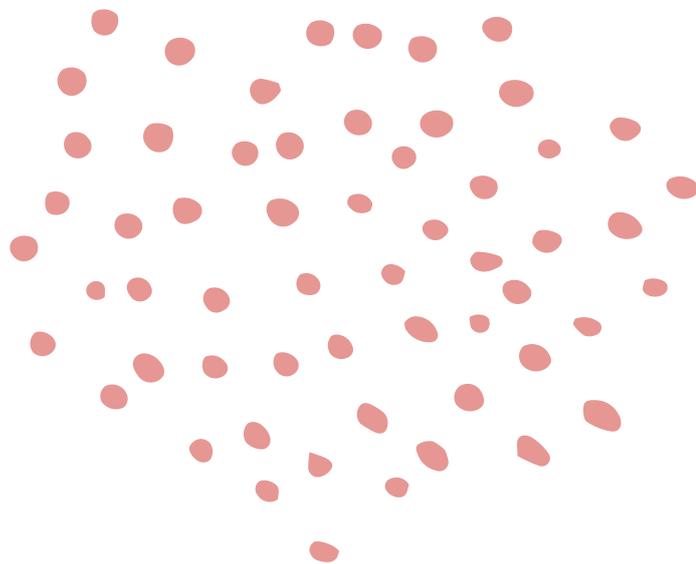




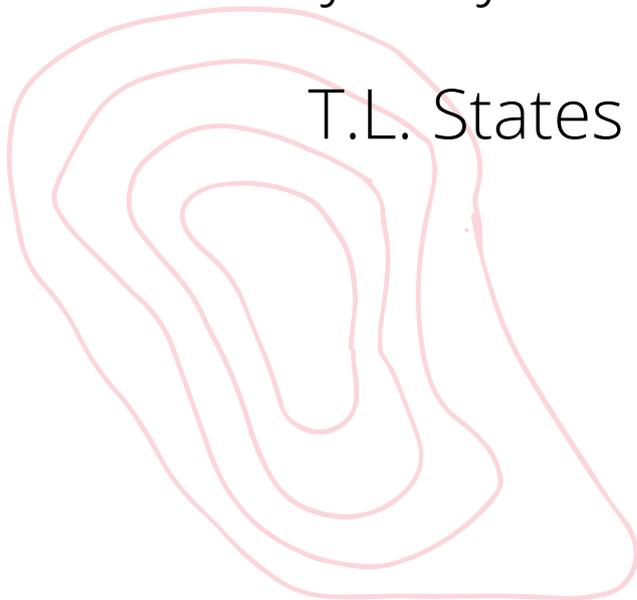
*Melbourne*  
CULTURE CORNER

ISSUE 8



# Contents

A. R. Salandy	02
John Drudge	03
Andre F. Peltier	04-05
Rajiv Bakshi	06-07
Emily Hizny	08-09
Carlos Mijares Poyer	10-11
Anabell Donovan	12-13
Yuu Ikeda	14-15
Shaurya Arya-Kanojia	16-18
T.L. States	19-20



# A. R. Salandy

## Devotion

Idolatry seems all too human  
When bright lights consume thoughts  
With the zeal of glaring commercial frenzies,

Where one buys tokens of affection,  
A sardonic new form of payment  
For age old satisfaction,  
Demeaned by mass-consumption, loving.

But in those avenues so synonymous to consumption  
Can glimmers of human spirit peak through  
The labelled facades of armour disguised with cloths

Synthetic and telling of status, ascribed,  
Ever rarely achieved  
Amongst the masses we fear might see our hands cusped,  
For overt passion must be hidden-

And instead maimed of actual affection,  
Better served by corrupted plastic  
And sustenance lacking in nutrition,

Oh how strange,  
Oh how loving,  
Oh how delirious one must be  
To believe that tinted paper could ever suffice-

For true devotion, eternal.

Anthony is a mixed-race poet & writer whose work tends to focus on social inequality throughout late-modern society. Anthony travels frequently and has spent most of his life in Kuwait jostling between the UK & America. Anthony's work has been published 140 times. Anthony has 1 published chapbook titled 'The Great Northern Journey'.

Twitter/Instagram: @anthony64120 <https://arsalandywriter.com/> Anthony is the Co-Eic of Fahmidan Journal.

# John Drudge

## Enough

The modern fetish  
For damaged souls  
And the puerile rantings  
Of broken little poets  
Taking selfies in the mirror  
Laying bare and ranting  
In egocentric triple time  
The vanishing worlds  
Of timid dreams  
And bowing low  
Before the storm  
We have become a society  
Of fractured feet  
Crawling over  
Bloody landscapes  
Of self-pity  
And it's time  
We left behind  
The loud moans of lost masses  
The self-indulgent pain  
Of little wonderings  
And all the hollow things  
That never really mattered  
Anyway

## To the Sea

Floating  
Through endless selves  
Boiling it all down  
To things unseen  
The things left out  
And thrown away  
The discarded things  
That define  
Like fading ripples  
On a pond  
And the lost center  
Of beginnings  
Fumbling  
In the face  
Of forbidding time  
And following unknown rivers  
To the sea

John is a social worker working in the field of disability management and holds degrees in social work, rehabilitation services, and psychology. He is the author of three books of poetry: "March" and "The Seasons of Us" (both published in 2019) and New Days (published in 2020). His work has appeared widely in numerous literary journals, magazines, and anthologies internationally. John is also a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee and lives in Caledon Ontario, Canada with his wife and two children.

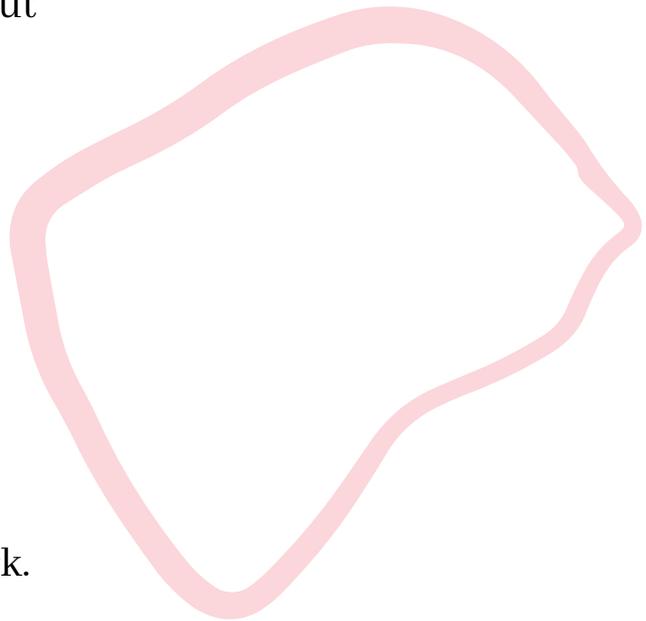
# Andre F. Peltier

## Stand and Shout

What through the wandering haze  
will disappear as the names, faces,  
agency of those we hold dear  
so quickly wither and  
turn to soot?

More vapid and evil, their badges they fly  
with knees and tasers and hatred.  
So we stand and shout  
and scream their  
names:

Beonna  
& Rayshard  
& Daniel Prude,  
George Floyd  
& Atatiana  
& Stephon Clark.  
Philandro Castile  
& Michelle Cusseaux  
& Freddie Gray  
& Tanisha Fonville  
& Tamir Rice &.....



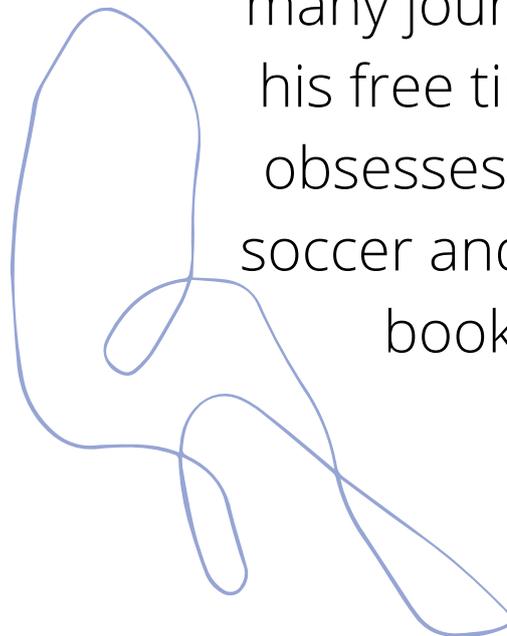
## Jumpsuit

The day I met Elvis Presley,  
November 1975, has lived in  
infamy as the day the storm  
broke over Minnesota and  
the Edmund Fitzgerald  
came to rest on the floor  
north of Whitefish Point.  
I wore my greatest jumpsuit:  
wide collar, white, sequined  
breasts. The collar was wider  
than the King's.  
The white was whiter  
than the King's.  
The sequins shined brighter  
than the King's.  
He didn't like it.

No one should stand  
head and shoulders  
above him he thought.  
The storm clouds crashed  
and the lightning lit  
the world. The white of my  
jumpsuit pushed back those  
flashes and blinded the King.  
My sequined suit nearly  
saved the freighter as she  
broke up and nestled like  
"an old man into a warm bath"  
below the thunder.

Elvis wanted to shine brighter.  
"You should show more  
appreciation for my talents,"  
he quipped, as he pointed his  
Barretta at my chest.  
I puffed it up to deflect the  
bullet. Superior rolled on  
and my jumpsuit shone  
pure and bright.

Andre F. Peltier is a  
Lecturer III at  
Eastern Michigan  
University where he  
teaches African  
American  
Literature,  
Afrofuturism,  
Science Fiction,  
Poetry and  
Freshman  
Composition. He  
lives in Ypsilanti, MI  
with his family and  
pets. His poetry has  
appeared in or is  
forthcoming from  
many journals. In  
his free time, he  
obsesses about  
soccer and comic  
books.



# Rajiv Bakshi

## Dubai Connection

Prateek was a shy boy who had come straight from Mumbai to attend marriage of his cousin Raghav. Both of them were born in the same city and same year. Raghav was an extrovert known for his flamboyant nature while Prateek was a typical introvert who had great love for sports and books.

Prateek had just completed his B tech from IIT Delhi and was now working as a software engineer far away from his home town. He had driven straight to Raghavs house in Panchkula to be part of all the festivities. Raghavs sister Divya was looking after all the guests who had come from far off places including Dubai. Divyas best friend Neha had come from girl's hostel of Punjab University to be part of celebrations. She was born and brought up in Dubai and it was for the first time she was seeing a Punjabi wedding with lot of good food, wine, music and dance. She had often confided to her best friend that she will marry some one from Dubai and then eventually settle in USA. But marriages are made in Heaven, but celebrated on earth.

Neha was casually introduced to Prateek and both exchanged pleasantries in a casual manner. After two days it was time for all the guests to leave in a jovial mood carrying lot of sweets and gifts given by Raghavs parents.

At the first marriage anniversary of Raghav and Shaveta , it was Divya again who was conducting the stage. She all of a sudden announced when the lights were dim and all the guests were dancing on the floor that she had an important announcement to make. The audience mostly who were relatives were stunned by the announcement. She said in a hushed tone : Prateek proposes Neha . And the lights are switched off. This secret was known only to Divya who was Nehas best friend for the last seven years.



There were lot of Face Book posts but none knew what was brewing in the mind of Aquarian introvert Prateek and Leo lioness Neha. Parents of Prateek and Neha who were not on any social sites never knew about this. Prateeks parents were stunned when they heard this announcement. How ever Nehas parents were in Dubai.

Prateek who was afraid to talk to even a girl had proposed to Neha , the NRI girl who was the talk of town in her college.

A few months later Neha mustered courage to talk to her conservative parents. The parents were not convinced that their lovely princess would marry some one who is not of their caste and not from their known circle of friends in Dubai. Prateeks parents had no qualms of marriage but Nehas parents were adamant. One fine morning Prateek and Neha went to a temple and tied knots in front of Divyas parents.

What followed after a few days was a grand lavish party in one of the five star hotels in Chandigarh hosted jointly by the parents of Prateek and Neha to welcome the new bride and bridegroom.



Rajiv Bakshi is a Retired Banker from Ludhiana ( India ) and now a full time writer . He has penned down a book on short stories : Journey from Guwahati to Machhiwara which is in 21 countries , 528 libraries in India and 17 libraries in India . He is also a Co Author in Turns and Trails : Life's Journey . He writes for Tribune , Hindustan Times , Deccan Herald , Assam Tribune papers and his stories are published in Womens Era and Alive magazine . His style of writing is humorous .

# Emily Hizny

## Fracture

Through the silken shadow portal stepped the young girl,  
pulling the soft stitched curtains aside, hands shaking with hesitation.  
She steeled her resolve, crossing the threshold into the chamber of her mother,  
examining the trinkets strung from the ceiling as her toes landed on the cold stones  
below.

Her fingers continued to tremble after letting go of the cloth barrier  
but she smiled once she located the item she lost: a sphere of lime and evergreen  
moss  
that had rolled to a stop on the stone floor, ugly compared to the shells and coral up  
above  
and the similar orbs that lined the wall, pristine glass spheres swirling with hues of  
rainbow.

No longer captivated by the faded emerald orb she had sought  
the girl turned to the wall, staring into each sphere trying to decipher the beauty  
they held,  
brilliantly shifting between shades in heavenly hurricanes within the curved  
crystals.

The dazzling scarlet-rose orb nearby drew her closer, curious smile growing with  
each step

as she peered within, squinting past the swirling atmosphere to see a tiny  
civilization  
and without a second thought she plucked the world from its pedestal,  
pressing her face to the rosy glass, enraptured by the little people on their little  
farms,  
curiosity melding into excitement as her hands continued to shake, too much to  
retain her grip.

The orb's fragile fate now resided with the young girl, far from its place on the platform  
which proved fatal, shattering into a beautiful array of shards and curves  
when the sphere slipped from her flimsy grasp,  
no longer a new world but the remains of one, littering the ground around the little girl's feet.

The fragments remained shimmering rose and garnet, abstract, irreparable  
and the girl pressed her hands to her face, tears seeping through her fingers as she wished away  
her present reality, the carnage of her mistake and the crash of its impact still ringing through the  
air. She sat down and began hastily pressing pieces together, heartbeat rising in panic

with tears clouding her eyesight as she struggled to fix the fragments in front of her  
but nothing she held together stuck together, the glass remained in its final form.  
Riddled with regret she threw the shards back and dropped her face in her hands  
once more,  
begging she could go back, turn back, and mend what she couldn't fix.

The clock ticked on, the crystals remained still, and the tears trailed down the little girl's cheeks,  
wishing more than anything she had never stepped through the silken shadow portal,  
that she had stayed on the other side of the forbidden curtains, away from the sapphire spheres,  
too afraid to cross the threshold of her mother's chamber.

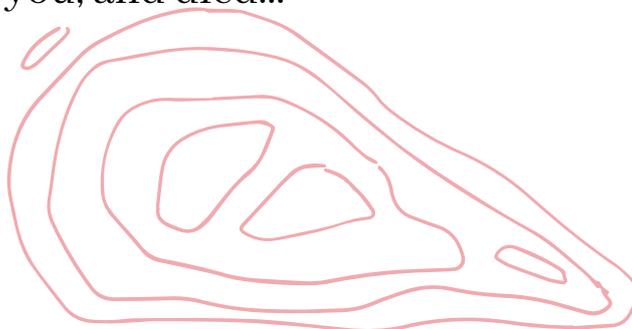
Emily Hizny is a Creative Writing and Publishing & Editing double major at Susquehanna University lurking around Twitter as @OctoEmily. Her work will be featured in the upcoming edition of SU's literary magazine RiverCraft as well as Dwelling Literary and Ice Lolly Review. In her free time you can find her sewing, playing video games, and being a part-time octopus.



# Carlos Mijares Poyer

## -DREAMING OF ANGELS-

The apocryphal thought of the Bible burning  
But did you at least turn the pages?  
A jester coughing blood unto the pallid snow  
and the archangels with black hair awestruck, descending  
never the vultures so close, white snakes in beaks,  
warbling  
or are they people in the new garden  
looking for food in trash bags  
like poor Santa Clauses under broken street lamps  
I dream't of you, and died...



Carlos Mijares Poyer, is an international author, journalist, translator and marketer. He studied all of his education in the U.S. at Pine Crest School and English major at Guilford College. He studied Marketing in ISUM Marketing College. Since 2015 he has published in numerous on-line literary websites in the U.S., Ireland, Venezuela, Mexico and Argentina. Main contributor to the Ultimas Noticias Cultural Supplement in Venezuela in different journalistic and literary genres.

## The Drift of Sea as Rain

I sense, like in so many cities  
The drift of sea as rain  
Over buildings and secret homes  
Over modern families of a century  
Intimating holy water  
Drowned in the obliqueness  
Of their gaze.

One can not foretell this climate  
As emotion  
One can not foretell what the fall  
Establishes  
As shadows can unmask the day.

One has become the end, misunderstood  
Trapped askance between passions  
And imagined arhythmias  
Confronting darkness  
With the footprints of past  
Pretending.

As now the sea dissipates  
Undinal mayeutics in the sky  
Drawing the color of countries  
And the limits of the rose.

One contrasts this ascension  
To a polite wave  
That asks as it wavers  
And responds:  
"Whose are those footprints in the sand?"

(Remembrance of mysteries...)

The moment between the neutral  
And smiling face  
The careful closing of the eyes  
As a tear perils.

# Anabell Donovan

## Wildflowers

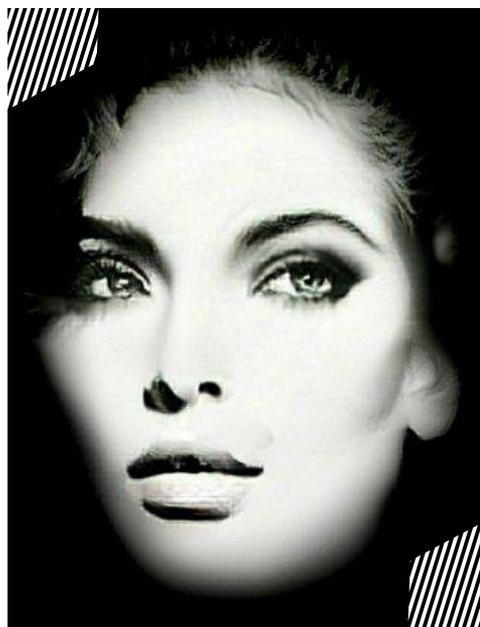
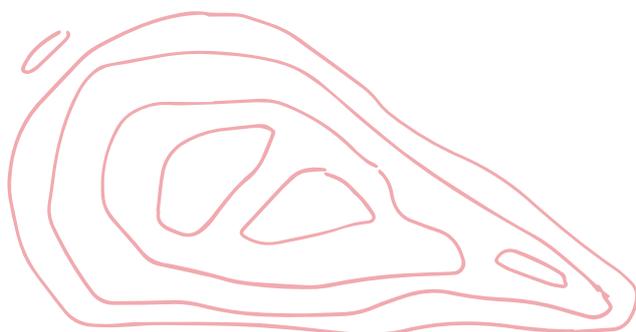
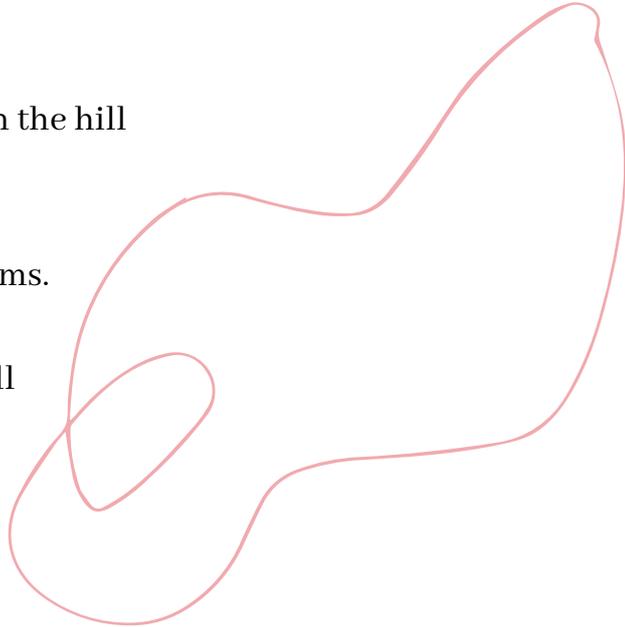
Walking through the wildflowers on the hill  
by the college, next to the bridge,  
pastel blues climb as loose vines  
up my legs, thighs and round my arms.

Bees hum about, their sense of smell  
alert to the fragrance of the other,  
the female within the flower,  
and they gently spread petals  
to partake in heady exploration.

Shadows taste of sudden coolness  
under limber trees contoured to the hill,  
bunnies tentatively hop out of their burrows  
and I follow their random patterns.

I lean on an appealing tree trunk,  
shaded like Monet's in the Mediterranean.  
back-to-back, curve to hollow.

And I watch bees drunk on love  
hang from bluebonnets,  
suspended in their Circadian rhythm,  
in the last golden threads of sunlight.



## Flamenco

I improvise with cheap Burgundy  
and orange juice from the food truck  
to brew homemade sangria,  
purple paint thinner on my tongue.

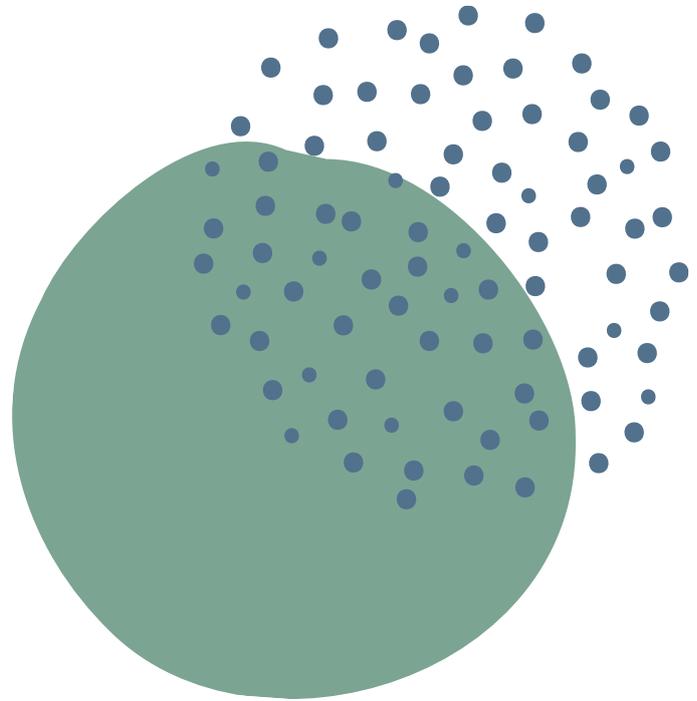
Flamenco sounds inhabit the body  
with the resonance of tablaos  
and the sure tremor of lost love  
thick on the cantaor's voice.

Soft clapping skims uneven grass  
with guitars coaxing blooms  
from an Asian jasmine  
bruised by ice storms.

Noisy games of hocky sack  
in a corner of the courtyard,  
and the tree and I exchange glances,  
the lyrics are immediate  
yet seasoned as carriages  
on cobblestone,  
furrowed browed  
Moors invading a far off shore,  
black silk veils and worn  
rosary beads on crooked hands.

A couple of ducks ease  
in flight approaching  
the lockdown pool turning  
pandemic green.

They land and leave a trail  
of orange grace on cement.



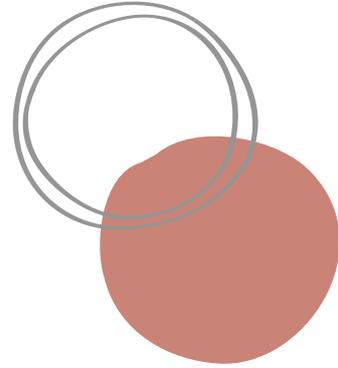
Anabell Donovan  
(Anna Eusthacia)  
is a psychologist  
and educator  
dedicated to  
student success  
of minorities and  
under-  
represented  
individuals in  
higher education.  
She loves words  
and would always  
like to “start  
where language  
ends.”



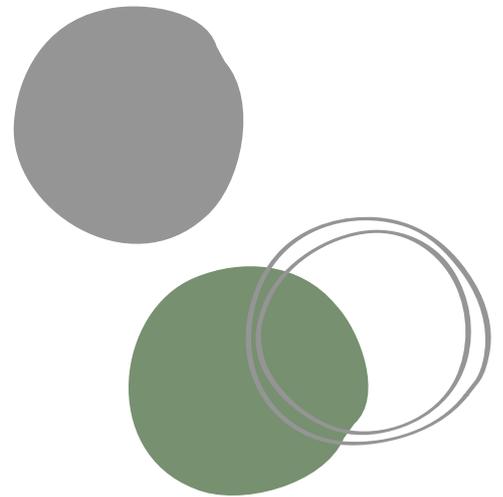
# Yuu Ikeda

## Like I Go Down The Stairs

Like  
I go down  
the stairs,  
life  
gradually  
becomes narrow



Like  
I go down  
the stairs,  
life  
gradually  
closes the  
sole door  
that I can see



Like  
I go down  
the stairs,  
life  
gradually  
reaches the end  
that I hope

Like  
I go down  
the stairs,  
life  
gradually  
increases  
the brightness

Then, the end.

## Waves of Emptiness

Waves of emptiness  
swallow my remainders

My blood  
shuts its mouth,  
and holds its breath  
My skin is frozen,  
and makes a lot of cracks of emptiness

Emptiness loves me,  
and takes torture away  
from me  
But it also takes energy to live  
away from me

Waves of emptiness are endless,  
unless I forgive myself

Yuu Ikeda is a Japan based poet. She loves writing, reading mystery novels, and drinking sugary coffee.

She writes poetry on her website.

<https://poetryandcoffeedays.wordpress.com/> Her published poems are "On the Bed" in <Nymphs>, "Love? or Death?" in <Sad Girl Review>, "Poetry Drops Like Raindrops Do" in <JMWW>, and more.



# Shaurya Arya-Kanojia

## Two Swords

You know what's going through my mind?

The Philosopher's Stone. Yes, the one that's used in making the Elixir of Life. That gives you everlasting life.

You'll laugh, considering that I'm standing on the edge of a cliff, peering into the black, seemingly bottomless abyss under me. The man behind me, Sadey Niaha, whose name I both resent and dread, even asked me to slip out of my shoes and keep them next to me.

Some ritual that makes no sense whatsoever. But, then, nothing is making sense anyway; and my kicks are the least of my worries.

There's a nip in the air. An icy chill runs through me. I shudder. Maybe he sees my slight tremble, maybe he doesn't. He doesn't say.

"Move it," is what he does say.

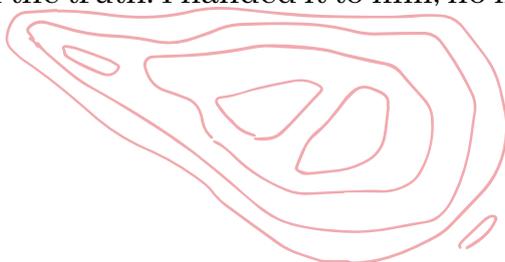
And an image of the Philosopher's Stone, which even Voldemort could never get his hands on, appears before me. Everlasting life. Staring death in the eye, telling that hooded monster you've found a way to defeat (or circumvent, but that's really how you perceive things) it. Such is my desire that I see the pink glint of the stone, far away and unattainable, in the sky.

I think of asking Sadey why he's doing what he's doing. But of course I know. Can't have two swords in the same fight, he'd said a few minutes ago. I wanted to say I didn't know what he meant...

But I do. Having me around will not sit well with all the glory and riches I've inadvertently lent him. After all, as my literary agent would say – oh, not to brag, but did I tell you I'm a bestselling author? – experimentation has a price.

In my defense, my agent didn't warn me breaking the ceiling would cost me this.

Sadey Niaha, the man who... I don't think I can say he stole my name, because that couldn't be farther from the truth. I handed it to him; no matter how innocent the mistake was.



Experimentation has a price.

I've never favoured learning things the hard way, even though what I am today – and by extension where I am today – is because of the exact same endeavour. I was an ordinary copywriter in an ordinary advertising agency, a job I started disliking not because my boss was evil personified or that I earned peanuts. It was... uninteresting bordering on boring. I was just another cog in the wheel, and I wanted out.

Why? Because... Well, just because...

It took being stranded by the side of a road with a flat tire, as the monsoon rains lashed with a record breaking downpour, at 1 a.m. on a Wednesday that finally did it for me. I spent the night in my car, because my phone was dead, I couldn't see anyone around me, and, frankly, taking refuge inside the car seemed a safer alternative. I cried myself to sleep in my car seat, because the well-paying and even respectable (yes, I may have been a garden variety copywriter, but I got respect) job wasn't enough for me. Lately, I had started longing for a change with a desperation I couldn't pretend to ignore any more. So, the next week, I quit. My manager was flabbergasted. I moved in with my sister, a single mother with an eight-year-old, because I couldn't pay my rent anymore. And I got cracking on the novel which a year later put me on the map. Anya Deshai, a magazine said about me, the new kid on the literary block.

The book and the subsequent two constituted the Step Sisters trilogy. And the stark resemblance of one of these sisters, and that it hit the bestsellers list in the first two weeks, became the reason for my sister's resentment. Towards me. But I truly think the animosity stemmed from the envy over how the lesser responsible of the two sisters ended with the glory than the more mature and level-headed one. Amya, my sister, may not show it; but I know she resents me.

Be that as it may, I should have learned to be contented with what I had.

Experimentation has a price.

My agent wasn't in favour of my suggestion, but he also didn't have an appropriate answer when I asked him why not.

I don't want to be a typecast, I'd told him. Or exhaust myself doing that.

What I didn't tell him was: I don't want the flame to die out. I want to live forever.

You can see where my fascination with the Philosopher's Stone originates from.

Maybe I was destined to be in Slytherin.

Well, if ifs and buts were candy and nuts...

But my agent saw through me. Despite his reservations, he agreed. Though he did wish me the best of luck.

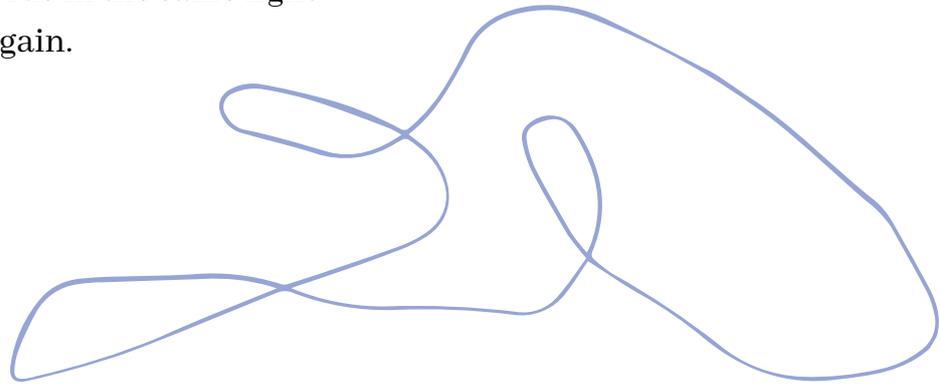
And, so, as the plan kicked into action, we made a deal. Should the book under the pseudonym (Sadey Niaha, because it was just another anagram of my actual name) do well, we would spill the secret through anonymous means. However, if it wasn't able to garner the kind of response I hoped for, I'd let it drop and not pursue the idea anymore.

What followed is pretty much self-explanatory, considering the state I am in currently. The book did wonders; and if I weren't here right now, I'd probably be basking in the glory of not just the book's success but also how I'd proven my agent wrong. But what the success also did was point the unrelenting media towards the real Sadey Niaha.

I'm assuming it didn't take Sadey long to connect the dots. And once he was brought out in public, would he have refused to accept the riches that came his way? I'd say he'd be an idiot to do so. What he did need to take care of, which he was doing right now, was me.

Can't have two swords in the same fight.

"Move it," he said again.



Shaurya Arya-Kanojia authored his debut novella, *End of the Rope* ([amzn.in/eZ0EUss](https://amzn.in/eZ0EUss)), in 2019. He likes sports (cricket, mostly), eating out, and watching reruns of *The Office* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*. His social media handles include @shauryaticks (Twitter) and @main.hoon.ek.sharara (Instagram).

# T.L. States

8/20/20

I remember sending an email to our case worker, asking if we could cut the boys' hair. We always had to ask first, and the case worker gave the go-ahead. This time he wrote back the next day. Said he'd reach out to their birth mom. Then he'd let us know. First time he ever responded like that, asking their birth mom. She was always out of the picture. Never responded to requests for contact, never requested contact. Nothing changed, except now our case worker invoked her name.

Few hours after the email, I went to pick the boys up at daycare. I plugged my phone into the truck's stereo, like any other Thursday, and started listening to No Code, Pearl Jam's fourth album. Then I started to remember. Remembered putting headphones on David, a little after they turned one, and he gave the thumbs up to "Evacuation" from the Binaural album. Kevin looked at me like I was crazy when I had him listen to "Of the Girl." I remembered David, headphones on, smiling as he listened to "Comes Then Goes" from Gigaton, shortly after quarantine started. I thought of my wife, Tonya, telling me how "Unthought Known" from the Backspacer record came on one day, and there was David in the rearview mirror, air drumming along with Matt Cameron.

I was almost to the daycare when "Smile" came on. Eddie Vedder was singing about the sun not shining, asking if it makes you smile. I grew up seeing an ornamental potholder that read, "The man that's worthwhile is the man that can smile, when nothing goes his way," so I was amenable to the sentiment. But then, Eddie's optimism in the face of darkness lost me. He started singing:

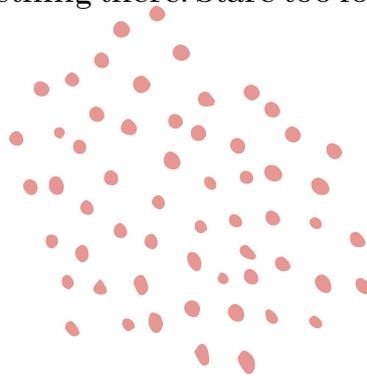
"I miss you already, yeah  
I miss you always  
Three crooked hearts  
Swirls all around, yeah  
I miss you all day"



Our daughter, Nizhoni, me, and Tonya. We were three and the boys made us five. I remembered one of the first times they were at the house and we were eating at the dinner table. I was tapping the opening drum beat to “I’m the Man” by Anthrax. David smiled and tried to do it. The memory made me smile, but Eddie kept singing about missing and smiling and then I was crying. Thought to myself, I’m going to miss you boys, always.

I’ve wondered what it would be like, as a birth parent, to have a child taken away. Whether the rights are signed away, or taken by a judge, it’s a terrible price to pay. I can’t imagine what it’s like. What I know is, that last time we asked to cut the boys’ hair, in August 2020? Their birth mom never responded. We cut their hair. A few weeks later, the judge took away her rights.

Now, I’m working late. Smiling, thinking about how Kevin runs like Sonic the Hedgehog. Shoulders back, arms pinned at his side. I’ve got headphones on, so as not to wake anyone. Listening to Pearl Jam, this time a concert from 2000 in East Troy, Wisconsin. They closed the show with a drawn-out version of “Rearviewmirror” from their second album, Vs. A song about moving on. I’m happier every day with my kids. Language fails to capture my happiness, but the joy I feel is side by side with another one’s despair. Thing about rearview mirrors is, real or imagined, there’s always something there. Stare too long, and we might miss the present.



T.L. States lives in Tucson, Arizona, with his wife and kids. His writing can be found at Hobart, Rejection Letters, The Daily Drunk, and other places. He tweets as @epmornsesh.

Thanks to all our lovely contributors for their support and submissions, and to everyone taking the time to read all the amazing poems and stories we receive!



As always we would like to acknowledge the original custodians of the land we live and work upon, and pay our respect to all indigenous peoples past and present.