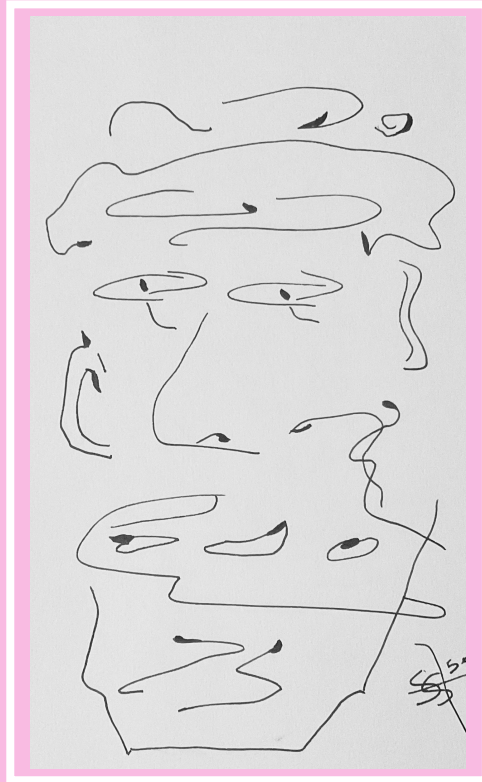


Hilary 2024



# The Vanity Papers

Chaos

Selection © The Vanity Papers

Copyright of works  
rests with authors and artists

The Vanity Papers  
Oxford Review

The Harris Manchester  
Literary Society



Hilary Term 2024  
[thevanitypapers.com](http://thevanitypapers.com)

**THE  
VANITY  
PAPERS**

## The Vanity Papers

Give up all your possessions tonight  
and donate your alarm clock to charity  
you don't need it anymore  
for time eternal.

Let your sister know  
the kind of thing  
you would backspace  
out of existence.

Reeking of jasmine  
and vetiver and musk  
in the palace of the mind  
reading Hesse in your voice.

Touch the stones  
pulled out of the earth for us  
your clothes glossy and black  
strewn on the floor.

As the violets bleed their shadows.  
tomorrow the door will be left  
open for you to stand in

**Welcome to Chaos**

The Vanity Papers: 06 The Chaos Issue

Psychodrama  
Reverse The Curse  
Metra Mitchell-Taylor

Being You  
Sumana Khan

Directions & Memories  
Hannah Ledlie & Rupa Wood

Songs Of Chaos  
Saraswati Nagpal

Chaos  
Paula Chappell

Patterns  
Elen Jones

We Cannot Stop For Grief  
Beth Hurst

Ai Wei Wei At The Mathematical Institute  
Catherine Digman

Three Poems  
I.Caron

Only Daughter  
Imogen Usherwood

The Phenomenon's Prophecy  
Jennifer Nolan

Sport And Story  
Openings  
Dylan Squires

The Palace Of Floating Cards  
Johanna Böttiger

Photographs  
钱小林 Qian Xiaolin  
Freya Ziyan Lu

If I Am Dead, Read Me  
Lua Valino De Jong

Love  
Catherine Digman

Paintings  
William Wray

There Were None  
Laura Andrikopoulos

First Year  
Griffin Gudaitis

A New Rearrangement of The NKJV Habakkuk  
Elijah Wong Man Shun

The Gloom  
Alice Brooker

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
Rupa Wood

EDITORS  
Roland Fischer-Vousden and Bidy Vousden

POETRY EDITOR  
Tomas Thompson

PROOFREADERS  
Tallulah Hawley  
Bridget O'Donnell

BUSINESS DIRECTOR  
Catherine Digman

HEAD OF EVENTS  
Jennifer Nolan

COVER ART  
Sara Farnworth

The Vanity Papers is a termly literary review  
Published by the Harris Manchester College Literary Society  
With support from the HMC JCR and the Kellogg College MCR  
[rupa@thevanitypapers.com](mailto:rupa@thevanitypapers.com)

The Vanity Papers, Harris Manchester College,  
The University of Oxford, Mansfield Rd, Oxford OX1 3TD



## Contributors

LAURA ANDRIKOPOULOUS is reading for a MSt in Literature and Arts and has a love of the imaginal realm and interdisciplinary approaches. She has written a thesis on modern magic which she is turning into a book and is also completing a novel. Kellogg College.

ALICE BROOKER is a poet and English Literature undergraduate at the University of Oxford. Her work has been published with Young Poets Network and Mosaïque Press, among others. Her first collection, is *Men Made From Candles* (Frosted Fire, 2024)  
alicebrooker.com wildfire-words.com/alice-brooker  
Instagram: @\_alicebrooker

JOHANNA BÖTTIGER is a second year reading English — who was in a rather precarious living situation and writes mainly self-reverentially about the utter chaos that is her life”  
Instagram: @johannaboettiger

I.CARON worries too much and gets easily infatuated with her professors. ‘Any bad sentence has the germ of something good’. *Je sais bien mais quand même.*

PAULA CHAPPELL is an art dealer and gallery owner in Kent.  
Instagram: @chappell\_contemporary

LUA VALINO DE JONG is a lyrical prose writer. They were the chair of the Literature Society at University



College Roosevelt, and the editor of the Fiction & Poetry column of the magazine *Tabula Rasa*. Beyond writing, their interests include history, as well as queer and feminist studies. They are currently doing a Masters in Classical Archaeology at the University of Oxford.

Instagram: @lua\_jong

CATHERINE DIGMAN is reading History at Harris Manchester. In her heart she knows that History is the greatest fiction of all time.

Instagram: @CatherineDigman

SARA FARNWORTH is window shopping until she finds some new inspiration. Awaiting that moment, she remains ready with pen in hand.

GRIFFIN GUDAITIS has published in *The Purple* and *The Isis Magazine*. An MSt student at Oxford in English (650-1550) he specializes in Old English poetry and the literature of animal tricksters in fairy tales. He comes from the town where *The Sopranos* was filmed and plays rugby for the university team.

TALLULAH HAWLEY is a psychology undergraduate visiting at Wadham College for the full year. Back home, she is the editor-in-chief of Sarah Lawrence College's newspaper *The Phoenix*, and serves as a culture section editor for the Oxford Student. She is from Missouri, which has prompted Google searches from multiple Tesco cashiers to verify that it is indeed a real place.

West England, now based in East London. She completed her BA in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Warwick in 2017, and is currently reading for the MSt in Creative Writing at Kellogg College, University of Oxford. Beth is also a Content Marketing Associate Director for a global media company.

ELEN JONES is an author, visual artist, and performance artist living in Kent. She is the author of an oracle deck *Voices of the Dark Mothers*, and is currently in process of editing a book of cunning wisdom.

Instagram & Facebook: @SpiralPriestess

SUMANA KHAN's unpublished crime novel "The Good Twin" won third place and the Readers' Choice award in the *SI Leeds Literary Prize 2020*. Her short stories have been published in *Writing Magazine* and have received recognition in various competitions including the *2023 Bath Short Story Award*, *2019 Royal Society of Literature's VS Pritchett short story competition*; *2016 Just Write competition*; *2016 Manchester Short Story competition*. She holds a MLitt in Creative Writing and a PhD in Psychology.

HANNAH LEDLIE is an Edinburgh-born and Manchester-based writer interested in form and futurism. She was shortlisted for the BBC Young Writers' Award 2015, and a winner of Penguin's

'Platform Pride' poetry competition in 2019. Her work has featured in a number of publications, including *Ambit*, *Gutter*, and *Magma*. Hannah is a graduate of the MSt in Creative Writing at the University of Oxford.  
hannahledlie.com

FREYA ZIYAN LU is an aspiring Egyptologist among many other things.  
Instagram: @freya\_zl

REBECCA PEARSON is a writer and editor based in Oxford. Graduating from Loughborough University in 2023, she is currently studying for her MSt in English (1830-1914) at Oxford. Her poems have appeared on the Overhear App and in Loughborough's student magazines.  
Instagram: @wordsbyrebecca

METRA MITCHELL is an American painter whose work has been exhibited internationally. Featured publications include *Juxtapoz Magazine*, *Studio Visit Magazine*, *Riverfront Times*, *Alive Magazine*, *All the Arts Magazine*, *Create! Magazine* and *LUXE Interior + Design Magazine*.

SARASWATI NAGPAL is an Indian poet, writer of fantasy and sci-fi, and a classical dancer. Her graphic novels are feminist retellings of epic Indian myths. She is published in *The Atlantic*, *Atlanta Review*, *Acropolis Journal*, *Tipton*, *Dust Poetry* & other journals. Saraswati has

a forthcoming chapbook with *Black Bough Poetry*, Wales. Saraswati has choreographed and performed for stages and films. For two decades, she has been a teacher of creative writing and literature to teenagers.

Instagram & X: @saraswatinagpal

JENNIFER NOLAN is reading for a DPhil in Archaeology at Kellogg. She enjoys exploring museums, stone circles, collecting dusty old tomes and sailing on the open sea.

BRIDGET O'DONNELL is a third-year undergraduate reading Law at St Hugh's College.

ELIJAH WONG MAN SHUN studies English Language and Literature at Harris Manchester College.

DYLAN SQUIRES studies Engineering at University College. He is part of the committee for the Percy Shelley Poetry Society and enjoys procrastinating studying by going rock climbing.

Instagram: @percyshelleypoetrysoc

IMOGEN USHERWOOD is a fiction writer, playwright, director and very occasional poet, currently studying for an MSt in Creative Writing at Oriel College, Oxford. Her work has been published in *Msllexia*, *Joyland*, and *The Oxford Review of Books* among other places. She is represented by MMB Creative.

Instagram & X: @imogenusherwood

RUPA WOOD is a multi-disciplinary artist exploring the philosophy of miraculous and commonplace magic. She is published by *Varsity Publications Cambridge*, *The London Magazine*, *The Oxford Magazine*, *Loft Books* and *The Oxford Review of Books*.

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

WILLIAM WRAY is a California based artist. He studied painting at the Art Students League in New York. Making his living as a cartoonist who specialized in painted subjects, he spent many years coalescing an eclectic array of art styles, ultimately finding his voice in a contemporized reflection of traditional California regional paintings that focus on humble subject matter rarely considered as fine art.

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

Instagram: [@William\\_Wray](https://www.instagram.com/William_Wray)

# *THE VANITY PAPERS*

**Psychodrama &  
Reverse The Curse**

**Metra  
Mitchell**







Metra Mitchell



**Metra Mitchell**

Being You

**Sumana Khan**

# Being You

The autorickshaw stops on a desolate, muddy lane. The driver, a wiry kid barely out of his teens, turns off the engine to indicate that I've arrived at my address. The sudden silence after forty-five minutes of the rickshaw's diesel engine drone is startling. I look out. We're parked in front of a compound wall with peeling distemper. Mahatma Gandhi is painted on the wall and the unevenness of the surface makes his smile appear manic.

I hesitate to alight. "Are you sure this is the place?" I ask, even though I know this is the address.

The kid turns to me, eyes the shape of hilsa fish. "Yes madam. Dr Basu clinic, no?" He comes around, takes my suitcase, and plonks it on the ground. I'm left with no choice but to alight.

A haze of red-brown silt is suspended in the still evening air, and I sneeze. Even though it's past 5pm it's easily above 40 degrees and the air is viscous with humidity. My linen kurti is sticking to my skin like clingfilm. I'm tempted to tell the kid to take me back to the ferry port at Canning bridge. I could be back in Kolkata by night. I'd check into a good hotel. Maybe the Taj Bengal — crisp sheets on the bed, LCD TV, room service, high pressure showers, swimming pool... maybe get lucky with a stranger. But I pay the fare and watch the autorickshaw leave. There's no turning back now. Being you will not be easy, my dear sister.

The compound has a rusty gate that dangles on one hook. I push it open and drag my suitcase inside. I find myself in a large courtyard paved with uneven stone slabs, with clumps of weed and grass growing between them. To the left is Dr Basu's clinic. The clinic is locked. I guess we can scratch out bullet point number one of the agenda on the NGO slide presentation: *Warm welcome by Dr Basu.*

Next to the clinic is your room, Pallu... now mine. The door is bolted on the outside with a piece of folded paper thrust in the bolt hook.

The handwriting is atrocious, and I read the letter with difficulty. *Will meet tomorrow*, it starts abruptly. *Food in basket next to the stove. Close windows to avoid mosquitoes, scorpions, and snakes (mostly non-venomous) before sleeping. Light mosquito coil without fail. Warm welcome — Dr Basu.*

Right. There's the bullet point one. I guess I'll stay awake, thank you very much.

I enter the room with trepidation, expecting to see coiled reptiles. The fading evening light pools on the single bed pushed against a window. Your Shangri-La is immaculately clean, sparsely furnished, and tightly packed with secretive silence. Just like you, Pallu.

I can't remember the last time I'd slept this way, deep and dreamless, waking up fully alert. There's an electric charge thrumming inside me as I anticipate my first meeting with Dr Basu.

I open the file with the printouts of your emails. I find the one I want and read it a couple of times even though I know it by heart. I change into the powder blue salwar kameez. I drag a chair to the porch and sit with an old edition of Filmfare. This was how Basu saw you for the first time, a vision in blue... only you were reading Dostoevsky.

The clinic is still locked but I see a motorbike parked inside the compound. Basu must be around somewhere.

I wait. It's a little after 10am, the day is already white hot. The dusty lane outside remains quiet. Now and then, women walk by carrying firewood bundles on their head, their hips swaying to balance the load. They stare at me with kohl-lined eyes.

Basu walks through the gate like a storm cloud. He's unkempt... yet inexplicably magnificent.

"You look nothing like your sister," he says. It sounds like an accusation. He is holding two cups of chai and thrusts one into my hand.

"Pallavi was adopted." I reply.

He plonks himself next to me, a bit too close, and slurps his tea with a loud *aah*.

Damn Pallu... remember how you'd tease me for reading those *Types of Men to Avoid* articles on Femina? Basu is the poster boy. If only you'd read them instead of those depressing romances, you'd not be a "missing" statistic today. Men like Basu are not meant for someone vanilla like you.

"If you have plans of leaving abruptly like your sister let me know right away," Basu says.

I don't reply. My skin prickles with goosebumps as I hold his stare.

"For six months she does a brilliant job. Then, when I was away for a few weeks she just clears out. No phone call, no text — hell, not even goodbye scribbled on a note."

I remain silent. I remember getting that call. It was a Tuesday. I can still hear his voice play back in my head like a recording. Maybe the brain stimulates the eardrums to vibrate in a certain way. That bass depth when he said certain words; that slight elevated pitch when he uttered your name; the tremor when he asked if you had returned home. You returned, I lied... *sorry, she does not want to keep in touch.*

"This NGO internship is not a joke," Basu continues to berate me. "It's not some certificate generation factory that you people use as a highway to get into Ivy League universities."

"I don't have any such ambitions."

"So you are here to atone for your sister's behaviour?"

"Look, I'm sorry for the way things ended with her. But I was genuinely interested in coming here. It was my idea in the first place. I did not think my application would even be considered. But you approved it. And here I am."

It's been a month since my arrival. I am surprised at my resilience. Being you is exhausting, Pallu... an excruciating penance.

I try to capture your essence in every move — that virginal beauty, that butterfly-fragility, that cringe-worthy need to be altruistic. The truth is I wake up every day wanting to scream. I hate this enforced celibacy. I miss the comfort of civilisation — TV, internet, air conditioners, microwaves. I don't give a shit about primary healthcare, climate change, or the ecology of this hellhole — I want to know how Basu romanced you. I want to relive your moments, throbbing in the fever heat of first love. In your emails you described *sensual languidness* as if you were Lady Chatterbox or whoever. It was probably just the heat and humidity, you idiot. It's forty-six degrees.

I may not know how to calculate carbon emissions, but I can sure decipher the Basus of the world like a universal equation. They are boringly predictable, always following the same behavioural patterns. The more I present myself like you, the sooner I can draw him out, this much I know.

So here I am, someone who prefers to Uber her way to a spot a kilometre away, walking for seven to eight kilometres every day in vicious heat. I grudgingly admit the routine has grown on me though. I look forward to my daily commute, the lurching motorboat rides on the Bidyadhari, the spine-jarring tractor rides on the road jostling for space with cattle. I enjoy walking, gruelling as it is, traversing dykes, mud roads, and swamps. The landscape is speckled with weed-choked ponds with startling pink lotuses. Women squat on the clay banks to wash clothes and vessels, discussing their healthcare. The heat does not bother me now, I don't sweat copiously like before. My acne problem has reduced drastically, and my skin is clearer, though it will never resemble your porcelain visage.

More importantly, I can now understand why you found Basu so magnetic, though I've never come across such an uncouth man. Everything is unruly about



him – his hair, his scruffy clothes, his loud banter, his swag. An atrocious larynx... the man guffaws, roars, yells, sings out of tune, yawns horrendously throughout the day. Whenever his clinic is open, the compound turns into a village fair. I return to this cacophony almost every evening and sit on the porch pretending to read, listening to him jabber.

“Why are you here again?” I hear him roar at a bent old woman. “At this rate people will gossip about us.” She calls him monkey-face. Another time, he listens (with loud snorts) to a young man describing symptoms of illness and declares, *You are pregnant*. I figured his patients were few, but the milling crowd comes just to listen to his diagnosis, slapping their thighs and laughing. It is as though he is a mythological hero. From treating constipation to repairing water pumps, he apparently has all the solutions.

One day I return early, my period cramps are so bad that I find walking difficult. A delivery van is parked in the compound and Basu is taking inventory of a consignment. He usually has something cruel and sarcastic to say whenever he sees me but we just exchange a glance and I hurry to my room.

After a while I hear a light knock on my door. Basu hands over some food and a strip of Ibuprofen.

“You don’t have to do this.” he says, the kindness in his tone stinging my eyes. “Go back to your life.”

‘All my life I’ve heard that I’m not as good as Pallavi. If you also think I’m not good enough just tell me directly. I’ll leave.’

Something shifts between us after that. You are now history, Pallu.

Today Basu offered to take me boating around the waterways of Sundarbans. There’s something charged about his body language – he’s going to

make his move, I can tell. I refer to your emails and select my wardrobe carefully – a sleeveless Chikanari kurti and a Batik lehnga-skirt. He does a double take when he sees me.

We set off. You are right — he knows every creek and tributary of the delta like the lines of his palm. He talks about the mating behaviour of olive ridley sea turtles as he steers the motorboat. I wonder if this is foreplay. I've never made love on a boat.

We head southwards on the Bidyadhari. Basu turns off the engine and we bob on a vast expanse of a wave-less water body. The silence of the place presses against my ears. The air is viscid. The sun has splintered into a million pieces on the water. I wonder if you are lying below somewhere, ripped apart by crocodiles.

Basu guides the boat into one of the many narrow waterways with floating banks of sundari trees.

He anchors on a clay bank and *déjà vu* overwhelms me...

This is where he brought you. This is where he spread the orange and yellow straw mat. You had the picnic lunch of tomato and cucumber sandwiches. He reached out to wipe a smudge of ketchup on the side of your mouth. And you... YOU... bent forward to taste his lips.

Basu is staring at me intently. I feel every drop of sweat on my body, I wonder if he can hear my galloping pulse.

‘This is a very special place for me,’ he says, his voice guttural.

We look at each other in silence. The air is radioactive.

He takes a step towards me and holds out his hand, palm upwards.

I take the cue and extend mine. He holds my hand gently, his thumb on my pulse.

“You need to calm down,” he says and traces the tattoo on my wrist.  
“Interesting tattoo. What is it?”

“The flower of Aphrodite.”

“Have you come here before?” He asks abruptly as I stare at his lips.

“What? No,” I stiffen.

“I want to show you something special.”

He drops my hand and pulls out his phone.

He plays a video.

“The bank has ground level cameras hidden in the vegetation, to track crocodiles and turtles.”

The camera captured you falling flat on your face, Pallu. A pair of hands are around your slender neck. The hands drag you to the water. You are squirming, thrashing around like a freshly caught fish. Your head is pushed underwater, and you go still. Unfortunately, my tattoo is clearly visible.

The familiar rage rises up when I realize that you are again taking away what belongs to me. My parents were first, they did not ask me if I wanted a sibling before adopting you, I never wanted to share them. Then my boyfriends, they wanted my body, but they wanted you emotionally. And now, Basu. I claimed him first, remember? Remember that Sunday afternoon in Bangalore when we walked into Chowdiah Memorial Hall to see a play? But it turned out to be the wrong programme... a talk with Dr Basu. I wanted to leave but he came on stage and the

world stopped. I spoke about him for days and days. You knew how I felt about him. And yet, the next thing I knew you were here with him. This repeated betrayal must be punished, no?

“I’m relieved, actually,” I say. I was sick of inhabiting her skin and mimicking her mind-numbing existence. “So what next? I don’t see any police around. Why is that?” I ask Basu. I pull him close, and he does not resist.

“Take a guess,” he says.

“Is it because there are no witnesses, or because you are relieved too?”

“Oh we have a witness, Aphrodite,” Basu says as he turns me around slowly. “You could never be her,” he whispers in my ears.

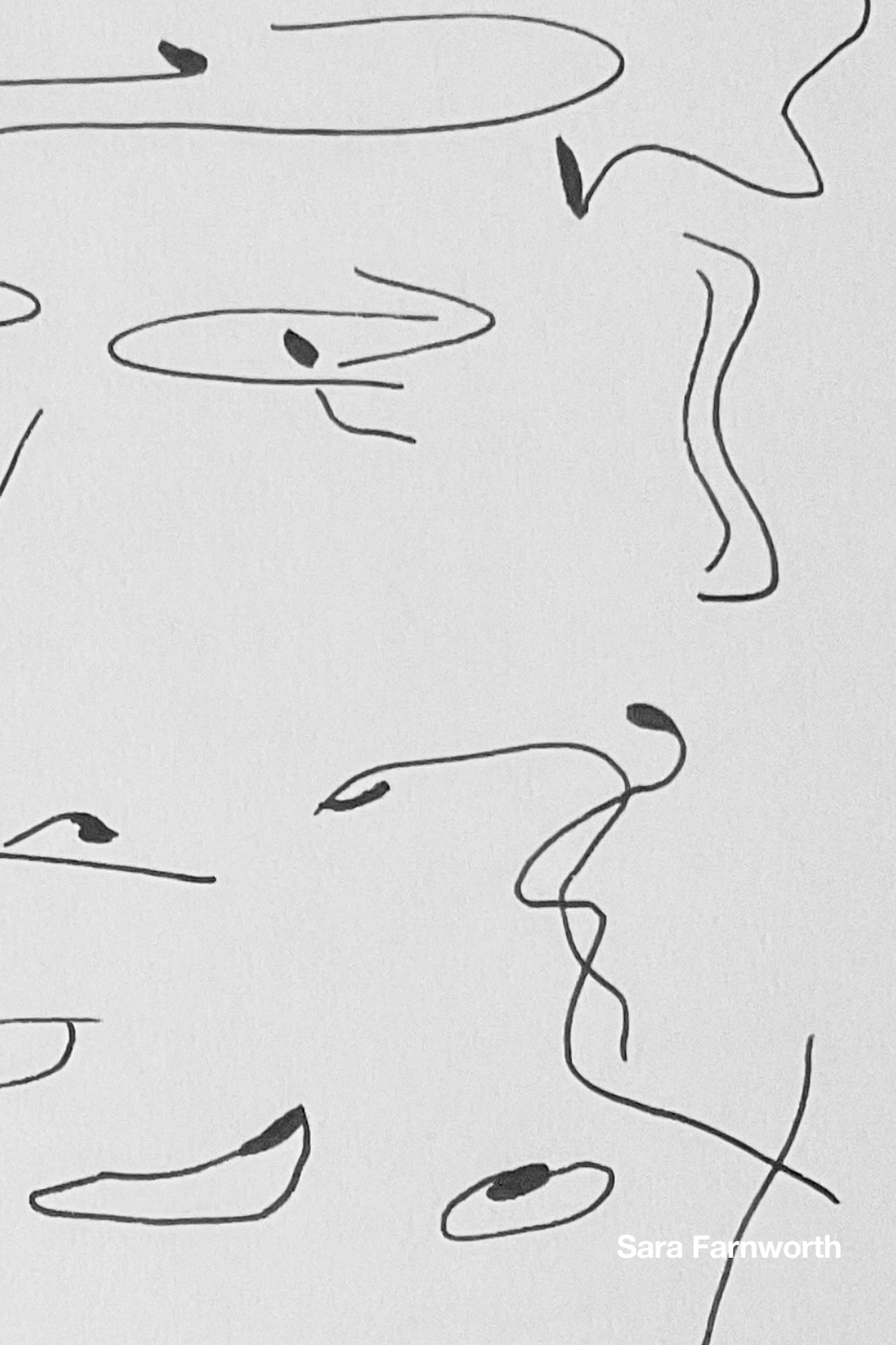
And you emerge from the thick mangroves like an apparition, mouthing, “I forgive you.”

**Sumana Khan**

Winner of The Vanity Papers Wonderland Fiction Competition



Sumana Khan



Sara Farnworth

**Directions & Memories**

**Hannah Ledlie  
&**

**Rupa Wood**

# Directions

It's simple,  
take the  
cycle path  
cutting through  
the meadow  
when you reach  
the crossroads  
you'll know  
the road  
is not a road  
and the cross  
is a shape  
you traced  
over my body  
follow the wall  
of the factory  
you can't  
miss it  
where we  
were once  
hungover  
in the tesco  
and before that  
hungover  
in the safeway  
in the greengrocer  
in the field of wheat  
in the field  
in the forest  
past the trees  
as wide  
as houses  
by our home  
which is not  
a house



and our bed  
    which is  
        not a place  
            where you  
                crawl  
                    on your  
  
                    hands and knees  
  
to make yourself  
forget  
the road  
    you reach  
        is not a road  
            and  
                the blood  
                    you bleed  
                        is not alone  
and the cross  
  
    you drew  
        is not  
            a shape

**Hannah Ledlie & Rupa Wood**



Hannah Ledlie

# Memories

That was the year all the moons had special names. They were part of the venn diagram, when your shadow was inside my shadow. I return back to that place, to be more than myself, and sometimes find that I have been all but left behind. The mirror was a stranger and yet it met your face and left behind a piece of you, a touch of foundation like a police station fingerprint. You are more yourself, the one you once left behind in a dark green garden underground. Surrounded by your childhood belongings, you sigh and sweep your hand over a fire. The sound of a door closing touches the edge of knowing who was home by the creak of the floorboards. You knew the way they felt, a foreign language you were fluent in. Our houses were made distant by winter. Sometimes I forget your name and we are brought closer by it. Sometimes I say your name to divide us in silence. Sometimes I say your last name next to my first name, as a kind of alchemy, which is, at the same time, embarrassing. The kind of thing I would backspace out of existence, had I written it down. But I say it, and so it stays in the room with me, lit by sparks from a passing night. The place moves through us and out again, as though we never really knew where we belonged. And yet these are the times I'm not able to stop remembering. These are the times you pick up off the ground behind me, running and shouting, *wait, wait.*

**Hannah Ledlie & Rupa Wood**



Rupa Wood

**Songs Of Chaos**

**Saraswati  
Nagpal**

# Songs Of Chaos

First, the Word —

scatter of swarovski in Kali's darkness,  
spell in dream-gold meandering

seas

song of shapeshift aching to be  
sung

by writhing poets questing,  
fragments

opal cadence darting in

shadows

Creating is leaps and languor tangled,  
word before thought, then shape of

mountain

crust folds, winds sigh  
pebbles gather, grow, glimmer,  
dust blooms a sea of pines,  
roots a-quiver in  
dawn

outside my window, buffaloes sup,  
slick black skinned  
in barley fields of monsoon

green

iridescent, glassy Andaman

sea

you and I float

the sun etching gold on our

bodies

that press, quiver, sing

the ancient song

peaks

in Kali's smile worlds burn,  
the Word we grasp

unspeakable

**Saraswati Nagpal**



**Saraswati Nagpal**

Chaos

**Paula  
Chappell**





Paula Chappell

**Patterns**

**Elen Jones**

## Patterns

The old man sets his artefacts, in order. He sits, at a wooden table. An old man, nearly eighty one, and near to death. That, he knows. For he has calculated the births, and deaths, of many men. The entrances, and exits, of each, on the stage. Oxford, now dead, and so died the inimitable voice, of Shake-Speare. Only I, am still alive, thinks the bald old man, with the fine head, still full of questions. He doubts, that on his own, he can speak, anymore, to angels. For Kelley, is long dead. Father of my son, thinks the old man. Theodore, now also dead. He takes the Seal of God and sets it down. Sets upon it, gently, gently mind, the shew stone. Both, he knows, will survive, and one day be found, in the British Museum. My theories, will spawn an empire, that will one day span the globe. Mathematically, it will be born, and grow, and die. Slowly. And I will be thought much of, for that, or much despised. For, after all, I am only human. Soon, soon, and soon, says the shew stone, you will leave this body, good John Dee. And soon, soon, soon, you will ascend, into ether. Touching the sacred hands, that up till now, have held you fast. You will be blessed, then, for all your flaws. For you did your best. You are a good man, John Dee, and a fine magician. Christ cannot birth it all, alone, says the wise stone. He cannot hold the all. He must work, hand in hand, with vulnerable men. Even, at times, with tricksters. Ah, the old man sighs. Now, you tell me this. Now, too late, to stop the mathematical proliferation, of sin. Empire, infecting the world, with greed, and lies, and false gods, And poor thinking. Life, says the shew stone, is fractalated-wise. And it shows old John Dee a wise fractal, called God-in-his-Heaven, And another, called Christ-in-Majesty. And a third, called Nature-in-Chains-and-Bound-to-her-Cross-For-Time-Eternal. And, at last, a fourth, which is Those-Who-Have-Eyes-To-See. And the old man rests, at last, exhausted.

**Elen Jones**

Flick

**Freya Ziyang Lu**

# Flick

One year my friend and I were walking in the woods in the middle of the city.

There had been three arson attacks in the city in the same month that year. Two of them appeared to have been accidents. A Maritime Self-Defense Force officer set fire to his own house, killing four of his children. He explained that he committed the crime out of anger at his wife for not sending him off to work that morning.

We walked on, and saw a haystack in front of us.

I asked my friend, "Will the hay catch fire somehow?"

"— Probably not." I answered myself, seeing the morning dew glistening on the grass.

I turned to my friend, "Have you ever tried to make a fire out in the wild?"

"No, never," said my friend, "it's not as easy as you think, especially when it's humid."

I thought for a moment and blurted out, "Fire is hard to please."

I watched Andrei Tarkovsky's film "Sacrifice" that evening. A man sets fire to his house to give up all his possessions. At the end of the movie I fell asleep, and dreamt that the whole world was burnt to ashes.

I still watch movies alone in the dark, but only light-hearted comedies. I no longer fall asleep at the end though. If I do fall asleep a while after the film finishes, I have no dreams before shortly waking up again. I donated my alarm clock to charity. I don't need it anymore.

Not long after waking up today, I was told that a man set himself on fire

yesterday afternoon on a local train. After reading related news reports, I learned that the man committed suicide because he could no longer bear the torment of poverty and illness — or so everyone thought.

I put down the newspaper to get a cup of coffee, but I could not remember where my coffee cup was. I opened the cupboard and looked inside. Not finding it, I reached into the hidden compartment. But instead of my coffee cup I found a green lighter. I'm not a smoker, so why did I possess a lighter?

I removed it carefully, it looked dusty. I tried several times but the spark wheel didn't turn and it certainly did not produce sparks — *fire is hard to please*.

The lighter was from someone who had gone out like a fire in my life.

*I want to go outside for a cigarette, come with?* He would always ask me this question.

*Yeab.* That was always my answer.

It was so cold outside that I kept shivering. I couldn't help coughing a little as the wind carried his smoke.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"It's okay. I don't hate the smell."

I said something like, "There is no colour at all in winter." — though maybe it was him who said that.

"What's your favourite colour?" I asked.

"Take a guess."

“Hmm... Black?”

“No of course not, black is depressing.”

I frowned. After a while I said, “Green. Your lighter is green.”

“Correct.” The man took a drag on his cigarette and continued, “Green and blue, to be specific.” He reached into his pocket and fumbled around, then took out two lighters together. “Look, I have a blue one too.”

I picked up the green one and played with it. The fire flickered on and off, creating a little warmth.

“Keep it.” He said.

“I will keep it, always.”

*I will keep it, always* — Did I really say that? The green lighter lay in the palm of my hand, the same as back then.

On the way to the bookstore, I put my hand into my pocket from time to time to fiddle with my lighter. Although I knew it was already a scrapped thing, I imagined it ignited, a terrifying thought — but the lighter was indeed dead. A particularly reassuring sensation ran through my body for half a second followed by a little disappointment.

I found a book introducing Soviet films, which mentioned Andrei Tarkovsky's ‘Nostalgia’, a story about an old man who wants to set himself on fire to save the world — something like that. While I read I fiddled with the lighter in my pocket and realised that the spark wheel was now easier to spin. I pressed on it more and more frequently, until the sound it made attracted a strange look from the

woman next to me.

I stopped what I was doing and took out my lighter, so she could see what it was. The look she gave me turned even stranger.

I tried to explain, “No, it doesn’t catch fire — it’s not as easy as you think...” Swallowing the rest of my words.

At night I thought of a new experiment for curbing insomnia, being awake is tiring after all. Holding a lighter feels better than hopelessly counting sheep.

The lighter chanted in the dark like a sutra: IGNITE ME. IGNITE ME. IGNITE ME. I yawned and felt my eyelids getting heavy.

The sound of the flicking lighter echoed rhythmically in the quiet of the night.

**Freya Ziyang Lu**





Freya Ziyang Lu

**We Cannot Stop For Grief**

**Beth Hurst**

# We Cannot Stop For Grief

Even today, of all days,  
clothes ache for the washing machine's lips,  
there is lunch and dinner to prepare,  
suspicious strawberries to decide about.

Emails hover like hummingbirds,  
bold in the inbox.

The grout still smells; you forgot  
the mould and mildew again,  
the spores creep in gridlines.

The world still spins on an axis,  
while at the centre, your love is immovable,  
sat on the balcony,  
watching the buses orbit the roundabout.

What do you pack in your tote bag after the news comes?  
Five pairs of knickers, your comfiest leggings,  
a half bag of pretzels.

I want to scream to the corner shop counter,  
He's dead! Instead I buy four diet cokes,  
some dark sea salt chocolate,  
manchego and olive tortilla chips.

None of it matters.

I say thanks for the bag.

The phone calls line up, the voices, the boys.  
They staggered from work into the too-bright streets.  
The gutter glitter, the people who don't know  
today is the worst day.

When does a person stop being a person?

We wander the flat, unsure  
how to operate our limbs anymore.  
In control the way a puppet master  
is attached at a distance  
by strings.

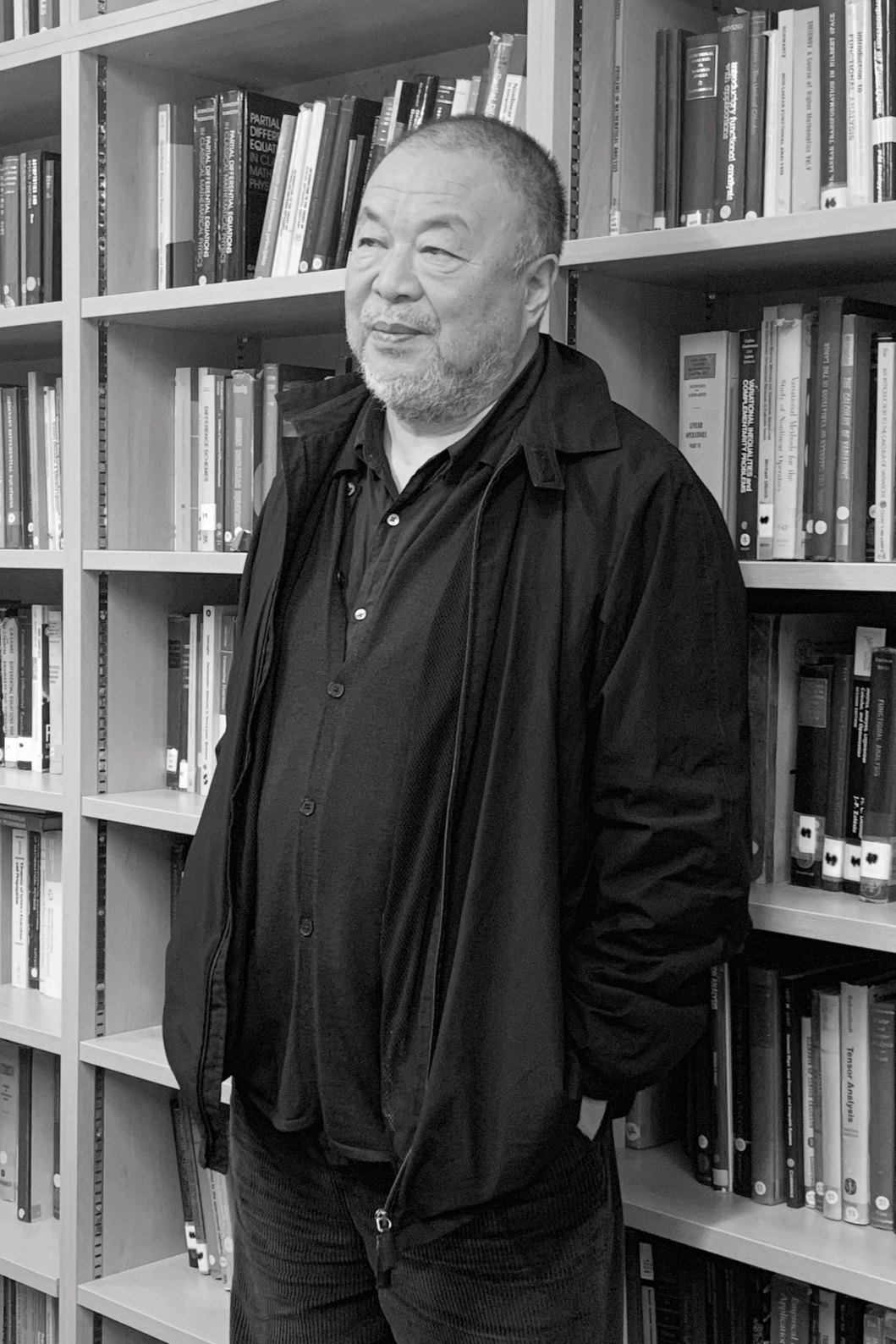
He reaches for me in the night,  
body hungry to feel and not feel,  
to consume.

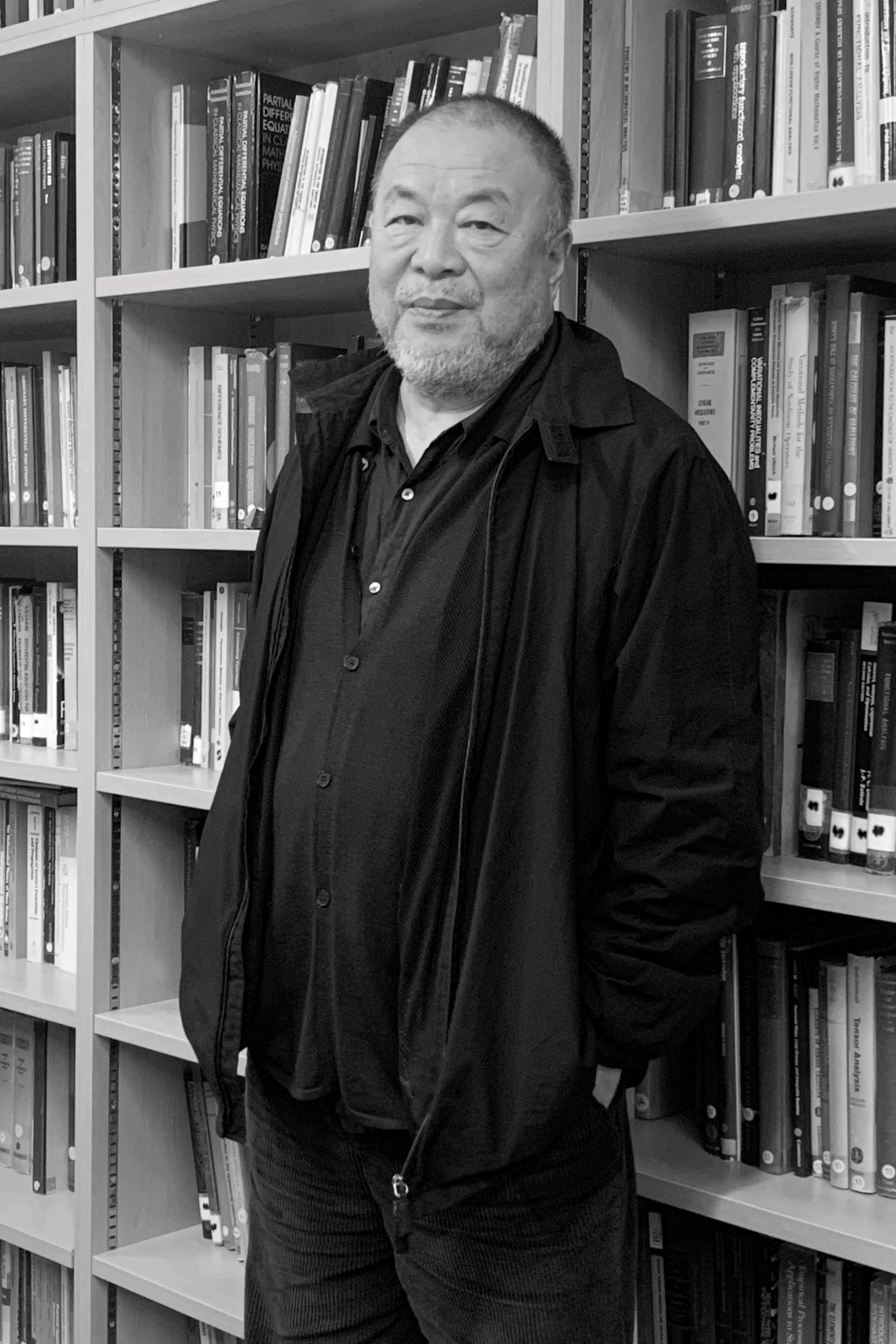
Dreaming in foreign syllables,  
I let him come in.

He is playing the recording of his laughter again.  
What a beautiful Saturday, he says at the end.

**Ai Weiwei at the  
Mathematical Institute**

**Catherine  
Digman**





**Three Poems**

**I. Caron**



# Three Poems

I

You're better than anything I've dreamt of.  
Maybe my imagination is extremely limited,  
footprints of Siddhartha all over your face,  
and your smile descending on my fractured Kantian jumble of cause and effect,

revisiting the moment when you asked for my number,  
my neurons firing hoping that  
you'll imbibe me with proper inclinations  
and will imprint the gestalt onto my sparagmian eros.

You at least enrolled me in a club of ecstatic caffeine consumers,  
whilst I was sprinkling the conversation with the  
buzzwords of determinism and phenomenology  
heavily pulling the discourses behind me.

Am I falling in love, or is this just a sporadic temporary hormonal imbalance?  
The surplus of oxytocin after a customary cortisolian Oxford.

## II

Schiller heedful of Spinoza, 80s - Derrida and Irigaray  
the fetus of the dying cells and the death in life  
future of predictability. Pavlov's dog, the measured  
wave of light, the effect of keystone

species: it's anticipated but it works. You show up —  
intellectual elite in the Schillerian ludic, stuck between  
freedom and necessity, Bach and Plato,  
and the next day you say you're reading Hesse.

An overstimulated hand sends the tremble down the spoon,  
pregnant with too many possibilities, trajectories, resisting the standstill,  
Schrödinger's cats in an epileptic shake  
ungraspable, unutterable, cognisable ersatz

Benjaminian aura, second definition and you  
swiftly catch one of my prunes — the dying cells spurt the fall, Sylvia.

### III

you were laboriously decanting  
predetermination from free will, monologuing the  
jumble of tangential observations - a gothic pre-Albertian  
architect with no cultural predisposition to finish the church.

Then, I was impulsively throwing out Laborit  
and the air was rich with afternoon petrichor.  
for your compliment, you cherrypicked the  
trite female binarity of devil and angel,

mindful of Paris syndrome, readily embraced  
the possibility of a positive flake rate tomorrow before  
subjecting me to the crème-brulee test. "And you said  
you're good at mind-reading." I quipped following your

repetitive blank rounds at my destination when sfumato blending,  
Satie and Verlaine were deliciously corrupting my shyness.

Only Daughter

**Imogen**

**Usherwood**

# Only Daughter

Drowning in your wedding gown  
and highest heels, my cheeks red  
with your most expensive lipstick,  
my little limbs doused in Chanel No 5.  
I've come downstairs to show you:  
to say look, look, I look like you!  
Hair all duckling-fluffy and reeking  
of jasmine and vetiver and musk.

A whole half-life's to come: of stealing  
clothes once worn by a skinnier spit of me,  
and shopping for the same black shoes  
every August, and doing my very best  
to remember to call you every week  
for as many weeks as there might be.

For there is a price I'll pay for love  
and for being loved, for being born  
to a Very Good Mother like you.

**Imogen Usherwood**



Imogen Usherwood

**The Phenomenon's Prophecy**

**Jennifer  
Nolan**

# The Phenomenon's Prophecy

(or a Response to Yeats' The Second Coming)

Touch the stones

Oppenheimer paperclips buried and reborn

Embedded hybrids integrate and ambush

Collective punishment sacrificed in bloodied Megiddo

Theocratic despots vanquished by feathered eyes

Peeling paint from holy houses

Glowing orbs extract their progeny

The wheat from the chaff

Binary puzzles stamp their approval.

Touch the stones.

Touch the stones

Confront the gated threshold of the petrified trickster

Offering a solemn invocation worthy of Eleusis

The ancient oak grove whispers cloak the light:

We are the unspoken fragmented worlds yet to come

Watchers of the terrarium and the ladder of life

quantum consciousness longing to manifest

Embody the Guardian; the center is the whole.

The Third Coming is the mind inversion.

Touch the stones.

**Jennifer Nolan**





**Jennifer Nolan**

**Sport And Story**

**Openings**

**Dylan Squires**

# Sport and Story

What is the summation —  
of me, of you and all?

How does the heart find  
another breath to slide into  
day after day?

The Gods have pulled the  
mountains, granite and grit,  
out of the earth

for us.

Should we leave them desolate,  
let them slip in dimensions  
back under?

Billions of years have passed untouched  
so don't close your newborn eyes.

This life, an eggshell in your skin,  
is sport and story, a tale that ropes

us together.

So I beg, do not stay  
with me.

Leave. It calls in your voice,  
but return and call your voice

**Dylan Squires**

# Openings

I have traded it for initiative.  
The days buried beneath books that  
left you bruised, and sore to the thought.  
The rolling wheel of rising with  
grave-eyes to sleeping halls,  
shuffling in on a still dreaming wave.  
It coming after evening wicks have  
    burnt to the morning,  
taking glöm in passing —  
and the threads are cut short.  
I've lost a piece somewhere,  
trying to walk with the  
    world in parallel,  
but we're of the same chalk,  
all afraid of loosening into  
another someone.

I left on foot, in search  
of something better, taking turns,  
reaching outposts, walking through  
thick gorse. Left pinned  
by all the mind can offer,  
after it all, I am trapped-  
as we are, collected in symphony.

Take the sacrifice and stay till the end.  
When it's over and your crown of hope  
lies decaying in the patchwork soil  
disfigured without any traces of the past,  
thinking over all the places you never

set your feet,  
be proud that you never resigned  
your heart to it.  
Tomorrow the door will be left  
open for you to stand in.  
and the games will be set up again,  
so for now breathe-  
the earth looks back at you,  
  
waiting on your move.

**Dylan Squires**



Sara Farnworth

**Chaos Is Come Again**

**Rebecca  
Pearson**

# Chaos Is Come Again

Love me,  
love me not —  
the soft petals fall to the ground,  
each a touch of skin.  
Slight shades of violet bleed shadows  
onto your fingers as you pluck each fragile petal  
away.

My heart flickers in the darkness, gently, breath held,  
eyes glittering, waiting — I feel myself peeling apart,  
quietly unravelling as the crescents of your fingertips  
fold into each-flowery bloom.

One careful shift at a time I pull myself  
away,  
finding my way back from chaos.

**Rebecca Pearson**





**Rebecca Pearson**

Belinda

# Catherine Digman

# Belinda

*It was meant to be a public space, but the other woman always looked at me like I didn't belong there. When she thought I was distracted she would come close, trying to make out the marks on my back, figure me out. I missed my husband, and I had an overwhelming sense that I wasn't safe around this woman, like a large looming presence waiting to kill me / I caught snippets of what she said about me .... "She looks foreign. I don't trust her." It's true, people see me as exotic, and they never quite know if they are safe around me. I try to call out to her, tell her I'm harmless but she doesn't hear me / I hear her whispering, "What is she eating? Why is she eating so much? Is she pregnant? Oh God, why is she here? Her revolting babies will be crawling everywhere." / We circle one another, day after day, in the communal spaces of this ugly house. I feel safer if I can see her, keep an eye on her, and I'm sure she feels the same / On Tuesday I overheard her talking to her friend on the phone, looking at me, talking about me; she thinks I can't hear her or don't speak the same language "Did she kill her husband... maybe, maybe not? Maybe she's a fraud." / After a few days of this, I catch her looking at me, fascinated, I come out wearing a new gown, glossy and black, beautiful in my own way, my old clothes strewn on the floor. She has a newfound respect for me, and seems to accept my presence. She smiles.*

\*Over time, the other lady became fond of Belinda, but still killed her in the end.

**Catherine Digman**



Catherine Digman

**The Palace of  
Floating Cards**

**Johanna  
Böttiger**

# The Palace of Floating Cards

Before—the pages of the book  
the words of the sentence  
the letters of the word

the palace in my mind  
a palace of cards—crumbling  
floating through the  
spaceless, placeless,  
homeless emptiness

the loci of  
—spacelessness—  
—placelessness—  
—homelessness—  
the not belonging, the  
deviance of the order of the road,  
the order of the map  
like the neat, the fine, the line  
that seems to place  
order into the present  
order, into the past  
that was circulating  
around the force  
of being, of places, of power  
—by expelling, excluding  
—by displacing, de-homing.

The palace in my mind  
a palace of cards—crumbling  
floating through the  
spaceless, placeless,  
homeless emptiness.

Tell me who I am.  
I ask—who am I?  
My mirror responds

leaving traces of tears on my  
face, rivers and streams,  
lines like those on the map  
you are the  
—spaceless—  
—placeless—  
—homeless—  
a face on a tarot card  
a hermit, magician, empress  
hovering and floating through the  
emptiness and nothingness  
an ancient chaos of un:belonging  
of un:being that is never

solved—overcome.

Like the crumbling palace of cards  
so nicely arranged,  
so well put together,  
oh, so gentle the hands  
that place together the cards—are floating,  
floating through the  
spaceless, placeless,  
homeless emptiness,  
that want to be arranged  
in order of the before  
that has never been,  
can never be,  
—are hovering in the endless  
liminal of chaos,  
waiting for divine interference.

*In the beginning  
there was the word.*

**Johanna Böttiger**

Photographs

钱小林

Qian Xiaolin

Freya Ziyang Lu













**If I Am Dead, Read Me**

**Lua Valino de  
Jong**

## **If I Am Dead, Read Me**

I love you. I do not write your name, but whisper it from beyond as a prayer. For me and you to remain tender. Nothing that you need to say I do not know yet; the words have already been uttered in a thousand lives. Rest assured, you have told me I love you and I have said it back. Let me be honest. Sometimes it is hard. When I do not pick up the phone for weeks at a time. When I am sleepless and restless and fuck around. To feel. Alive. When I dream dreams that I would rather not. The one in which I am told my grandmother will die, but I wake up and she is already dead. But this is not a suicide note. Not as long as the trees embrace / the dirt caresses / the sea dances / the rain kisses / the birds chirp / the tune sang to / the womb of me. I do not want to bid farewell to a world that leads to your bosom, in which the fox appears from the front yard bushes at night time and asks me to be wiser. Or wilder? Following its tracks away from the white noise of stress, laptop sleep (quick!) work. Away to leaves falling onto more leaves, loving each other. Just as you hold me at times when I am un — holdable, desirable, lovable. You love me, and that is enough. So, if I am dead, read me and wave from the shore.

**Lua Valino de Jong**



Lua Valino de Jong



Love

# Catherine Digman

# Love

*What is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly.*

There's never a good place to break up...

...wherever you do it...

...that place will be tainted with the memory of *that* person...

~

Waiting for you I heat up soup from a can, and eat it while it is still too hot, burning my mouth. I can feel a blister form. A fluid-filled bubble.

I am in one of those big Victorian town-houses, with a communal kitchen and bathroom, the garden is full of mature oaks, and a dilapidated wall which looks poetic...

...it is a dump, but I am endlessly trying to be hopeful... project a degree of romanticism onto my mundane life...

I should meet you somewhere away from the house, but I have no energy, and I feel that I want to do this face to face.

It's summer but 'This Shade of Autumn' by Portishead is playing on shuffle.

You arrive, your hair long, and tinted pink, a red that has faded but somehow looks good, "I got you into this music," you say...

... I nod, it's true, you know a lot about music, that's one of the things I admire about you, you were always more avant garde than me... charging into the mêlée of culture...

I lead you outside, the green glow makes you look radiant, I think about how

much I love you and how you don't love me...

“Antoinette, you know this isn't working,” I say, your paleness always poetic, even though I know you are a bitch...

“Narinda, it's fine, we're great together, what are you talking about,” you say...

~

### School

I am fourteen. I am at a school in England. It sounds glamorous. Lady Marian's Grange. But the buildings are old and scruffy, the whole place smells vaguely of mince fried with onions ...

... dormitories in the attic where we smoke and listen to cassettes of Garbage and The Manics ...

“This is Antoinette ... she's joining us at The Grange ...” says Miss Hobbes the deputy head who is also our form tutor ... the class looks bored ... you look nonchalant and take a seat at the back of class while she prattles on about a choir service and asks you what clubs you want to join ... and hands you your timetable ...

We play hockey, an ice-cold day, you hit me hard across the knuckles with the stick, I can't feel it due to the cold, but later back in class it starts to hurt and my hand turns purple

“My mother says I'm careless with other people,” you say, looking at my hand, but at least you noticed that you hurt me

I wait for the “sorry” but it never comes

I can't see snow, but I can feel the ice particles in the air ... the classrooms are cold, and we start wearing jumpers underneath our shirts, which isn't technically against the rules but we see some of the teachers rolling their eyes at us, as they sit with their extra layers and hot mugs of tea ...

We're not close friends ... I see you hanging out with a girl called Cecilia whose father is in the House of Lords ... but she's a rebel like you and you sit in the orchard talking about Communism and free-love. We take English classes together and you write about the crazy lady in the attic. I realise you are smarter than me, and the teacher moves you to the top set ... while I'm staring at 'Sailing to Byzantium' and struggling to say anything profound ...

... a few months later your family move you to a school in Switzerland, and I get used to not seeing your face in the corridors ...

A rumour flies around ... "Did you know Antoinette got sent to Switzerland because the teachers couldn't handle her ... she had a knife ... and she set fire to the book cupboard and then she swore at the maths teacher ..."

... they keep moving you because you are so naughty ... because the adults can't contain you ... the isolation and the mountain air is supposed to pacify you ... but really you're just moving around because your father keeps having affairs and your mother keeps needing a fresh start ...

~

### Turkish Restaurant

"You have no right to be angry with me," you say, "remember that time in the Turkish restaurant, I paid for your dinner, but I explained to you that this isn't love, this isn't forever, sometimes relationships are *transformational*, people come into each other's lives to teach them something, or to help them grow"

In my memory I can see the tessellating tiles, going on forever, rich Mediterranean colours, terracotta, mustard, azure blue, gold, it's raining outside, we will walk home sharing an umbrella and then make love, except it won't be love because it isn't love and you can't create love when it isn't there

~

### Freshers' Week

"It's true," I say, "I remember the restaurant, and I remember that you said this isn't love, so I have no right to be angry at you"

But I also remember an earlier night, a bad nightclub during freshers' week, the room upstairs is playing euro-pop, I try to get a drink but they just have red bull and cheap vodka left, new friends, and you, a familiar face from school, sweaty, we go downstairs to the bathroom, I splash cold water on my face, you're slumped over one of the sinks, "we should go back to college" I say, trying to lift you, you weigh almost nothing...

"I remember you," you say, "I remember sitting in the orchard with you at school....I fell in love with you.... Why don't you love me?"

"You're drunk Antoinette," I say

You rest your sweaty head on the cold wall tiles, your face flushed red

I take you back to college and put you to bed, I sleep next to you on the floor, to be close to you and keep you safe, "I love you Narinda," you murmur, before drifting into a deep sleep

That night stayed with me...

~

## Situationship

We fall into a routine, studying together, paying for each other's food, drinking too much, swimming together, I often think about that moment downstairs at the club — *in vino veritas* — against the coldness of the tiles, but you never use the L word again — we are friends — with benefits — good friends — you know everyone, and you help me with some career opportunities, you are a stepping stone, not a foundation — I get clingy, until that night in the Turkish restaurant where we drink too much and eat fresh hummus and saç kavurma and you explain to me in simple terms that this is nothing serious while I look at the tiles and think about eternity

My father is coming to visit, I need to find a restaurant “I don't want to go to one of those places where you spend a lot of money but the food is tiny,” he says “you've always got to bloody get chips or something on the way home, dinner should be dinner”

I spot a few places, one that has good steak but I know they serve it on wooden boards instead of plates and I know that's something that will set him off ... so I am anxious all week, my intestine knitting into a gordian knot ...

“Do you want to meet my father?” I ask Antoinette,

“I'm busy on that day,” she says, without even asking the day ...

I take the excuse at face value, we both have a lot of deadlines, lectures to go to, essays to write, sports fixtures, and volunteering...

... a few weeks later she goes away to see family during vacation... she doesn't invite me because her mother is too unwell to receive guests ... I message her and

Tuesday morning she's messaging me again ...how are you... I was terribly busy ...lets have a drink when I get back...

~

## Cheating

Is it even cheating if we're not exclusive

I find out you were sleeping with a boy while we were together - all those months I thought you only had eyes for me - how do you even have time to see someone else?

Standing under the mature oak, the green glowing on both our skin "I know you were seeing someone else - the whole time we were together" I say, looking deep into Antoinette's grey eyes - they are like stone

"I'm sorry you feel hurt," she says "I did try to warn you that I wasn't ready for commitment"

"Yet you ate dinner with me everyday, let me repair your clothes with a needle and thread, let me dye your hair" I say "people always joke that we're like an old married couple, why did you go through the motions with me if it wasn't what you wanted"

I found out who he was via a friend of a friend, some blond kid from Winchester called Jack, he was doing Classics but he was probably going to end up in banking, he and Antoinette know a lot of the same people, and used to sleep together at house parties, I'm guessing they didn't use the L word either... people like that are too big to use the L word ... I manage to avoid him because he is at a different college and we don't have any of the same lectures but then he starts going to a coffee shop I like... he's tall and skinny with an aquiline nose ... he catches me staring at him and smiles "do we know each other?" He asks...



... No I don't think so, I stammer

It's only been a year but I've lost track of how many times Antoinette and I have broken up and got back together —days of not talking to one another and avoiding each other around college

I sit at my desk and write a story in the past tense. There is something satisfying about the “-ed” “-ed” “-ed” of each verb. Like dull thuds falling on a wooden floor.

In the future, I shall write about marriage — babies — affaires — work worries — houses — grown-up stuff...

I think about how Antoinette is a useful friend because her father knows a lot of people in publishing, and wonder if I should be amicable with her... she causes me this pain ... a dull ache inside and a nausea ... often I don't eat when I'm waiting on her calls

She gets offered an exchange ... and goes off to America for a term ... some comparative literature course she has a scholarship for ... I know there is a time difference so I add Massachusetts to the clock on my phone so I can message her at sane times... cute “hope you have a good day” over breakfast ... or “goodnight xx” and a sleepy face around ten pm their time...

... but I get two messages from her in the whole term

When she comes back she invites herself up to my room... I have an essay to write but I say yes because I am desperate to see her and fob off my tutor with a rough draft

We lie in my single bed watching old episodes of *The Simpsons*, we should go out

I say, let's go to the pub or get some food ...

...I like it here, she says, so I order Mexican food, champagne, gin, and ice ...  
we only eat some of it and then my room smells stale

She's eating into my allowance but I don't say anything

We fall asleep in each other's arms, and she says his name in her sleep...

A few days later my tutor calls me into her office to say that my work is slipping

I feign some story about being ill and my cat dying, I don't tell her about Antoinette and how lovesick and lightheaded I feel

I manage to tumble through the rest of the year ... scraping a pass

~

### Fight

We have our first real fight because I hear via a friend of a friend that Antoinette is in love with Jack ...

... Antoinette denies it "perhaps this isn't working" she says "you're way too intense... I think we need some time apart"

"Are you dumping me?" I scream at her...

... "I'm just trying to be honest with you, about who I am," she says and I can feel the conversation twisting away

Later we make up but it's not the same

Standing under the mature oak tree, in the summer heat, the threat of rain in the air, I get lost again in her stone grey eyes...

...she offers to buy me lunch... takes me somewhere nice... we both have money but the gesture is nice ...then we go back to her room to watch movies... and make love slowly "let's try again" she says "we're good together"

We try again, or rather, I get drawn in again

The summer stretches on forever... I neglect my work to spend time with her ...I am supposed to be working on a dissertation but whenever she calls I lie and say I'm not busy... dropping my own future to be with her... I never know when she's going to leave town... drive down to the countryside to spend time with her other friends... or go and hang out in Mykonos with her friends from the Swiss school... she often leaves with only a few hours' notice and never invites me

While she's travelling, I bury myself in work, endlessly reading and taking notes ...she tells me my degree isn't metaphysical enough, I am too prosaic, thinking about employment...

Sometimes I message her, but I don't expect a reply, but then my heart jumps on the rare occasions she responds to me ... often just one word at a time. Yep. Cool. Sunbathing. Hot. Clubbing. Good. Beach. Fun. Ok. I should string them together and make one of those terrible spoken word poems. I overhear some girls in the street outside talking about dating. The main thing, one says, is to look at your ratio. How often do you text them versus how often they text you. If it's less than one-one you should quit. I think deeply how this simple advice speaks to such a great truth. But I ignore this wisdom and carry on being in love with Antoinette

I buy all her favourite things because she is returning from Mykonos... I don't

ask her what went on there, or if HE was there, because I don't want to know. I know their paths cross as they both travel the world, spending a few days at a time in places most of us only dream of. She camps out in my room for a few days, eating my food, drinking my spirits, watching my Netflix. We make love but something about her skin feels different. I can sense him on her. Like a land that has been trespassed upon. We kiss, and I imagine the grains of sand on her fingers and hair

I have no right to be possessive because we've never had The Talk... what are we? Are we exclusive? There is no WE. We are all separate entities floating in space. Bubbles that might merge or pop depending on the strength of the breeze

Our dance goes on for weeks, you touch me, I enjoy it, but then I start to feel sick deep inside thinking about you touching HIM. That seed was planted, and now it is growing, like a bitter vine, choking me. We make love on the sofa in my room, I feel happy, and then I close my eyes and his smug face flashes into my vision, that intimate space on the back of my eyelids, the projector screen for fantasies and dreams, the place where flower fairies dance and little girls plan perfect weddings and dream houses, stone cottages lovingly renovated with tasteful Farrow and Ball paints and upcycled antiques. I imagine their little clique laughing at me. That sentimental naïve girl who thinks love is one-on-one

We sleep next to one another. Or rather, you sleep, and I lie awake mapping your freckles like constellations, and looking for signs. The next morning I make you eggs and pretend to be happy. We walk into town to look at second-hand bookshops and buy coffee. I reach out to hold your hand but you pull away. You don't like public displays of affection. We walk this circuit most days, only staying indoors when the summer rain comes

A few weeks later, I realise I can't do it, I see him every time we make love, it's autumn now, the garden is still green but some of the leaves are starting to turn yellow

We hold hands under the mature oak by the fallen wall

“Antoinette, you know this isn’t working,” I say

She takes my hand, bowing slightly, and looks into my eyes, “Narinda, you know I miss you when we’re apart,” she says, “we’re good together”

“I’m sorry, it’s my fault, I can’t forgive you,” I say

I think about how beautiful the garden is, and how I’ve ruined it by using this spot to end things with her.

**Catherine Dugman**

Paintings

**William Wray**











There Were None

**Laura**

**Andrikopoulos**

# There Were None

Chorus: 'Χρόνια πολλά, Χρόνια πολλά!'<sup>1</sup>  
In my mind  
So many years stretched ahead of us.  
There were None.

Blinkered by wretchedness,  
I could not see you,  
Fading, your yellow-tinged skin, the  
Bruises the doctors dismissed  
As ageing pains, missing  
The ultimate ageing pain of all.

'Χρόνια πολλά, Χρόνια πολλά.'  
There were None.

Hail Mary, Mother of God...  
Nightly we three sat, hands entwined,  
Entreating every God and ghost we knew,  
Crying, distraught, your Greek grandsons trembling,  
Joy of our new home  
Eclipsed by the tragedy  
Of you.

As I walked the Van Gogh fields,  
Sun warming my stained face,  
Shivering, I stopped

Knew indubitably.

Your cruel Death barred the way,  
'Sleep now, and dream of a better future,'  
And sleep you did.

'Χρόνια πολλά, Χρόνια πολλά.'  
There were None.

What would we have done?  
In that imagined timescape never to be  
Both old and grey,  
Cosy, companionable afternoons reminiscing.  
There will be None.

Your shoes  
Blue, rounded, small,  
Remained by the front door you never stepped through.  
Clad in your clothes I, hollow, tread the years.  
You slipped through a different door  
Forbidden to me to follow,  
You were gone.

<sup>1</sup>Common Greek celebration wish; 'Chronia Polla', meaning 'may you live many years.'



Laura Andrikopoulos



William Wray

W W W R A Y

First Year

**Griffin**

**Gudaitis**



# First Year

People always ask, “How did you come to be a follower of Jesus Christ, a believer of the one true Lord?”

My simple answer is, I didn't. I never did.

I became a religion teacher because I needed a job and it didn't require a teaching certificate.

One morning, my boys locked me outside. I pulled a kid out of class and forgot my keys on my desk. My students turned the deadbolt behind me. I slammed my fist on the door. "Let me in!" I screamed. They made googly eyes and laughed. I was furious, fighting back tears. I had never been disrespected like this before. I sent the kid away, and ten minutes later, he returned with the janitor who brandished his master key with a sly grin.

I pretended like nothing had happened when I got back inside. By October, I learned that punishing a kid without prior warning invited open rebellion — just one of the many harsh lessons I learned in my first year.

When the bell rang, I stepped in front of the doorway. "Do you guys think locking me outside is funny? Do you guys think that is allowed?"

The boys slunk back down, exchanging heavy glances.

"Fucking cowards," I said.

\*

Days from Christmas, a fight broke out in the cafeteria that led to the immediate expulsion of five students. Worse was the fact that they were left unsupervised when the fight began. The school was considered liable for one of the boys' injuries. His parents threatened to sue.

We, the teachers, stopped caring about our work. Even the most passionate teachers wanted to call it quits.

*Eureka*, I thought, finally figuring out how to impose order: Grading. If I couldn't control a kid's behavior, I could damn well control his grades.

That week, a student hid behind his backpack, a sign he was up to something. I gave a presentation about the Book of Matthew which I didn't believe a word of.

Getting pissed off, I repeated the boy's name.

No response.

"Give it to me," I said.

Behind his bag he was working on a drawing of a basketball player dunking — LeBron James. He shaded the Nike swoosh on the shoes, putting on the final touches. "Just a second."

I snatched up his drawing and smacked it down on the podium, speaking over the boy's protests. "Are you kidding me?"

"You said we could do work for another class once we submitted the packet."

I ground my teeth, "I was talking, and you weren't listening."

He stood up. "Mr. Miskinis, did you not say that? Are those not your words?"

I picked up his drawing, waving it back and forth in the air. "You're not getting this back."

There was so much I could have done differently. Instead of apologizing or rectifying, I sat behind my computer and looked for new jobs on LinkedIn. In the Book of Matthew, Jesus asks the disciplines, "Which of you by worrying can add an hour to your life?" *There has to be a way out of this*, I thought at my desk. *There has to be.*

"Can I take a walk?" the boy said. "Miss Adler lets us take walks when we get frustrated."

I blurted out a laugh. "I'm sorry. Is this kindergarten?"

He walked over and got in my face. “You’re not a real teacher. You are a fucking joke.”

Everything was so different just four months ago. I was a college student, falling in love with a stranger at a party, practicing Buddhist meditation to cure my hangovers. I was excited about the future, which was now and so far from what I dreamed.

Violence overcame me. I wanted to pour all my anger and suffering onto him. I wanted to destroy this kid.

He couldn’t understand what he had done to deserve my hatred. I felt ashamed.

\*

During lunch break on a Monday, I got three missed from my friends: two from Abbi, one from Justin. I figured they finally called it quits after four years of dating. Anxious and annoyed, I put down my lunch of leftover spaghetti and called Abbi back.

She answered after the first ring. I geared up to hear about the breakup. “What’s up?” I said.

She was crying. “I wanted you to hear the news from me. Jack Wilks is dead.”

Jack was my roommate for four years of college, my best friend. This was a fact as real as the chair I was sitting in and the time on the clock above the door. I had class in seven minutes. This wasn’t real.

“You’re lying,” I said.

“Charlie.”

When I heard my name, I looked down at my spaghetti. I couldn't believe that I had been eating only seconds ago.

I punched my desk as hard as I could and broke three knuckles in my right hand. But I didn't feel the break at all. My body was trembling violently, my heart raced so fast that I thought I was suffocating.

Abbi said, "Charlie, are you okay?"

I grabbed my phone and concentrated on my breathing. "What happened?"

Jack went drinking with his coworkers, got hammered, and ubered home alone. The toxicology report stated the cause of death as alcohol poisoning. *Death?* I thought. How could this one casual night spell out Jack's *death*? Did he kill himself? What were his last thoughts? Did he know that he was about to die? His roommates left town that same evening, they didn't return until Sunday afternoon. Jack was there for three days before they found him.

Just as the class bell rung, my students flocked in. They took their seats as usual, some of them saying, "Hi, Mr. M."

The chitchat evaporated when they saw me. The part of my shirt over my heart was smeared in blood where I had wiped my gushing knuckles. I stood up and walked outside.

\*

"You shouldn't use grades to discipline students," said Miss Adler, the Vice Principal and my boss. She was single, in her thirties, and smiled with too many teeth.

I rolled around in a bean bag, her version of a guest chair. "How do you control them?"

"*Control,*" she said from behind her desk, "shouldn't be the goal of

classroom management — *cooperation* or *collaboration* are what we want.”

When I walked into her office to tell her Jack died, her first question was: “Do you know what day you’ll be back?”

She only cared that I did my job.

“Kids like patterns. If they recognize patterns in your train of thoughts, they will feel like they can succeed in your classroom.”

I itched my wrist just above my hand cast. “What made you become a teacher?”

Her smile began to sink. “Why do you ask?”

I shrugged.

She leaned forward. “I like the kids. I like the parents. What made you become a teacher?”

I tried to smile.

\*

Every time I went to bed, I thought about Jack falling asleep forever. I didn’t have a good night’s sleep for months.

I followed a crowd of the youngish teachers to a Bar ’n’ Grill one Friday afternoon, striking up a conversation with the Algebra 1 teacher. He was about thirty-four year old, recently married. As teachers do when they drink, he got around to talking about other people’s jobs.

“There is no real job you can’t describe in one word.”

I put down my drink, a vodka tonic with lime. Every time I went to a bar, I had a vodka tonic. It was a ritual I kept going throughout college. On my twenty-first birthday Jack bought me a vodka tonic, my first legal drink.

“What about ‘President of the United States?’” I said. “Better yet, ‘I.B. Banker.’”

“‘*Teacher*,’” the man said. “Now that’s a *real job*.”

Four months out of college, and Jack had already earned \$60,000 as an analyst at a top financial firm. My job paid a measly \$45,000 annually. In four short months, Jack earned more than I would in an entire year. I thought he’d hit the jackpot and I’d spend the rest of my life questioning my potential.

I wished Jack were still here. I imagine him fat and happy, flipping meat on a grill, listening to his children play outside.

\*

Jorge was the Chair of the Spanish Department, in his late forties, a father of three. We would bump into each other at the gym sometimes. He asked where I’d been. I told him the truth, all of it. Speaking with his thick Uruguayan accent he cancelled his AP Spanish, class making up some excuse.

The coffee at the supermarket was burnt. Jorge and I had about five cups of it. I told him stories about Jack “You mean, he got home with an actual map?” Jorge said.

“Fort Lauderdale, spring break our senior year,” I said. “Jack loses me and his phone at the bar. It’s 4 AM. Our flight’s that morning. Jack is like totally fucked. He ends up wandering for miles until he finds a gas station. Cashier says, ‘I don’t have a phone, but I can draw you a map.’ The guy then gets out a piece of paper and draws a map from memory. Jack follows it all the way to our motel, and forty-five minutes later, we’re in the air.”

Jorge shook his head. “If my wife knew me as a boy ... me cagué. No caminar en dos pies nunca de nuevo.”

He took a long swig of coffee. “You know, Charlie. You don’t have to be a teacher.”

I sighed. "I know, I know. I just want to get through to them."

He put his coffee down. "It's hard to see now, but some come back to thank you. They'll say you changed their lives, and you will never know how."

He breathed out deeply. "Some kids will like you, and some kids won't. Your job as a teacher is to be in the room."

\*

I would stay after school to finish grading, sometimes until it was dark out, but I stopped coming home with work. I began to have time for myself, which I spent reading the Bible. I was surprised how often people in the Bible struggled to believe in God. Reading their stories didn't resolve my questions, but they made me ask more.

I decided to bring these questions to class.

"We're just going to talk today. Socratic seminar."

Some kids cheered. "Yeah, woo-hoo, another free period I don't gotta do shit." Some drifted off into space. Others gathered in a circle and began to talk.

I asked them, "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

One kid said, "I saw a child fourteen years old shoot a man. There was noise up the street, the kind that could only be about a woman. Then, this little man came out in all black, hoodies and sweats. I thought it was weird 'cuz it was 85 degrees out, the middle of July. I was working out down on the field. I thought it was firecrackers." His voice trailed off. "Maybe this is hell and God's giving the bad people a chance to do good."

No one spoke for a while until one kid said, "God is to adults what Santa Claus is to kids: a made-up reason to do good because someone else might watching."



be watching.”

“Then why help people at all?”

“Why would I want to help someone like you?”

“You don’t help people because you believe in God. You help people for the sake of helping them. You don’t need to believe in some God to do good.”

Another boy said, “I feel like God is real when I’m with my mom. I get worked up about things, especially stuff that’s in the past. But when I sit down and tell my mom how I feel, it’s like this big weight gets lifted off my shoulders. I don’t know how to explain it.”

The conversation carried on until the dismissal bell rang. The boys jumped up, saying their goodbyes on their way out: “See you later, beauty.” Another said, “That was the best class I ever had”

I was alone now. My students had left behind a mess for me to clean up, but I didn’t mind. We got to talk to each other about the questions we had.



**Griffin Gudaitis**

**A New Rearrangement of  
The NKJV Habakkuk**

**Elijah Wong  
Man Shun**

# A New Rearrangement of The NKJV Habakkuk

*For Habakkuk, whose words I borrowed. If they should be kept silent, the stones would immediately cry out.*

The burden: you will cry out  
To violence. And you will – why do you? – show *me*, cause  
*Me* plundering and violence?

Powerless justice, wicked righteous; you,  
Bitter and hasty judgement, swifter than leopards.  
Fierce evening eagle. From afar,

Set like sand.  
Are you not rock?  
Creeping ruler; over-glad sacrifice!

I watch myself. I then answered:  
“Write the vision – plain tablets, for an appointed end it will speak.  
It will not wait.”

Behold him because he is a proud man.  
He does not stay at home, he enlarges  
His desire – cannot be satisfied, gathers to himself all peoples.

Will not a proverb and a taunting riddle woe his pledges?  
All the remnant of the people, of men’s blood, of evil counsel,  
Cry out from the wall: a town with bloodshed establishes the Lord of Hosts.

The knowledge of the Lord, as waters cover the sea:  
Woe to him who gives drink! Look on his nakedness.  
You are filled with shame instead of glory; uncircumcised Lord!

Right utter shame,  
Violence to cover you,  
And the plunder of men’s blood.

Is the image its maker?

Carve it: the molded image, teacher of lies, mute idol.

Wood, awake! Silent stone, arise!

Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,

Yet in it there is no breath at all.

In the temple, silence.

A prayer: Revive your work, make it known.

Remember: God was hidden.

Before him: The earth, the everlasting mountains, the perpetual hills.

I saw the affliction, the curtains, the rivers, the horses.

Made the earth with mountains, overflowing water.

By uttered voice, lifted on high the sun and moon.

Salvation came to me like a whirlwind rejoicing,

Like feasting on secret waters.

My body trembled.

The voice entered my bones, and I trembled in myself.

The fig tree may blossom. The flock may be cut off from the Lord.

I will make my feet like deer's feet, will walk on high hills.

*Selah selah selah*

**Elijah Wong Man Shun**



**Elijah Wong Man Shun**

The Gloom

**Alice Brooker**

# The Gloom

*The earth was without form, and void*

– GENESIS 1:2

Before the shape of consonants, did we exist?

God had no breath to sweep up this, this language forged  
Of deep water, bulging cloud — I sounded nothing

But an idiot sprawling out, in black ink I rolled around  
Until I saw you under my puddle — under air

Am I ever alive when you're not there?

Can I ever go back to a screaming thing

*My dear*

I want to be moving so fast that my atoms go  
Straight in yours, loving you with the force

Of all chaos: of our gloom. In all this darkness

Where were you?

A lockless black hole, screaming too?

Material nothings cloaked in tulle

*My love*

The earth had no form while I loved you.

The gloom, the gloom, she's in my room.  
Plucking out ribs to spell your name, and  
When it's done, it won't be the same.

Before we were, we didn't exist —

Before I'm born, I'm missing this.

**Alice Brooker**





Alice Brooker



Sara Farnworth

**THE  
VANITY  
PAPERS  
THE CHAOS  
ISSUE**