

CULTURE

ESTD

MELBOURNE

2020

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Andrew Miller

Little Pilgrimage

At Carrick-a-rede, seabirds swarm
the air around the rocky islet.
Black-legged kittiwakes call out in summer
mating season, the same season salmon
spawn here in River Bush. Fishermen used
to catch hundreds each day.
Today, there aren't as many salmon to catch,
wild
pink thyme grows over white quarry and the
rope-bridge improved by local abseilers now
boasts two handrails, no gaps between slats.
One
at a time, tourists cross over,
each at her own tantric pace.

Andrew Miller lives in Virginia Beach, VA, and teaches secondary school English at a boarding school for boys. He studied Poetry Writing at The University of Virginia and earned an M.A. in the Humanities at the University of Chicago. He has poetry published in The Daily Drunk, and Leaping Clear; he has two poetry reviews published in EcoTheo. He lives with his wife, Hales, and their crested gecko, Toast.

To My Hoard of Treasure

Pile of gold, imperial
topaz of champagne and sherry,
old clay jugs of ruby
and sapphire, lapis lazuli
set of chess, and from the ocean
orange coral and pearl,
I fix my attention on you
less and less. You make me
anxious, on edge, upset,
my belly's inner heat
off-centre, unstable, and,
counting you, I can't
calm down. My lair smells like
death: phosphorous
and sulphur, but the next brave
boy who comes, head of dark
ringlets, God on his lips,
steel in his hand, can have
you —once he slices off
my horns for a trophy,
for proof that I'm dead. That
said, I'd like to shrink my
colossal wings, spinal frill,
forked tail, and, though I'm still
not sure how, breathe in
miniature with common
grackles, laughing gulls, and
sleep like a snake on a branch in
sun or a cool bed made of moss
and ferns.

Dave Clark

Pity the Fool

Circumstances beyond control
Reduce hard working and
Enterprising people
To the dole queue.

Social script challenged,
That toil leads to riches
And laziness to empty shelves and
stomachs.
If you have a go,
You get a (my)Go(v account).

I was beaten
At chess by a bedraggled man.
After three floggings
He smiled. He was the reigning state
chess champion.
And homeless.
A most brilliant mind
Under rumped and unwashed hair.

His story
Was my story.
Except for one detail.
Brutality took his home.
Luck sheltered me with parental rooving.

I pitied the fool,
Though the fool
Was brighter than me.

Took credit for success
That landed at my feet.
Shocked
Now the shoe is on the other foot,
Especially when
I struggle to afford the shoe.

Stiff Upper Hearts

Are our heroes the ones
who run

away
from hardship?

Shaming boys towards
a manhood that

avoids
droplets of eye moisture.

Programmed into
suppression,
stiff upper lips

forging
stiff upper hearts.

Strength faces hardship,
goes into the fire,

into
the emotion.

Dave Clark in an emerging writer-poet who does his living and breathing in Alice Springs. He works as a counsellor and enjoys reading, photography and giving voice to silenced stories. His poems have appeared in Verdant, Adelaide, Glow and read on 8CCC and ABC Radio.

Twitter: @DaveClarkWriter

Karlo Sevilla

Afternoon Snack

When we made love in the bedroom,
we may have appeared no different
from any couple on any porn video.
(Except we considerably kissed more,
which they don't do much in porn.)

That was twenty minutes ago.
Now we sit at the dining table;
our hair still wet from the shower,
soft sweet scent of shampoo in the air.

The shaft of sunlight
that showers down the window
and bathes your face
is numinous,
as if it paves the descent
of a white dove.

And the gentle way you break your bread
above your cup of hot coffee,
Eucharistic.

**Karlo Sevilla of Quezon City, Philippines is the author of the full-length poetry collection, "Metro Manila Mammal" (Some Publishing, 2018), and the chapbook, "You" (Origami Poems Project, 2017). Recognized among The Best of Kitaab 2018 and twice nominated for the Best of the Net, his poems appear or are forthcoming in various publications worldwide, including *Philippines Graphic*, *Small Orange*, *Radius*, *Matter*, *Eclectica*, *Collective Unrest*, *Minnnow Literary Magazine*, *Quince Magazine*, *Little Old Lady Comedy*, *Muse-Pie Press*, *The Last Leaves*, and others. He is a member of the *Rat's Ass Review* online poetry workshop.
Twitter @KarloSevilla2
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The Undoing

It seems like only yesterday when you told me, "We've become close enough that I'm confident you'll see it, clear as daylight, the moment it starts. It shall be visible not only in your mind but likewise to your naked eye: the first crack that will run, zigzag, from my hairline, down my forehead, and end behind either eyebrow."

Now here I am, speechless.

Forgive me, but I didn't see it.

Forgive me, but the first crack was too fine to see.

It seems like only yesterday when you told me.

They insist that I deliver a eulogy, as I was one of your closest friends, and all I can muster,

"I do not know if a man's coming to pieces is fast or slow."

Bethan Rees

When I write I

am sat on a lone boat, stagnantly
sat on earth

with no water.

I am confined to my vessel.

It starts to flood. Flooding letter,
“d”, “q”, “c”

to form a sea of sentences, rivers
of paragraphs,

and an ocean of metaphor.

Using my pen as an oar I can
travel the world from my little
boat.

Until I eventually become a small
dot

that joins the line of the horizon
where the sea then meets the sky.

Bethan Rees lives in Swindon, Wiltshire and has appeared in *Fly on the Wall*, *Atrium*, *Persephone's Daughters*, *Domestic Cherry*, *Amaryllis* and *Three Drops Press*. She currently studies MSc Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, runs Wellbeing Writing groups and can be found sharing wellbeing work on www.safeandsoundpress.com

Apostle John Chinaka Onyeche

I REASSURED HER

Tell it to the daughters
Born in the old city ways
That I am in love with you
My daddy's princess

She grew up tenderly
Loved and cared for
Each day like in heaven
As an angel she's dear

I saw her when truly
I was waiting for love
At the middle of the night
There she emerged as
Daddy's girl my shy guru

Have you seen brilliancy?
She's an embodiment of it
Great heart to discuss with
With few words, she writes

Let's celebrate the day we
First, let our tongues melt
In that cold darkness and
Our love shone lights up

The brilliancy I once seeks
For, now has embraced me
And I learn words each day
From every wit, she wrote me

She echoed from within me
Now I feel loved by this poem
Since it is dedicated to me
And in response, I reassured her

LOST BUT FOUND

In the midst of life's hills
Up from the ancient cave
Less survival than thought
Counted amongst few folks
Life emerges at last seen as
Lost but found

Valleys of sorrows hunt
Nights of sleeplessness
Series of ache nightmares
Less survival skills there's
Men lived to become heroes
Lost but found

Learn to live without many
Few are the most important
Men that have lived this side
Retelling their own life stories
How time flies and hope found
Lost but found

In my deepest darkness
I lay my hands on the rope
Laid down by fate and destiny
Up at every pant, I pulled out
From the depth of sorrow at last
I made my way upward view
Lost but found

John Chinaka Onyeche (Rememberajc) comes from the Etche LGA of Rivers State of Nigeria and is currently living in the city of Port Harcourt, The capital of the state. He is an undergraduate student at Ignatius Ajuru University Of Education Port Harcourt Rivers State, studying History and Diplomatic Studies. He has a passion for literary works and hopes to develop his skills more to serve the world at large Twitter.com @apostlejohnchin Iam_apostlejohnchin Instagram

Arun Jeetoo

SEPTEMBER 31ST

We rode the Santander Bikes down Millennium bridge at 2AM
But you disappeared.
October 32nd, we painted the garage marigold and the fences blue.
We had an alfresco and ate chicken curry in our hands, November 31st.
We watched Motown the Musical, on December 32nd, for our anniversary.
Went to a pool party, January 3rd, at your ex's place in Chelmsford.
Had my birthday on February 31st, and we summoned my grandmother's spirit.
Then, on March 32nd, you wanted to make a baby, but I wanted to play Scrabble.
April 31st, you celebrated your birthday without me at The 100 Club.
May 32nd, you turned your phone off all day at work.
Wednesday 31st June, you said you are staying at your mum's for a bit.
Saturday 32nd July, you came back for birthday sex and breakfast in bed.
Tuesday 32nd August, I heard your heart weeping for Lilly at night.
September 31st, I watch you two ride Santander Bikes down Millennium bridge at 2AM.
October 1st, you left me with me.

Arun Jeetoo is a poet and educator from Enfield, North London. He is a wanderer and a compassionate soul, known for his dirty realism style, provocative imagery, and dark humour.

His work appears in The London Reader and LUMIN Journal amongst numerous print and online magazines across the world. His poetry has also been placed second in the John Hopkins Prize (2016). His debut pamphlet I Want to Be the One You Think About at Night published with Waterloo Press is on sale right now.

Tweets @G2poetry

Instagrams @g2poetry.

WORDS ARE WEAPONS

What is Freedom of Speech now
but hatred and bigotry?

Responsibility
slips out the mouth
like discharged saliva.

Can responsibility exist
in a country that gives
everyone a voice?

Where tongues roll out slurs,
where teeth are malignant
and lips carry toxic words
from history to the present day.

I choose to believe that most people
are not bystanders but rescuers—but
Who can rescue you from the law?

Where the intention
is for minorities to disappear
from human history.

Leah Holbrook Sackett

What's Wrong with a Happy Ending?

Dick waited in the bar of Gate A, the Budweiser Brew House, with his carry-on tucked under his stool. It was nice to travel without the monstrous set of luggage that Noel and the kids incurred, which he was expected to carry. Finally, Rick came strutting down the terminal, with his charming grin already etched on his face telegraphing he was already three beers in. Dick ordered two more beers. They had enough time to get these down before they continued their drinking on the plane. Dick and Rick were headed down to Nashville for their friend Doug's bachelor party.

" Dick, are you ready to party? Doug is the last man standing." Rick said. and took a long pull of his Pale Ale. "We gonna get some?" Rick said, wriggling his eyebrows like Groucho Marx. He thought it was sexy and a sign of cultural depth. In reality, he came off as an itchy, creep.

Besides, recently graduated jailbait did not know who Groucho Marx was.

Before Dick could reply, "At least a happy ending? Right?" Rick said.

"Ah, I don't think so."

"Oh, come on."

"We're all married," Dick said.

"At least one happy ending," Rick whined.

Dick does not get blow jobs at home. He recently wondered aloud to Noel about what happened to the Tuesday Night Blow Job.

"Honestly, Dick, I was just trying to get you to the altar," Noel said while sorting dirty laundry for a family of four. That was the Tuesday before the Bachelor party.

Boarded, Rick swallowed a Xanax and inserted his earbuds. He zoned out for the next hour. Dick had forgotten his earbuds. Noel's comment ricocheted in Dick's empty mind and stomach, taking him down rabbit holes of doubt. He munched

on Rick's peanuts beleaguered with the concept of wedding festivities. Bachelor parties are a test of monotony and monogamy to come. It's the place where romance crawls to die. He pushed the haggard strippers from his mind. He thought about his own wedding preparations. His bachelor party was an elongated exercise in self-control. He felt he had passed the test. It was Noel who rang the death knell of romance with the bachelorette party where men were posturing, and women were degraded for participating. Sex was revealed for its showmanship and pageantry. Before anyone could say I Do, the romance was sucked dry as that cock in cousin Wanda's mouth. And don't forget the wedding shower, a party primed to kill romance prior to the sleazy Bachelorette party. Love began as a leaky faucet wrenched wider with the inundated supply chain of appliances with all the blenders, toasters, and knives one could want. The tools of marriage and day-to-day life spelled romance as S-L-A-V-E to the domestic goddess.

Noel picked all of our junk out by hand with a little scanner. She dragged Dick along like it was fun. He waded through the kitchen wares nodding assent to items he would never cook with or clean.

Dick had imagined ten years down the road. How Noel would wind up with all the worn-out kitchen gadgets and the kitchen, in a divorce. Her best friend sat as a stenographer of the wedding shower. She made a list of every item received for thank you cards, then filed it under D for divorce to make it easier for Noel to keep a tally of what was hers. Dick sat in the backyard with the rest of the men nursing beers. Dick shook with a sense of foreboding. He felt like crying over the waffle iron from cousin Wanda. Noel was flashing it in the bay window for him to see and approve. This was the foundation of married life, silent nodding. Was this where things had landed for Dick and Noel? Did Noel even have a cousin Wanda or was Dick's paranoia fantasy taking off with the plane?

"Welcome to Nashville," the pilot said.

Dick nudged Rick to wake-up. He had drooled on his shirt. No wonder with all the beers and the Xanax, he took pre-flight. Dick had to babysit the groggy Rick off the plane and over to the Baggage Carousel. Dick hoped Rick would rally in time for the festivities tonight. He, for one, was in the mood to party.

Doug and Chad, Doug's local friend, picked Dick and Rick up in a SUV limo. Celebrations were already underway. This time Rick popped his wife's Vyvanse. Usually, Dick would become anxious, not tonight. He bummed a Vyvanse off of Rick and waited for the magic to begin. Steak dinners might be creating a load barrier to the Vyvanse consumption. Dick bummed another Vyvanse from Rick. This time, they all did before they headed into the first strip joint. This place was full of high-end strippers—the club had a jacket dress code. Chad, Doug's Best Man, had previously gone to Goodwill and purchased a pile of sports coats in a variety of sizes.

The ladies inside could absorb singles faster than one could imagine. Once Dick was asked to stop dancing on the stripper pole, it was suggested they go to a more accommodating club. The SUV ride was down three jammed city blocks. The four men had lost track of their beers and shots. This new club had a swanky Austin Powers feel. It was uncertain if this was meant to be trendy or if it had been that long since this place had a makeover. Either way, the deafening music and flat-screen TVs' running loops of porn was a decidedly marked move downwards in the strip club arena. Chad suggested lap dances all around. Rick reminded Dick to get a happy ending if the girl offered it. Ginger, with obviously artificial red hair, was showing her roots. She led Dick to the back and inside a booth with a loose hanging door. Dick hesitated before he sat down. He wished he had a black light; then again, maybe he didn't want to know this booth's secrets. The lap dance started with Dick's hands raised in an arrest; with all the drugs and alcohol, would he be able to get it up.

"Would you like a happy ending?" Ginger asked.

"Ah, I don't know about that. This was fine," Dick said.

"Oh, come on, Dick. I'm getting signals that you need a little release. It's only an extra \$50. \$75 to swallow."

Dick exited the booth and returned to the guys.

"Hey, we were thinking of hitting another Titty bar with younger girls," Doug said.

"But I already blew my wad. I don't know if I got another one in me," Dick said

"You got a happy ending?" Rick said. He was incredulous.

"Dude, you're married," Doug said.

"I thought that was what we were doing," Dick said.

"Holy Shit, You fucking dog. I can't believe you were the one to stoop so low," Rick said.

Back in the SUV, Dick began to feel his cups. Sinking into the sports coat two

sizes too big, he analyzed his actions, and he did not feel remorse. In fact, Dick felt vindicated. He felt free of Noel's empty caresses, and he wandered into the lust of his evening. Luckily, Dick found a bartender that sold Viagra for \$20 bucks a pop. The release he felt with Ginger had washed away. He was trying to bust a nut again with anyone giving a happy ending. He pursued the lust-driven night with the lazy, addictive zealotry reserved for a game of Candy Crush. Dick was on the edge of a sobering thought. He advanced his night with oiled-up touching, but each stripper's approach left him feeling ill. The idea of Noel made him sick, too.

Leah Holbrook Sackett is a short story writer. Her debut book, *Swimming Middle River*, was published with REaD Lips Press in 2020. Additionally, her short story, *The Family Blend*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize with *Crack the Spine*. Leah's work has won various awards such as the Gold Award in Art Ascent, Two Sisters Publishing Contest, and she was the recipient of the Institute for Women and Gender Studies: Creative Writing Award. Over 50 of Leah's stories have appeared in literary journals. Learn about her published fiction at LeahHolbrookSackett.website.

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Vineetha Mokkil

Moon Song

He found her trapped in his net at dawn.
The forest was still asleep, the horizon
softly brightening. He had caught many
an animal before—some he sold to the
highest bidders at the market, the rest he
roasted over the fire or cured and saved
for the dark winter months. A man needs
meat to keep his body running. An empty
stomach is a killer. A lonely heart, you
make your peace with.

After freeing her from the tangled net, he
scooped her up in his arms and carried
her all the way up the jagged path to his
house. She was feather-light. Her skin
glowed like the moon, pale, chalk white.
A slim green band was wrapped around
her wrist. He couldn't tell if this object
was a piece of jewellery or a talisman.

She slept all day. Twelve hours later, when
her eyelids fluttered open, a sigh escaped
his lips, a weight lifted. Words flew out of

her mouth like delicate-winged moths.
Her language swirled in the air between
them—a mist that left him unmoored.

He pointed at the wound on her forehead,
bruised red, turning black. “Does it hurt?”
he asked, applying a salve with his
fingertips, keeping his voice to a whisper.

She blinked twice and he took it for a
‘no’. Blink once for ‘yes’, twice for
‘no’—he asked for nothing more elaborate
than that from her.

Her wound healed in a few weeks. Her
pale skin stayed the same, but her stride
quickened, her smile bloomed. She
sprinkled meats with herbs he had never
tasted before. Brewed a dark, spicy broth
that warmed his bones. He heard her
humming a tune under her breath in the
kitchen. Her song quickened his pulse.
Her voice caressed him like summer rain.

Summer of joy, winter of warmth. Who
needed words when their bodies could do
the talking? Her lips were ripe berries,
softer than snow. Her kisses left him
begging for more. In the light of the
moon, she shone like a vision, pale and

luminous. The band on her wrist stayed on her wrist. He never saw her take it off.

Because she couldn't speak his language, his questions bounced off her like water off a lotus leaf. Night after night, questions bubbled up inside him. Night after night, doubt gnawed at him. He groaned, buried his face in her hair, and breathed in the strange scent of her mysteries.

Slowly, answers stopped mattering. His questions faded away like autumn leaves. She planted a garden in the sunny patch behind the house. Flowers sprang up at her touch, buds bloomed. She never learnt his language, but she taught him a song whose meaning he couldn't understand. The tune got stuck in his head. He hummed it when he was out in the forest setting traps and tracking prints. He hummed it when they held hands under the moon.

Vineetha Mokkal is the author of the short story collection, "A Happy Place and Other Stories" (HarperCollins). She received an honorary mention in the Anton Chekhov Prize for Very Short Fiction 2020 and she was shortlisted for the Bath Flash Award in 2018. Her fiction has appeared in *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *Barren*, *Spelk*, *Fictive Dream*, and "The Best Asian Short Stories 2018" (Kitaab, Singapore).

Dog Cavanaugh

Learning Mode

Shelly had suggested they buy the electric blue tent with signal red tabs and signal red seam tape. He chose neon orange with no contrast because it had been his brother's favorite color. In the checkout at Walmart, she goggled her eyes and flicked her head away and away. "You need to listen to me better," she said. "Color matters beyond favor."

Even though they were out in public and he loved her more than he ever thought possible, Groznick guffawed noticeably. He wanted to be unobtrusive with this humor and not insulting. But he was also embarrassed and didn't exactly know why.

She told him she might as well wait outside if he was going to be that way. He finished the shopping alone in line and tried not to feel like a complete ass. It was true, anyway, that his brother had died the year before, and the closer Groznick's

brother got to death, the more he talked about the importance of the color orange.

Already there's the water sound of cars slopping downhill. He watches a brown mist trickle in through the pores of their tent—early morning dirt and smoke mixed, maybe, with hydrofluorocarbons and benzene. As he rolls onto his back and begins to escape the sleeping bag, he decides summer morning heat could actually be a form of electricity. Tilting left to admire Shelly, he inhales her sleep breath and blinks as sections of her face glow orange. He does his best with the zipper opening to the tent while kneeling, near-naked, wondering if she really, truly loves him at all.

The line of cars rolls by at the bottom of the hill. He stands in his skivvies, a morning boner in hand requiring patience. After it calms, he delivers a gleaming arc of first urine in the direction of the cars. This is something he's very proud of, this peeing in his girlfriend's family yard every morning with all those cars way at the bottom of things rolling out of the hills heading down to work in the city or beyond, maybe near the ocean. The end of the arc splashes gently onto her father's imported Mediterranean sod, sparkles to foaming warm pilsner trailing in the direction of the whole world of cars.

Standing there, he decides he needs to admit to Shelly that the blue tent would have meant waking better, a luscious slow-motion feeling, maybe even a sense of flying. She had everything planned out for them and saw all the moves required to win. She had a broader and better view of the world. It seemed like he was supposed to fit into her plans. Why question her? Such a funny form of

satisfaction admitting to Shelly he was dumb-shit wrong. It is, he might admit, so important to remain in learning mode once you think you've found the girl for you.

Dog Cavanaugh is an Afro-Irish Quaker American author. His stories have appeared in New World Writing, Bull magazine, Thirty West's Elevator Stories, Mikrokosmos, and Philadelphia Stories. You can track him down at <https://dogcavanaugh.com>

Mehreen Ahmed

Chasing A Dream

I am old. But I wear a slippery, silken skin without a single crease. I carry a great many twigs, logs and sodden leaves. I bear boats and swords and house swordfish, home to spoons, plates and glasses. Gold, and silver of priceless trinkets. I witness listless stories of storms and floods. Human dramas played out upon my body. Great tragedies, even comedies sometimes upon my breast, cherished ephemera, jewelled bridal cavalcade of lost arks. Destruction of land, giving way to new ones across the other side. New farms yellowing, new laughter ringing, new loves budding, on the far stretch of the alluvial soil.

Then one day, the drama takes a turn as I bend around the lofty gums. All is going smoothly on the precious, fine land. There is a thud. A branch falls off. Splosh, Splish, Splash. I cave in, a moment, pirates are on the run. A sepulchre is lowered. It touches the bottom of my gut. That the pirates mutter, not enough, not enough is taken from the new land. A new bride's home has been ransacked. Her bridal Jewellery in the casket; bales have been torched, and people burnt alive. Yet, that is not enough, the weighty sepulchre, more gold and more silver on the horizon. My body is murky and heavy in places. Dark and grisly sorrow is painted. In my burrow, I see what I see, I hear thee. I record all your grievances and I bury them down-under. I record, not recoil, but the vengeance is mine.

A cyclone slaps hard, a catcher in the rye, takes the pirates on the lurch, in a frenzy of a ruckus. They flee as far as they see. But the eye chases them until it is dawn. It takes them astride. The pirates are funnelled and then embedded, not far from the sepulchre. This is the story, I take back to the maiden, bereaved in white garment. It has happened. Now you can move on. Make new jewellery, even more, fashionable ones. The maiden hears me out. But she says nothing. And I

wonder, why this news has not sunk at all. The sun has risen. Vultures have flown away. The time is now ripe to chase the dream of life.

The divine numbers, 1,2,3 and 4 are pure and wilful. They do what they do. They slide, and never look back. Use it. This window of opportunity may not return. Pirates are gone and will not be coming along in a long, long time now. I cannot wait for I am the tide of both glad tidings and bad. I proceed unhindered. I mope for loss. When the bridge is crossed, over the moss, I see an albatross. Swooping low, it speaks to me, oh no no! The maiden is cursed. No rhyme, no reason. They said she brings bad luck. A community of fools has decided that they must condemn her to distrust. No happy ending, this tale ends here. My nuanced waves cannot be euphoric. No winds to stir it, no big ships foghorn. On my placid waters, the maiden's body surface. I push on at once. The chase begins — an endless motion of chasing a dream, a metaphor of a wavering journey yet to be realised.

Mehreen Ahmed is an award-winning author, internationally published and critically acclaimed by Midwest Book Review. One of her short stories won The Waterloo Short Story Competition,2020. Her works have been nominated three times for The Best of the Net,2020. Pushcart Prize nomination,2020.Two times for Ditmar Awards in 2016 and 2019, Aurealis Awards nominee,2015 and nomination for Christina Stead Prize,2018. Her book was announced as The Drunken Druid's Editor's Choice, June 2018. Three of her books received Author Shout Reader Ready Awards,2019. One Received Silver. The other two Bronze medals

Sobia Ali

Creatures

Creatures walk the earth. Creatures have a mission. The mission is so large, creatures need more creatures to take care of it. So they sync up and there are more creatures. The earth goes on tolerating this mass of mission-driven creatures. The earth is perfectly suitable for this creature-run mission. More suitable than creatures are suitable for the earth. Hence there are constant small discrepancies between the earth and the creatures. This results in frictions between the two. It affects the mission, of course. But creatures know the mission is bigger than the creatures. It is bigger than the earth. So it doesn't amount to anything. But sometimes one creature is split off the edge of the swarm of creatures. Alone, the creature begins to have ideas. It begins to doubt the importance of the mission. It begins to belittle the creatures and the earth. It begins to think himself above the mass. It becomes a highbrow. It sits mocking the creatures engaged in the mission. It swells with intellectual pride. It bloats with idleness. The creatures look at it askance. They bear it till they can't. One day they swarm over. They sting the creature. They smother it. They suffocate it. The creature ceases to be. It becomes a husk, an empty shell. Then the creatures make a meal of it.

Sobia Ali is a student of English Literature in India. Her work has been featured in, or forthcoming, among others, The Aleph Review, Atticus Review, The Indian Quarterly, The Bosphorus Review of Books, Another Chicago Magazine, Sahitya Akademi's Indian Literature, Gone Lawn, The Punch Magazine, Queen Mob's Teahouse, Manawaker Studio Flash Fiction Podcast, Trampset, Lunate, Kitaab, The Cabinet of Heed, ActiveMuse, Ombak Magazine, Close To The Bone, Squawk Back, Secret Attic, Indian Periodical. She is currently at work on her novel.

Deryck N. Robertson

Middle of the Night

The wind howls outside my creaking
windows,
Shaking the siding, and twisting trees
below.

Keeping me from sleep at 2:00 am.

I get up and go to the bathroom
To drop the blinds that have been
Creeping lower all night.

My side of the bed is still warm
When I crawl back in beside you.

I'm not sure if you're awake or not
So I gently roll toward you
And place my arm on your thigh.

Secret Garden

There is a secret garden
That everyone knows about
But too many of us have forgotten.
Where Magic
That is wonderful as springtime blossoms
and never-ending blue skies,
Dampsmell, and morningsong
is waiting patiently for you.
And me.

Magic is yours, is mine,
If we look for it
In the small cracks and crevices of old
stone walls
And in the hollows, long hidden, under
the hills.
Once, Magic was everywhere
And it was everything.
But we have suppressed it.

Dark magic has hated it;
Lurking and cursing the good Magic
That is in the eyes of the
Young.

(Dickon knew it.
Mary learned it.
Weatherstaff remembered it.
And Colin discovered it.)

Wherever you are planted,
Your secret garden must be tended
And guarded
By you.
Under summer skies and grey rainclouds,
Down the ancient, wooden hallways
The Magic is there
Waiting to be refound
and reshared.

Remember the new commandment
That was given:
Love your neighbour as yourself.
And that will bring the magic back
Into this dark world.

Deryck N. Robertson

Restless

Most nights I don't dream.
Hours pass in darkness
while the stars circle above
the clouds and rain.
But in the morning fog
 of sunshine and singing birds,
my tangled sheets
tell another story

Deryck N. Robertson lives and creates in Peterborough, Ontario, where he is an elementary teacher. His work has appeared online with Bird, Buried Press, Underwood Press, and in Wunderlit Magazine. He can usually be found in Algonquin Park with his family of paddlers. His two self-published zines can be found in recycling bins and lining upscale bird cages near you.

Middle of the Night

The wind howls outside my creaking
windows,
Shaking the siding, and twisting trees
below.
Keeping me from sleep at 2:00 am.

I get up and go to the bathroom
To drop the blinds that have been
Creeping lower all night.

My side of the bed is still warm
When I crawl back in beside you.

I'm not sure if you're awake or not
So I gently roll toward you
And place my arm on your thigh.

Mimi Bordeaux

Asylum Blowup

Deep purple and pink Floyd you have
colour in your valium _yellow like
sunlight inside this hole place of evil
minds come to bare_a-trolley a-cometh to
your table lots of goodies and your
medication eat up yum yum cha: you got
what you deserve: falling off the roof like
that-bad girl climbing to the apex of the
most enormous building in New York
City, hollering you are free!
Sleep comes after 15 minutes with
Clonazepam 10mg. Life spreads its
forgetmeknots out down a drainpipe:
slipping ballet shoes silver
dreamlands+crime of death more red
raving crud drag drog grotto grime_ her
silver gun hidden in pocket flipped lid out
boom you're dead gone for good.
"Wake up Miriam!" Swimming through
an embankment of weeds green muddy
river of Ohio ranges, m
I yell, my head eyes opening in a second.
"Sshh..." the nurse whispers after
bounding out my name.
"Time for breakfast."
"You know I hate eating before coffee!" I
say, terse.
It's true and written on my profile notes,
c/o my senior psych Jenny Dakoz, a brain
with accreditation who saved me.
Rescued me from myself and a 35kg
figure; sleepless body of bones suicidal
hanging off a bridge cars breaking
quickly; fast she runs away police again
pick you up sit me down at the station.
They're running out of ideas.
This last visit to John Cade Ward was c/o
Fitzroy police who told the senior psychs
they had to keep me in otherwise legal
action would ensue. Luckily this was my

last time after nearly 30 attempts to get me
on my legs.

Knees begging_, "Please God give me a
grave I just want to go not be here
anymore dry me out please take my heart
soul everything and hang it on a wall
saying Here Lies Mimi Once Was..."

Elusive hard to die exit from your body
really. No poison shop pills will piss you
off taking you out for 3 days sleeping
awake again this insomnia driving me to
do these things no food for 3 months no
wonder my dress hangs like an elbow
kick framed out of space, life. Dyes my
hair, blue/black. Like my mind in flight.



Letter From the Editor

Upon releasing our second issue we would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we work, live and walk upon.

We would like to pay our respects to the elders past and present.

I would just like to say an overwhelming thank you to everyone for their incredible amount of support and for all the endless encouragement and respect. This second Issue of Melbourne Culture Corner was put together so effortlessly due to the outstanding submissions we received. Please know that none of this is taken for granted and we aim to continue to grow and maintain our level of effort into further issues. Much love to this amazing community.

Steven Pearman; *Lead Editor at Melbourne Culture Corner*