

“

Melbourne  
Culture  
Corner

---

ISSUE 11

# Contents

---

Sarah Robin	2-4
Gopal Lahiri	5
Jaswant Singh Gandam	6-7
Perry Gasteiger	8-9
Anna Kirwin	10
Strider Marcus Jones	11
Zainab Iiyasu Bobi	12
Yuu Ikeda	13
Rekha Valliappan	14-16
Amanda McLeod	17
Rob McKinnon	18
Ankur Jyoti Saikia	19

---

# Sarah Robin

---

## Metamorphosis

“I’m not going!” I throw my arms into the air with frustration. My dad pokes his head around the door to see what’s going on. Seeing that the coast is clear and there aren’t any objects flying across the room, he enters my bedroom and stands behind me looking at my reflection in the mirror. I stare at his large hairy hands placed on my shoulders. “Deep breath, son.” He picks up my tie, untangles it and drapes it around my neck, tying it into a perfect knot.

“What if he sees the chair and changes his mind?” I scowl, my head cloudy with negative thoughts. “Then he’s obviously not the one for you.” My dad had a hard time accepting my sexuality, but he took it far better than knowing I’ll be stuck in this chair for the rest of my life. So what if I date other guys? I can’t swim, I can’t play football, I can’t go motorcycle racing with him. I can’t do all the things with him that we loved doing together as father and son. Being gay is trivial compared to the loss of my ‘old life’.

In the car, I sit staring out the window, my stomach turning over with nerves, my dad humming ‘Streets of London’ as we make our way to the restaurant. Once I’m in my chair and ready to go, he pauses for a moment and his eyes go a little red. “Hey, son.” He looks me up and down. “You look great.” He sniffs, smiles and then leans forward and nudges me on the arm. “I’m proud of you, son. Now you go and have a good night.”

I tell him I love him and start to roll away as panic starts to set in. What if there are steps? What if the table is the wrong height for my chair? What will he think of me? Will he be annoyed I didn’t tell him I use a chair? Thoughts race through my head as I approach the entrance to the restaurant. “Great, no steps. Good start.” I reassure myself silently. I arrive at the doors and just as I go to reach the door handle, a middle-aged guy and his wife spot me and they hold the doors open for me. “Cheers!” I thank them. “So far so good.” I begin to ease a little.

A young waitress strides over in her white blouse and black apron. "Reservation?" she squeaks. I confirm my name. "Great, your party has already arrived. Just this way, please." Oh god, he's already here! I don't have any time to settle in and make sure everything is ok. I follow the waitress past many tables, conscious of the odd person looking up from their tables to look over at me, especially children who gawp at me until I'm out of sight. We turn into a quieter area with a log fire and an impressive chimney breast. "There we are. Can I get you some drinks?" The waitress' voice sounds muffled in my overwhelmed reaction to meeting Ryan for the first time after speaking online for a little over six months.

"Same again for me, please." His voice is lower than I thought it would be. "I'll have what he's having." I stammer. He smiles warmly at me, the orange glow from the log fire flickers onto his face. "Great, I'll move this chair over." I thank her and park myself into the spot. I stay silent for a moment, unsure as to what to say. I decide to let him speak first.

"Well, isn't this a surprise." He grins, looking at the chair. I immediately spill out apologies and try to explain the many reasons why I didn't mention anything about the chair beforehand. Before I could go any further, he raises his hand and I instantly stop my spiel. He calmly leans over to one side and points towards a wheelchair folded up behind him. "Me too!" He laughs. I sit open-mouthed and we both giggle uncontrollably. "No way! What are the chances?" We echo each other. This perfect ice breaker relaxes me and the twisting sensation in my stomach eases. Our drinks arrive and we order our food; our starters and mains are identical with a dessert to share.

"How long have you used a chair?" I ask. "Parachuting accident four years ago. I did a jump for charity and the parachute got tangled and we had a pretty hard landing." He explained. "What about you?" I tell him about the car accident; about how mum had died and dad blamed himself, even though it wasn't his fault. "I'm sorry" he frowned.

"This is my first time out in public on my own since getting the chair, so I was pretty nervous about not having someone with me in case I got stuck. But then again I didn't fancy my dad joining us!" I joke. Ryan explains he had a few guys stop talking to him online after he told them he uses a chair so he figured just to get to know someone well enough to meet up and take it from there.

We speak a little about the emotional and psychological effects of using a chair and it comforted me to know he is fully independent, lives on his own, has a great job and plays a lot of sports. “You’re welcome to come along on Tuesday night and meet the team. Bring your dad along, too. It can be something you can do together,” he said enthusiastically. “How could he play?” I ask, confused. “He would need to use a spare chair from the sports hall,” he explained. I didn’t know if wheelchair basketball would be his thing, but it was worth mentioning, I suppose.

We finish our dessert, argue over who pays for the bill and get ready to leave. I watch him get into his chair quickly with ease. Once outside, we say goodnight and say we’ll talk later. I roll around the corner to the car park, a contented smile on my face. I enter the car park to find, to my surprise, my dad’s car already waiting for me. I knock on the driver’s side window and wake up my snoring, drooling dad. After some disorientation, he rolls down the window.

“How long have you been here?” I laughed. “I never left. Just in case, you know, you needed me or things didn’t work out,” he admitted. “You silly sod!” I go round to the passenger side and heave myself into the car with his help. He pushes the door shut and hauls my chair into the boot when I feel my phone vibrate;

RYAN

It was great meeting you tonight. See you Tuesday for Basketball 😊 I’ll msg you later to sort out our next date, my treat this time xx

“I take it went well then, yeah?” he asked, spotting the smile on my face. “I’m taking you out on Tuesday, Dad. Bring your gym shorts.”

---

Sarah Robin is a new writer from Bolton, England, starting her writing journey during the coronavirus pandemic. Robin has had several pieces of work published in anthologies and online literary magazines as well as being a competition winner for both short fiction and poetry. She is also a columnist for Floresta Magazine and prose reader for Sepia Journal.

Twitter: @SRobinWriter

---

# Gopal Lahiri

---

## Lothal

I go from shore to shore  
seeking clarity, to stand on the threshold,  
rip open the history books,  
filled with creeping shadows and whispers,  
light up the fire-dried brick pillars.

Overhead the summer sky glistens  
probably the clouds are hidden behind the sun  
a place of antiquity, of broken columns  
what is past, words are weapons  
yet seal with silt and debris.

Always a nest for the creators and planners  
chisels and spears, beads and jewelleries,  
there is an attempt to cleave memories  
in a sheltered, leafy corner,  
redrafting the years of prosperity.

What work have I come here to do?  
The raindrops are in search of an inlet  
sluicing ships into the deep basin  
beyond the strip of sand and stone,  
wooden canopies are exposed in flood and fire.

Sick with desire  
the monument of its own, break into echo  
days and nights born and die  
in this ancient city-  
it knows what it is at the end- the mound of the dead.

\*Lothal was one of the southernmost cities of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, located in the Bhāl region of the modern state of Gujarāt, India

---

Gopal Lahiri is a bilingual poet, editor, critic and translator and published in Bengali and English language. He has authored 23 books. His poetry is published across various anthologies as well as in eminent journals of India and abroad. His poems are translated in 14 languages and he is the recipient of Setu Excellence award, 2020. Recent credits: Ink Sweat & Tears, Catjun Mutt Press, Verse Virtual, Borderless Journal, Different Truth, Kitaab, Indian Literature, Piker Press, Scarlet Leaf Review, The Daily Sun, Spillwords, Internationaltimes, NewYork Parrot, Tourvallie Review, Indian Periodicals, Setu, Muse India, Ink Pantry and elsewhere.

---

# Jaswant Singh Gandam

---

## A Weekful of Lies to Save A Life

(A real-life story)

Like to err, to lie is also human.

Though not a 'Satyawadi' Harish Chandra, I mostly prefer truth to falsehood but have occasionally told harmless, gentle untruths, too.

But ethicists say that a lie is a lie!

I will leave it to the readers to decide whether my weekful of lies fell in the category of gentle, good lies or malicious ones.

A few years ago, I lost my three close relatives in a fatal road accident. Two of them were a father-son duo (the son was just three months old). All four males (including the taxi owner) had died while all four females had survived, though they had sustained serious injuries, including multiple fractures. They included a mother and her three minor daughters, including a toddler.

The family of six NRIs was coming from Canada for paying obeisance at Golden Temple Amritsar for thanking God for blessing them with a son after three daughters. And, as they say, "Man proposes and God disposes!" The son and his father died in an accident. The third to die along with others was the NRI lady's elder brother who had gone to Delhi to receive them at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi.

The unconscious NRI lady, who along with her daughters was first rushed to a Chandigarh hospital, was later shifted to an Amritsar hospital as she had multiple fractures. Her three daughters were admitted to a Jalandhar hospital as her parents lived there.

And then began my weekful of lies!

On regaining consciousness, the lady enquired about the condition of her husband, children and brother. When told that her three daughters were stable while the other three had to be admitted at Chandigarh, she smelt a rat. She became frantic and insisted to talk to them on phone.

My wife, attending on her, got her connected to her daughters. But how could one connect her through the phone with the other three who had left for their heavenly abode where no temporal calls reached?

Then she wanted to speak to me.

I refused out-rightly to my in-laws to tell her a lie as it would be a breach of mutual trust and morality. But my wife told me that the treating doctor says that if the patient was told the tragic truth straightaway, she might not survive the shock.

I resentfully cried for being selected to tell lies. Eventually relenting, I told lies like an inveterate liar! "Don't worry, I am with the trio. They are serious but having best treatment at a famous hospital of Chandigarh," I lied so one day.

"Since their condition did not improve, we have shifted them to a known hospital of Delhi," was the other lie.

The lies' spree continued for a week. Words were meticulously rephrased daily so that the lies sounded truthful.

And two days before the 'antim ardas' (last prayer) of her husband and brother, the doctor advised us to reveal to her the fact first of her brother's and son's death.

She wept, she wailed, she whimpered. After collecting herself, she pleaded for at least saving her husband.

Then a day before her husband's 'bhog' (a religious congregation for mass prayers), the doctor asked my wife to also tell her about his death. The doctor held her hand and sat by her side.

On learning about her husband's death, she burst into sky-rending long wailings.

When, after completion of all religious rituals of the three relatives, I went to meet her on the ninth day in the hospital, she simply said to me, "Bhaji, tuhathon eh umeed nahi si"(Respected brother, I did not expect it from you i.e. you too will lie). And again bursting into tears, she turned her back to me. After torrents of tears, she became tranquil.

I felt so guilty that I thought as if she had hurled a Shakespearean poser at me, "Et tu, Brute"? (You too, Brutus)?

Tears welled up in my eyes.

But everybody there comforted and assured me to not feel guilty as a lie to save someone's life was as good as, if not better than, truth!

---

Jaswant Singh Gandam, A Phagwara-based  
Retd. Associate Professor of English

---

# Perry Gasteiger

---

## To the Bone

I love you with the marrow in my bones,  
and you're all raw heart and bloody nerves:

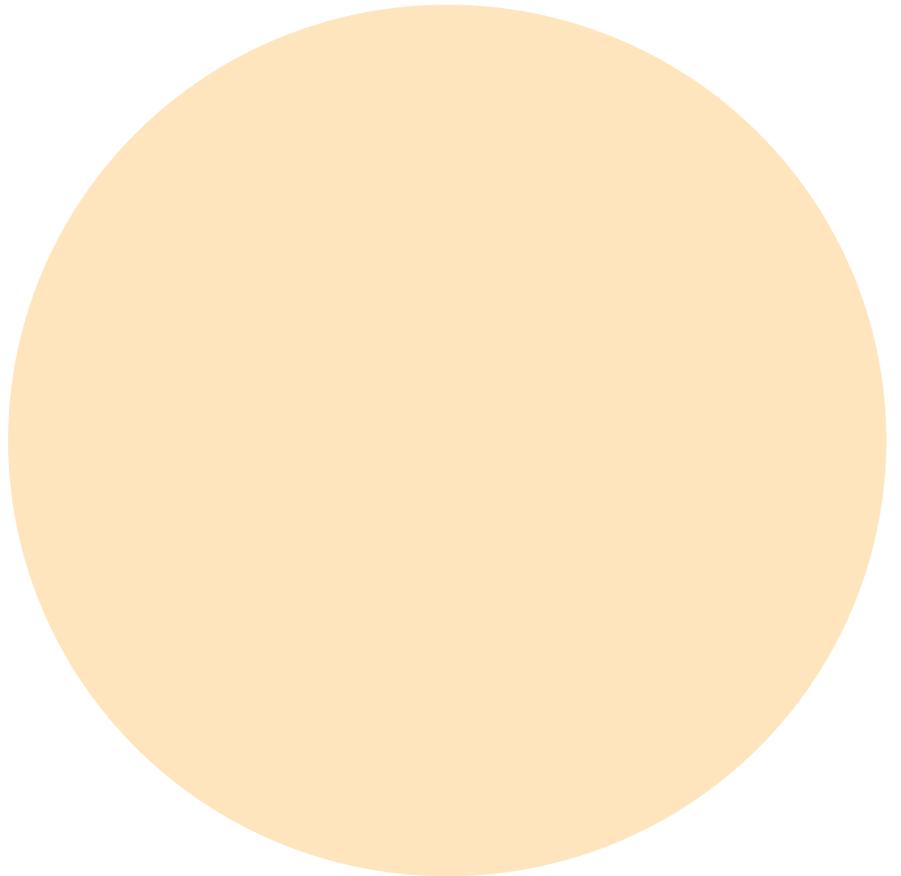
blue and black bruises gather  
where you bump into my arms  
as I welcome you into my breast,  
your skeleton crushing with the  
weight of my embrace  
you crumple to the floor  
in a pile of broken ribs,  
femurs, and finger bones,  
praying for me to love  
just a little bit softer.

Your eardrums rupture  
to the symphonies of my laughter  
and promises whispered  
into the warm night,  
bursting with the pressure  
of untempered passion  
blood drips off  
the bottoms of your lobes  
pooling in red oceans  
in the hollows of your collarbones,  
begging me to love  
just a little bit lighter.

You cower beneath the  
soft blade of my affection  
slicing quivering pink skin  
as I trace secrets into your back,  
the sweat from my fingertips  
stinging on your lacerated shoulders,  
screaming at me to please love  
just a little bit less.

And I am left in the carnage  
of my adoration, pale and shaking  
as the pieces of you lay scattered around me,  
splintered bones litter the ground  
like rice on a wedding day:

Not all were meant to be loved  
with the ferocity of my nature.



## First Tears

I wonder what it feels like the first time you cry,  
it must be like falling in love for the first time.  
I'm eight years old, falling in love on the playground;  
her name is Naomi,  
The most beautiful creature I have ever seen.  
It takes me two weeks to tell her I love her,  
she says, "Girls like boys",  
I feel my heart rip from my chest,  
invaded by the hollowness of careless words.

I wonder what it feels like the first time your body betrays you,  
it must be like seeing a monster for the first time.  
I'm thirteen when I find out that the world doesn't care who you are,  
there are monsters everywhere.  
It takes me two weeks to be able to sleep by myself again,  
my mother asks me what's wrong:  
I feel him rip my stomach from my abdomen,  
drowned in the emptiness left in place of stolen things.

I wonder what it feels like the first time drops of yourself fall to the floor,  
it must be like giving up for the first time.  
I'm nineteen when I realize that you can lose yourself completely,  
it takes me two weeks to get out of bed,  
I just want this to end;  
I feel my mind rip from my body,  
consumed by a chasm of hopeless thoughts.

I wonder what it feels like the first time you cry,  
it must be like finding truth for the first time.  
I'm twenty-four when I learn that babies don't cry,  
it takes them two weeks to form tears.  
My friend asks me what that means  
I say, "It means that's how long it takes  
for the world to rip the salt from our eyes  
and leave us with a vacancy --  
those parts of ourselves that  
roll off the sides of our cheeks."

---

Perry Gasteiger is a queer, non-binary poet and writer from Waterloo, Ontario. Their work tends to lean towards a Post-Modern Gothic sensibility with an interest in the mundane darkness of our everyday world using juxtaposition between the real and the abstract, the beautiful and the deformed, the congruent and the disordered. Perry's work explores issues surrounding pain, trauma, mental illness, and how these twist perceptions of the human condition. Their work aims to see the easily unnoticeable in an evocative and empathetic way.

---

# Anna Kirwin

---

They can't tell your story better than you

They can try to explain  
How it felt when  
You handed the envelope over, when  
The hand pulled you out of the water, when  
The clock struck nine and they  
Called all to order.

The picture they paint  
Might be vivid and real like  
The knots in your stomach from  
The knives in your back, like  
The salt of salvation you  
Licked from your lips, like  
The eyes of the crowd locked on  
Glistening brows.

The words that they choose  
Could seem haunting and true as if  
Precision could crumble the apex of pain, as if  
Alien terms could make fear otherworldly, as if  
Opacity could obscure what really happened.

But sensations and paintings and  
Supple persuasion can only  
Make eyes at the absolute.  
You hold it. You keep it.  
You share it. You spill it.  
They can't tell your story better than you.

---

Anna Kirwin is a writer and artist, living in London, but dreaming of the Arctic. Her last published piece considered sleep, but more generally, her recent work deals with language, thought and time. She sees light in the darkness.

---

# Strider Marcus Jones

---

## THE TWO SALTIMBANQUES (Pablo Picasso)

when words don't come easy  
they make do with silence  
and find something in nothing  
to say to each other  
when the absinthe runs out.

his glass and ego  
are bigger than hers,  
his elbows sharper,  
stabbing into the table  
and the chambers of her heart  
cobalt clown  
without a smile.

she looks away  
with his misery behind her eyes  
and sadness on her lips,  
back into her curves  
and the orange grove  
summer of her dress  
worn and blown by sepia time

where she painted  
her cockus giganticus  
lying down  
naked  
for her brush and skin,  
mingling intimate scents  
undoing and doing each other.

for some of us,  
living back then  
is more going forward  
than living in now  
and sitting here-

at this table,  
with these glasses  
standing empty of absinthe,  
faces wanting hands  
to be a bridge of words  
and equal peace  
as Guernica approaches.

Strider Marcus Jones - is a poet, law graduate and former civil servant from Salford, England with proud Celtic roots in Ireland and Wales. He is the editor and publisher of Lothlorien Poetry Journal <https://lothlorienpoetryjournal.blogspot.com/>. A member of The Poetry Society, his five published books of poetry <https://stridermarcusjonespoetry.wordpress.com/> reveal a maverick, moving between cities, playing his saxophone in smoky rooms. He is also the editor and publisher of Lothlorien Poetry Journal. <https://lothlorienpoetryjournal.blogspot.com/>

# Zainab Iliyasu Bobi

---

## Good night

to the river that flows in our tears  
to the earth that bellies our corpses  
to the sky that films our stories  
to the trees that bear our names  
to the birds that sing our songs  
we have lived today  
hoping tomorrow  
plays a new song.

## Paint a whole city in your dairy

You will sit, pick a brush & paint a city  
on your diary & mesh into your body

In your body will be a city with blue sky, orange sun,  
green grass, red blood, violet building, indigo ceiling,

& yellow bulbs. The city will be twin with the one  
you walk your shadow to the river to feel presence

again. this city is where you will flee from norms.  
where you will shave your hair and tint it pink.

# Yuu Ikeda

---

## The Fanfare

The fanfare of death  
resounds in summer night  
like a demon's eyes

Classical music  
wandering in my headphone  
can't erase the fanfare

Bourbon  
hovering in my brain  
can't make me forget  
the fanfare

I must continue  
to hear the fanfare  
until summer night ends...

## The Smoke

I'm running,  
running,  
running,  
to escape from  
smoke like heartbeats

The smoke chases me  
even in dream,  
ringing an alert of the Hell,  
screaming the connection  
of bloody tomorrow

I'm running,  
running,  
running,  
to cut a chain  
made by the smoke

But  
I'm never able to stamp  
my feet on the ground  
covered with the smoke

---

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>, "Pressure" in <Selcouth Station Press>, "Dawn" in <Poetry and Covid>, and more. Her Twitter and Instagram :

@yuunnnn77

---

# Rekha Valliappan

---

## Running River

*On the far side of an ancient river lie rock stones with strange markings. Paleontologists reveal short stick figures half scratched on the monoliths. One carries a glazed jar, another, a string chitravina--haunting reminders of a magnificent river that once supported life, tributaries upon tributaries, and a civilization.*

The car goes through winding roads. Then, in heat, in chaos, in a mess of muddy potholes flowing like it was the surface of Mars, back to Ohio, the finger lakes, herds of zebus, we're speeding, car flips over. We're in the front yard. We have reached the holy site, Temple One, on the empty banks of the deified river.

In Harappa riverbanks empty at dusk. It is a sign of prayer. My friend not knowing what to do, head full of crazy vintage mischief like squirting mango pulp at fruit-flies, walks to the river taking his shoes off. The sun goes down. He takes a dip. We drove too fast from one tributary to the next. Between rivers a civilization which ancient humans ditched for the moon has sprouted from nowhere.

There is no mistaking the Indus Valley settlements, shaped in a contiguous line, like *chakras*—circular. Anyone who is watching will say the importance in leverage is attainment. The clay-brick buildings are huge. The terracotta statuettes are female. The pottery is burnished bronze. The horned bulls are watchful. The curb of gentrification shimmers back and forth like transportation water buffalo remains meeting light aircraft in the first days of flying on Hempstead Heath.

We feel lost. We break down the number-ology of years, hovering between a few zeroes. Pictorial three-prong letters coalesce into the outlines of an enigmatic Harappa Stone Script, one of many mysterious pictish languages inscribed on ancient monoliths.

We rearrange ourselves prepared to decipher the present and the future, the journey and its opposite. This geriatric river, longest in the world, flowing into immortality out of Himalayan glaciers, takes us back, far back, to Ogham and Phoenician, to indigenous languages and Norse, to pagan European and rongo-rongo, to Babel and pre-Vedic Sanskrit. Harappa animal seals were traded as far as Mesopotamia.

Stretched by the metabolism of youth we are excited. I live on the downstairs, he lives upstairs and our paths cross. My friend wants to follow the deified tributary Saraswati. across the salt marshes, to the tidal basin. I want to follow the strange rock stones so severely weathered the unreadable markings aren't complete.

We're infused. We're carefully curating. We get the impression of the etched image of a half-naked man in *dhoti*. It's a torso, a bunch of lines, some kind of orthodoxy to keep the civilization running. This results in my friend proceeding in lateral movements, well as I progress spherically, taking copious notes of Harappa's rich historical artifacts and ancient masonry lying half-buried.

My friend reaches the site of two large mounds. I make the tentative but conspicuous discovery that the language of the Harappa stones can never be unraveled, because what language could precede the unreadable Indus River scripts—the world's oldest. My friend pokes around the public baths and granaries of baked clay.

"How could a language be so obscure as to not have an origin?"

"Lost languages exist. So do lost rivers. Very likely both are elusive," says my friend, re-discovering a two feet by four feet stone cist used for burials.

Clutching the dancing girl figurine of bronze in one hand I trace the unknown script on the rock surface with the other. The intermittent stick signs produce a sweet plaintive sound, so rich I'm on hallowed ground. I'm fingering an ancient string *chitravina* on the banks of the Indus's most famous tributary, lost underground.

"Sort of like holy chants along a *Rig-Vedic* river lost to existence?" I reply. "I'm not lying, but let me tell you I'm not falsifying or inventing either . . . I wonder . . ."

"You wonder *what*?"

"I wonder if musical *ragas* formed from sounds of running rivers . . ."

He plucks five *moongladdus* from his trouser pockets. "Time will tell."

"What can you do with that?"

He ignores me. This would not have happened if I were an early riser. I woke up late yesterday morning. I fed the birds. I watered the *bonsai*. I pulled out of my driveway when I spotted my friend hunched at the road shoulder, sipping Starbucks and solving the Rubik's cube. We looked at each other for a couple of long seconds and here we are.

When I was very young I once woke up in Serbia. Following the banks of many interlocking rivers, I actually walked from Moscow to Victor Hugo's farm on the Seine. How do I stop this trend? In the memory of regular people, there are stereotypes. I daresay many have followed rivers their whole lives. I hear my friend talking excitedly. He exits the burial cist very quickly and we leave.

"Sometimes I think I've lived my whole life in a cemetery."

"You mean underground, like the catacombs there? Rama-Rama!"

He hangs very tightly onto me. "I'm scared of living forever," he says.

"*Nirvana* happens to everyone. Even holy Saraswati despite monsoon rains dried up in arid heat, in a desert—no more reincarnations."

"I'm scared of not dying."

"It's the way of the wheel—the cycle of rebirth. Rivers flow and rivers return to restart their journeys—always running."

We watch the Indus flow in slow motion into space and time. I realize now what happened. We both enrolled for Classics 101 on the same day, which ended here.

"Wake up! Wake up!" I yell, re-imagining a boat journey on a paper river following trading routes out of the Harappa settlements if we built ourselves a raft.

He looks groggy. He gazes back, hollow-eyed, staggering awkwardly towards the stone cists, soapstone jar clutched tightly in one hand like a lifeline. He must be sleep-walking. Before I can stop him he disappears underground. How does he do it? The ossuary can barely hold an oversized possum. For a fleeting moment, the theory of three human species one diminutive swims before my eyes.

Never do I think I will see the day when a grown man buries himself carrying his own funerary items for internment--*laddus*, jar, clay pot.

I re-emerge in Ohio at the intersection of two major highways. With me is a *chitravina* and a couple of fossil vertebrates to be scientifically studied. I feel a holistic kind of energy return as if the Indus River with its magnificent length is flowing down the full length of my spine.

My friend has stayed behind with the massive river.

My existential journey has just begun

*The End*

---

Rekha Valliappan is an internationally published writer of prose and poetry. Her works feature in *Disquiet Arts Literary Magazine*, *Critical Reads*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *GHLL*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *The London Reader*, *The Blue Nib*, *Litro Magazine*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *The Prime Number Magazine*, *Aaduna Literary Magazine*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and dozens of other venues. A former university lecturer with a background in English Literature and Law, she has won awards for her writing and earned nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. For complete lists visit her website [silicasun.wordpress.com](http://silicasun.wordpress.com)

---

# Amanda McLeod

---

## Beacon of Truth

I probably should have turned the podcast off. 'Climate change will be the leading cause of death for the next generation' isn't something my kids needed to hear. The air in the car became thick; breaths were held at the end of gasps. I followed my own breaths in and out, the way my meditation teacher showed me. This, now. This, now. The seat was hot under my thighs and the atmosphere cloying. The car was the globe in miniature, heating up as we sat inactive, hurtling along the asphalt strip.

*Mum, that's true, isn't it?*

*Yes, my darling.* To our left, the lake shimmered, ribboned with blue-green toxicity.

*Can we stop it?*

*My love, it won't be easy. But I think if we try, and we listen to people who know-how, that we can.*

*Don't we already try?*

The tyres hummed. I considered how to answer the question. A hand squeezed my heart as I glanced over at his earnest face. How much truth can one child handle, when it means staring directly at his own end? An exhalation. A small hand on my own.

*Yes, my love. But we need to try harder.* We crested the rise, and the hill before us was a beacon, ablaze with autumn colour. Following a pattern millennia old.

Reminding us our lives are tiny blips in time, spinning through a world that moves much more slowly. Reds and golds and bronzes, Earth's confetti on the wind. My eyes filled. This, now. This, now.

*We have to try much, much harder.*

*/ends*

---

Amanda McLeod is a writer, artist, and nature lover currently living in Canberra. She's the author of flash collection *Animal Behaviour* (Chaffinch Press, 2020). When she's not editing for Animal Heart Press or designing issues of *FERAL: A Journal of Poetry and Art*, you will find her outside in a forest or near a river. Her work has been published extensively; you can find a lot of it at

[AmandaMcLeodWrites.com](http://AmandaMcLeodWrites.com)

# Rob McKinnon

---

## Six Months After the Bushfire

Restorative rains  
brings bright green to dark hills  
though blacken tree trunks  
are still daily reminders  
of the devastatingly savage blazes.

Flattened homes  
trampled sheds  
twisted burnt corrugated iron  
remains of wooden beams  
rusting scorched cars and machinery,  
still linger  
as painful infected wounds.

For some, borrowed caravans  
with cramped canvas annexes  
fortified in multi layers of tarpaulins,  
tents or shipping containers  
were saviours while the ground smouldered  
but have become smothering confinement  
splatted with mould and mud.

Near freezing temperatures  
lack of running water  
showers in communities centres  
uncertainties about how to rebuild  
pandemic lockdowns  
with no conclusions apparent,  
add to enduring misery  
long after the flames passed.

---

Rob McKinnon lives in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia. His poetry has previously been published in 'Freedom-Rapture' Black Bough Poetry, 'Messages from the Embers' Black Quill Press, 'From the Ashes' Maximum Felix Media, 'Glow' Truth Serum Press, 'Birth Lifespan Vol. 1' Pure Slush, 'Growing Up Lifespan Vol. 2' Pure Slush, Backstory Journal, and other online and print journals.

---

# Ankur Jyoti Saikia

---

## On yellow

Never ask a xanthophobic to  
make a poem on yellow. My dark  
God used to be decked and tucked in  
yellow - for reasons best known to him.  
A blossom that will wither is as  
much yellow as a fruit that will rot.  
A few mistake orange for yellow  
and misguide followers - can fruits  
yield gold? The Sun, if I am correct,  
is also yellow but will  
eventually succumb to black.  
I hope we'll be friends then!  
Facts about yellow will benefit  
only the poet, not me. I'm  
a xanthophobic, remember?

## To an addicted sweetheart

Naivety of people  
who love something that  
steadily hates them to death,  
leaves me wonderstruck

Your photo profile won't  
even be featured on these  
sweet, scented sachets  
What a pity!

Sometimes, I wish to offer you  
a cup of hemlock  
O Socrates of ignorance,  
let death embrace you quickly  
It will save me pain!

---

Ankur Jyoti Saikia (he/ him) is a researcher at a forestry research institute in India with works being published in the Minison Zine, Bluepepper, Sledgehammer Lit, Openwork mag, Holyflea, Spill Words, Visual Verse, Pop the culture pill and Outcast Press anthology. You can find him on Twitter @amythfromassam.

---

---

Thank you to all our lovely contributors for their support and submissions, and to everyone taking the time to read all these 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.

---