the sun or dull like the rainy day.

We pace.

Our heart beat amped to an erratic chaos of harmony.

We run and we run.

We work day in and day out.

Yet. Yet we are lost.

So lost. So held up with things and work so that someday we can have a happy life. A happy life.

Sounds like a dream doesn't it.

A dream so far-fetched that a young adult yearns to reach that goal somehow before her/his late thirties.

A dream our parents sacrificed to make our dreams come true.

A dream their parents found in our parents' success.

A cycle that will go on till the earth is proved to be flat.

Happiness.

A word so beautiful. So powerful. Which many yearn for. Many die for. Some kill for. Some sing for. But none. None live for.

We run and we run.

Everyday, every night, every second.

Towards happiness.

But is happiness something to be achieved?

Is it something that we get to take with us at the end of our race?

An object that can be stolen or taken?

Unfortunately, happiness is the only thing that cannot be bought.

It cannot be stolen.

It cannot be moved or made in a factory.

Fortunately, happiness is not the same price as red bottom shoes.

Because it is free.

Have we ever stopped to look at the path we have chosen to reach this goal called happiness?

We run and we run.

What fascinates me is that we never give up.

No matter if we achieve the goal or not.

We give it our everything.

If only we realised that happiness is not a trophy that we achieve at the end of the race.

It is the race itself. It's the deep breath that we take in during our long run we call our life.

The small tumbles and turns we cross.

The perils and pain that we face.

The romance and rain that we feel.

The days and dreams that we wake to.

The sweet memories and the sins that we make.

It is the fear and the fame that we succumb to.

It is the decisions and the deceptions that we chose.

It is the knowledge and the questions that we skilfully craft.

Happiness is now. Happiness is you. Happiness is a choice we should make. Everyday. Every second in every way.

It's not in your wealth.

It's not in your health.

It's not in your size.

It's not in your stature.

It's not in your skin.

It's not in your surroundings.

Happiness is you.

Happiness is in you.

Living your life.

Loving your life and everyone in it.

Appreciating the tiniest of moments.

Smiling for the silliest of things.

Dreaming about the most daring things.

Standing tall for what you believe in.

Remembering the ones who stood by you.

By never forgetting your roots.

Adoring your flaws and abolishing others' insecurities.

Admiring other's capabilities.

Fighting against the need or the urge to judge.

Burning down the stereotypes.

And oh, so much more.

If only we knew this.

If only.

Dollar bills and dreamy cars can make one "look and feel" happy on the outside. Success is not where our real happiness is felt.

It's the simple smile from a random stranger walking by you, that tingling sensation you feel in your lips as they reciprocate the action.

That smile on your lips is where your happiness is.
So, run.

Run as fiercely as you can through your path for that path is your happiness.

JANET BRUSH

ABECEDARIAN ABOUT RHETORINARIAN

A study of
Big ideas,
Concepts of Rhetoric, such as
Dialectic,
Ecphrasis, Enargia,
Fallacy.
Gorgias and Aristotle arguing about
Hyperbole and hypotaxis.
I am drowning in Artificial Proofs.
Justice or injustice – refer to
Kairos to decide.
Logic or Logos – what’s the difference?
Mimesis? Imitation or reality?
Nominis fictio – aka
Onomatopoeia.
Pathos, logos, ethos – three pillars of Rhetoric.
Querimonia – complain, complain! Stop already!
Repetition, repetition, repetition – so much of it.
Synecdoche – a form of Metonymy.
Tautology of terms.
Utis – nobody commits so many
Vices of language as I do.
Wondrer – Puttenham’s parado-
X [no entry in the handlist for X]
Y? Why so many terms?
Zeugma – a kind of ellipsis. HELP!

September 5, 2019

SARAH CARRUTHERS

Yellow Spots

Do you see us?
Yellow spots swaying in the wind.

Beneath your feet,
We notice you,
In the setting sun.

But you are not above us,
As you believe.
The setting sun
Is on both *you* and *me*.

AMBER CHINN

Mirror Images

I slip past you and I worry
that my breathing releases
memories you've forgotten.

I worry my feet follow the same roads
from when you knew me.
That every step is a crack in the foundation
of the time I have left, that I carry myself
into the future wearing the same clothes
you left me in, my head always
looking back.

I worry that the fractures in my spine
will spread until I collapse
laying in the dirt until I become it.
Never having left my mark,
Never reaching the end of the path,
laying on the ground looking
at the light just out of reach

I worry that my breath will always
be contaminated by you, that I
will never learn to grow or forgive.
Sometimes I think I grow rotten,
I spit green fungus into napkins
and imagine that's me scraping
my insides clean.

I worry
If I cut myself open to take out the stones
The moss will point me back to you
I worry some days that I might
have to break these ankles.
otherwise I might never stop running.

I worry I'll never empty myself of you
and in the mirror
where you always preyed,
you'll still be there
waiting

Forgiveness

I have no proof
Only my hands are stained red
my memory grey and muddled
I know I have committed sins that I've forgotten
I have lost myself many times
I have a bruising wretched ache inside
that I am ready to slip back into
I am unfamiliar with my skin
It betrays me, lashes out against me
I can only assume harms or trauma or weakness
but I have also transformed many times
Shapeshifted through my wounds
I know I am capable of growth
I know that there are miles ahead of me
I know that my body has forgiven me
even in the pain, even here
Where I am bearing it
Where I persist

WYNNE CLARK-SQUIRE

Dear Red Dress,

I'm sorry Red Dress.
You stalled in store fronts until I plucked you out
persuaded by pockets and visions of swirling romance.
But I've never shown you a good time.
You impress the boy but
I realize I want to end it on the

Fourth Date: we wait at a bus stop for a bus
we won't take. We touch thigh to thigh, intimate
strangers arriving to dinner late.
The pictures don't distract us enough, our clasped
knuckles look fake.

At home I slip you off
and breathe in regret.
I'm still hungry.
You live on a hanger until

Valentine's Day: dressed in you and icy skin
red lipstick cracked in the slits of my lips, sickly
smile and smudges on glass. The company is sour

we sit in expired conversation. But

let the monster say something nice to you,
accept his compliment.
Allow the prattle to poison the air and choke on his wooden
words,

the splinters will come out eventually.

Alone I peel you off
and breathe out contempt. Scoff at the tangle
of red and stick you in

The Closet: you sit stagnant. No point to parade
you around in frigid forbidden air.
Your long linen tail caresses the floor, kissing dust
adorned with deep valleys of wrinkles
that can never be ironed out.

Will you forgive me? Forget the world you've witnessed?

You can keep your silence, Red Dress.
I'm told it gets better.

CORA DEWITT

A Reflection

How beautiful it is, the glass that shatters,
Like a mind, tired and lost, which scatters,
I witness, in silence, your pain,
As you search for the pieces, in vain,

I see the distance you run for me,
But my words are lost to the rising sea,
My falter, my doubt, my hesitance,
Mistaken for angry resistance,

I fear even if I ever did speak,
The meaning would seem too weak,
Because the words fall in the air,
And with their weight bring despair,

These wounds you seek to heal,
Are not those that you can steal,
It is a burden, a shame, a constant fear,
A rite, an honor, a victory to cheer,

My bane, my birth, my battle to fight,
Until I can sleep in peace at night,
Your endless comfort and support,
Has in no way left me short,

But in this I must stand alone,
So that I might possibly atone,
You have kept me safe all these years,
And chased away all that I fear,

I know how much you love and care,
And that my request is just not fair,
Your instinct to protect,
I will never reject,

But though, above all, I fear her,
This is between me and the mirror.

AUDREY GREEN

Requiem for a Suburban Dream

We purchased this objectivity
Being born inbred and informed by free samples,
Not built for reality but for realty and ratings
And raw burger meat.

Is this insight not as painful as promised?
I've always been one for dissolving into the earth,
My exhaust pipe exhaustion curbs the death penalty
So I lie colicky and crucified in this subletted condo.

In the end we make a game of guessing whose will to depart
Will get us out of this department store, deserters
Dreaming and digging up dirt along the pristine shoulder
Subjected to the cerebral smell of sought-after suburbia.

As indebted as this highway is, to Freud, to Marx, to TJ Maxx,
I object to being its abject object cast away to the sale section
Taking the next exit in a pimped-out Mercedes—
Can't you see? Dirt underlies us
Rotting while we speed.

KAVITA KRUEGER

Reparation

Our Father who art in

Heaven is a place that I thought.

I knew corded tights and loose braids.

I sat in between.

The wooden benches.

With my knees down.

Willing.

Praying.

For everything I thought.

I didn't have.

Wouldn't be and needed to.

Become.

hallowed be Thy

Name?

I am a martyr of nothing - I keep losing.

Myself, collapsing.

Under crosses I didn't know I was carrying.

I was told that this was the way.

To everything I wanted but I didn't notice.

I was digging.

Down.

I am no longer a face my God finds familiar.

I don't even remember which one I am.

Praying to.

thy kingdom

Come home you beg.

But this task is not of ease I have heard.

Of things in this world that will take.

Anything from you but nothing.

Nothing I've learned is worse.

Than time.

But even time can bargain.

thy will be

Done in I must forgive myself.

For all I have.

Have been and didn't.

Become.

Lighting a candle against the dark.

I told my god I was sorry at the same time.

That they said it.

To me.

on earth as it is in

Heaven is a place I knew very well.

It spoke my name and knew.

The palms of my hands.

The arch of my back.

The taste of my tongue.

Now, cradling.

My skull, soft and tender.

It grants me entry into itself one last time.

A final baptism.

Before I decide to.

Let go.

On material belongings and their emotional weight

I'm wearing a forest green jacket in

the cold of my mum's jeep.

Big wheels amplify every

crack in the road every

uneven edge.

"are you okay?"

"yeah"

I lie and

the springs of her car ache under its weight but

I know her own shock system would do much worse on impact

of the truth.

I'm wearing a forest green jacket with

my hands buried deep in the pockets.

My friends smoke in the dark with

their laughter echoing through the night, blistered

my lips beg me not to join.

I smile.

It aches.

I'm wearing a forest green jacket while

my father screams with his lungs full.

"why are you not saying anything?!"

He doesn't know that the words I grip
between my teeth would split
skin, that they would rip
the tongues right out of
heads.

"you don't understand –"

"what the fuck does that mean? just stop lying!"

I can't.

I'm wearing a forest green jacket as

I explain how

I didn't do enough how

I am selfish

selfish

selfish

as I have always been and

have always let myself be.

"stop.

what do you mean selfish?

you

didn't have to fix people.

you

were sad too.

you

were fifteen.

Right?

Has anyone ever told you that?"

I no longer own a forest green jacket.

-

JANIK LEBLANC

Forever is a long way to go

Sitting under a tree of elm,
I cannot stop staring at thee!
In the shadow of this tree,
I look out at the brightly lit obscure.

What is this thing my eye clings to?
I strain and yet I cannot know,
For the light shields thee in its shadow.
And for that I adore it so.

Abandon my refuge under the elm?
No! I've not learned to be so bold.
Why gamble only to behold?
But the unrevealed beckons to be seen.

Alas! I give in to temptation,
And get on with my inquisition.
Out from under the elm I emerge,
Forever is a long way to go.

JAMES LEE

“Burial Urn”

To mold with clay is to mold with dust,
to craft from dust is to craft from
 labyrinth. An act of violence
to wonder what it means to take away.

To toil in the fields of cropless dirt,
to try to fill a vase with clumps of soil.
To ponder if the pieces know their place.
 Figures on the clay are dust,
too.

To mold with dust is to mold from our fathers,
to mold from our mothers and our friends.
 Still, one must try
to hope,
to fulfill what they had wanted.

To gaze up,
 up at guilty cliffs of history,
to look out over the great distance.
To dip your hand in the universe,
 a universe that is already you.

TIFFANY LEUNG

Lacerated Heart

at gunpoint,
p*AndeMoNium* ensues;
stopper *chimes*, flames **explode**

a sickening
crack
and stained bones *rattle*.
a siren **s h r i e k s**, and

a hand at the throat.
[*soundless*] lips.
trut-(LIES), you say

melodious voice, shiny projectile
deeper *cracked* disj oin ted
twisted gunpowder

leeches suck
lungs-mangled breath
why?

one ho le, two ho le s
scarlet (liquid) pools the hands
punctured more and *more* until

spider-lilies bloom, petals of blood
and nothing left, but

a lacerated heart.

This poem was first published in Mnerva Literary Journal.

TRISHA MALIK

glass: building/pink: sky

glass building,
and sky reflected:
pink sky
you, against the sky
you against the building
of glass
you,
 in the sky
writing you*
in a building in the sky
holding sky
 you
 building
you in my sky:
pink,
in a building
glass, in my hands

found,
in my indian–
sky

glass, you
crumbling

in my sky, you:
pink,

in my fingers you,
hands,

in my glass see:
home and pink and touching
in my building
in my sky

you

*(till words look like you and you, words)

KASSANDRA MORIARITY

“My mother’s jet-black hair”

My mother’s jet-black hair drips ink and bubbles into the kitchen

sink. Hawaiian foam peaks between my fingers,

as her knees rest on a foot stool—

the kind of stool meant for children

whose legs dangle off of doctor’s office chairs.

She’s propped up on her elbows.

Each faded suntanned wrist clasps against stainless

steel rigid

and surrendered.

My palms continue to lather

Soap and suds burst over uneasy laughter

Suds and soap take away the grease that hugs her strands While suds

and soup steam mock us as they crowd my

nostrils

Ink drops, bubbles, dead hair

eased away

down the drain with pools of steaming water.

But the steam—

Spits my spoken reassurance back at my eardrums
while it rises.

And ink drops and tears drip drop into the sink.

My fingers linger longer than is needed. They cradle
her tired neck for another moment more I've never
felt her delicate skull before Nor seen my hero
kneel to a children's chair

"That's good," she says.

I swathe her dampened hair in linen.

“That Couch”

That couch is a joke.

It’s

the type of place that

doesn’t just hold

dust from cat dander or

wet air from freshly washed hair or

blueberry bagel bits from busy mornings.

It’s

the type of place that can’t

let go of the laughter or

chit chat in lonely hours while

those late-night plane engines and thunderstorms

carry your mind away.

It’s the type

of place that weaves

those smiles from signing away Saturdays

to talk about Sundays and the days and the sun and how they matter

into threads of landless flowers—

the type of place under fire with light and desire while the grime

and green of vines and leaves hold your hands back home

in those alone stand-in homes.

It's the type of place that holds whispers of past disasters—

Airline crashes and planned massacres and those lands with less flowers and sun and days—

And they carry your mind away.

That couch is a joke.

It holds cat dander and laughter and

wet air from freshly washed hair and blueberry

bagel bits from those busy mornings after nights of thunderstorms

and plane engines carried your mind away.

It weaves smiles from Sundays and days and sun into landless

flowers while grime and green and vines and leaves hold your hands back

home...

while disasters,

chit chats during lonely hours that wasn't a planned massacre

but turned you into one of those landless flowers

that talks about Sundays and days and sun and needs it all to matter

because those vines and leaves looked like grime green when his desire

held your hands back until your land had less flowers.

at night,

those thunderstorms and plane engines

carry your mind away.

ALEX SCHOFIELD

Debris

Shuffling past debris, greying grasses, toes enter the haze, the hailed sterility.
I halt before the maverick Gods of penicillin and the dripping tubes, little lullabies of clarity drip drip drip,
gowned and pinned.
Patient patients, gazing through the four flats of white seeing everything as nothing.
Caught in a whisper, clutched into, held fast.
Building the day after day, compacting memories,
bricks of good times, bad times, walling us in, stack stack stack.
Walking into perceptions, a fragile compare and contrast.

The media is a news loop of again and again.
Market attacks, ammunition, storms and neighbours bringing cake and towels to old ladies,
bruised yet giggling. It takes a disaster to hear a fragile S.O.S.
Tapping my ears, agitating and disappearing, a knowing just beyond the dirty nail, evading the grasp.
It must be strong enough, enough to shield us from the gap, the canyon in the belly the rock
bottom, frenetic laughter is as good as it gets.

Upon Waking

I ask too much of the nights,
Flatbacked
the dust settles on the table, the pillows, the head and foot boards.
Each layer layers upon
writing its own chapter
illuminating my dark angles on parchment for no reader.
Poetry scrolled on the flat of my hip
thoughts encased by more thoughts upon waking.
Even squinting the message chafes.
Night over night I lay undaunted, still. Holding this fresh message on top of that
first figuring.
This room is a sentry. Minutes labyrinth through words into hours.
The poetic twitch of my tenth finger taps out time, not creating a stir. Tiny.

Not far away, the moon dogs are licking
the lifeline on her palm, panting.
They know her. Their moonlit requisition reaching places I can not.
Her room is no sentry.

My own fingers dithering, flitting
scratching the night's useless offerings
the cotton blessings
the harvested curses in this hideyhole of mistakes and contritions.
And turning to you
Vengeance God who may scatter your sweet and generous petals at some perfect
moment.

I outstretch.
Crawl down the stairs, four-pawed and two-headed
into that basement vast expanse, flat
concrete floor cold on the paw wet on the cheek.

Chasing white kittens some kitten-palmed, some slight as little wind-ups
tiny spits of laughter
soon to sputter, out of steam.
Shadowing them, but not enough to catch neither a where nor a when
to funnel an understanding into this wired jaw.

I swing with a thin twinned twig, bending.
At its apex, a crescent moon wrapped in muslin
Tips into mourning.
Just ahead of me two small windows so high up.
Unreachable, but for the beautiful Gods. I hear them through the glass,
Their continuous prayers chanting through the dreams of the receptive.

Nights transition too slowly. The gentle wolves are the most dangerous of all.
I may ask too much of them.

DEVARSHI SHAH

Her

My mamma was the best.

I looked up

Her round belly, big hips, calloused hands her soft nose, her hard face

I would stuff tennis balls down my shirt,

to look like her.

I could find her in a crowd

I knew how she walked.

She held me when I cried

She wouldn't talk to me for days when I was bad.

She had answers to everything.

Where are we going?

You'll know soon enough, baby.

When can I watch TV?

When the cable is paid for.

How far are the stars from our house?

As far as they are from any other place.

Sometimes she wouldn't give me an answer, told me I wouldn't understand.

When is dad coming home from work?

By the time the top of my head

could reach her armpit,

it was Monsoon.

I had stopped caring whether dad

was at dinner or not.

The silent treatment didn't phase me as much.

I wonder if she cared whether dad was around.

In the mirror, I could see we had the same eyes.

I even wore bras now, just like her.

Now that her arms were eye-level,

I noticed they were not big and firm like they seemed when I was shorter;

She could no longer pick me up.

I stopped asking her questions.

In the early summer before college,

I felt shy sitting by mamma's side.

She seemed a stranger.

What could I say to her?

I didn't know what to talk about.

Looking down, I could see the stray whites

that she had missed with her dye.

Her high cheekbones were an odd contrast with her drooping skin

I didn't have to say anything, she broke the silence When will you come back?

I don't know, after the school year?

Will you visit in the middle?

I'll try to, mamma.

How far is the college from the house?

About 12 hours driving or a 2 hour plane.

I wondered what other things she didn't know.

EMMY SHARPLES

A Poem of Two Siblings

Did your restless eyes ever stop watching for that chance,
to wander with naked feet along a cloudless dirt road
and find a hidden creature's humble abode
that no other humans were free to glance?
As children you never walked, you only knew to prance.
While older, I toddled behind, my feet were slowed
far from you, I could not see what path you took on that crossroad
waiting for years, without you, I did not know how to advance.
Until, by chance, my weary mind settled among the trees,
where silently it learned to sprout new leaves
into a canopy so full, I did not notice that it blocked my sight from you.
Now, I sit and wonder if you can smell the same fresh breeze
that my courageous mind receives,
or if your bulging eyes sunk while mine, though slower, grew.

1. Chance: my restless eyes grasped adventure with all their fiery might
2. Naked: eyes left bare, no longer disguised with reflections of lies they looked back to find you
3. Hidden: covered in a canopy of trees you were no longer in my view
4. Free: though I escaped to the wind I never stopped wishing that one day we could reunite
5. Walked: as a child you steadily moved, with your tight legs you always stayed upright
6. Older: always taller and stronger, I tried to study you as we both grew
7. Far: though when I skipped ahead on that branching dirt road you withdrew
8. Waiting: for years I sat on the other side, wondering if you were alright
9. Settled: waiting for you, my home became that dingy dirt road
10. Silently: rising with hopeful eyes each morning for just a glimpse
11. Blocked: obstructed by the trees I realized I was stuck
12. Breeze: until one day, in the crisp winter air, a hint of you flowed
13. Courageous: and I fought to get back to you through branches and dips
14. Bulging: rewarded with your silhouette, my craving eyes were struck

EMILE WEBER

Tapestry

May stick and stones break my bones but
words will always pick me apart

I was told, I'll grow to finery
become a grown tapestry
Yet, all I have to show are frayed edges
I've become fraught, no longer taut
My will sags like the loose threads I see
no value in reweaving
since all the world will focus on are the
mistakes in the thread count

I can't help but wonder
if it weren't for the cruel words
that cut me as scissors cut the string
What images would be depicted?
What stories would others make of me?

Would it be that of a lush forest
as ancient as history, wise with oak
Or rapids tearing through carts foolish
enough to tempt the waters
Most likely that of a fool
hanging by his feet
after stepping on the toes
of a none too kind king

When I look at my tapestry
I can't help but feel
disgust and disappointment
All I see is a tangle of knots
with no clear indication on
what it should all mean

Yet, friends and strangers alike
claim to see strength and resilience
A brilliance that shines through most
hardships
I don't know what combination of
symbols and imagery
could pull off such an illusion

It might simply be the case that I am forever
doomed to face the backside of
this tapestry

I guess I will never know
how it will turn out



FICTION

ALEX AFFONSO

Us vs Them?

Quickly and quietly, I crouched my way towards the broken military jeep while holding my SR-25 straight up beside my head to help lessen the weight. I poked my head out to scout the area, but the field was shrouded in shadows. All I could hear was my own heavy breathing. The tower seemed empty, so I advanced. As I approached the bottom, however, a dark shape emerged from behind a short wooden wall, his rifle pointed at me; I raised my gun, but not quick enough—“Ow, fuck!” I screamed.

“Sorry,” he said, raising his hand apologetically.

“It’s all right,” I lied, then limped my way back towards the tables where my brother and two of his Canadian friends were waiting. It didn’t take long after that before my other brother and my attacker—another Canadian—returned as well. Once everyone was back, we gathered around in a circle.

“So, what are the teams?” another Canadian asked. “Us versus them?”

Although what might have separated us in their minds might have indeed been our shared parentage as opposed to our shared nationality, it doesn’t change how we were divided into two distinct groups because of something we had no control over. But that has always been the case. Back when my brother and I were still Brazilian boys playing soccer with the other kids in our condo, we always ended up on the same team. What bothered us wasn’t that we got stuck with a bad player; we were both decent at soccer—though, of course, I was better than my brother). We just wanted to mingle with them, to forget for a second that we were siblings and to enjoy being part of a larger group. But the other kids insisted on grouping us together, up to a point when we didn’t even discuss the teams anymore. It was always us versus them.

Once I set foot in Canada for the first time, my head was filled with fantasies of what life would look like from now on—most of them drawing from Hollywood high school movies. I pictured myself taking books from my locker while talking to a white, blond guy with green eyes, and daydreamed about posting a picture on Facebook of me hugging and kissing a white, blond girl with blue eyes. In my head, what awaited me in Canada was utopia. Then came the day when I walked into a North American school—like the ones I had seen in movies my whole life—for the first time. I saw the lockers, the cafeteria, and the pale white kids; I was terrified.

A few weeks later, I had made a few friends: a Korean, a half-Russian half-Israeli, a Japanese, a Philippine, and a few Canadians. I spent most of my time with the first two. I remember watching the group of "cool kids" (most of them, or all, Canadians) talking amongst themselves while thinking: *what would it take for me to become one of them?* Approaching their circle felt impossible. Even if I somehow managed to be included in their group, I feared they would soon grow tired of my accent and limited vocabulary and start excluding me. Therefore, I stuck with the immigrants.

But then, throughout my high school years, I made many Canadian friends. One of them became close friends (maybe too close) with me during the last month or so of junior high; once high school started, he grew the habit of pretending I didn't exist. But that was okay. I still got to spend my lunches with three Canadians and the Korean previously mentioned. Then the first three had a fight amongst themselves, and our group was reduced to three members: me, the Korean, and one remaining Canadian. We lasted until the end, though the latter sometimes also grew the habit of forgetting my existence—and yes, he had blond hair and green eyes. Other than that, I had many temporary Canadian friends, none of which I still have contact with today.

Then came university when I thought I had finally achieved my Canadian dream. The classes I attended were just like the ones I saw in the movies, especially the lecture halls. Also, starting in my second year, I went to Tims every morning to get a French vanilla or hot chocolate—sometimes a Boston cream as well. What's more, I eventually made a few Canadian friends, and we did much of what I had seen young adults doing in those Hollywood films: studied together in libraries, played video games, went out to eat. But, most importantly, I had a Canadian girlfriend. She wasn't blond, nor did she have blue eyes, but I did post a picture of us hugging and kissing on Facebook. By the end of our second year at Dal, we were looking for an apartment together. I thought I had it all figured out, that life was taking a turn for the be—then Covid happened.

The Canadian life I had worked so hard to build shattered before my eyes. Trying to piece it together proved pointless, at least while the pandemic persisted. All I was left with, in my isolation, were memories of a better time. Then my brothers and I bought airsoft guns and developed the habit of shooting at each other for fun. Soon one of them invited his Canadian friends to play with us and, like a light at the end of a dark tunnel, I slowly became friends with them. The life I had lost was once again within my grasp, but then—

“Us versus them?”

It became clear to me at that point that I would never be a part of their “us.” I swore an oath to the Queen and have a *Certificate of Canadian Citizenship* signed to my name, but, to Canadians, I will always be one of “them.” If you’ve read this far, you’re probably thinking I’m part of some minority, but I’m not—I’m a white, straight man. I feel like an outsider, but I look like one of “them.” How, then, can I find an “us”? This question bothered me for years and years until I finally realized the answer was right in front of me the whole time.

“Sure,” I said, then walked with my brothers to the far end of the airsoft field.

It was us versus them.

The Gallows

I had never thought how different the view would be from on the gallows. The rope is rough and coarse around my neck. I am scared. Not because of my imminent death, but because of its implications. That Reverend Thompson is punishing me for my relationship to my Lucy despite the good that it brought to the town. Reverend Thompson and these people below me don't like a woman straying too far from the flock for fear of lurking predators just beyond our safe pastures. However, the predators are so good at acting that the sheep below don't realise that a wolf wears the cloth before them. But my Lucifer, with his smoldering eyes, saw right through the reverend's act. That is why I fell for him. Unfortunately, I am away from my Lucy on this stage and all I see are the contemptuous eyes of the crowd. Their contempt ebbs and flows like waves onto a beach. These creaky floorboards groan under the weight of the people strutting about on them. Are these floorboards pleading for my release? Or, maybe just from theirs. We do both find ourselves under the boot of this town's false virtue.

"Esther Wellesley, any final words? Admission of guilt, perhaps? Our loving Father is merciful, and after all, He welcomes sinners and invites them to His table." Reverend Thompson smiles smugly to the crowd after those words escape his lips.

"Only that the Lord knows that I am innocent. And that I pray to God that He'll show mercy to my accusers." I try to put on a brave face, but the hangman tightens the rope as I speak, and my voice falters. The crowd laughs at my misfortune.

"Get on with it!" Shouts a voice from the crowd, followed swiftly by all sorts of "Harlots!" and "Whores!"

Strange that my alleged promiscuity matters if my crime is witchcraft.

"I am sorry to hear that Esther. I am sorry that you do not wish to cast out the unclean spirits inhabiting your soul. For what else could have compelled you to summon Satan last night in the forest?" Reverend Thompson's jeers resonate with the crowd's. He turns away from me and recounts to them how, "In the forest last night, I saw her, prancing about like some crazed sorceress. She danced around a fire, and in the darkness, beyond the outer limits of the fire's

light, I saw two glowing eyes staring back at her and a deep voice in a foreign, unrecognisable tongue echoed throughout the glade. I was shocked. Then, this morning when the Sheriff's team searched her house, they found this." He produces my red-leather book and the crowd gasps in surprise.

I keep my composure. My silence should shame them into releasing me. Afterall, I had helped them when crops were bad by showing them better places to plant, and it worked. I healed Goody Smith when she got that rash; I cured the butcher's daughter's green finger, and they all saw me extract that information from my red-leather book. But now, scorn alone emanates from the crowd. The crowd forgets how useful my knowledge is and they blindly trust Reverend Thompson's words that profiting from my Lucy's guidance is evil. They lap up his lies like pigs at a trough.

Suddenly, I hear the floorboards groan again. This time, from behind me; as if to warn me that the hangman is at the rope with his axe. Suddenly, my composure starts cracking. Suddenly, I don't mind sacrificing my dignity at this altar of death if it means a little more life. Suddenly, my Lucy's promises of autonomy don't matter. Suddenly, tears begin welling up in my eyes and then torrenting down my cheeks like a hard rain falling from the sky.

"Wait! Please! I don't want to die! I'm sorry! I'm sorry Reverend, for consorting with the devil! I'm sorry! I won't do it again!" I plead with the crowd to sway Reverend Thompson's mind and they look to him for guidance.

"See everyone, she finally confesses her crime." The reverend turns to me and continues, "was that so hard, Esther?"

When he walks right up in front of me the groaning floorboards scream out. We aren't on the stage anymore. Now, I am out in the garden, and I am cataloguing the growth of my potatoes and my tulips. I blink; and I am now in the forest with my red-leather book, cataloguing the way that my deer-friend eats, and defecates, and socialises. I think that they sense that I am of no threat to them. That is why they allow me to get so close to them. I blink; and I am rubbing an ointment on Goody Smith's red arm. My mother taught me how to make and apply this ointment despite my father's protests. He never trusted her more traditional ways. I blink; and I am quietly chanting around the fire as my Lucy speaks softly to me. He found me after the death of my husband. He was kind and he filled in the gaps of my mother's teachings. I hear a branch snap. Was that an animal, or something else that I just heard in the bushes?

I blink; and now torch light from outside my window awakens me from an uncomfortable sleep. Outside I see a mob. They say they know what I did. They say they know about Lucy.

“Wait! Plea...” The words catch in my throat because the moaning floorboards finally give way and I tumble down between them.

My blood rushes to my face, almost like it wants to escape my body. I start thrashing, kicking, doing anything to try to relieve the pressure from the noose. The crowd disperses after a few minutes. The hangman and Reverend Thompson leave as well and then I see my Lucy’s spectral figure appear in front of me. I knew he wouldn’t abandon me. A smile creeps onto my face and my breath leaves my body.

Fade into You

Aliyah seems far away at first, but then I see she's just pressed into the corner of our tiny bedroom, still in her pyjamas, shaking.

"What's wrong?" My voice sounds strange. It turns her face blank, and she slips out the bedroom door. I shove off the blankets and follow her. My voice cracks as I call into the darkness of our apartment,

"Ally, what happened?"

She's on our second-hand couch, not looking at me. I sit on the floor across from her. In almost a year of being together, I have barely even seen Aliyah look nervous. Her dancer's posture has caved in on itself.

She whispers, "You told me you didn't love me anymore, said no one wants me."

I exhale and move closer to her. "Ally, I was dead asleep – you heard me sleep-talking."

I watch her face; she is trapped in the faux moonlight that shines into our apartment from the street. I move to turn on the lamp, but her eyes widen. I stop. Minutes pass until she speaks.

"Your face and your body – they were completely different. I woke up and you had turned into this strange woman." She is angry. I start to turn cold.

"What did I - she look like?"

Aliyah finally meets my eyes.

"Older than us, maybe thirty. Short black hair. Blue eyes. Mean face."

I'm alone in a bar that I've never been to before. It's mostly empty, with a few clusters of older people drinking under the orange lights. Supposedly it's open mic night. A microphone and acoustic guitar stand on a raised platform in the corner. I wish someone would get up and start playing music – just so that there'd be something to focus on besides my aloneness. Having just turned nineteen, I barely know how to order a beer, much less seem confident as I sit by myself and drink it.

I gaze at the colourful label on the bottle. Three months into university and I still haven't made any friends. I chose a pricey, unpopular bar because I know I won't see anyone from school. My burgundy sweater is too heavy. I am sweating underneath it, but I don't take it off. As I stare at my untouched beer, I hear the hollow sound of someone picking up a guitar. I don't turn around – I pretend that I'm absorbed by thought, or that I'm not here.

I want to hold the hand inside you

I want to take the breath that's true

I look to you and I see nothing

I look to you to see the truth

The voice is low and feminine; I am pleased with myself for recognizing the song. I allow myself to turn around to see the person who is playing – wearing a navy jean jacket, head bent over the instrument. She looks up and we make eye contact.

Fade into you

Strange you never knew

No one else is looking at her. The older bar patrons maintain their speaking volume and stay turned away from the stage. They don't notice her, and I don't want them to.

A stranger's light comes on slowly

A stranger's heart without a home

You put your hands into your head

And then its smiles cover your heart

Her song ends. Surprisingly, I don't feel embarrassed when she sits down beside me.

"I saw you mouthing the lyrics," she chuckles. "You like Mazzy Star?"

I admit I only know that one song. Being near her makes me feel more sure of myself. I tell her my name is Adrienne.

"I'm Megan," she replies.

Megan stands up, walks behind the bar and grabs a beer from the fridge – the same one as mine. The bartender doesn't seem to care. She sits back down beside me. As we talk, my knee slowly travels to brush against her thigh.

We leave the bar holding hands and she doesn't pay for her drinks. Again, the bartender doesn't care.

"Are you a regular at that place?" I ask.

"No," she grins.

We sit on the fire escape of my decrepit dorm room. Megan smokes into the morning darkness. She has smoked the whole time we've been together, but I haven't picked it up – "that probably makes you feel superior to me, doesn't it?". Her dark hair has grown since we met, it brushes the collar of her jacket and touches my face when we kiss.

She mashes out her cigarette and reaches to hold my hand. I need to ask her the question I have been pushing down.

“Meg, why do you stay, even though you don’t have to?”

I wait for her to speak. Her silence isn’t concerning because it isn’t unusual.

“I missed out on so much,” she says quietly. “I don’t want to miss out anymore. I just want to feel like I used to belong to this world.”

My heart expands. I think about how her eyes narrow when she’s concentrating and how she laughs when she struggles to interpret the memes I show her. We kiss, but I can’t stop my next thought.

I don’t want to be with her.

And just like that, she vanishes. I stay out on the fire escape, crying, until the sun rises.

“So, you never knew if she was real or not?” Aliyah asks. We’re in our living room, holding mugs of cold rooibos tea, delirious from lack of sleep. It’s dawn.

“Well, I mean, other people remember meeting her – just ask Judith or anyone else on that floor. It’s not like I had an imaginary girlfriend before you,” I laugh.

Aliyah smiles grimly. “She seemed real enough to me last night.”

I feel shame squeeze my insides. Aliyah shifts to lean her head on my shoulder and closes her eyes. The alarm that reminds her to get ready for work goes off in the bedroom; she doesn’t move. She’ll have to leave soon, and spend the day preparing health shakes and cold-pressed juices on only a few hours of sleep.

“I’m worried that Megan might always be a part of me,” I say.

Aliyah nods her head against my shoulder. I think about how something like Megan could never have happened to her – not with her charisma and ever-expanding circle of friends. I’m scared, but I ask anyway.

“If that is true, do you think you could still love me?”

Without hesitating, she says that yes, she could.

KAVITA KRUEGER

Junction

She was one of the most popular girls in school, which was odd because I can't think of a single person who ever had anything nice to say about her. There were always rumors that she'd slept with teachers or had gotten plastic surgery done, that every tooth in her perfect smile was fake.

But even with everything said and passed around, she'd always been the girl that everyone wanted to be. I guess that's how it always is.

Tall, pretty, athletic, and smart. She was voted most likely to succeed, was invited to every party, and any boy would do anything to get with her although they'd deny it if you asked. Student council president, called teachers by their first name, never in complete uniform; always got her way, and never got in trouble. She was the 'it' girl. Our city's definition of perfect. Everyone knew her name, and she knew that.

I don't know what anyone's specific opinion of *me* ever was. I've never asked, and I don't believe I ever will. No one really paid attention to me at all anyways, at least in the beginning. I had always been on the sidelines, was average at school, and was probably a bit annoying. If I was known for anything, it was probably for staying out of people's way, especially someone like hers. So, I used to relish it a little bit, the shock on people's faces, whenever they found out that I was her childhood best friend.

We'd grown up in houses that sat a street over from one another's. I don't remember when we became friends, but it had something to do with the creek that ran through our neighborhood. It was a wide, zig-zagging creek that looked calm on the surface but was vast and rushing underneath. We would later find that to be a metaphor for a lot of things in our lives.

She and I used to pull on high rainboots and old clothing, and we would jump the fence that lined the water. Sticking to the edge, we would drown our boots in the mud and feel the pull of the current on our feet. And despite the numerous water-danger programs we would sit through in school, the both of us could always be found by the fast-flowing shoreline the next day. Looking back on it now, I think the oddest part of all of it was how little our parents paid attention to it.

During the winter, the water in the creek's culvert would freeze and you could walk on it. The black mouth yawning out of the roadside was where we'd spend most of the frozen season. Brandishing flashlights and our choice of rock, we would chip away at the thick ice, excavating treasures that had gotten stuck in the shallower passage; old mugs, pieces of cars – that sort of thing. We'd keep everything we'd find, and we'd put it in a box that we'd kept in her garage. It's probably still there.

It was during one of our last winters in the creek that we'd found the frozen mole. A star-mouthed mole had drowned beneath the ice, its body preserved in the icy tomb. I remember how unspoken it was that we were to dig it out. We spent hours working away at the ice around it before pulling its body out and wrapping it in a cloth. I don't remember how or where, but we'd buried it after that. I do remember crying.

We were friends for what felt like a long time back then. From ages 7 to 13, we were inseparable. At least outside of school. In school, we didn't exist in tandem, let alone in the same vicinity of one another; like two opposing magnets, you could never put us together. But to this day, I know that if anyone were to go to her house and look through her old family photos – they'd see me because I'm in every single one.

Our friendship didn't end in a cataclysmic way. It just slowly burned out when I realized how fucked up it was that she never told anyone she even really knew me. This always plays as ironic to me when I think about how years later, people across town would come to know my name for something too:

the person who'd known the most about Emma Cleaver.

*

In elementary school, Emma had been smart, wicked smart. In the summer before we'd entered high school, she'd been invited to join a 'streamline to medical school' summer camp. I remember because I'd applied for the same one and didn't get in, but I'd known long before this that everything I could do, she could do better. And there was resentment there, of course there'd been, but it was never towards her – it'd been against myself.

Things didn't change when we got to high school, not right away anyways. We weren't friends anymore, but I still watched her from a distance; I guess everyone kind of did, but not in the way I did. While they gazed in silent, unspoken admiration, I competed. So, when she went from talking about becoming a cardiac surgeon to changing into the business stream, I thought I was beginning to win some unspoken race. Then, as the years passed by, our academic successes began to work on an inverse scale.

But as the gap between us began to grow in every sense imaginable, I became beyond the point of noticing, let alone caring. I had garnered my own social status and friend group, until eventually the only time I even thought about Emma was when I saw her briefly at a party, or when someone was telling me another rumour about her that was going around. Our lives were completely and wholly disconnected. So, when she texted me one day asking to hang out, I almost said no.

That first time we sat on the cold tile floor of her laundry room, and we stared at the walls in silence before she suddenly started telling me things that gave an edge of truth to the rumours.

We ended up starting to see each other regularly again, but really only to dump our fragile secrets and complain about our friends to one another because our social lives rarely crossed in that way. Like passing grenades back and forth, promising one another they wouldn't explode. But it was like a type of confession, and we would go our separate ways until we needed to scrape ourselves clean again.

I don't remember how long we did this before she stopped showing up for school, which I knew because I'd been giving her drives in; she'd never gotten her driver's license, although I never thought to ask why. It would end up being another few months before I saw her again. It was raining out and she knocked on my door wearing a raincoat and rubber boots. She asked if I wanted to go play in the mud like we used to when we were kids. I was up to my neck in early admission applications for university, but I said yes anyways.

But we'd end up only being outside for only about 15 minutes before she told me that she was sorry and that she needed to go home; that she was on some new medication, that it made her hallucinate sometimes. She said felt sick, she said needed to lay down, she said she was sorry again. It was the first time I'd heard about any medication, but I didn't let her know that. I just said it was alright and that we could hang out another time.

That was the last time I saw her.

*

They found her drowned in the same creek we used to play in. Her body was trapped beneath the ice like the star-mouth mole.

I still see it at night sometimes. A nightmare, I guess. One where we are playing in the culvert, chipping away at the ice. And while I'm at one end, uncovering spoons and suspended rocks, she's at the other, shaking with panic, as she desperately tries to dig herself out. And she's screaming, screaming, screaming.

But I never turn around.



NON
Non-Fiction
FICTION

TARINI FERNANDO

Red and White Citizen

The ceremony was long and boring. I can't even remember what happened in that beige room. I know toward the end they got us all to stand up and sing "O Canada." When my family and I finally walked out, we stood in line to take photos with two red-suited Mounties.

"Congrats," they said. "You're Canadian now."

Congrats. Like your third-grade teacher wrote in red ink when you scored 100 on that math test. A test was all my parents had to write for us to become citizens. That and leave their home of 38 years, pack all our belongings in 10 suitcases, and fly across the world to start something new.

You're Canadian.

When a Mountie says those words, they cast a spell on you and poof! You become a citizen of this red and (mostly) white nation.

After being enchanted by Mountie magic, my family left the grey parking lot of the concrete office complex in Toronto and drove to Tim Hortons. What good Canadians we were, supporting our home-grown multi-billion-dollar-brand-valued coffee shop. My parents got me a BLT. I'd never told them before that I hated tomatoes—I just never knew when to bring it up—but that day I found the confidence. (Was it the Mounties' magic?) I peeled off the red mushy slices and looked at my dad.

"I don't like them," I said, holding up the pieces of tomato. My dad said okay and ate them himself.

Turns out the Mountie's spell is temporary. When we left Tim Hortons and went home, I still shared a broken closet with my brother and sister, and my family still lived in a tiny two-bedroom apartment. Being Canadian that night didn't feel much different from my non-Canadian status the night before.

And every night since I've had a question: how do I feel now? I still share a room with my sister, but we have more space. Space we take up on stolen land. Land we've helped colonize.

My family and I are Canadian citizens. We throw away tomatoes in our sandwiches and forget the history of bloodshed in the earth under our feet. We question our belonging, privilege, and power every night before we go to sleep because we have space in our minds to think of these things.

Sometimes I lay awake and wonder if what makes me a citizen is the same thing that makes you one. Do we share the same scattered thoughts about our relationship to the nation? Do you ask yourself if you belong, and if you do, what it is exactly that you belong to? I don't know if I want to partake in it. I don't know if it's too late.



OTHER
—→ *Other Works* ←—
WORKS

TRISHA MALIK

A Love Letter About (rather than “to”) Home

“You speak great English!”

I find myself mumbling a tired “thank you” to the white girl with perfect blonde locks. The bland co-worker. The confused first-year. The girl I’m developing an e-crush on. This is far from what I feel, though. *I am not thankful.* Time feels pressed up against itself now, like I’m living something I’ve already lived before. Something I will live again, this evening and then tomorrow. How strange it is, to not belong. How humbling. *How maddening.* How transformative. *How fucking annoying.*

Perhaps it’ll always be this way, and perhaps people like me will never know a true existence in these parts.

At least the ocean is everywhere here though, so when I’m tipsy it almost smells like a beach back home. And then I get to belong, for a second.



What if I stop missing,
longing for home?

What if this strange
land—a place that
doesn’t care all that
much about me—
becomes a home of
some kind?

Am I running away
from a problem with
my name plastered all
over it?

If we all leave for
strange lands, will
Bombay start to

combust? And disintegrate? And die?

“Are you Latino?” *Ha-ha, no.*

“You look so... exotic! Where are you from? Oh, India! Namaste! Say something in Indian - please?” *No.*

“You eat meat? Wow. You’re not religious? Is that allowed?” *Stop, please, now.*

Here’s what I have to say about where I come from:



Mine is a country that’s loud. Sad, crazy, bustling, bursting and full. It’s a world of technicolour madness. Of strange unions between hopelessness and hope, sun and rain. People are strange there, like they are strange in other parts. It’s a world of old friends, and friends who are old. Oceans, first loves and scars that come from, well, I really wouldn’t be able to tell you.

I will tell you though, that it’s a world of fucked up politics and so much poverty. But also, so much more. And that there’s a time during the monsoons when the city becomes literal mush and magic.

That you’ll never feel anywhere else, as you do there.

I don’t know if home can take up another name while Bombay’s still around. Maybe it can though, who’s to say. Maybe we belong to more than just one person, one origin, one place. Maybe we can have homes everywhere (and in everyone).

Bombay *is* lovely though. (Rain, and family and the holy land of all my firsts.)



EMMA SKITCH

Finding Where I am In the Words

My mind keeps my thoughts and memories hidden behind a thin veil. I can see their outline, and I know they are there, but I can't tell what they are. They float around and bump into each other, but when I try and take a closer look, all I see is static. A friend once asked me what my favourite memory was from when I was little. Everyone began spouting off stories of great adventures and summer days with ice creams in hand. But I had nothing to say. It felt like my memory had been blurred, smeared across my mind like ink that hadn't dried. I often wonder if the reason that my memories are just out of reach is because they are not really mine. All the past versions of myself are sitting behind that veil, hiding, and hoarding all of my thoughts and experiences for themselves. As though once the moment has passed, my memories become property of somebody else. Maybe we all are changing so constantly, so rapidly, that the people we were before are just strangers to us now, somebody that we once knew.

For this reason, I keep a journal. Well, I keep many. I keep one as a diary, full of the monotonous day-to-day of who did this and who said that. One is full of detailed lists, coded in colours with tiny boxes for me to check. But it could be argued that the most important one is the journal I bought at the second-hand store and covered in floral paper, filled with the words I cannot speak. It holds the thoughts that sit just in front of the veil. I let them pour out, using them to drag along some of my lost ideas, and for once, I feel like I have lifted the curtain. But while this book is an improvement upon the out-of-range tv satellite in my head, there are still so many times where I want to rip it up and burn it so that no one can ever find it. I hate almost all of my writing the moment I finish it. It's not until I have let it sit on the page, untouched and unread, that I eventually come around and put down the matches.

These books serve as my memory. A record of every feeling I have had that will be lost in a haze someday. Many of these scraps of writing are just that, scraps and pieces of ideas that were likely jotted down in a whirlwind of teenage emotions. It is hard to take a piece of writing seriously when it lives on a page sandwiched between a poem about love and a page covered with the singular word, "fuck". But I did find a poem that felt familiar, that felt true:

*"Not knowing how you feel
Is a feeling in itself.
You're lost,
Stuck,
Drifting through life.
Where do you go?
When you don't know what you want"*

I felt like these words had been written for me, the me that was reading them five years later. I could now see and feel these words and little thoughts. Like these poems had been wrapped up in a box and sent to the person I would become, the person I am now.

I used to write poems about boys. Boys who had never broken my heart, but who I wished had. I wrote down angry spoken words about problems I had never faced. I was a girl in the suburbs who wanted to write like she had experienced the world. I spun together a life for myself that I never had. I felt everything at a volume that cracked my world open. I read my words now, and I am sixteen again and hopelessly in love. I am that girl who loves flowers and Bon Iver. I am the girl that wrote all these words, she lives in these pages for me to uncover. These notebooks are me. They contain parts of myself that I don't remember. They connect me to that girl, the one that I was. They hold my heart and my mind; they are the string that holds the pieces of me, scattered through time, together.

I wish I could say that I find writing as simple as breathing, but that is not the case. It feels like I am in the middle of the ocean, and I am treading water. It would be so easy to simply stop and drift down deeper into the dark. But instead, I keep swimming, fighting my better judgment to let go. This feels like an accurate representation of my relationship with writing. It is exhausting as my hands cramp and my mind jumbles letters around like a juggling giant. I scream and throw tantrums in my room like a small child who cries for their candy. But there is no other choice, I have to write; if I don't, I will cease to exist, taking mouthfuls of saltwater that sink me down, down below.

I don't write for the same reasons that I wrote two years ago. I don't even write for the same reasons I wrote two weeks ago. I am constantly changing shape as my limbs, eyes, and mouth all morph into some new creature, just slightly different from the last. I write so I can find the parts of me I haven't heard from in years, to find the thoughts that I haven't yet met. And whether those thoughts are about eating ice cream in the sun or about the time I didn't get out of bed for a month, these are my thoughts, and I deserve to have them. To hold them, read them, and to know them. So, I write about the way I felt and how that feeling was never enough. I create myself with every stroke of my pen. I am on a never-ending search for who I was, who I am, and who I will be.

ISSUE 38

