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FALL 2012



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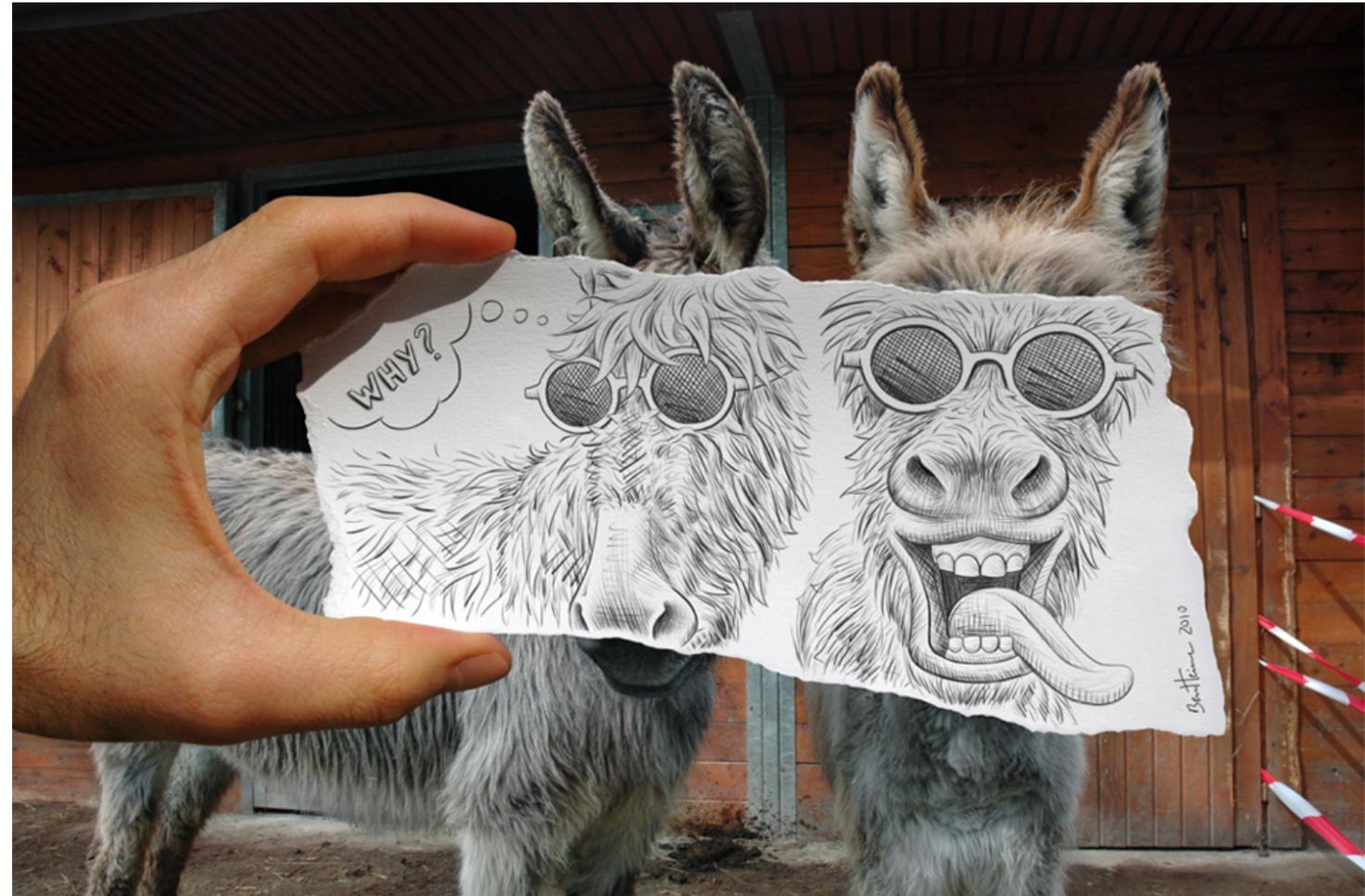
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PBOP II by Ahsan Masood

“ *We’re freaks, that’s all. Those two bastards [...] made us into freaks with freakish standards, that’s all. We’re the tattooed lady, and we’re never going to have a minute’s peace, the rest of our lives, until everybody else is tattooed, too.*

~ J.D. Salinger, Franny and Zooey



Pencil vs. Camera 12 by Benjamin Heine

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Readers,

Operating as a literary journal is not an easy enterprise and one based in Pakistan with an eye for global literature is harder still. Trying to place *The Missing Slate* on the geographical map of literary journals, with its cosmopolitan team and essays on largely global issues, has not gotten easier after two years.

This issue—with the twin themes of “identity” and “belonging”—is an introspective one for the magazine. Both ideologies have played a role in *The Missing Slate*’s development not just in the last quarter but for the six that have preceded it. This issue, our seventh, marks the two year anniversary of a project whose vision has shifted from being a representation of the country of its birth—Pakistan—to embracing literature wherever it surfaces in the world.

Perhaps what really matters is *The Missing Slate*’s willingness to arch its back and transform itself into another interpretation, or its reluctance to be the “quintessential” literary journal of the sub-continent. Our aim is to provide a platform that we perceive missing from the current scene – one that embraces writers, poets, journalists and artists irrespective of age, race or country.

The decision comes at an important time – derision and intolerance wink at us at every turn, from the surprising narrow-mindedness that seems to join regressive Pakistan to the seemingly progressive United States, to the lack of concern perpetually shown to dissenting (minority) voices.

Our contents reflect what this quarter has meant to us as a team of varying nationalities united under the common banner of literary and artistic equality, if such a thing can be perpetuated. If you like what you read, be prepared to see a print version of this magazine available for subscription in the not-so-distant future.

It seems the love/hate relationship with print continues and with any luck, will continue as we debate the need for print in an increasingly digital world. So while the debate rages on in the editorial room, welcome to the seventh issue.

Happy Reading!

Sincerely,



Maryam Piracha
Editor-in-Chief



Tough Love by Ahsan Masood



Empty Cold Cage by Mohsin Shafi

WRITING PETITIONS

lately i've been writing
peaceful poetry: as if the earth
weren't a raw-wrist shackled whirling
wreck smashing through
speed limits, as

if species weren't going
extinct fast as chemical-filled
semi-toxic candy we give our
children (it makes them
happy)
as if family upon
family weren't starving and
starved in africa, asia, the caribbean, those
developing countries whose grimy
skeletal reaper hands we hastily
force off our well-ironed
business suits, like that beggar
down the street, cigarettes bloodshot
eyes hands more
open than your orthodox
mind – he has a name, you
know.

lately, i've been thinking silly
thoughts: how i want to save
the world. scribbling poetry instead
of writing petitions and leading
marches and pretending
it's the 60s, when people
still had hope (says the
textbook, see i aced that
test but what good can that
possibly be to anyone
else?)

Camille Thigpen has resided in Pennsylvania, Sweden, and is currently based in France, although she is beginning her freshman year at Bard College (New York). Her true home, writing, is one she never intends to leave

INTERVIEWING NORA NADJARIAN



*Nora Nadjarian is an award-winning poet and short story writer from Cyprus. She has published three collections of poetry: *The Voice at the Top of the Stairs* (2001), *Cleft in Twain* (2003) and *25 Ways to Kiss a Man* (2004). *Cleft in Twain* was cited by *The Guardian* in an article on the literature of the new European Union member states in 2004.*

Her work has won prizes and commendations in various international competitions: among others, in the Commonwealth Short Story Competition, the Féile Filíochta International Poetry Competition (Ireland) and the Binnacle International Ultra-Short Competition at the University of Maine at Machias, USA.

*In addition to a book of short stories, *Ledra Street* (2006), she has had her work published online and in journals internationally. Her work was included in *Best European Fiction 2011* (Dalkey Archive Press) and in the poetry anthology *Being Human* (Bloodaxe Books, 2011).*

Q You're a very versatile writer: as well as being a poet, you write short stories and run a blog. You've even been featured in an anthology of 'Twitlit'. How close are the connections between genres? Are Nora Nadjarian the poet and Nora Nadjarian the flash fiction writer one and the same?

A I like to think that poetry is something I carry within my soul. It comes out in my other writing too – whether that is flash fiction or a longer short story – and yes, it is always the same person writing, often mixing the genres in a way that makes people wonder whether what they are reading is poetry or prose. Some of my shortest work (in any genre) has also been the most successful. I love minimalism and the way it makes people take notice of what is missing, rather than what is there.

Q More or less on the subject of '140 and Counting', the Twitter anthology, do you think new technology will change the way we write?

A I recently won first prize in a delightful little competition run by "unFold", a Twitter-zine of poetry in 140 characters edited by Rose Auslander.*

Folded Word made a wonderful animated film of my poem "The Name"* which got a lot of positive comments. I simply loved that fact that my poem could come alive and touch people's hearts in just 140 characters, or even fewer. At the beginning of my writing career about a decade or so ago, I would never have thought such a thing was possible. Technology is certainly helping us be more innovative in our approach.

Q Adapting a question The Paris Review asked Pablo Neruda, if your work was on fire would you save the poems or the prose first? (Neruda said he'd abandon the work and save a girl instead).

A Actually, I would grab my laptop and run! It contains ALL of my writing and without it I would be completely lost.

Q What words would you use to describe your work to an unknowing audience?

A This is a difficult question to answer. How does a writer fit into a particular tradition? How does a writer fit into anything, I wonder. All my life, I've considered myself a bit of a misfit. To the naked eye I am a Cypriot writer, obviously because I am a Cypriot and a lot of my earlier work was inspired by political issues and the trauma of living on a divided island. However, I write in English, having received a British secondary school and university education. My grandparents were Armenian refugees from Asia Minor. A lot of pieces make up the puzzle of my life, some of them gone missing – and I don't like "classifying" myself as anything. My more recent writing tends to move away from the Cyprus problem. I'm not sure if that makes it more European. I think I am just a writer. I want to be thought of as a writer.

Q Which book, or which writer, do you keep coming back to?

A The Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai inspires me and his poetry often moves me to tears. I have read some of his love poems over and over.

Q If I'm allowed to ask you the first line of one of your own poems, which language do you dream in?

A To be honest with you, my most vivid dreams tend to be "movies" rather than "talkies". I vividly remember images, long after I have woken up. I recently dreamt of a friend who died a few months ago.

THE ISLANDERS

They grew up watching the salt scattering flight of gulls,
the horizon and the chaos of waves. By day, they waited for ships.

Every night, when the world fell asleep,
they walked into the sea. It was like entering their past.
Their feet disappeared first, then their legs, their necks and lips.

They liked to think that somewhere in the pitch black
they would find their beginning, that they would finally be comforted.

© Nora Nadjarian

SEPARATION

The time came when they longed to return.
My father walked circles in the living room,
my mother packed and unpacked her hands.
We will leave when the rain stops, they said.
The rain in this country is so unkind.

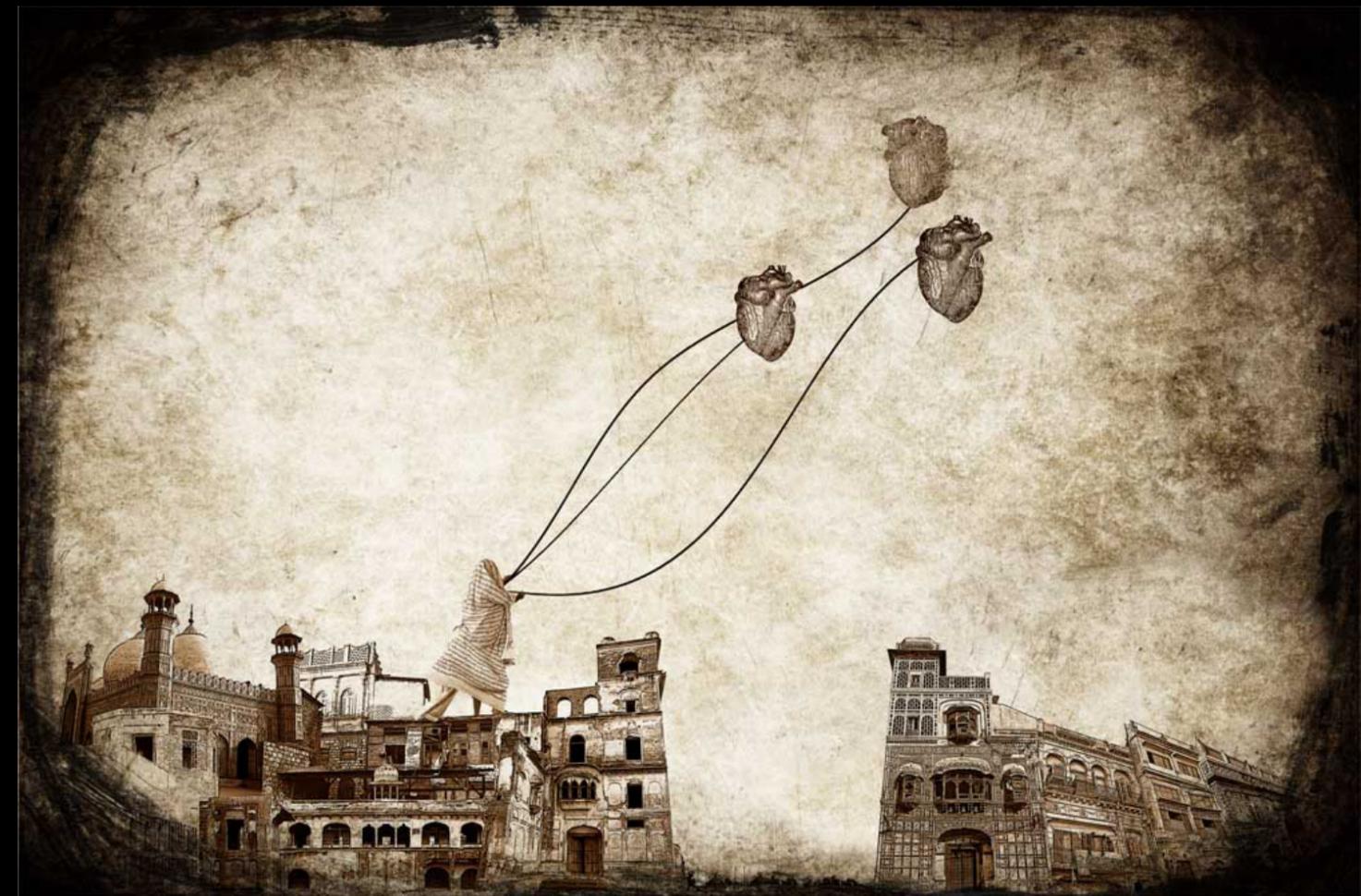
The time came when they could no longer return.
My father sat in his remote corner of silence,
my mother leant into lamplight and threaded sighs.
We will leave when the rain stops, she said,
hummed intricate tunes, sewed invisible tears.

© Nora Nadjarian

TAPE RECORDER

My tape recorder
Plays symphonies backwards.
From where I'm sitting I can hear
Two drunk dogs whistling at the moon.
No, howling. No, whistling. Maybe howling.
Maybe neither – nor.

© Nora Nadjarian



My Heart Skipped a Beat by Mohsin Shafi

Throughout the dream he was getting ready for a journey, a trip, for which I had no details. All the time, I was wondering if he was going to ask me to join him. In the few seconds before I woke up I saw him in the distance, and I thought “He’s going to turn round now and wave goodbye.” And that is exactly what he did. And I woke up. The symbolism of the dream was very powerful.

At other times my dreams are gobbledygook. They remind me of this passage from my story “Cheque Republic”, inspired by my visit to Czech Republic a few years ago.

“Babylon is a beautiful place after all. Like that hall where a Danish poet and his American translator decided to read the poem and the translation at the same time. Simultaneous translation and original on top of each other, layers and layers of. It was lovely,

I finally understood everything about lan-

guage. I loved that poem.”

Q

Looking ahead, what are you working on this year? Are you appearing at any festivals/events?

A

Two of my short stories will be read in German at the famous Café Bräunerhof in Vienna in October. It is part of a literary event which includes writers from all member states of the European Union, and I am pleased that my work will be representing Cyprus. Meantime, I am working on some short stories and writing new poems.

THE CRITICS: POETRY PARNASSUS

Reviewed by Jacob Silkstone

The World Record: International Voices from Southbank Centre's Poetry Parnassus
Edited by Neil Astley & Anna Selby

Bloodaxe, 2012, 359 pages (Paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-85224-938-0

How many poets does it take to change a reputation? Poetry Parnassus recruited one from each of the 204 countries taking part in the Olympics: in Anna Selby's words, "if it is perfectly natural for hundreds of athletes to flock from every country in the world, then why not poets?" Partly, The World Record is an attempt to prove that poetry is 'one of the richest, most democratic... of art forms' (Anna Selby again), that the work of elite writers can be enjoyed by thousands of 'perfectly normal' readers in much the same way that the hard work of elite athletes can be appreciated by thousands of perfectly normal spectators.

The World Record, which anthologises a poem from each of the Parnassus participants, is something of a logistical miracle, the result of 'mornings, afternoons and evenings' listening to everything from Romanian prose poetry to 'Islamic hip-hop from the Tunisian uprising.' Selby and Bloodaxe founder Neil Astley have organised all 204 poems into an easily-navigable collection, arranged alphabetically by country, and included extensive biographical notes on each poet. There's something almost irresistible about seeing Saadi Youssef's plangent war poetry (representing Iraq) beside Seamus Heaney's melding of the London Underground and Greek mythology (the Irish entry), or finding an elegant Bhutanese haiku only a few pages on from Mir Mahfuz Ali's savage and completely unforgettable 'My Salma' (a defiantly non-traditional poem from Bangladesh).

Once the initial excitement of having a world of poems at your fingertips has abated slightly, you become aware that The World Record has its also-rans as well as its gold medallists. There are a number of odd selections: Derek Walcott, perhaps the Usain Bolt of the poetry world (minus the late-night visits to the Swedish handball team?), is an obvious

pick for St Lucia, but what happened to his fellow Nobel Laureate Tomas Tranströmer? The Swedish representative here is slam artist Laura Wihlborg, whose 'Google Search Results' are witty but nowhere near Tranströmer's level. With the exception of Pia Tafdrup (Denmark), the Nordic selections are rather baffling: is Endre Ruset really more representative of Norwegian poetry than the harder-hitting Steinar Opstad or the jazz-inspired Jan Erik Vold? Is the Finnish jouhikko player Pekko Kappi a better selection than Tua Forsström or Olli Heikkinen?

Even more confusingly, the reader is told that The World Record 'marks the first time so many living poets from so many countries have been gathered together in one anthology'. The term 'living poets' doesn't really seem open to interpretation, but a closer look at the biographical notes reveals that Grace Mera Molisa (Vanuatu) died a decade ago, while Elisabeth Büchel (Liechtenstein) died in 2005. If they are eligible for inclusion, why not Szymborska or Miłosz for Poland, Roberto Bolaño for Chile, Mahmoud Darwish for Palestine?

Minor quibbles aside, both Bloodaxe and the Southbank Centre have to be congratulated on bringing together so many poets and introducing so much work in translation to English-speaking audiences. Very quickly, a few standout poems: 'My Salma' is shocking, and initially seems gratuitous, but with each rereading it begins to sound more and more like a courageous effort to speak truth to power; Amjad Nasser's 'The Phases of the Moon in London' performs a particularly delicate high-wire walk across the gap between prose and poetry; Rafeef Ziadah's Palestinian protest poem 'We Teach Life, Sir' is blunter than Darwish's work, but no less powerful.

As with all anthologies, the list of favourites is rearranged with every turn of the pages, and The World Record is particularly tough to assess so soon after publication. After all, it contains (almost) an entire world...

The author is Book Critic and Poetry Editor for this magazine.

DREAM OF A VOYAGE

Time now to head for the harbour;
the girl in turquoise follows me
reluctantly, will go no further
than the steep lane down to the jetty.
The boat is waiting, shallow, heavy
with ballast, barrels, talismans, provender.
A slurry of ice on the water's surface
holds the waves in harness, they hardly
murmur or move, and I step on board;
the barque slips her mooring, ropes
fall away like promises released.
The land behind us the memory of a figure,
we traverse the freezing sea,
a splinter riding eternity.

—Rosemary Merriman

Rosemary Merriman studied English Literature & Creative Writing as a mature student; sometimes lives on one of the north isles of Orkney. She strives to balance an inborn restlessness against a desire for rootedness; is inspired by the elements, elementals, fairy-tale, celebration, everyday ritual, conversation. Apprentice poet, adores pyrotechnics.

BOBBY

By Suvi Mahonen

Strands of light blue twisted, crossed over, then sank into the expanse of knitted wool only to emerge at the next stitch and repeat the pattern again. They ran in parallel symmetry, converging up to the pompom at the top of the cap. Around the circumference of the brim ran a border of yellow on which marched small embossed elephants, each holding the tail of the one before it with its trunk. Fine wisps of dark hair the same colour as Nick's curled out from beneath the edge to cling to its fuzzy surface in places. When we'd bought it eight weeks ago I'd thought it was too small to fit anyone, but Nick had correctly guessed it would be the right size.

The skin of Bobby's forehead not covered by the cap was furrowed as if caused by a frown. This accentuated his eyebrows; delicate lines of barely there hair on the ledge of his sockets, inclining medially upwards to form an arc at the top of the bridge of his nose. His nose was short, more like a nubbin, tilted slightly upwards at the end like mine; its tip was a little raw, as if wiped by a tissue one too many times.

I ran my finger over the smooth and doughy surface of his swollen lips. Velvety glossed skin a few centigrade cooler than mine. Drooping in loose repose, colour not right, a dusky shade of purple.

He lay in my arms, loosely wrapped in a green flannel blanket, the back of his head resting in the crook of my left elbow. His body was both light and also strangely heavy. I held my arms still though there was no reason why. Looking at him I tried to align our eyes. His lids were parted slightly, a hint of blue between moist lashes. As I sat there, propped with three plastic-covered wipe-down pillows between my back and the bed's head, I kept wanting, almost waiting for those eyes to blink.

Nick sat on the edge of the bed, arm on my shoulder, looking at our Bobby. Afternoon light angled in through the window and cast Venetian-striped contrasting shadows on our son's already mottled cheeks. My finger moved downward tracing his chin, then onwards across his jaw to his left ear, curving to avoid an open patch of sloughed

skin. It wasn't the only one. There were two on his right cheek and a large one on the side of his neck, the full extent of its angry margins concealed by the collar of his Peter Rabbit jumpsuit. Made of the softest white cotton, it was the outfit I'd planned for our baby to wear on his first trip back to our home. Across the garment multiple little rabbits sat on their haunches, cheeks puffed with chewing, holding a large carrot whose tip was missing. Sewn into the outside seam of the left shoulder was a tiny blue tag saying this was a genuine item. Matching mitts and booties were still in the bag.

I moved aside a fold of blanket so I could see more of him. His left arm was angled, bent at the elbow, resting on the front of his chest. The embroidered cuff of the suit's sleeve was hitched a short way up the forearm. Between the rim of the cuff and the base of Bobby's closed fist circled a thick clear plastic band fastly secured. In the pocket of the band a slip of paper had words typed on it in small letters, the portion visible to me saying, 'Baby of Alicia Rus ...' The bend over his wrist's bony prominence obscured the rest. A vein line of discolouring more pronounced than that of the skin went up the back of his hand to the fourth knuckle dimple. Lifting his hand gently I straightened his four fingers and thumb from their loose clench. The webbing between them was puffy and wrinkled, like he'd been soaking in a tub for too long. Such small and frail digits, despite their also waterladden state, the creases over their joints swollen to mere faint lines. On his distal pads were enlarged whorls of print. Opaque slivers of flesh were peeling back from around the nails. I closed his fingers again, covering his hand with mine.

We remained in silence.

Me, my husband and our baby.

I was conscious of sounds from outside the room—muffled voices, the ping of a call bell and the diminishing roll of a trolley. But these didn't enter my reverie. The only noise that was real to me was the whistle of breath from my nostrils and the clicking of the clock's second hand. A mere moment in time, yet this seemed like forever.

'Would you like an autopsy to be performed?' Dr Taylor had asked us.



Puppet by Hashim Ali

'Is it necessary?' I said.

'It's your choice. But it may help to find out exactly what went wrong.'

'We'll think about it,' Nick said.

Dr Taylor stood there by the side of my bed. His gaze kept shifting between Bobby and the green blanket. From the edge of my eye I saw his hands move to cross each other and rest at the front of his belt. Speckles of blood soiled the cuffs of his white shirt. I wanted him to leave but also needed him to stay. It was as if I had the delusion that he was somehow able to reverse this. He remained there for a few more awkward minutes then made his excuses and left the room with a final 'Sorry'.

It was then that Nick had put his arm around my shoulder, and we stayed that way with Bobby cradled against my swelled breasts that were aching with the need to lactate.

'You haven't called my mum yet, have you?' I asked Nick as I held onto Bobby's hand.

'Do you want me to?'

I shook my head. Once our families knew, it would be real.

I stared across the room at the wall opposite. Glints of slatted sunlight reflected off the glass that protected a framed painting. A lamb standing on a hill's green slope. Underneath it against the wall was an empty cot on wheels. It was the one in which the midwife had brought Bobby back in to me once she had cleaned, weighed and dressed him.

I looked back at my son and squeezed his hand gently. His soft nails pressed into the folds of my palm. I turned to look into Nick's bloodshot eyes.

'Can you ask the midwives if there are any nail clippers around?'

'Why?'

'I don't want him to be buried with long nails,' I said.

I started to cry.

Suvi Mahonen is a freelance writer living in Airlie Beach in Australia's tropical Whitsundays. Recent publications include fiction in GringoLandiaSantiago (Chile) and MetroMoms (USA). More of her work can be found on her website.



Moniza Alvi was born in Lahore and came to England when she was a few months old. She grew up in Hertfordshire and studied at the universities of York and London.

*Moniza's collections include: *The Country at My Shoulder* (1993), which was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Whitbread Poetry Award, and which led to her being selected for the Poetry Society's New Generation Poets promotion; *A Bowl of Warm Air* (1996), one of the Independent on Sunday's Books of the Year; *Carrying My Wife* (2000), a Poetry Book Society Recommendation; *Souls* (2002); and *How the Stone Found its Voice* (2005), inspired by Kipling's *Just So Stories*.*

*Her most recent collections are *Split World: Poems 1990-2005* and *Europa*, both published in 2008. *Europa* was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize. In 2011, she published *Homesick for the Earth*, English versions of selected poems by Jules Supervielle.*

This poem has been reprinted with permission from Bloodaxe Books.

PROPHECY

One day the Earth will be
just a blind space turning,
night confused with day.
Under the vast Andean sky
there'll be no more mountains,
not a rock or ravine.

Only one balcony will remain
of all the world's buildings
and of the human mappa mundi,
limitless sorrow.
In place of the Atlantic Ocean,
a little saltiness in the air
and a fish, flying and magical
with no knowledge of the sea.

Picture a car of the 1900s
(no road for its wheels)
and three girls of that time
travelling through the fog.
They'll peer through the door
thinking they're nearing Paris
when the odour of the sky
grips them by the throat.

Instead of a forest
there'll be one bird singing,
which nobody will ever place
or prefer, or even hear.
Except for God, who listening out
proclaims it a goldfinch.

THE SEA

It's all that we've wanted to do and haven't done,
all that we've wanted to say but haven't found the words to say it,
all that has left us without telling us its secret,
all that we can touch, or even plough through without ever
reaching,
all that has become wave after wave again because it looks for
itself without finding itself,
all that becomes foam so as not to die completely,
all that leaves a wake of a few seconds, because of its taste for
the eternal,
all that makes for the depths and will never climb to the surface,
all that rises to the surface in dread of the depths.
All this, and so much more.
The sea.

The sea which has so many things to say and despises them,
who wishes to be always unformulated,
or simply to murmur
like someone all alone humming behind clenched teeth.
The sea who gives her surface to the ship
refuses to give her depths.

Is it so as to contemplate in secret her tall nakedness
that she presents her other self to the light of the sky?
And the sky above offers its great upside-down bowl
to make the sea understand she'll never be able to fill it.
The bowl and the ocean remain there face to face,
pressed together in endless watchfulness
since the world began.
It's true
there are paired eyes staring down from on board ship
but they see so little they might almost be blind.
I'm gazing at the sea below me, and can't grasp hold of anything.
I don't know what to do with the beautiful day.
Too much ocean, too much sky wherever I look.
I turn into a piece of foam dying and lighting up,
changing position on the sea bed.
I no longer know where I am, or where I where I belong.

We were saying then, that this day,
this day – I'll not remember it at all.

Note on the translations

As a teenager in 1973, I was introduced to Supervielle's poems by a Swiss friend of my family. Then browsing in a bookshop ten years ago, I came across George Bogin's English translations, which helped bring the poems to life for me, and sent me back to the originals. Jules Supervielle (1884 – 1960) was born to French parents in Montevideo and orphaned within a year of his birth. He grew up in Uruguay and France. His poems were to be much admired by T.S Eliot, and by Rilke who called him "a great builder of bridges in space". I was strongly drawn to the surface clarity of his writing, the quietly fantastical or dreamlike, the sense of wonder, and I felt an affinity with aspects of his life, such as his birth elsewhere, on another continent.

BELONGING AND IDENTITY IN LITERATURE

The Writer's Struggle

By Sana Hussain

In the modern age the existential conundrum of belonging and identity has plagued many in the literary world. Both are complex issues that have multifarious interpretations of race, ethnicity, religion and politics. Writers who are better attuned to the intricacies of such issues simultaneously create and interpret an impression of belonging and identity.

While writers themselves are usually not tied down to one, linear interpretation of these factors, they do have a major role in constructing a narrative that can influence the general perception of what these words mean and how they were significant in the context that they were meant. Although sometimes writers may deal with their personal crisis of identities and feelings of alienation, at other points they appear to have a higher calling, becoming the mouthpieces for the confusion and aimlessness of a nation or an entire generation. Writers like Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot fall into the category of writers who defined the mores of their age. Their experiences of living abroad at the time of war, disillusionment and existential struggle colored their literature and also captured the general sentiment of that age.

Agents like war and colonial invasions bring with them not just physical destruction and monetary damage, they are also responsible for the disintegration of beliefs and value systems. Ideological chaos and a feeling of meaninglessness is usually a result of these agencies. However writers channel this confusion into their work leaving behind a documentation that not only gives an account of the facts, but presents an accurate portrayal of the emotional and mental anguish felt by the collective population of the period.

World War I was a war whose destruction had perhaps the most far reaching effects in history, leading to an existential crisis among people and causing them to denounce existing value systems and embrace nihilism. Gertrude Stein's "Lost Generation" comprised of writers who came of age as World War I raged outside their windows. The phrase Ms. Stein used to describe these writers is

“Writers with their heightened sensibilities often translate this invasion of identities and confusion in affiliations into their work leaving behind a cannon that has a strong sense of affinity and an individual distinctiveness, collectively boxed into “post-colonial literature”.”

a classic embodiment of the identity crisis a catastrophic event like war leaves in its wake. Sarah Cole in *Modernism, Male Friendship and the First World War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003) says that in talking about the Lost Generation both parts of the conjunction should be considered, the word “lost” implying “alienation, solipsism, brokenness” and “generation” referring to “community, shared identity and intimacy”. For a more articulate understanding of this phenomenon she describes the experience of R. G. Dixon who speaks of this generation formed by war saying, “I have been painfully aware of how I am different from many of my compatriots. It has always been difficult for me to be wholly at home with those men who have not been through the experience of war”.

Transitioning from the ascetic Victorian and Edwardian eras into a period where the values and moral structures crucial in forming a relatable social unit had withered away, these writers had an acute sense of alienation and detachment from the regions to which they had once belonged. They sought familiarity and association in order to come to terms with the loss of their inherited values, but it was the sense of isolation and lack of a concrete identity that ultimately shaped the generation. By capturing the social mores of the rapidly changing post war world, the members of the Lost Generation were success-

ful in constructing a coherent literary character amidst the chaos of ambiguous identities. Eliot's *Wasteland* perhaps captures the essence of the aimless, unsatisfying life of this generation most accurately. He writes of the detachment an artist feels from his homeland and the shattering of his sense of belonging to the world he perceives as a wasteland. The work of these writers reflected their struggle to look for meaning and purpose in a world rocked by destruction, while revealing the changing identity structures in society including evolving gender roles and the new notions of masculinity. Hemingway's Jake Barnes and Frederic Henry along with Lady Brett Ashley and Catherine Barkley, are all characters that symbolize the need for belonging, the meaninglessness of life and the changing gender roles of that time.

The flappers of the early twentieth century, the libertines, and the excesses of alcohol, drugs and decadent parties became defining features of the early twentieth century. Writers like Fitzgerald and Hemingway, despite suffering the same alienation and isolation of the Lost Generation, gave this age such an iconic status through their literature that their identity is synonymous to the age itself.

War symbolizes a clash of civilizations, a trait it shares with its natural counterpart – colonization which, like war, can greatly alter a nation's understanding of both its place in the larger narrative and its collective identity. The rule of a foreign country which comes with the influx of new cultures, language, religions and value systems, can interfere with the existing constructs of identity and belonging. Writers with their heightened sensibilities often translate this invasion of identities and confusion in affiliations into their work leaving behind a cannon that has a strong sense of affinity and an individual distinctiveness, collectively boxed into “post-colonial literature”.

Post-colonial literature offers a strong polemic against the oppression and exploitation of the invading country, concentrating its focus on the fallout of colonization. Due to the usurpation of indigenous identity by the foreign presence, questions about belonging and identity often surface culminating in existential concerns (what is our new cultural identity? Where do I fit into that identity, if at all? Who pulls the strings now that X Colonizers have departed?). Of course, there are no easy answers.

Monica Fludernik is quoted in *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australian Literature* (Rodopi, 2007) as saying: “Literature is both the creator and the critical analyst of diasporic consciousness”. This argument is true for colonial literature as it describes as well as analyzes the trappings of a colonial system. Looking at colonized Australia and the literature it produced, Sheila Collingwood comments that for the representatives of the Australian Aboriginal diaspora, writing, albeit confrontational and polemical, was the one means of constructing an Aboriginal identity and culture. Like the Australian Aboriginal diasporic writers, other diasporic writers have an inherent affinity with their homelands. Despite being away from the place of their origin they have a strong sense of belonging with their native land and create a homeland ideal that is fundamental to their diasporic identity.

A similar trend can be seen in Pakistani diasporic writers who despite using foreign settings and foreign narratives, have a collective inclination to refer back to their native country in their nostalgia for desi food, music or literature. Even though they live in foreign countries, their identity and sense of belonging remains tethered to their homeland. Many novels like Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and H. M. Naqvi's *Homeboy*, apart from reminiscing about “home” through culinary and other cultural throwbacks reveal in the protagonists a struggle; whether to return home, where they belong, or stay in a country in which they should belong, yet, don't quite.

“Pakistani writers, based on their own origins and that of their ancestors, often appear to vacillate between India and Pakistan, having an identity that is multicultural and binational.”



Whisper Inside by Mohsin Shafi

With colonization, often a new and alien language is introduced to the natives by the invaders. Intent on implementing their own culture and lifestyle in the colonized land, the colonizers bring with them their own language and enforce it as the official language in the country they occupy. The penetration of this new language in the major affairs of the country overrides the use of native language, causing a split in identity formed through language. In Africa this split was so pronounced that a writer as prominent as Achebe who wanted to write in English had his allegiance to his country questioned and his identity as an African put in doubt. Writers in Africa were faced with a tough choice – either to write in English and jeopardize the integrity of their literature or to write in their native language and have no one but a select few to communicate their message to. According to Abigail K. Guthrie, African literature is accosted by the same problems of identity that the literature of any country faces after the departure of its colonizers; she asks, “how, in a practical manner, does Africa, in its dissimilated postcolonial state, assemble a national identity and agree on a cohesive literary canon? Is it even possible? How does a nation who suffers the alienation of languages and politics unite under one canon of cultural identity?”s

Engelbert Jorriseen writes in *Colonialism, Literature and Identity*, “The language of the colonizer and the colonized will be in conflict on various levels, as e.g. those of dominance, control, and obedience, or of cultural authority and prestige, and, related to all of them, of linguistic, and connected to this cultural identity.” This conflict in identity based on language also comes across in the literature of a colonized country. The narrative of one language is often very different from the other in its communication of content, emotions and tone. One language can present the same idea while another completely fails, proving how important the use of language and writing is in identity construction. In colonized countries, writers have used literature to spark the desire for belonging, subsequently constructing new identities. By presenting the people with a remodeled identity and giving them a sense of kinship and association through a common cause, they can help achieve something as monumental as independence. Here, of course, we have the example of the Pakistan Movement in which writers and poets played an instrumental role in stirring the emotions of a nation

“ By capturing the social mores of the rapidly changing post war world, the members of the Lost Generation were successful in constructing a coherent literary character amidst the chaos of ambiguous identities. ”

through their words that in turn inspired people to challenge the status quo and come under a common banner in the rallying call for freedom.

For a very long time, the influences of colonization have held sway over the Pakistani consciousness. The status and use of the English language along with other cultural indicators show how the identity of the nation and also of its writers is still shaped by history. Pakistani writers, based on their own origins and that of their ancestors, often appear to vacillate between India and Pakistan, having an identity that is multicultural and binational. Kamila Shamsie’s novels portray this idea of multiple belongings the best. She constantly look back into the past whether it be the complicated heritage of an Indian family or the chaotic family drama that ensues during partition from Bangladesh. Her novels along with those of Bapsi Sidhwa reveal a sense of forgotten belonging, a multiple identity perhaps understood only by the 1947 émigrés to Pakistan.

To say belonging and identity is a complex and complicated issue for writers is an understatement. Writers’ association with society and their social and cultural identity are reflected in the literature that they produce. Through the cannons that they occupy writers get to assert their place in the world centuries after their deaths; they also leave behind an individual account of their time that helps to not just identify the writer and the dominant influences on their personality but also those on their generation. It is through an expression of this identity that they belong and remain relevant in society year after year and decade after decade, free from the fetters of geography and race.

Sana Hussain is an articles editor for the magazine and occasionally contributes to “Alone in Babel”, a column on books and the publishing industry.

SPOTLIGHT POET: SHARANYA MANIVANNAN

Interviewed by Jacob Silkstone



In an issue that deals largely with belonging and identity, interviewing Indian-born and Malaysian resident (for 17 years) Sharanya Manivannan who represented Malaysia in the Poetry Parnassus collection released by Bloodaxe Books in time with the 2012 London Olympics, seemed a perfect fit. Here, the poet talks about the experience, poetry and the differences between ‘performance poetry’ and ‘page poetry’ with The Missing Slate’s Jacob Silkstone.

Q Firstly, could you tell us something about the Poetry Parnassus experience? When did you find out you’d been selected? What was it like to be a part of one of the largest poetry events in history?

A At the very end of 2011, I received an email from Southbank Centre inviting me to Poetry Parnassus more than six months down the line. It was the first I had heard of the festival, and when I saw that I was being asked to represent Malaysia I immediately declined. I am an Indian national, and Malaysia was a burnt bridge: I had left the country in 2007 after 17 years, and written politically about it and earned the ire of its government. To my surprise, they responded telling me they were aware of my citizenship; and that many of the invitees were nationals or residents of countries other than the ones they would be representing. The representations were cultural in nature, and the selections had been arrived at after two years of decisions by an international committee.

It was, naturally, an honour. But it was also very complicated. I had spent nearly five years outrunning my history as a political dissident, meaning I had tried to put it behind me in terms of my work even if I was still haunted on a personal level. To accept this invitation would mean revisiting that trauma, in a very public way. The months between accepting the invitation and actually getting there were a period of introspection and scrutiny, and some backlash. Most shockingly, people I had known for over a decade in Malaysia aligned themselves with extreme right-wing modes of thinking about who belongs and doesn’t. I was sent nasty emails bullying me to pull out. In London, another Parnassus poet asked me if I had known there had been a Facebook campaign to have me disinvited (I hadn’t). The Malaysian media kept a complete silence, unlike those of various other countries which took a keen interest in this historic event. It would seem that my participation was so uncomfortable that it was simply ignored.

But when I finally arrived at Poetry Parnassus, I found that I was not alone. There were poets there who had been incarcerated, who had been deported, who were in exile in unequivocal, irrevocable and pragmatic ways (as for me, I had considered my-

self to be in exile my entire life, such that my actual political exile as it were was not a turning point in my vocabulary). I was awed and humbled and profoundly grateful. When I am able to write at length about how, I will, but for now I can say: my trauma was exorcised, and my political consciousness was renewed.

If I had spent five years trying to outrun my history as a political dissident before Parnassus, by the end of the festival I understood that I stood not among wounded, but among those who bear witness. I was fired up about a concept I had believed in empirically but hadn’t found suitable articulation for: that of anti-, or more accurately, post-nationalism. The most beautiful thing about Poetry Parnassus was that it took this regressive patriotic syntax and used it as the very instrument of its own rebuttal.

Q Since our next issue deals with the theme of identity, can your writing be described as ‘Malaysian’ in any way? Is it significant that you were born in India? Do you belong to a particular tradition?

A I think it’s significant that I was born in India, and even more significant that I was raised by the Sri Lankan Tamil side of my family. My Tamil heritage has always been deeply important to me, and it is my regret that I do not write in the language. I would say that my writing is as Malaysian as I am Malaysian – which is to say, I lived there between the ages of 5 and 22, how could none of that have shaped me? And yet, I never think of it. I’m not a Malaysian writer, I’m not an Indian writer, I’m not a Sri Lankan writer, I’m not a female writer, I’m not a writer of colour. Any writer who needs demographic adjectives just wants a crutch.

In terms of traditions, nobody works in a vacuum. The 2000 year-old Tamil Sangam poems made a profound impact on me, as did the entire flamenco aesthetic. From all over the world, folk storytelling and songs, as well as canonized mythology and its texts, inform my aesthetics. In the short fiction I have been writing in the past year or so, with its mix of languages, I take as my literary ancestors authors like Junot Diaz and Sandra Cisneros. I put myself

POEM FOR CLOTHES LEFT IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

Sometimes you come back to me, invoked by accident
– a similar pigment, something almost kindred
in the way you absorbed the light – and I am
seduced, unstitched with the thought of you.
I come undone like a cascade of beads from the
broken filament of my memory, seeing myself

as if in a mirror or a photograph: your color, your
cut, your grace on my body, the witchery I
bought you for. Here a chemise's boatlike sweep
on the clavicle, here a plunge deep as risk, here a
gossamer blush, like a remembered kiss. Garland of
feathers

the color of my birthstone. Shawls gathered coyly,
shrugged off in cunning. Trinkets twinkling with
suggestion.

Lace and satin, stepped into, steeped in anticipation.
Things I bought as much for the undressing as for the
dress.

Vine of bells for the wrist, twins of the same
for the ankles, so a lover might learn the sound of
a bed being left. Batik. Those leopard print boots
ribboned up the thigh, loved once
and boxed ever since.

How delicate, the weave of incident and accouterment.
Gypsy silver. The bias cut in bottle
green, crown of flowers, kalamkari acquired in the
sickness
of another nostalgia. Skirt, sunlit as Pondicherry ochre.
Guile of womanly sway in nonchalant denim. Jacquard
velvet bought when too young to wear it.
Mandarin collar. Basque translucent as rose quartz.

What I wore that night, what I would
wear if only – *if only* – I had it tonight.
Drape of poncho or pashmina, for a sagacious guise.
Crepe crinkling like a laugh. Power and play
of gentleman's fedora. Cowgirl's hat.
The simplicity of a tight black thing, amiable
with everything.
Embroidery. Mirrorwork. Say it slowly – suede.

Oh these splendidous
things fit for a queen – if only they weren't
in quarantine.

Let me have them back for a day,
if not for tonight. How
I'd set this town on fire:
the damage of desire, kindled with
couture and thrift shop glee,
tinder of greed and regret,
struck alight with the
heartbreak of my highest heels.

~ *Sharanya Manivannan*

Sharanya Manivannan was born in Madras in 1985, and grew up in Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Her first collection of poems, Witchcraft, was published by Bullfighter Books in 2008. In 2012, she was chosen as Malaysia's representative in Poetry Parnassus. Sharanya received the Lavanya Sankaran Fellowship for 2008-09 and was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2012. She currently lives in India and can be found online at www.sharanyamanivannan.com.

“ Most shockingly, people I had known for over a decade in Malaysia aligned themselves with extreme right-wing modes of thinking about who belongs and doesn’t. ”

into all these family trees because I am in so many ways an orphan, belonging without belonging.

Q You’ve written a number of ghazals – is the form at all liberating? Can you relate to Paul Muldoon’s comment that form is a straitjacket in the way that a straitjacket was a straitjacket for Houdini?

A I would agree with Paul Muldoon – formal verse sets limits, without which the act of liberation would not be possible. It’s also the best cure for writer’s block, which can be torturous. It demands discipline and sets pressure, and thus forces a result. It’s great brain exercise, and on a creative level it also gives one the license to play with turns of phrase that may appear clunky or overwrought in free verse. One can get away with a nice antiquated sense of drama. My favourite challenges are ghazals and sestinas, although I’m also known to snack on haiku.

Q As an excellent performer of your own work, do you feel that there is any significant difference between a ‘performance poem’ and a ‘page poem’?

A I think ‘page poems’ translate more readily to the voice than ‘stage poems’ do to the page, and this can be a weakness for those who work exclusively in the latter form. The intersection between literature and performance is an interesting one; one which any poet, regardless of

which side of the line they edge toward, must navigate when giving a reading. A reading is always a performance, but if a poet cannot move or entertain in person, that doesn’t necessarily make them a bad poet; just as the ability to rouse applause because of a cultivated style or presentation does not make one a good poet.

In the past, I would comfortably identify myself as a ‘spoken word artist’ because, as you’ve been so kind to point out, my stage presence or delivery has always attracted a warm reception. I am no longer sure about that title, because I do not rehearse or memorise and often do not even prepare a set list, depending instead on intuiting the audience. I am fundamentally a page poet who happens to like microphones a lot. What is sacred to me, however, is the idea of mutual receptivity in performance: the idea that something occurs between performer and viewer within the space in which they meet. Before I settled completely into writing, I trained as a dancer and worked as a theatre actor, so that sensibility is deep-rooted – when I step onto a stage, I never take it for granted.

Q If you could have dinner with any poet(s), living or dead, who would you invite (and who’d do the cooking)?

A I would invite Federico Garcia Lorca, and I would definitely do the cooking. He would be the star of the evening, and I’d carefully select an intimate guest-list of only my most sensitive and sweet-hearted friends. I can tell you the menu, too: white rice, my famous original recipe caramelized bitter melon, prawns in spicy coconut broth, a homemade passion fruit sorbet to finish and a good flow of dark rum. There will be a red carnation beside every knife.

Q If you had to suggest one golden rule for good writing, what would it be?

A Wow, one golden rule is a tall order, but maybe it’s this one: live fully, love naively, give as though you have more than enough (the secret – you do have more than enough). All of the pleasure and pain of such a life will be distilled into your art.



Pencil vs Camera # 52 by Ben Heine

MEMORY OF WALES

This is how it arrives, the memory
of Wales, on a day of scanty light.
I'm walking towards the playground.
I will never know newness like this,
or fear. I'm walking, and I'm eight.
I see a girl on the swing – my mother,

or at least, a version of my mother:
fair-haired, small. In the memory
of Wales it is often cold. I'm eight
and the cows are stalking light
like monsters in the playground.
I will never know newness like this.

I will never know a world like this.
This is my childhood and my mother's.
Everything begins in the playground:
beauty, decay, love, lilies. Memory
starts here on the stairs, in skylight.
Cows chew eternally. I'm eight



Will You Remember by Maria Khan

in this memory, I'm always eight.
There's a painting that speaks to this
malady of recurrence – an indigo twilight
of melting clocks, which shows Mother
Time as a kind of persistence, memory
and dream, coupling on the ground.

Everything we love returns to the ground.
Mother, father, childhood. When I'm eight
I know nothing of betrayal, but the memory
persists. Only once, is it different from this.
The playground is empty, and my mother,
no longer a girl, is walking a ridge of light.

Now she's at the wooden gate. Light
from Welsh stars tumbles to the ground.
Bronze cliffs in the distance sing. My mother
has met a man. She's going away. I'm eight,
but I've always known she'll leave all this.
Forsaking, after all, is a kind of memory.

My mother is eight and in Wales again.
She's in the playground of memory,
swinging towards light, towards this.

Tishani Doshi is an award-winning poet and dancer of Welsh-Gujarati descent. In 2006, she won the All-India Poetry Competition, and her debut collection, Countries of the Body (Aark Arts), won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. Her first novel, The Pleasure Seekers, was published by Bloomsbury in 2010 and longlisted for the Orange Prize. Her second poetry collection, Everything Begins Elsewhere, was published by Bloodaxe in 2012. <http://www.tishanidoshi.com/>



Oh! I Am Burning in Love by Maria Khan

THE HAPPILY EVER AFTER ALTERNATIVE

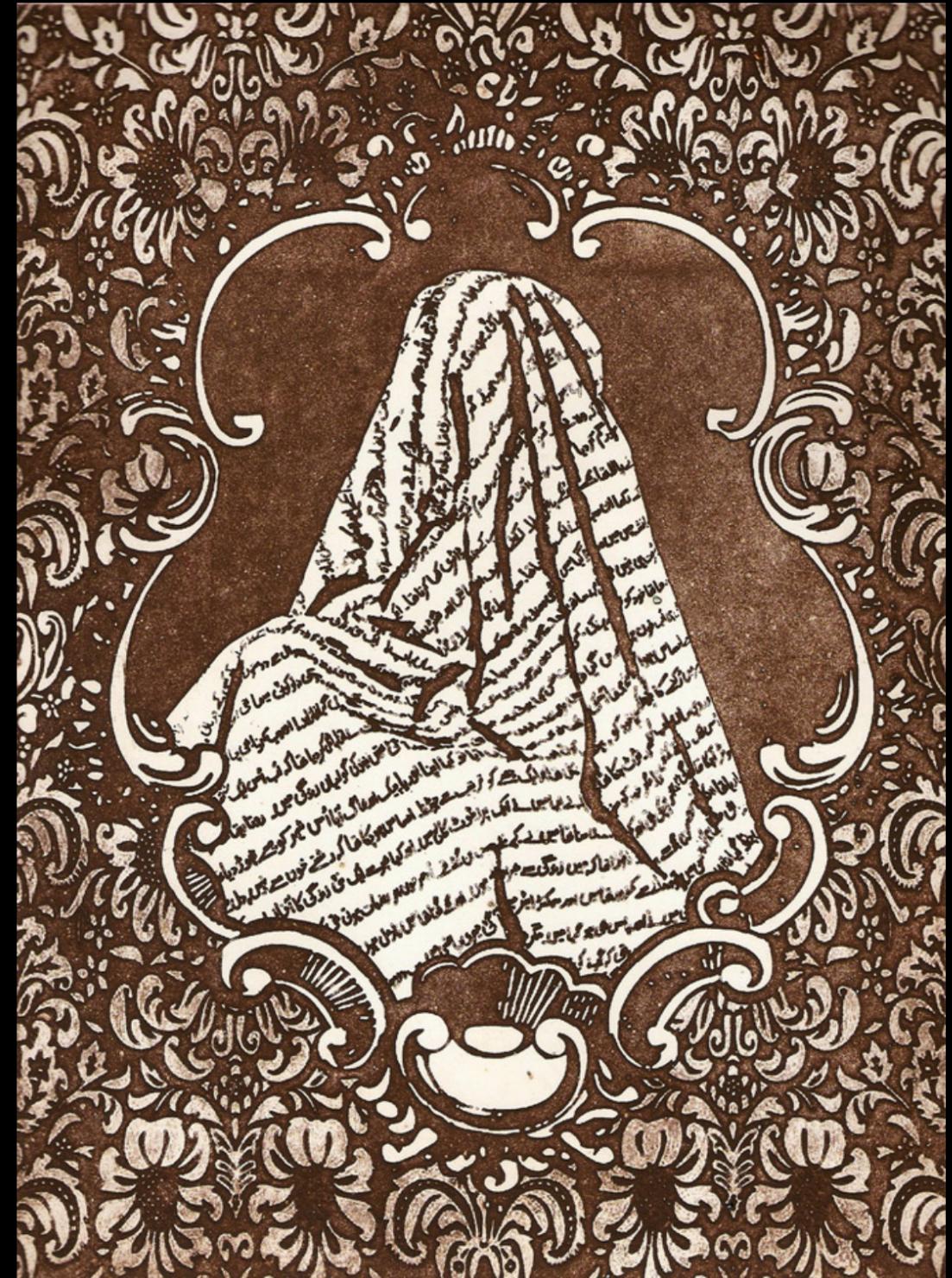
Time to refurbish the fantasy

By Maria Amir

Once upon a time in a land where people still read books and did not possess ready access to the internet, children were naïve and innocent. The children of this land grew up listening to bed-time stories about princesses, evil stepmothers, goblins and faraway kingdoms where good always triumphed over evil and princes always rode their women -- only somewhat sexistly -- off into the sunset.

Women were almost always rescued from the dastardly fates that only they were forced to endure, with a single, all-powerful true love's kiss. Many of these children grew up to search for similar princes in their lives. But as time passed and grand kingdoms gave way to much more boring democracies, many found that princes were becoming a bit of a rarity, so they settled for doctors, lawyers and investment bankers. Most of these children grew up to be little girls and some of them even grew further up to become women.

Alas, most of the ones who grew up to be women, were severely disappointed by what their fairy tales had turned into. You see, 'Handsome and Charming' was somehow never handsome enough or charming enough and nobody warned these 'women' that HEA, was really just an acronym for Hyper Enchantment Aftermath. Some of these women took to admiring the wicked stepsisters and evil queens in the tales far more than the sweepresses of cinders and the beauties that slept. They grew up a little disappointed and a lot angry. This meant that the very few little boys who ever loved fairy tales and grew up into big boys and the even fewer ones who grew into men had to pay. And pay they did.



Self Acceptance by Mohsin Shafi

Once Upon a Time, the world was slightly less jaded and filled with atrocities that permeate childhood early, and fairy tales anchored children to innocence and positivity for much longer than they manage to today. The same stories also stunted little girls in ways that continue to spark feminist rage all over the world. One can easily agree that most notions of romance stem from fairy tales and that this is what makes them endure.

Today's children tend to be slightly more skeptical of one dimensional narratives but this has not diminished the importance of fairy tales, if anything, the need for them seems to be increasing. The present narrative and the resurgence of a 'Happily Ever after' has re-emerged in a big way where the only twist seems to be that female protagonists in these narratives tend to be presented quite differently than they were previously. Characters like Rapunzel in Disney's *Tangled* (2010) are frequently depicted comfortably battling bandits and Tiana in Disney's *Princess and the Frog* (2009) has the dubious, dual privilege of being the first black animated princess as well as an independent career woman struggling for her place in the world.

The fact that both characters are victims of circumstance and eventually require a man to help them escape their problems is downplayed in these modern depictions, as opposed to Snow White and Cinderella (produced by the same studio) who were portrayed as one dimensionally as they are in writing. The interesting part is that fairy tales are not only being picked up by Disney, where the subject matter tends to be somewhat of an occupational hazard, but also by Hollywood. *Red Riding Hood*, *Snow White and the Huntsman* and the ABC TV series *Once Upon a Time* are now attempting to refurbish the trend for adult audiences. One reason for branching out may involve society's growing disillusionment with the status quo and that single women everywhere are ever hungrier for an happily-ever-after. However in order for these narratives to be palatable to adult audiences the protagonists need to be 'feminized' and so far the results in this department aren't too promising.

Now this may be because it is nearly impossible to "feminize" characters that are trapped in inherently patriarchal narratives. In other words, it is hard to make Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty or the Little Mermaid appear feminist,



Jolly Aunty by Maria Khan

when the entire tale culminates with each needing to be rescued ... and always by men. Mae West put this rather well -- "I used to be Snow White, but I drifted."

In her book *Cinderella ate my daughter: Dispatches from the front lines of the new Girlie-Girl Culture*, (Harper Collins, 2011), Peggy Orenstein describes in great detail how 'princess culture' has debilitated previous generations and how far the trend has progressed today. The book depicts how legions of young girls are proving to be the perfect market subjects for an 'Ever After' ideology, all too conveniently packaged entirely in pink taffeta. The book, one that grew out of Orenstein's 2006 article in *The New York Times* titled "What's Wrong with Cinderella?", goes on to explore how Disney's princess franchise has been a key factor in the meteoric rise of little girl pageants across America and addresses questions of early sexualization and self-esteem of the tween generation.

Over the years, the very words 'Fairy Tale' have somehow become synonymous with romance, perfection and happy endings, completely side lining the much darker stories of the *Ugly Duckling* or the *Snow Queen* penned by Hans Christen Anderson. Fairy tales today mean princesses, they mean ball gowns and they mean tiaras...all eventually followed by a ring and a wedding. Note, that I use the term "wedding" and not "marriage" because these stories never traverse beyond happily-ever-afters and what actually happened later. They don't need to. This trajectory forms the premise of nearly all Hollywood romantic comedies and today one doesn't need to be a princess to find a fairy tale ending. The 'fairy tale' can be framed for single women, having "sex in the city", working and paying their bills and battling street crime. All independent women in every aspect, save their overwhelming reliance on that 'happily ever after' crutch.

One might ask what is so bad about happy endings, considering nearly every person on the planet

“ It is hard to make Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty or the Little Mermaid appear feminist, when the entire tale culminates with each needing to be rescued ... and always by men. ”

secretly or not-so-secretly longs for one? It's the build-up and hype that are both troubling and misleading, such narratives presuppose that life ends in that ellipsis after "and they lived happily ever after..." and it doesn't. If anything, reality begins after, which is why this account is so damning. It has damned generations and little girls who believe in princesses and fairy tales ought to be cautioned. Not for believing or hoping but for placing faith in the allegories of princesses and magic wands, because this prevents many from recognizing their very own fairy tales when they happen to arrive in a pair of jeans and a pick up truck. Fairy tales tend to set a premise of what one expects of men and of romance in one's own life and people are almost always disappointed in the grandiosity of that expectation.

As for feminism, it is an absurd twist in tale-telling -- that a damsel in distress be painted as a dominatrix (sic) simply because calling a spade a spade seems too itchy a subject. Fairy tales by their very construction sell make-believe and romance. Sadly, there really is no politically correct, feminist version of "old school" romance. Attempting a feminist fairy tale would either mean modernizing it and thereby losing the romance or gender neutralizing the content...and somehow a fairy tale about a business mogul who finds a suitable partner after having eliminated several candidates and deciding to move in together to test their compatibility as a couple before rushing into the business of commitment, just doesn't have the same ring to it as a kiss complete with back lighting and an Elton John score. fairy tale princesses need to be rescued either from centuries of sleep or poisoned apples or trapped towers.

“ As for feminism, it is an absurd twist in tale-telling – that a damsel in distress be painted as a dominatrix (sic) simply because calling a spade a spade seems too itchy a subject.”

The recreation of such narratives for modern generations is problematic because the lowest common denominator in such romances remains a ‘boy saves girl from--’ equation. The check-list never changes: Must find prince, Must get kissed, Must live in palace, Must be ridden (side saddle, of course) off on preferably white horse, Must have giant, floral fiasco of a wedding, Must fade into the sunset, with the ‘And they lived Happily Ever After’ in italicized script as the picture fades to black.

Over the years it might have been prudent to at least include other fairy tale narratives such as The Ugly Duckling which tackles issues such as self-esteem, appearances and acceptance, and what many have assumed is a narrative regarding homosexuality, given that Hans Christen Anderson was by most accounts bisexual.

Another one to take up instead of riding the princess train, would have been Snow Queen - which is about frozen emotion and cold, hard intellect without any harmonious link to the universe and everything in it. Or even The Little Mermaid, in its original narrative, where the mermaid dies. She dies for a man, so this certainly doesn’t make it any more feminist but she dies, so it isn’t by any stretch a happy ending and this might have kept all the “Once Upon a Times”

and those who lived through them in check a little. Hans Christen Anderson didn’t really do happy endings in the same way as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. There aren’t really many Disney attempts at Anderson’s tales and the one that remains, The Little Mermaid, only worked with a Brothers’ Grimm-esque ending.



Resentment by Hashim Ali

There is a reason why Grimm versions sell, they sell because they perpetuate a potent brand of delusion and hope. Hope is great when it’s attainable but not so much when it either presumes or presupposes a distinct lack of individuality. Eugene O’Neil said “Obsessed by a fairy tale, we spend our lives searching for a magic door and a lost kingdom of peace”. And that is what fairy tales essentially do -- they emphasize one story, one kind of happily ever after and they plant the seed that everyone should shoot for that pumpkin-turned carriage rather than defer to their own stories and make their own narratives.

CS Lewis once said that ‘someday we would be old enough to believe in fairy tales again’ and I now know what he meant. For the present, I am content being just ‘Happy’, ‘Ever Afters’ are just way too much pressure.

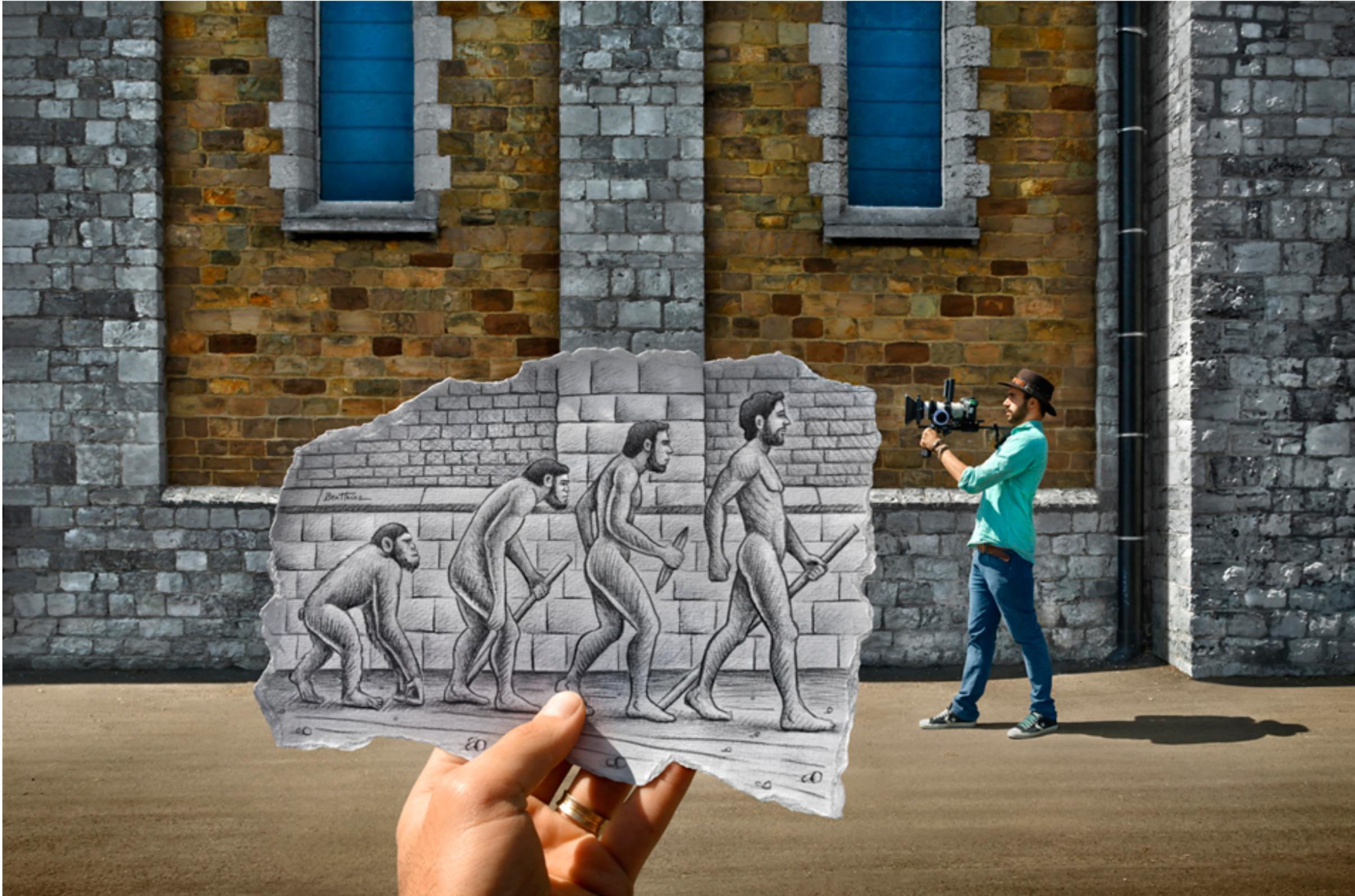
The author is Features Editor for the magazine and is based in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Once Upon A Time, there lived a little girl in a big, empty, lonely, cruel house. All this girl had to escape shadows and monsters were stories and she held them to her chest every night when she fell asleep. She played with the Lost Boys in Neverland and she sprinkled pixie dust in all the dark corners of her mind. She lived for a happy ending and a magic kiss. When she grew up, she was taken to a Kingdom far, far away where she met a Handsome, Charming prince who fell in love with her and gave her, her first toe-popping kiss in front of the sea, with her hero The Little Mermaid looking on. The prince bowed down and asked her to marry him and she said yes and her fairy tale wedding was a quiet room with happy people in every corner. She lived happily, until Ever After came, and she realized that the ‘after’ really meant putting aside the magic and living for each day. It meant marriage and marriage meant loving a person not a prince. She discovered that the magic and myths would be the downfall of Love, if they were allowed to take over and swallow the every days, the grocery lists and the long walks. She learned that holding hands was more passionate than kissing in the rain and bear hugs were more powerful than diamond rings. She realized that Happily Ever Afters never came with soft lighting and Elton John soundtracks. And that that was okay.

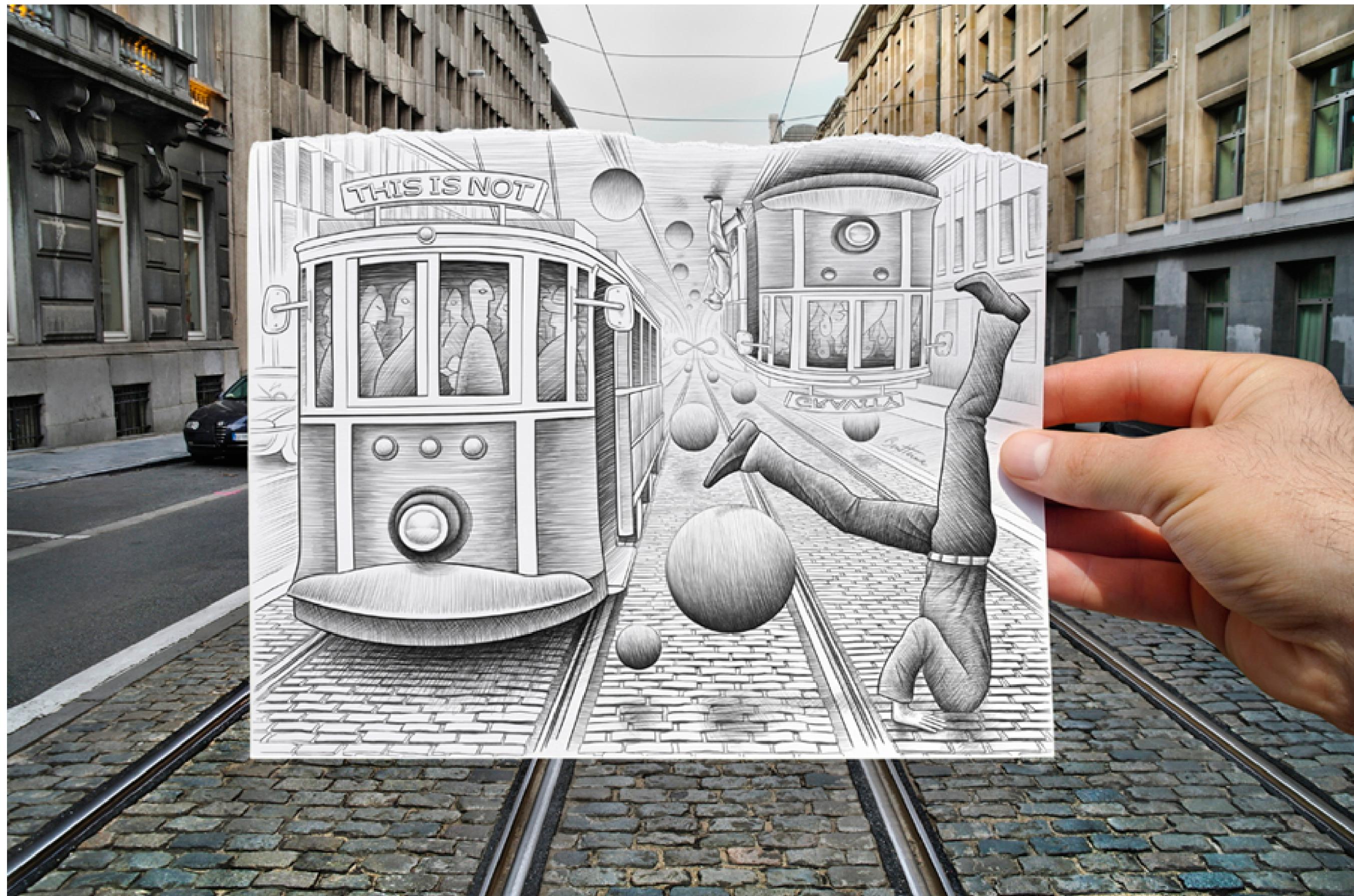
PENCIL VS. CAMERA

Blurring the line in between

Photography and Artwork by Benjamin Heine



Pencil Vs. Camera 55 by Benjamin Heine



Pencil Vs. Camera 35 by Benjamin Heine



Pencil Vs. Camera 63 by Benjamin Heine



Pencil Vs. Camera 64 by Benjamin Heine



Pencil Vs. Camera 57 by Benjamin Heine



Pencil Vs. Camera 2 by Benjamin Heine



Pencil Vs. Camera 3 by Benjamin Heine

Benjamin Heine is a Belgian Multidisciplinary Visual Artist. As a photographer, fine artist and conceptualist he has conjured up not one but three new categories of art of his own devising, blending together those separate disciplines. In his Pencil Vs Camera works he first takes a photograph and then overlays a section of that photo with a photo of his own hand holding his own penciled sketch over a portion of the original photo. The effect is an astonishing jolt that echoes pop art but is also entirely fresh and new. An already beautiful photo is transformed with a sketched “comment” that adds a splash of satire or whimsy. Creative Director Moeed Tariq sifts through a bewildering array of his creations from this particular series to offer a personal selection of his work. This is Benjamin Heine at his zaniest and most brilliant.

SPOTLIGHT ARTIST: HASHIM ALI

Interviewed by Moeed Tariq



Hashim Ali is a young artist carefully balancing college with life as an artist and believes, among other things, that this is the perfect time for art in Pakistan, even going so far as to say the country may see its own Renaissance. In this candid discussion with Creative Director Moeed Tariq, Mr. Ali talks about the person beneath the artist.

Q

Your work is very direct, just how much of your thought process while painting actually ends up on canvas?

A

Hmm... well studying communication design has helped me [tremendously] in transferring my thoughts onto the canvas. Before I used to paint and the painting would end up ambiguous and the meaning very grey, but learning design really helped me translate what exactly went through my head. It also matured my ideas and the power to create the right impact. So I would say about 85% of the thought process gets translated onto the canvas.

Q

Is there a recurrent theme in your creations?

A

I think so. I have my phases but I find the idea of controlling and being controlled really interesting. It just takes different forms... In my early work I used the idea of a puppet [a very direct symbol] for being controlled. In my later work I started making the symbol more abstract; the idea of the forbidden fruit, original sin, for me started to represent religious control. The challenge that Pakistani English writers face, is

Q

Where / who do you draw your inspiration from?

A

My inspirations come from everywhere and anywhere. Mostly from a gut feeling and a bit of reading. I read a lot and it has always helped me create concepts and ideas.

Artists who have inspired me are quite a few, but I feel Klimt, Botticelli and Tim Burton [yes I consider him an artist] have inspired me a lot – in my visual language but [especially] in my process of ideation.

Q

Which of the currently prevalent social problems in our country do you feel the most strongly about?

“

I believe that the media has a very strong part in promoting terrorism. They [help] create terror by [broadcasting inflammatory] news. ”

A

The lack of censorship of the media. Yes freedom [is important] but censorship is highly needed. For example, the brutal imagery of bomb blasts and the violence displayed on the news is highly inhumane. I believe that the media has a very strong part in promoting terrorism. They [help] create terror by [broadcasting inflammatory] news. Also the amount of nonsense and the amount of channels out there are ridiculously high. Call me backwards or whatever, but I long for those days of PTV where everything was organized and TV was worth watching.

Q

Over the years, in your life you've ended up seeing both sides to many coins, do you think it's important for an artist to walk the tightrope between opposites?

A

Yes, because I believe that an artist is a sensitive being. The more you experience the more sensitive you become.

Q

If you could exhibit anywhere in the world? Where would you do it and why?

A

My wish has always been to exhibit at the Venice Biennale and the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.



Newspaper Puppet by Hashim Ali

Q

What's a day in your life like?

A

A day in my life is rather full. I do a lot of side projects so in the morning it is college and straight after college it is work for the projects. In a typical day I eat very little, walk a lot, (and) am tense most of the time. the day would start at 7ish in the morning and end at 2 am. A rather long day.

Q

You're reclusive, why is that?

A

Really? I never thought I was reclusive...

Q

If you could legalize one drug of choice in the country it would be?

A

I would go for the fictional drug "Soma" used in Huxley's dystopian novel Brave New World. I think we as Pakistanis really need it. I just wish it existed.

Q

What do you think of the other artists your age out there in the country?

A

I believe that soon Pakistan will be making its name in the world as a center of art. My fellows are exhibiting and creating work that is beyond brilliant. They are sending their work abroad, they are getting prestigious residencies, their work is getting permanently displayed in galleries and museums across the world. I think that our generation of artists are going to be bringing a Renaissance in Pakistani art very soon.

Q

What are your guilty pleasures and pet peeves?

“ I believe that soon Pakistan will be making its name in the world as a center of art. My fellows are exhibiting and creating work that is beyond brilliant. I think that our generation of artists are going to be bringing a Renaissance in Pakistani art very soon. ”

A

Guilty pleasure is definitely watching The Devil Wears Prada again and again... and my pet peeve is when plans are changed.

Q

To the youngest artists who're just entering the arena?

A

Listen to everyone but only follow the critique which you think is right. It's harder than it sounds. :)

Q

Describe your work in five words.

A

Dramatic and direct.

I FOLD PAPER FOR A LIVING

By Orooj-e-Zafar

People think it's weird - that I fold paper folded beauties in front of me;

I sit by a park bench, chant numbers under my breath and bend each fiber of light, fragile paper just the way I want.

Because it makes you feel powerful?, you ask. And I sit there and smile at the words that twitch the sides of your lips.

I sit here and watch that simple square turn into a crane right before my eyes - *with my hands* - because I can make it happen. I imagine my next move, anticipate an outlook and create beauty out of the simplicity of what the bark of the tree next to the bench twisted into, from the paper in front of me. *Because you've been ugly your whole life?*, you ask. And I laugh at your naivety and inhale the scent of the rain.

The musky scent seeps into the paper and carries itself into the presence of the butterfly I folded. And it sits on the mantelpiece with all the other folded paper I find beauty in. I watch them on cold November mornings, when the fireplace is lit and the clouds sigh outside my fogged windows. *Because you're only capable of faking pretty?*, you ask. And I stay quiet while you parade around my sanctuary.

I inhale every scent on each of the

paper folded beauties in front of me;



Kaava by Ahsan Masood

rain, the park, the desert, strawberries. I inhale in a memory and let out a sigh.

A painful, long-awaited, blood-tainted sigh. *Because memories are all they'll ever be?*, you ask. And I look down, too afraid to tell you you're right.

Maybe you couldn't rest till you knew the truth behind life and death

or before you could find the right card on a random corner of the street (one that I haven't folded a living out of) or maybe you were just scared busy. Maybe it would've hurt you if you knew how much it takes out of me to turn those memories into matter. *Because you're weak and needed me to hold you through everything?*, you ask. And I lie back down and hope you stop talking because I was too simple and in-the-moment to think that far.

My life exists in these folds. These folds I make to restore beauty in the mind that you ravished with your chocolate-polluted words. My life exists in paper cuts and small bleeds because I love doing my job so much, I forgot I am not paper thin as well. *Because you like to look at me and wish I would understand your delusions?*, you ask. And I cry out to you, whimpering words of help that you're too tired to hear.

I was too simple and impulsive to think about the universe and determinism. Most days I was just glad I could feel; feel the blood behind a wound, or pain behind my eyes, or the papery feel of the crane mobile on my window.

Because people think it's weird - that I fold paper for a living.

Orooj-e-Zafar is a sixteen year-old author. This is her second piece for The Missing Slate (the first is available in our online issue).

SUGAR

By Diana Rae

Mr. Armstrong found Joshua Tree crumpled up by the wharf one morning, skin rubbery and stained with the lightest dash of crusted blood. An arrow stuck out from his chest like the sweetest Valentine's surprise.

There was a note tied to the arrow, a Sharpie-scratched Exxon receipt that read, "Ham--\$2.25," "Pepsi--\$1.08," and "Mateo High KILL. KILL."

Surge barely got a look at the thing because right after Lucy showed it to the team she tore it to bits.

"Joshua's mom might want that," Surge yelped. Lucy twisted her upper body around to face him, huffing and gnashing her teeth. Her hair had still been frizzy then, overtaking her ego and friendly, spotted skin with its volume.

"Joshua's mom is a flying cunt," Lucy shrieked. "And so are you."

At the end of practice she wouldn't let Surge leave the room until he removed his arms from his face and let her slap him softly. Fifteen smacks, all of them tinting Surge's sallow cheeks pink.

"You're good," Lucy warned, "but you aren't that good."

*

Surge was a mathlete because of its healing powers, the ways in which its light and omnipotence diluted the bitter flavor of his home life. He lived with a divorced mother and an older brother, neither of them offensive people but how they crowded him! Always including him in frozen pizza dinners, leaning on their elbows asking, "How's Lucy? How's Lucky?" Asking him if he'd like to watch *Die Hard*, telling him they wanted to see his yearbook.

How he envied Lucy, a frizzy, gangly creature with millions of frizzy, gangly opinions. All the other girls loved to really pick at her, P.E. class picking, locker room picking, head-in-toilet picking, "You can go fuck yourself," and, "You're dead meat," just like in the movies. The force of the scorn seemed fueled by Lucy's starchy jeans, her nasally voice and abrupt answers in English class, but who was Surge to judge?

"If I didn't know any better," Charlotte loved to scoff, "I'd say she was *trying* to be unpopular."

Whenever a chocolate milk carton was thrown at Lucy's head, whenever her puffy braids were tugged or snipped with safety scissors, she wouldn't shrivel and sob as she had when they'd lost the regional championships last year. Instead, she'd stumble towards her aggressor, lift her middle fingers, and overlap them like a crucifix. No, this was not protection against the devil, but shorthand for the eternal plus sign, her reason to live and breathe. The very glue of math, an oily adhesive with such infinite and humbling power.

"Suck it," she'd shout.

Lucy's home *looked* like a plus sign, a lopsided, renovated lighthouse that her ruddy father ran like a ship. The man was built like a hacked piece of gristle, always spitting and pouring Surge mugs of Guinness.

"Whatever you do," Lucy's father liked to say, "never have ugly daughters."

Surge would guffaw wildly, hungry for alcohol and some nameless sort of attention. Lucy would sit in the corner, kicking her chair and biting her fingers.

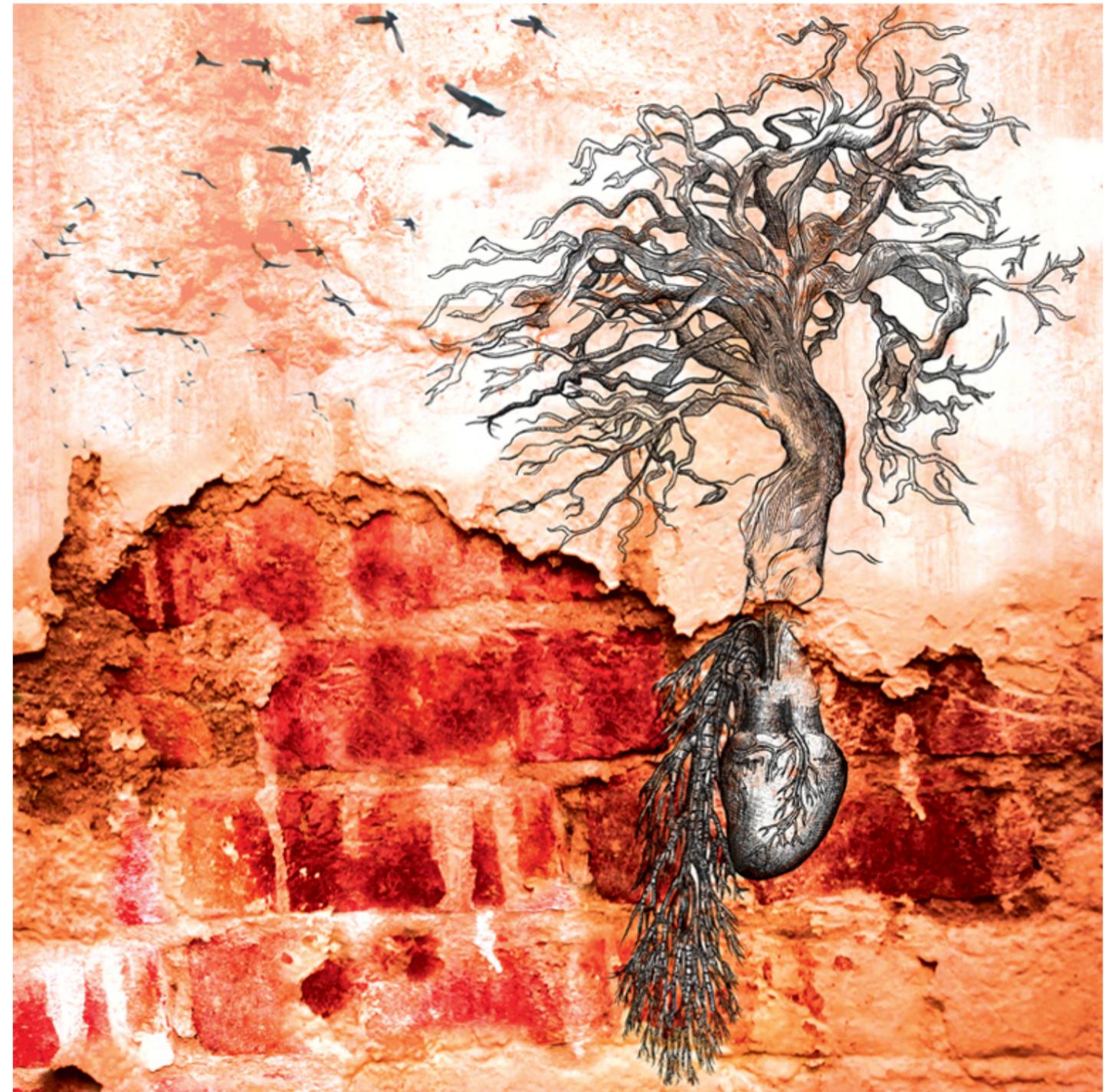
"Suck it," she'd whisper.

Things changed, however, when Joshua Tree was murdered. The team firmly agreed to cancel official practices, "For all intents and purposes," as Lucy said. Still, they continued to cloister in the dusty space above Two Star, the liquor store they had used for meetings since the beginning of the school year. In middle school they had met for practice in a classroom, but then Mr. Armstrong had been asked to resign for storing explosives in the janitor's closet.

When Mr. Armstrong accepted a job as the new Two Star clerk, Lucy demanded that he continue coaching the team during his evening shifts.

"All the best math teachers," Lucy claimed, "are a bit psycho."

For the first few days after Joshua's death, no one—not even Lucy—mentioned retribution. Instead, they spent each evening dissecting basic details of the event: the San Mateo High mathletes' disdain and how their upcoming meet was causing so much tension. How a team member must have rowed the short distance between the two shores because the San Mateo bridge was always closed



Kaava by Ahsan Masood

at night. How Joshua Tree liked to go for late night strolls on the wharf.

“That’s what did him in,” Lucky growled, glaring at Surge. Back then Lucky was always glaring and huffing at the slightest provocation because Surge had so recently said, “I don’t *want* to be best friends anymore.” It was during Lucky’s family vacation, on a bench outside of a truck stop, both boys chomping on melting Creamsicles and sweating like hogs. Surge explained to Lucky that he did not want to hang around the Santa Cruz Diner working out problem sets on weeknights anymore. Instead he longed to drink tequila with Joshua Tree. He longed to run around Old Town, growling and clicking pebbles on Lucy’s window and coax her downstairs with drunken renditions of sitcom theme songs.

“I don’t *want* to be best friends anymore,” Surge told Lucky and the three remaining vacation days were hardly memorable.

“Joshua was my best friend,” Surge sobbed to the rest of the mathletes during practice. The whole team—Lucy, Lucky, Kevin H., Kevin G., Kevin T., Charlotte and Terrence—laughed.

“I knew him better,” Lucy laughed. “You only hung out with him for like, a month.”

“He told me things.”

Lucy’s eyes flashed coldly. When Surge walked her home later she made him step into her kitchen for a glass of chocolate milk.

“I think you’ll have to be my next second-in-command, Sergio.”

*

A week later Lucky said, “All we ever do is talk shit.”

“Sometimes trash talk is a little fun,” Mr. Armstrong replied. He was squeezed into his Two Star uniform, a simple blue polo shirt wearing thin under the breadth of his post-resignation weight. His bearded chin sunk into layers of youthful facial fat.

“We won’t be just talking shit for long though, will we Mr. Armstrong?” Lucy shoved her body against the edge of Charlotte’s chair but Charlotte leaned away. Surge understood; Lucy’s iridescent butterfly shirt hadn’t gone over very well at school and that sort of stench just *clung*.

“I don’t see why we won’t be able to retaliate,” Mr. Armstrong chuckled. “You kids have been doing so well lately. I know you need to let off a little

steam.”

“If we don’t practice for a while we can figure out a way to get back at San Mateo,” Lucy whined. “Those flying cunts took Joshua, and he was my best friend.”

“I wouldn’t go so far as to call San Mateo students ‘cunts.’” Mr. Armstrong frowned. “Don’t let



Pencil Vs. Camera 58 by Benjamin Heine

them get to you so much, Lucy. It was just a bit of pre-meet heckling.”

“I’m concerned, Lucy.” Charlotte attempted a smile. “I don’t think I’m comfortable cancelling more practices.”

“Hey Char, I don’t think I’m comfortable with one of my starters being a traitor to the cause,” Lucy snarled. “And I don’t think Sergio is comfortable with that either. So shut up, okay?”

Charlotte’s face spasmed and she relented with a jerky nod.

“This way we can really focus,” Lucy argued.

When Surge walked Lucy home later she barely spoke to him.

“Charlotte likes you,” she grumbled before slamming her door in his face.

*

“It’s not that I’m jealous,” Lucy explained the next morning over breakfast sodas in the cafeteria.

“I want to be more like you.” she slid away from him.

Surge avoided Lucy until she cornered him later that afternoon and demanded that he grab a milkshake with her and come to her house before heading to Two Star. As Lucy led Surge out of school, a hand clamped onto the sleeve of his polo, they saw Charlotte cruise past on her red Schwinn. Her naturally neat, beige, symmetry—a mane of linear hair undulating from her body in tandem with her puffed skirt—made her look like a neatly-packed lunch.

“She’s alright,” Surge muttered.

*

Upstairs at Two Star, they began to scheme.

“I think we should use my dad’s gun,” Lucky said.

“I think you’re psycho,” Charlotte said. “We just need to use an arrow like they did. That way they won’t try to one-up us.”

“You’re so damn wrong,” Lucy said. “We don’t end a conflict by being mediocre and derivative. We end it by making it impossible for *them* to one-up *us*. Have you ever heard of an atom bomb?”

“Sorry I’m not very good at violence.” Charlotte brushed Surge’s leg while reaching for her root beer, abandoning a layer of dead skin cells on his khakis.

“Mr. Armstrong, how can we win?” Lucy growled.

“*Mr. Armstrong, how can we win?*” Charlotte repeated, rolling her eyes.

“Settle, girls,” Mr. Armstrong said. “Just settle down. I enjoy Lucky’s initiative but I still want you kids to think bigger. Quantity is key here.”

“What do you mean by ‘quantity?’” Lucky grinned and rocked back and forth in his chair.

“The more bodies down the better,” Lucy said.

“Stop acting like you’re in the army,” Terrence said.

“Stop sucking up to Charlotte,” Lucy said.

“Settle,” Mr. Armstrong said.

“If we’re just going to fool around I don’t see how we’re going to accomplish anything at all,” Charlotte sighed, rubbing her right temple

“I don’t see you coming up with any great ideas,” Lucy said. “What, do you have a bazooka hidden away somewhere?”

“It’s just that ... why would *anyone* like *you*?”

Surge honestly didn’t know. His ribcage was so defined, his feet were so slim, and his neck was often graced with a grey ring of dirt.

“No one likes me,” Lucy said.

“Mr. Armstrong likes you.”

“He doesn’t count—he’s a teacher.”

“Not anymore.”

Lucy groaned and sucked on her left index finger. One of her less appealing habits was a tendency to chew off her nail polish and swallow the flakes.

“I don’t think a bazooka would even be that effective. Quantity, right?” Lucky poured eight packets of sweetener straight into his cream soda and stirred the concoction with his finger.

“You’re right, Lucky. We need to take out the whole team as swiftly as possible.” Lucy nudged Surge’s shoulder and began to stroke it almost as if she was flicking dirt around. “What’s your idea, Sergio?”

“An atom bomb like you said, I guess,” Surge said. “That’s how I would kill anyone if I could. I mean, at least an explosion.”

“Hey, doesn’t your brother sell fireworks, Sergio?” Lucky sat up high in his seat, knocking his knees together.

“Ahem,” Mr. Armstrong interjected.

“Oh. Sorry Mr. Armstrong,” Lucky said. “I forgot.”

“Do you have anything we can use, Mr. Armstrong?” Lucy flipped one of her braids in Charlotte’s face. Her hands were twitching from a light Coca Cola overdose.

“I think I can come up with something.” Mr. Armstrong laughed.

*

“I was wondering what you’re doing tomorrow night?” Charlotte asked. They were in math class and Surge was still buzzing from a breakfast soda.

“I don’t know. We’re going to Two Star, right? After that I might go home and watch *Friends* reruns.” He jiggled his right leg so hard the floor began to shake.

“Well I rented *Die Hard*. I was wondering if you wanted to come over and see it.”

“I don’t know.” The fluorescent lighting wasn’t doing Charlotte any favors.

“I just thought it’d be cool. You can bring Lucky if you want.”

“Why would I bring him?”

“Aren’t you best friends?”

“Lucy and I are best friends. Can I bring her?” Surge chomped his pencil.

“I hate Lucy.”

“No you don’t.”

“Of course I do.”

“Whatever.”

Charlotte’s eyes flitted closed. Surge liked the look of her again.

“I’ll be over tomorrow then,” he said, standing up for a bathroom break. “I’ll bring Lucy.”

*

“Why do you want me to come on your date, though?” Lucy asked. They were standing upstairs at Two Star half an hour before the team was due to arrive. Coming in early always had its benefits, for Mr. Armstrong awarded punctuality with handfuls of candy. Lucy was sipping soda through a stalk of liquorice and Surge was licking Pixie Stix residue from his palms.

“Because I just don’t want to be alone with her is all.”

“Well, bring a boy for me.”

“I’m not going to do that.”

“Just call someone. Call a boy you know from summer camp. Or someone at our school.”

“Definitely not going to do that.”

“Give me your phone, I’ll call someone.”

“No.”

But Lucy became fixated on the idea and sucked on her sugar-cruled lips for the first ten minutes of practice, slinking around Surge to sniff out his cellphone.

Finally, Terrence yelled, “What are you doing?” and she was obligated to stop patting Surge’s pockets and dipping her hand into the front pouch of his backpack.

“I’m agreeing with Terrence on this one, Lucy,” Mr. Armstrong said. “Let’s just sit down and stop bothering Sergio. Let’s sit down and appreciate the plan I’ve thrown together.”

“Right, Mr. Armstrong.” Lucy crouched on the side of Surge’s chair and tucked his ankle into the crease of her sweaty elbow.

“Who knows the first one hundred digits of pi?” Mr. Armstrong asked.

“Three point one four one five nine two six five three five eight nine seven nine three two three eight four six two six four three three eight three two seven nine five zero two eight eight four one nine seven one six nine three...” Lucky, Lucy and Charlotte barked in unison. Surge kept count in his head so he could really sink into the rhythm, each num-

ber awakening another pathway in his brain with an almost audible *click*.

“Okay, okay.” Mr. Armstrong raised his hands to his chest and crossed them over his collarbone like a plaster saint. “You kids are really the coolest. Now Terrence, Charlotte, and—erm—*Kevins*, I assume you can also go a few rounds? So to speak?”

Terrence, Charlotte and the Kevins nodded mutely, but Surge suspected that they could probably only go about twenty digits in, tops. They lacked the sort of necessary, ravenous confidence that he, Lucy, Joshua Tree and Lucky had gained from late recitations.

“Well, we need to take this thing into hyperdrive, folks.” Mr. Armstrong passed around a pile of papers. “I’ve got the first hundred numbers printed out on these cheat sheets. You can have them on hand, but I want to make sure that we’ve got the cadence of the thing down together. It’s like reciting poetry—even when you’re reading from a slip of paper you’d better not *sound* like you’re reading. Understood?”

“I thought we were doing explosions,” Lucky said.

“Explosions take work, young man.” Mr. Armstrong’s right eye twitched. “We can’t think in the short-term.”

“But how is a recitation of pi going to make *anything* explode? In the long-term, I mean.”

“On Friday,” Mr. Armstrong said, “we’re going to sit on the wharf and target San Mateo with an equation I’ve worked out—”

“An equation? What sort of equation?” Lucy pumped Surge’s ankle with her elbow.

“Well, not an equation per se,” Mr. Armstrong confessed. “Something a little simpler. It’s going to be a great little project. You’re all going to sit right out on that wharf, say what you have to say and punch those corresponding digits into your calculators.”

“Say what we have to say?” Charlotte said.

“You’ll do the hundred digits, like I’ve been talking about. You know, you’ll recite it.”

“Well, what do we do after that?” Charlotte said, her words overlapped by the sound of Lucy sucking her teeth.

“We press ‘enter.’”

“Um,” Terrence said.

“This might be a lot of work.” Lucky said. The Kevins murmured in agreement.

“Listen, this is why I had reservations about coaching you kids this year,” Mr. Armstrong groaned. “Can’t you just act like a team for once?”

“What happens after we hit ‘enter’?” Surge sat up straight and kicked his leg away from Lucy. “Do the explosions go off then?”

“Ah ha ha!” Mr. Armstrong skipped to the corner of the room and rummaged around in his navy blue Jansport. “I almost forgot that bit! Thanks, Sergio. Anyhow, let me explain. Yours truly will dye-*rect* this energy—the lovely energy of *teamwork*—with a very special device.” He lifted up a gleaming instrument of rough silver, a chunky gadget that seemed neither cylindrical nor rectangular. Surge released a low hum through creased lips.

“Is that your television remote?” Charlotte adjusted her glasses.

“It’s wrapped in tinfoil.” Lucy giggled.

“A device of my own invention. We don’t have much time so I had to improvise with some household objects.”

“Once again,” Lucky said. “this sounds like a lot of work.”

Mr. Armstrong’s shoulders crinkled down into his body like edges of wet paper.

“I think it’s cool.” Lucy gave Mr. Armstrong a thumbs up.

“Maybe we *should* use Lucky’s dad’s gun,” Charlotte sighed.

“So you’re going to direct this energy into a big explosion?” Surge felt little patience for gun-related chatter. “Our energy?”

“Yes, that’s the plan.”

“Big explosions?”

“Yes.”

“I think it’s cool as long as we get to blow up San Mateo.”

“That’s the spirit.” Mr. Armstrong clapped.

The meeting’s energy lightened, for at that moment two or three mathletes obliquely desired Surge in some fleeting and physical way. Still, Surge later came to the conclusion that they all would have agreed regardless of any expression of enthusiasm on his part. Such was their intense devotion to the

BETWEEN STRANGERS

I want you to undress me
like a stranger again,
tugging at my jeans
to see if I will let you
and I did, lifting up
in an anything goes kind of way
because anything did
and you pulled down
so that everything landed
all in one, determined
like the expression on your face
of wanting nothing but me
and me wanting nothing but
the moment despite all it hid.

Originally from Minneapolis, Minnesota, Loukia M. Janavaras currently resides in Athens, Greece. Her poem White was published in J.D. Vine publications The Creative Writer in 2008 and in 2010 she received an Honorable Mention in the Writer's Digest 79th Annual Writing Competition for The Neighbor in the Memoirs/Personal Essay category.

memory of Joshua Tree, a boy who had transferred to their middle school in May of eighth grade and hadn't talked to anyone but Surge for all of July.

"All right then," Lucky said. "Let's do this."

*

By the end of practice, Charlotte's face gleamed with a sheen of sweat. Getting the rhythm of their recitation down had been so trying that they'd had to stay at Two Star until ten o'clock at night. At one point, Terrence had been on the verge of tears.

"Aren't you supposed to be a genius?" Lucy screamed. "Aren't we all supposed to be geniuses? Isn't that the point of us?"

"Please walk me home, Sergio," Charlotte whispered.

"We'll practice on Thursday," Lucy reassured everyone as they packed up to leave. "Though it would be much more effective if Terrence and the Kevins practiced tomorrow as well. Walk me home, Sergio."

"He's walking *me* home," Charlotte said, though not derisively. She looked as if she needed a sweaty teenage wrist to clutch.

"He and I always walk home together." Lucy swung her backpack onto her shoulder. "We need to strategize."

Surge waved at Charlotte and descended the stairs with Lucy.

"I wonder if Lucky likes me," Lucy said.

"Don't get into that." Surge sighed. "Why does anyone want anyone to like anyone?"

"On TV it's so they can get together. I guess that applies to real life, too."

"Yeah, but what do you do when you 'get together' with someone?"

"I don't know. You're just basically friends with the person. Only you have to stay in contact all day long. And you have sex."

"It's only biology." Surge dug into his pockets,

searching for spare, linty Skittles.

"Kinda. Only you gotta keep it really interesting."

"Were you fucking Joshua?"

"No."

"Then why did you always follow him around?"

Lucy jumped over a puddle, her yellow rain boot skidding upon impact; luckily, she didn't fall.

"You must have been having sex. Why on earth would you hang around someone so much if you weren't having sex or on television?"

"I'm not entirely sure," Lucy said, "if you're actually a human being."

*

Surge and Lucy had never been to Charlotte's house but they knew she lived below the biggest hill in town. Lucy demanded that they bring along an enormous flan she'd prepared in a casserole dish the size of Surge's chest because she suspected that Charlotte was filthy rich.

"It's my dad's recipe," she screamed at Surge when he tried to smash the dish over his knee at Lucy's doorway.

"It's bourgeoisie," he said, but this admission of resentment felt showy and weak. He bowed in apology and they walked to Charlotte's slowly, the both of them in great spirits.

The house itself was absolutely tiny but the yard yawned open for a mile at least. Twelve whole pick-up trucks were parked in an X formation across the sloping lawn and Surge could spot several children gathered around a clubhouse in the distance.

Charlotte let them in without their even ringing the doorbell.

"Our walls are like Saran-Wrap," she said.

"What, you mean plastic?" Lucky asked.

"No, they're just thin. I could hear you two coming up the drive."

She led them into her house, which was even more haphazardly decorated than Lucy's. Surge fingered the overlapping red tapestries and family photos tacked directly to the wall, attempting to rip something away to keep for himself. Charlotte pulled at his hand and said, "Come see the kitchen."

"This house doesn't look like mine," Surge said. Lucy stepped on his foot.

The kitchen was filled with smoke because Charlotte had burnt some cupcakes. Three or four more children were crouched under the table with a tub of frosting that Charlotte had apparently abandoned.

"Sorry." Charlotte opened a window. "This is just like *Clueless*."

Lucy set down her flan on the counter and clapped her hands against her legs.

"Let's watch a movie," she said.

"Yeah okay," Charlotte responded. "You want some soda first?"

"God, no," Lucy said. "Did you know that when you drink a Coke that's your whole day's recommendation of sugar? Because I just learned that."

"Wow. But I have diet root beer."

"Okay."

While Charlotte was pouring drinks, Lucy and Surge reached into the oven for her bare, blackened cupcakes and began to eat.

"Sergio—," Charlotte started.

"Only Lucy calls me Sergio," Surge said.

"No, I call you Surge," Lucy said.

"Only Charlotte calls me Surge."

They all laughed.

Charlotte handed them cups and led them to the den, a wide, wood-paneled room that was filled by a mammoth leather sofa.

"Should we do a practice round of pi, first?" Charlotte sat down with her legs tucked underneath her. She looked thin and alert, *An actress*, Surge thought.

"Let's take a night off," Lucy said, sitting next to Charlotte.

"I just feel bad. Terrence and the Kevins are practicing at the Santa Cruz Diner all night, did you know?"

"No." Lucy smiled.

"Well, they are. It's depressing. They're so desperate to get it down. We're never going to do well enough to—"

"Focus our energy?"

"Whatever, right?"

"I really think that Mr. Armstrong has got us covered. I mean, he's a teacher."

"Not really," Surge said.

“Well, you know. I mean, yeah, you know.”

“Whatever.”

“Are we going to watch a movie or just talk?” Surge was still standing.

“Sit down,” Lucy sighed. “Here, let me go fetch my flan. Everybody likes flan.”

Surge took Lucy’s place on the couch so that he could come face-to-face with Charlotte’s alertness, a force far less presumptuous than one would assume.

“I kind of don’t want to even do this,” she said. Her tone was casual.

“Why not? Didn’t you like Joshua?”

“I hardly knew him.”

“Well it doesn’t matter anyway. What do you think it matters?”

“Not much, probably.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“Oh, you know.” She rearranged her knees again, pressing them loosely to her chest. “Every action has an equal and opposite reaction.”

“That’s true,” Surge said.

“Let’s practice pi with this,” Lucy sang, sauntering into the room.

“Why are you so happy, chick?” Charlotte leaned back a bit and sunk half into the sofa, half into Surge’s forearm.

Lucy stuck her hand into her deep, ruptured flan and pulled out a squat bottle of brandy.

“It’s my dad’s recipe.”

“Pour some in my soda,” Surge said.

“Does that even taste good?” Charlotte leaned her cup towards Lucy as well.

“Joshua used to do it all the time,” Lucy said. “but then again he also used to throw firecrackers in mailboxes.”

“That was him?” Charlotte gasped. Surge began to drink.

“Well, yeah, who else?”

“That seems like something Surge would do.”

“Oh God, it does, doesn’t it? I don’t think he ever would though, not really. The difference between Sergio and Joshua is that Joshua is more of a sympathetic character. Not emphatic, but sympathetic at least.”

“Will you put on this movie?” Surge felt crowd-

ed whenever two people conversed across him.

“In a minute,” Charlotte said.

“Joshua had all sorts of ethical reasons for doing those things. Like, he would come up with some great idea to slash Mr. Armstrong’s tires because he *sympathized* with Mr. Armstrong. He had a kindness organ. Like he just wanted to help everyone. He was very sweet.”

“Hm.”

“Sergio is sort of less organic, you know. Are you into that?”

“I want to watch *Die Hard*,” Surge said.

“No you don’t,” Lucy said.

“Well, what else are we going to do? Sit around and think about Joshua?”

“Probably not.” Charlotte gulped down her soda with a grimace.

*

The team met on Thursday for an early morning practice but Surge did not participate. Indeed, he was not lucid again until Lucy physically shook him awake that afternoon and said, “You’re a fucking freak.”

“I didn’t see you complaining,” Surge groaned.

“I guess I don’t mind so much.” Lucy was kneeling at the side of his bed, her hands outlining his face with light traces, as if anticipating his disappearance. Surge heard food sizzling downstairs and reasoned that someone was probably frying slices of lunch meat. Sure enough, Lucy whispered, “Your brother eats a lot.”

Lucy and Surge were in high spirits again when they departed for practice. Though Surge was still swollen from sleep, he balked at Lucy’s suggestion that they ride the bus to Two Star.

“I want to take my bike,” he argued. Lucy agreed and sat on his handlebars, rambling on about some parka she wanted.

“But my dad,” she said, “just doesn’t want to buy me anything *that* blue.”

The Two Star was always closed on Thursdays, but Mr. Armstrong would still hold practice if the whole team promised up and down not to take too much free soda. He met them outside to complain.

“Last time you all were here my boss noticed that there was a whole case of root beer missing. I had to blame it on my white coworker,” Mr. Arm-

strong said distastefully.

“Aren’t you white too?” Lucy asked.

“Not in my truest soul,” he responded.

“Let’s get around to that later.” Surge rarely felt like talking with Mr. Armstrong

“Anyway, I hope you kids are ready.” Mr. Armstrong unlocked the door and only let them pass through under his outstretched arm.

“Definitely.” Lucy said, racing loudly up the stairs despite Mr. Armstrong’s hushed protestations.

Surge followed Lucy inside and stood with her at the top of the stairs until each athlete had been separately smuggled into the building. When they had all assembled, Terrence took six minutes to berate Surge for missing morning practice.

“Surge has been sick,” Charlotte said, wrapping her forearms across her stomach.

“We’ve had enough of that.” Mr. Armstrong rolled up his sleeves and began to tinker with his foil-wrapped remote. “Take care of that on your own time is all I mean.”

“We’d better get down to it, then,” Terrence said, his voice hoarse. The Kevins began right off, *Three point one*—, but Lucky and Terrence were slow-going and had a hard time jumping into the chorus. Both Surge and Charlotte preferred to lip-sync, but their lack of participation seemed particularly bad for the team’s wavering morale. Lucy smacked her right palm against her forehead and stuck her left palm towards Mr. Armstrong’s chest.

“We aren’t geniuses for nothing,” she said. Everyone blushed. They practiced for five hours, sustaining themselves with only three root beer breaks.

*

Lucy and Surge met for breakfast sodas on Friday morning in the cafeteria. Lucy had smudged two lines of black face paint under her eyes and they were swiftly flaking.

“Do you think Lucky likes me?” She took a sip of her Coke. “I should get some food or something.”

“You already asked me about Lucky.”

“Don’t name the game. Ugh.”

“Why do people pretend to care about love?”

“So they can make indie movies.”

“Do you know why I don’t get it? I think it’s because you don’t get anything to show for it?”

“When you’re in love you get photos. And necklaces and free food. There’s plenty.”

“I just wish I understood some of these things.”

“That’s not true.”

“Are you nervous or something?”

Surge laid his bare arm out across the table. Lucy twisted her hands around his wrist and began to rub it raw.

“Why would I be nervous?”

“I don’t know.”

“Okay, last night I was very worried. C’mon, if Mr. Armstrong’s could change his experiment without us knowing—”

“I wouldn’t call it *his* experiment.”

“—and direct our own energy back onto us. He’s the one controlling everything when you think about it. He could kill me if he wanted to. He could kill our families. Maybe he’s a sleeper agent! How do I know I can trust him?”

“You shouldn’t.”

“I don’t.”

“It’ll be okay.”

“How do you know?” The bell rang.

“There are bigger things for us.” Surge wrenched his burning wrist from Lucy’s fingers.

*

Charlotte laid her head on her desk for most of math class. Surge stared at her hard, willing her to sit up and start a conversation. Eventually he poked her with the graphite tip of his pencil.

“Look what Lucy gave me.” He held out his wrist.

“A present.” She did not turn to face him.

“Yeah.”

“I bet we kill ourselves on accident.”

“I wouldn’t much mind.”

“I would.”

“Why?”

“Well, you know, there are things I haven’t done yet. I’d like to do those things.”

“Like what?”

“You know. Go to college. Get an A on my next history test.”

“What does that matter?”

“I don’t know.”

“I bet you don’t have anything awesome left to do. I bet you just want to be famous or something.”

“That wouldn’t be horrible.”

“It probably would.”

“If you could be famous, Surge,” Charlotte said, sitting up properly, “what would you be famous for?”

“Discovering an alien drug up in the quarry.”

“You’re such a dick.” Charlotte smiled.

“I’m serious,” Surge said. “Some people are going to be famous for making mediocre music, one or two people are going to be famous for murdering other people, and some people—like you—aren’t going to be famous at all. *I’m* going to be famous for discovering an alien drug up in the quarry. I don’t know how these things work.”

Charlotte shook her head and reached down into her bag. After fishing around for a moment, she pulled out a gallon Zip-Lock bag filled with M&Ms. She held a finger to her lips.

Surge shoved his cupped hands towards her. While she tipped the candy into his fingers, he began to laugh.

“It drives me crazy when you don’t believe me,” he said.

*

As the team walked to Two Star that evening, Lucky began to sob, loudly, wetly, without constraint.

“I just realized that nobody’s going to compete with us anymore,” he mumbled. “After we do this I mean.” Everyone traded prolonged stares, silently agreeing not to indulge the whining fit. As always, Lucy chose to proclaim herself as an exception.

“Oh, you *just* realized that?” Lucy shoved him. “Seriously? What did you *think* was going to happen?” She shoved him again. “Ugh. Did you actually believe that we were still going to be able to compete?”

“Well, yeah.”

“We’re lucky if half of us aren’t sent to Catholic school,” Lucy replied.

“I thought we’d still get to go up against Riverside High next month.”

“But if we lose we’d just kill them so what’s the point?” Lucy spat at Lucky’s feet.

“Are we winning?” Lucky rubbed his nose.

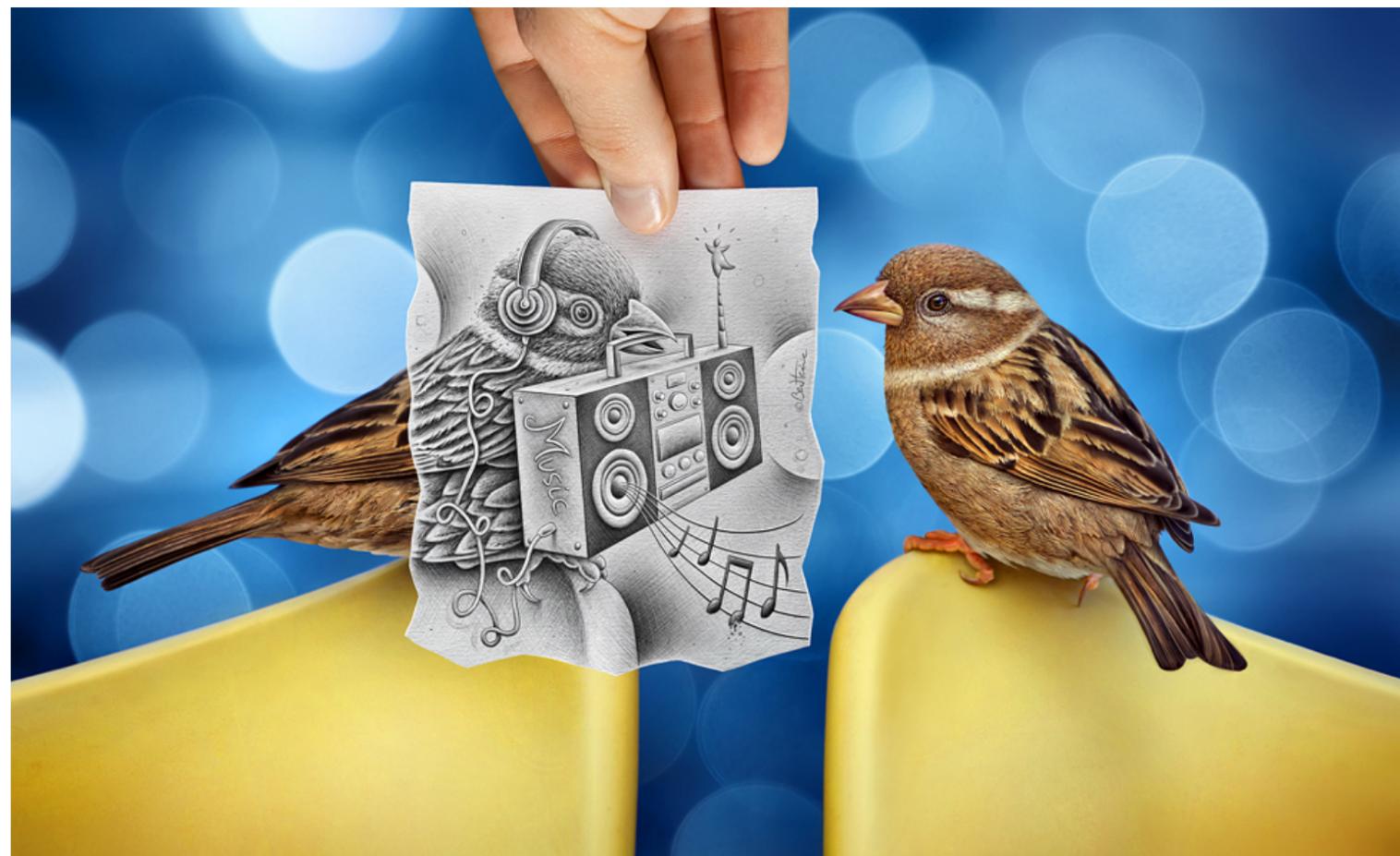
“We’re right around the corner from the Santa Cruz Diner.” Lucy quickened her pace. “I want to stop for a pineapple milkshake.”

Terrence, Charlotte, and Surge nodded vigorously while the Kevins whooped.

*

As soon as they reached Two Star, Mr. Armstrong began to scold them.

“You kids stopped for food? I’m disappoint-



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ed—you know we need to focus entirely on the task at hand—”

“We’re only ten minutes late,” Lucy said.

“Exactly. Ten minutes of practice wasted. What makes me even angrier is that I had already prepared refreshments.” He gestured to his cardboard box of homemade milkshakes. The team collectively recoiled.

“That shit looks green,” Lucy sneered.

“You have a lot of nerve, Lucy—,” Mr. Armstrong started.

“Could we get this over with?” Surge’s teeth

began to chatter. “It’s basically dark.”

Mr. Armstrong grunted and walked towards the wharf. Surge took a moment to collect the homemade milkshakes.

“What are we going to do tonight?” Lucy shouted.

“You know what we’re doing.” Charlotte kicked her shoes off.

“I was ramping up to a pep talk.” Lucy toed her

“Since forever.” Lucy kicked sand towards Lucky. “That’s why you like me so much, remember?”

“Surge, you like me better than Lucy, right?” Charlotte sniffed.

“Not really.”

“Why?”

“She smokes.”

“You infuriate me.” Charlotte slowed her pace and began to lag behind with Terrence.

“When I discover alien drugs,” Surge yelled back at her, “I won’t be giving them out for free. Even when you’re begging on your knees, girl.”

“I like Sergio.” Lucy tried to blow a plume of smoke in Surge’s face, but the wind was too strong.

“Not for long.” Despite his distaste for meaningless touching, Surge threw his arm around Lucy.

“We’re in love,” Lucy said to no one in particular, “because we’re writing a movie.”

At the end of the wharf, the team wordlessly spread out in a pre-organized formation. The Kevins stood in the back because they were the tallest, Terrence kneeled off to the side, and Charlotte, Lucky, Lucy and Surge huddled together in a compact circle. Each team member took out calculators and crumpled, soda-stained cheat sheets.

Surge set down the box of Mr. Armstrong’s milkshakes and knelt to suck from the nearest straw. He thought he should say something before the attack began, just in case it was hard for Lucy to hear him over the explosions.

He stood up, leaned over, and whispered in Lucy’s ear. Because his mouth was flooded with thinned ice cream, his words were warped into slurps; regardless, she understood.

“What did he say?” Charlotte asked.

“He says Joshua Tree would be proud.” Lucy brushed the tips of her fingers against the back of Surge’s neck and then turned away from him.

“Shut the fuck up,” Mr. Armstrong shouted.

“He says we’re doing a kindness,” Lucy said, preparing herself by widening her stance and gritting her teeth. “And we are.”

Diana Rae Valenzuela is a working writer. She studies and works in the San Francisco Bay Area.

STITCHES

I

a woman can fracture open under
unspeakable violence. skin can
tear like the voice can break
and go silent.

a poet can speak of radical honesty,
carefully document a life, and hold
a secret

without believing she broke
her vow,

but in the end, to have grace,
she can speak the words because
another woman stands at her back

and only then is she safe

to say, yes, there was blood
and emotion, but in the end
there were fourteen stitches

threaded through her animal self
that remade a woman who could
speak
for herself.



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II

a woman can choose to allow
her own destruction.

her body becomes self-obsessed
in an ocean of pain and she gives
herself
over, pushing against the waves.

another woman stands beside her,
only then is she safe, and says,
reach down and feel your skin
open –

she's coming.

no longer a poet,
or simply a woman,

as her skin splits, again,
she is her own fierce self,
her fingers feel the rush,

the arrival of life,

not simply an animal, despite
twelve stitches, not a woman who
can speak, but

a mother, listening
to her daughter's

first soft cry.



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Kate has been published in The Susquehanna Review, ditch, Third Wednesday, Barrier Island Review, Verandah Literary Journal, Grasslimb, Kill Poet, MiPoesias, The Junk Lot Review, The Legendary, The Missing Slate, Existere and vox poetica. She has self-published two books, escape artist and hallucinations, cancer & the purple tree and is publishing a third book, inheritance, with Unbound Content. She mostly spends her time rolling on the floor with her daughter and her Husky. She is currently writing full-time and trying to get more involved in the poetry community.

FINDING OUR PLACE HERE

By Aaron Grierson

The question of who an individual is and where they belong is a philosophical one; centuries have provided no consistent or generic answer. Some are simply born feeling like they belong. Others are born with the innate urge to find a place where they can comfortably belong. Like tendrils, this latter group reaches out across the world, cautiously, scanning for enjoyable experiences.

Once, these experiences would have been found through expeditions or through books or films. The modern era has expanded this into a realm somewhere in between. The digitization of information has made for some drastic changes to a person's quest for belonging. It is now possible to experience the sublime nature of the Amazonian Rainforests or the Alps from the comfort of your own home. Not only are pictures available, but apps like Google Maps have created ways for a more direct experience of many places around the world. In addition to opening up future vacation possibilities if some place in particular really appeals, one may see something that causes them to question some part of themselves or their surrounding world.

Seeing is not the only type of experience that has been affected by digitization however. If it doesn't taste any different, you're probably not licking the power chords. While this may be a good thing, it is also indicative of the only sort of sensory input that hasn't really been affected. Unless you count salivating over 'food porn'. People can now hear and read things they never might have had the chance to before. Music, speeches, and even clips from everyday community life now have the chance to be open to someone half a world away. One may also experience a pictorial capture of a piece of art, or an ongoing travesty, despite the distance between viewer and subject.

What, then does all of this mean? Well, a lot of questions, for one. Perhaps even some quandaries. It may also make for hours of revelry, or perhaps being wrapped up in a blanket overwhelmed by thoughts. Realistically though, in between all the distractions the digital world has to offer, a typical person's reaction might be somewhere in between the two. The result, were it mapped out, would be a kind of awkward, fumbling dance.

Speaking from personal experience, this can be a process that lasts a whole lifetime. Taking things for granted can have some serious negative outcomes, and while questioning everything may seem like the polar alternative, doing so may leave one in a perpetual state of indecision. This can happen due to information overload, a fear of coming to certain

guarantee that someone else out there can be found who shares the same interest. But that doesn't automatically make for a community—scorn or disagreements can still arise, especially if existing members of a digital niche see themselves as exclusive or the concept of their hobby set in stone.

And even if one is welcomed into a new community with open arms and friendly faces, that still leaves the question of belonging unanswered. It may take years but even the most engaging obsessions

terests—academic, athletic or artistic—that in some way deviate from their defined identity.

Digital culture even goes so far as to allow a person to work within several different niches simultaneously. Not just living or abiding by each, but actively participating through mediums like chat rooms, forums and social media. Browser tabs, for instance, make for excellent multitasking. Such mediums also open a person up to being viewed by a plethora of opinions. Not only are they exposed to those about certain topics but also themselves.

Beneath the social layer of identity and belonging lies the mental conceptualization, both internal and external, of a person. Often this is hidden and not always evident through public or private interactions. In their own mind, someone's identity could be as sharply defined as a crystal even as it changes like the flow of a river. In the mind of another, their identity could be something altogether different and in their eyes, quite possibly wrong. Such a discrepancy may never be known, and so the two individuals would carry on their merry acquaintanceship or hobbyist friendship. This risk is far from limited to the digital world and is a danger of everyday social interactions.

The final divide, then may not be a matter of categories, digital or tangible, or belonging or displaced. Rather it may be one of internal and external connections and disconnections. A person can feel secure in their identity yet it may never be known to other people, even close friends. The result is a sort of intangible paradox, lost not only to webpages, costumes, music or tabletop gaming sessions but to any given individual through having a relationship with other people. Digital communities accentuate some of the symptoms of this disconnect. Even with webcams and voice chat, it may be hard to read a person's body. It is harder still to truly experience that human connection that many strive towards.

While philosophers and other self-fashioned thinkers ponder such grandiose questions, people go on living. Their lives become walking, or typing proof that an identity is not a simple, nor really a single thing, but rather an amalgamation of facets, each of which is carved out in single instances of connection. While the result may not be a community, the blossom of belonging waits patiently.

The author is an articles editor for the magazine. More of his work can be found on our website.



Pencil Vs. Camera 52 by Benjamin Heine

conclusions or an acceptance that the world changes quickly and has no problem leaving people behind. If it was truly possible to leave us behind, that is. It's not because people are the ones who determine the pace, but because of how variant the pace is of the billions of people alive.

Community is one of the aspects individuals help determine. Have a particular hobby that you're interested in but don't tell anyone about because it's too nerdy for your circle of friends? It's almost a

eventually burn out. If people allow themselves to be defined in connection to a single group, what happens when they grow out of it? Or the group evolves into something new? They'd be left in the same position they were in before, longing to belong.

Yet this should hardly be seen as an encompassing concern. It seems impossible even for an individual to define themselves through one thing alone. Even the most obsessed must have other in-



“We can spend our lives letting the world tell us who we are. Sane or insane. Saints or sex addicts. Heroes or victims. Letting history tell us how good or bad we are. Letting our past decide our future. Or we can decide for ourselves. And maybe it’s our job to invent something better.”

~ Chuck Palahniuk, *Choke*

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