



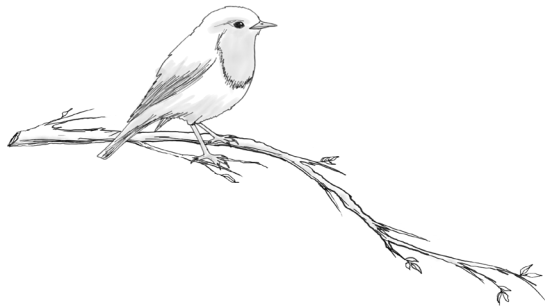
WELLS STREET JOURNAL

ISSN 2055-3676

ISSUE 16

POETIC WRITING • FICTION • NON-FICTION • COMIC STRIP

IMPERMANENCE AND GROWTH



The Wells Street Journal

Impermanence and Growth

Issue 16

Published by wellsstreetjournal.com

Copyright © 2021 by The Wells Street Journal

All rights reserved.

Illustrations by Blerina Gjeka

Final Cover art by Victoria Trentacoste

Photography: Hanna Komar (pg. 83), James R.W. Hayward (pg. 86), Jennifer Emery (pg. 22), Maarya Abbasi (pg. 17), Rukaiya Idrish (pg. 30), Sophie Harris (pg. 66), Pixabay (pg. 11, 13, 15, 20, 24, 26, 28, 33, 35, 36, 41, 43, 49, 53, 60, 71, 79, 90, 93)

Disclaimer: Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the named author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.



About the Wells Street Journal

The Wells Street Journal is a London-based biannual literary anthology of poetry and prose run by the University of Westminster's Creative Writing: Writing the City MA students. Founded in 2014, it was aptly named after the street in which the department of English, Linguistics and Cultural studies was hosted.

Representing all ends of the globe, the journal's main impetus is to provide its readers—both nationally and internationally—with literary works that represent equality, diversity, and inclusivity. It achieves this by showcasing not only the talents of its own writers, but by sharing its platform with a collection of external writers with a wide range of experiences and locales.

This issue embraces the concept of Impermanence and Growth in all its facets and interpretations. It is the sixteenth issue and sixth edition in print.

Table of Contents

About The Wells Street Journal	3
Acknowledgements	6

POETIC WRITING

London Parting.....Emerson Collins	11
Put It All In One Bag.....Joseph Beshara	13
Rocky Recovery.....Naima Young	15
Dear Universe.....Maarya Abbasi	17
مارياMaarya Abbasi	18
A British Seed.....Olivia E. Ochola	20
Moments.....Jennifer Emery	22
Deciduousness.....Eleanor Rees	24
Moving Towards the Light.....Bahja Al-Qazweeni	26
Wind and Rain.....Melanie Cope	28
Metamorphosis.....Rukaiya Idrish	30
Once a Caterpillar.....Nisha Patel	33
Bridges.....Shaymaa Al-Qallaf	35
We Grow.....Ciara Burrell	36

FICTION

A Day Return.....Daniel McKay	41
Anthesis.....Victoria Trentacoste	43
A New Sort.....Buddhima Weerawardhana	49
Seven Going On Seventy.....Airana Ngarewa	53
The Play Room.....Shane McDonnell	60
The Little Girl.....Sophie Harris	66
A Light Bulb.....Afshan Sayed	71

NON-FICTION

Denouement, But Not Quite.....	Aran V. Hernández	79
Flower Power, or How I Defeated the Victim in Myself...	Hanna Komar	83
An Impermanent Life.....	James R.W. Hayward	86
The Growth We've Grown.....	Kerrie Portman	90
How Not Being Beautiful Has Empowered Me.....	Zhuotong Hou	93

COMIC STRIP

Metamorphosis.....	James R.W. Hayward	99
--------------------	--------------------	----

Acknowledgements

As another issue of The Wells Street Journal is released, it proves once again the resilience, determination and passion that the postgraduate creative writing students at The University of Westminster have to perfect and hone their craft, and help others to do the same. This is the first issue created in-person in over a year, and despite the uncertainty surrounding the situation, the team have never surrendered in their efforts to produce another enlightening edition.

As always, we would like to express our gratitude to the Vice Chancellor, Dr. Peter Bonfield, for his continued sponsorship to the journal, which provides the vital basis for our work. This semester, his considerate donation has enabled us to continue our creative process and connect with such wonderful writers, who only further our passion. Likewise, thank you to the Student Union who have been wonderful in their assistance throughout, as usual.

Furthermore, we would also like to thank Dr. Monica Germanà for her guidance and support throughout the course, and also James Trevelyan for his encouragement, both of whom so clearly only have their students' best interests at heart and we are nothing but grateful to have them both involved in the project. It is very rare that students get the opportunity to manage an entire project to this extent during any degree course, but this is something that the university should take great pride in, as its students recognise the trust and belief put into them which is only furthered by the supportive environment in which they find themselves.

Having only met in-person for the first time three months ago, I am delighted by the teamwork and dedication that each member of the team has demonstrated over the course of this semester. It never fails to amaze me how enthusiastic each member of the Journal team becomes over the course of its production, and this always comes to light in the final product. I would personally like to thank the team involved in Issue 16, including: Maarya Abbasi, Malyuun Ali, Shaymaa Alqallaf, Bahja Alqazweeni, Olivia Ecweru, Blerina Gjeka, James Hayward, Aran Hernandez, Zhuotong Hou, Bahar Isik, Hanna Komar, Kunal Raju, Eleanor Rees, Joseph Sadek, Kishore Sapkota, Rukaiya Siamwala, Victoria Trentacoste, Buddhima Weerawardhana and Naima Young. Each member has worked incredibly diligently throughout and their creative contributions have been not only interesting, but vital to the final product.

Finally, we must thank the writers who took the bold step to submit their work to us; every single writer has been fantastic to work with, and we wish them the very best going forward. I am constantly astounded by the vast array of work that we receive, and this issue has been no exception. As with this issue's theme, Growth and Impermanence, working on The Wells Street Journal drives us all to become better writers, and continues to encourage our passion for all things creative.

Ciara Burrell

General Editor of Issue 16

Poetic Writing





London Parting

Emerson Collins

The spilt light of dawn trickles heath-wards
Softening capital's peaks in morning's squint
Conspiratorial, time's dimming switch
Conceals smog and grit's blemish
And blends memory's fraying edge.

Hazy days in beer-swilled parks
Wriggle and glide in far-off London Fields
Your limbs outstretched, your hands splayed at setting suns,
While around us seas of salty foreheads, blackened nails
Convulsed, bequeathing protesters a dirty spray.

That washed across the shrunken streets
Sifting time from memory's silt.

Tenacious residue drooped in jack and cross
That bends as our mercenary city refashions
Privilege, age to age.

I read to you my vision, history, cliché,
Behind your milky gaze your mind is still
Pragmatic as a clock, weighing in little ticks
Veracity's instance, you say
'Likely true but go lightly – jettison and live.'

A sharpened giggle draws the heath's swoop
Cricket – grit and ball streaking past ears into thickets
Of barbs and bristles that yield to little feet.
Babbling endless needs amongst the weeds,
They rise to pitch and swipe at empty air.

On barrows river-bound their joy bowls to your stubborn life:
The Bermondsey boy who refused to cross,
You brimmed with substance to stave off unwelcome colonies,
Until the city cracked at its wet fissure
Until your body's grit became the smog of air.

And on it goes:
Gambling over green gulfs spoiling in the growing sun,
Between the stoic peaks of Europe and the galloping sea
That laps at the dry land of my future,
To Victorious waiting beneath its golden effluence.

Emerson Collins is a writer and lawyer living in the Middle East, whose work has previously appeared in American and UK publications. Emerson writes because he must.



Put It All in One Bag

Joseph Beshara

Don't need it? Don't want it? Throw it.

Throw it from the window. Throw it in the river. Throw it in a pyre and let the flames burn through the night. Throw it out of your mind into the streets and let its stench fester. Don't worry, wherever it is, I'll find it and put it in a bag.

Here are the bottles of wasted dreams. The streams of thrown up love. The cat, wandering down the street, searching for its head. Here is a compass that once pointed to a closed door, and here is the crimson liquor of dreamless slumber. They came to me of their own volition, and I've put them all in my bag.

I see you in the grey of morning, clutching your soul in sleek leather bags, in glimmering plastic bags, and in those vulnerable brown ones you love so much. Before the sun sets you'll have laid them open and filled them to the brim.

You see me. Of course, you'll avert your eyes. Cover your young ones' eyes. That's right. Politely shepherd them away.

That's okay. You've left your shame for me to find by the doorstep countless times.

Before the moon rises, you will have drunk your happiness, swallowed your lonely times, laid your bridges, popped your comfort, cracked your self-doubt, and whacked your fears. A lost idea, left in the cold, has fled from its cage to be attacked by ravens and a fox; it lies mangled on the street. That one will be hard to clean. Ideas you never meant to throw away, and those you never meant to be found, those are the hardest to clean.

In time, your young ones will learn to wait for me too. To entrust me with their small acts of rebellion, their pages of secret desires, their lists of fears and worries. They will sneak and leave them for me in a neat white bag. They know I'll come. I will not care, I will put it all in a bag darker than a moonless night, and just as cold.

As their bags grow they too will learn to avoid my eyes. They will learn to leave their bags for me by the doorstep and go searching for sleep.

Every night I will come to your houses and fill my bag with your gifts. I will carry it over my shoulders and hear its rattle. Then, over the banks of the forgetful river, I will heave-ho and throw the bag away.

The bag is clean, you are clean. Don't worry, I don't care and I don't judge. By the fog of the following morning I will scour the streets for your refuse, and put it all in one bag.

Joseph Beshara is a writer and playwright from Alexandria, Egypt. He is a member of Gwana Group for Performative Arts. His short stories have been published in Hobart, URJe, and Welkins.



Rocky Recovery

Naima Young

Recovery is a pathway not everyone follows,
taking that first step can seem immense,
because there is comfort in the hollows.

Depression is an emotional hole,
a hiding place that feels safe and secure,
giving a false sense of control.

If that dark pit is left unattended,
the emotions can rot and fester
causing a feeling of being lost and undefended.

These feelings can make recovery feel impossible,
like there is no light at the end of the tunnel,
a broken bridge splintered and uncrossable.

That doesn't mean recovery isn't encouraged,
it just means that a little more help is needed,
someone is on the other side of the bridge.

Emotionally, physically, mentally might be hanging by a thread,
recovery is growth,
even if you're stuck in bed,
it's better to always be looking a small step ahead.

Naima Young is a prose and poetry writer. It has been her passion for a very long time, starting at A-Levels and now doing her Master's in Creative Writing. When not writing, she can be seen rock climbing, reading, and working in the pub where she gets most of her character inspiration.



Dear Universe

Maarya Abbasi

From the hilltop the sun gazed over the crops.
Vineyards grew with such proud, good health.
The entire world was organic, rich in purity, free from the age of pesticides.
Native trees bore native fruits.
Love watered them deep within their roots.
Here, I stood on my toes reaching out to the golden pink dream upon an
extended branch. A humble peach echoed within my soul of freshness and
summer sun.
A bite into it gave the savouring sweetness of Earth's gifts.
It was then I realised my soul was free.
This was where I felt alive, this was where I was meant to be.
Patience is a sweet apple,
expressing concerns in overcoming an internal battle.
Will I ever taste the fruits from this tree again?
A taste of paradise, but only a taste.

Will it be mine again, will I be embraced.
Time is ticking, time is a waste, but time is all we have, tracing our fate.
The universe will voice her opinion once again.
Yes, she is a woman!
And until then, I'll wait as long as I can.
For now, goodbye my friend.
I'll grow and be as tall as a tree,
with love watered, I hope to see you next to me.

I'll be back and my soul will be free...
Dear universe, return my paradise back to me.

ماريا

Layered under my clothing rests a necklace carved In the Arabic letters ماري

The first letter projects a Maa sound. Can you guess what it is? The first letters, Alif, represent the beginning and the manifestation of one's self. The second letter Mim defines as the place, thing or being of something. The third Arabic symbol hangs the letter م, the sound a child makes when impersonating a powerful roar. The selfish letter stands as Independent and cannot be joined by any other, unless another letter joins it. The last letter ي addresses me with 'prosperity, determination, most importantly, power.' Together sounds create the heavy echo of the name – Maarya. On the independent letter م dangles a golden ring, my Grandmother's ring... A ring held for generations with only one reason behind it. The necklace lays on my chest so elegantly light yet heavy in its sentimental value. A piece of jewellery that automatically crafted me into a woman of power, culture, but mostly, 'a woman'. Was I ready to be a woman of power? Was I ready to be a woman? For years the necklace felt like a choker, wrapped weightlessness around my neck, suffocating me with its heavy meaning. The ring had a journey of its own, travelling from across the world, across the borders and into the hearts of cities I have yet to discover.

The ring gave my Grandmother the strength to overcome hardship, it gave my Mother independence, was I supposed to bring power to it? A small box held the gold ring, and it was kept polished, protected, passed down to specifically the women of the bloodline. For me. The ring held secrets that I had learnt on the way. On the way to becoming a woman of power, culture, but most importantly, 'a woman'.

Maarya Abbasi focuses her attention on all creative aspects around her which involve photography. She is able to showcase her work on social media platforms such as her blog. Alongside photography, her work resembles genres of writing which include photojournalism, travel writing, and spoken word poetry. Maarya is currently writing a romance thriller fiction novel with hopes to be published soon.



A British Seed

Olivia E. Ochola

To integrate we – hid our hair underneath straight wigs
answered phones in rehearsed accents
so that clients were reassured
‘they’re Black British’

to be one of you we – pronounced our tribal names in English vowels
followed the team for sashimi at lunch–
and pints at five
shrugged off our self-worth sobbing – abomination!

to get along we –
forbade our stiff smiles from reaching nervous eyes
silenced our opinions
empathised with your fragility

to eclipse expectations
we put in twice the hours for a similar pay
ignored the riots in the Daily Mail's comments section
while we waited for the tentative package

to make it, we sacrificed family
our babies suckled unregistered childminders
consumed processed mash
the ancestors wept!

it wasn't enough that you'd sliced our ancestor's tongues and forced them to
swallow your language
we took the IELTS and Knowledge of English tests
to advance the rat race.

to become British
we depoliticised our ancestry
stripped our individual spiritualities of the 'Benin Bronzes', 'Koh-i-Noor'
and the 'Cullinans'
to swear allegiance to the Queen

to lay down brick and mortar
we ignored the numbing soreness
championed diversity
to make Britain our own.

Olivia E. Ochola is following her lifelong passion for writing after a career in Law. She is an ardent collector of African, Black European and American books.



Moments

Jennifer Emery

Today Gabes is learning to tell the time.
All morning, folded at the kitchen table,
the click of the central heating,
the steady tick of a metronome.
He draws hands on blank clock faces
to match the words and numbers written beneath.

Time and again, the arbitrary fancy of it
eludes him. Why does the long hand mark
minutes and the shorthand hours,
when minutes are short and every hour so long?
To or past? Before or after? Moving towards
or moving away? And why does time
move in circles when it does not?

It does not.

This boy of mine. This boy who conjures galaxies.
Consternation and constellations of freckles
mark his blank face.

This capricious whim of ours,
this whim of hours, bewilders him.
It makes him cry.

We chose this, I told him.

We could have chosen anything at all
to mark the winter sun's slow march
across the kitchen wall, to mark the ground
slipping imperceptibly beneath our feet—

yesterday, today, tomorrow.

Outside the snow dances in circles, endlessly
resolving itself, beckoning us out
to a future we're already nostalgic for,
from a past that never was.

This morning. This interminable year.
Moments amassing like snow until their weight
will surely crush us. Moments here and then gone,
as a single snowflake melts on the tongue.

Jennifer Emery writes poetry, blogs and to-do lists. She lives in London with her family amidst a flock of origami birds made from lost homework, her grandma's best recipes and abandoned fragments of sonnets.



Deciduousness

Eleanor Rees

Part of the beauty of life lies in its impermanence.

We move from one place to another and grow with each journey around the sun.

Seeking love, friendship, and experiences that will bring a smile to our faces as we draw our last breath.

We look for a way to freeze time in a single moment while making sure that we've moved fast enough to fill up as much of it as we can.

We try to absorb and soak up every breath we can before the sand in the hourglass runs out and we can grow no more.

It is truly a beautiful thing.

Despite this desire to run, sprint, flee from place to place

Our growth is stunted by the pressure to build permanence around us in the form of four brick walls and a window to watch the world go by.

The expectation to root ourselves to the same place and relive the same time.

We are led to believe that to ignore the natural desire to grow in ourselves is akin to correctly fulfilling a duty.

It is an endless cycle set to halt our growth and keep our feet on the ground.

We cannot simply reject this pressure for there is a safety and dependency in permanence.

And so we must find another way to exercise our need to grow.

This is where the artists, the painters and poets offer assistance.

They create a world in which anyone can do anything.

Where we can sing and dance, learn and love without inhibition.

They show us how to be perfectly impermanent amongst the permanence of the mundane.

And it is, indeed, the greatest gift.

Eleanor Rees is a Creative Writing master's student. Her poem communicates her feelings about the struggles that accompany our need to grow when we are continually being told to settle down.



Moving Towards the Light

Bahja Al-Qazweeni

When I stand next to you
your light seems
to glow so bright
that it makes
me disappear
And I have no choice
but to walk away for now
in order not to lose
myself in your brightness

I will meet you on a day
where my light shines as bright as yours
and I no longer feel like I am drowning in
your dazzling world

Bahja Al-Qazweeni is an aspiring poet. She fell in love with stories from a young age through the movies, anime, and books she consumed. Stories were the only way she escaped from this world. Bahja wanted to pursue an MA in creative writing to contribute to the world of storytelling. She uses creative writing as an outlet, and she further wants to explore the relationship between creative writing and psychology. Other than writing, she is interested in photography, digital art, and spoken poetry.



Wind and Rain

Melanie Cope

They say the winds of change will come.
For me it was the rain.
Sprinkling, trickling, washing over,
a mighty broken time,

watering the soil,
where new flowers sprang up,
neath' the warm sunshine.

Daisies, irises, tulips galore,
So many lovely colors in bloom,
I couldn't have asked for more.

They say the winds of change will come,
Oh, that may be true.
But it may be a change of a different nature, vein, or hue.

It may be change in a different form.
What will it be for you?

Melanie Cope is a world traveler, creative writer, and lover of milk chocolate and sunshine. She lives in Tualatin Oregon. She has been working on a novel for a bit now, and is aiming to complete this work by the Spring of 2022.



Metamorphosis

Rukaiya Idrish

I cannot make you understand. I cannot make anyone understand what is happening inside me. I cannot even explain it to myself.

Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis

Rain in straight lines drizzled down onto the roof of her house, momentarily washing away the sorrows, the jealousies, the anxieties, and the stress. She gazed longingly at each drop sliding rapidly down the tall window. A deep grey roaring sky brimming with hope stole her breath, paralysing her thoughts, freezing them to a raging awe.

Mesmerized, her round wandering eyes followed every droplet as it performed its own cosmic dance. It was like the mysterious lord Shiva's tandav. She felt a sudden aching need for movement. A need to drown her anxieties in the cosmic dance. While pregnant earth, bearing the divine seed played her music, she imagined herself moving exquisitely to mother earth's lull of happiness. Her despair temporarily oozing out of the curvaceous shelter of her body.

Her hands, as if blessed with lives of their own, created waves, each narrating distinct stories, which lay at the bottom of civilization. Her body in sync, flirted back coquettishly with her hands. A whirl followed by a hand movement in gentle waves, accompanied by another whirl. Finally came the crashing wave, a striking move. She felt like free-flowing water, moving in sync with the ebbs and the flows of life.

Her mischievous musings moved to the disequilibrium in her life. The vacant spaces of a marriage. The hollow emptiness eating at her. A strange shine in her eyes overtook her. Her hands moved rapidly. Her body followed, each step coordinating with another, everything the way it should be. Organised chaos! The sweat, an occasional aftermath of nature's mischief, of Cupid's arrow and of the lovers' shenanigans, slithered down her temples, journeying towards her straight, sleek neck. Her thoughts introduced into her body a dull ache, the sudden uneasiness of a lover's first ever union.

Her mosquito thoughts set forth on yet another pilgrimage, this time halting onto the sham that was her marriage. The fights were never-ending. They fought about everything under the sun; the bills, the maid, his clothes, her clothes, the increasing price of the vegetables, his in-laws, her in-laws, who would serve dinner that day and the following week. Often their clashes would be centered around the tiniest of things.

'I come home tired from work, you could also pitch in...'

'I do pitch in.'

'Filling a bottle of water or watching TV with your legs stretched? If that's what you call pitching in...'

'Please don't start again... I had a long day. I am not in the mood...'

'Right, bas say that and shut your wife's mouth: husband had a long day, so wife can't speak. What about us? What about women's long days? What if we are tired of grinding spices and making aloo poshto?'

'Then don't. I haven't told you to... we could order food from outside!'

'Right, that's your solution to everything...'

Her whirls grew faster, steadier. An overfilled vessel she was, frustration and helplessness spilled out of her. A strand hung loosely onto her wide forehead. The bottom half of her long white angrakha sported the

swell of a heavy pregnancy. Her stance was that of a wild tigress protecting her cubs. She resembled a warrior princess safeguarding as well as showcasing her feisty and fierce essence.

Ruk(q)aiya Idrish is currently pursuing her MA in Creative Writing at the University of Westminster. Her interests are scattered amongst the various spaces of art, dance, cinema, theatre, culture, politics, and aromatherapy. On most days, one will find her on the bus responsibly drifting between eavesdropping, glancing outside the window or hiding behind a book.



Once a Caterpillar

Nisha Patel

Curled up like a galaxy rose,
in the womb of the cocoon.
A bulb of life in me disperses
my fears, that hang with the tree,
too. I flower on my own soil
terms. I begin a pearl, but I am
more. My cocoon, like a lantern,
hatches brightness into my future.
Cracking outside reflections.
Sparking the first release of
my wings, striving for change.
I am a butterfly blooming out,
like a bright handkerchief from
a magician's hat. Showcasing

lace like wings in front of my
silk curtains, not behind them.
Bursting into flight, I board a
sea of glimmering lights.
My debut of hope, breaking
a new dawn, which I once knew
inside and out.

Nisha Patel is a young writer who lives and studies in London. She is currently studying a BA in Creative Writing and English Language at the University of Westminster.



Bridges

Shaymaa Al-Qallaf

A long succession of cars and a line of disappointments that's even longer.

He fades into it.

His heart sinks deeper.

And we glance at each other in complete irrelevance, yet hoping that down that line somebody could ease his suffering.

Somebody who believes it.

Then, we're at ease

until we meet another sufferer.

Shaymaa Al-Qallaf is an English Literature graduate who decided to study Creative Writing to broaden her horizons. She loves everything that has to do with theory and criticism in movies and art and how it can be deeply embedded within culture. She is also big on Nietzsche. Everything that has to do with literature is familiar and home-like and so she is never a stranger in a bookstore!



We Grow

Ciara Burrell

Every flower
In every forest
Is impermanent

But it grows.

And every creature
Around the world
Is impermanent

But they grow.

Today,
We grow,

Tomorrow,
We grow,
Onwards,
We grow.

Despite the torrents,
We grow,
Regardless of our dreams,
We grow,
Mindful and remembering
The ones who brought us here,
To situations unbeknown to those
Who welcomed us to Earth,
And anyone along the way
Who taught you of your worth-
Through them,
We grow.

Even when the flowers droop,
And their leaves wilt just a little,
We remember that their time with us is short,
But with impermanence,
We grow.

Ciara Burrell always had her head stuck in a book as a child, and this hasn't changed in adulthood. As a child, she read whilst cuddling her teddy bear, but now she tends to read and write whilst nursing either a strong coffee or a G&T.

Fiction





A Day Return

Daniel McKay

It is her matted hair that catches his attention, wet as it is from a rush through London's early morning rain. He fumbles, then glances at her again before getting out his debit card. Unusual, that. As a customer, all he wants is a ticket. She, the clerk behind the plexiglass, is there to provide it. Now, though, that extra glance has switched them over from standard gauge to broad gauge: a seductively inviting but highly unorthodox form of travel.

Each of them senses it.

She rings his fare details up and tries to look as if nothing has happened, even as her lips do a quivering up-and-down dance of their own (like a Pacer train, her brother once remarked: a national embarrassment, never quite getting where it needs to go). The man in front of her is undoubtedly handling himself better than she can.

As if to prove the point, she sees one of his cheek muscles raised in a lopsided smile. Not bad for someone in a face mask.

'Enjoy your trip,' she murmurs, sliding the day return underneath.

‘Half a mo,’ he answers, and scrawls a phone number on the reverse of the receipt, for all the world as if he were updating her journey planner. That done, he steps back and delivers a single flamboyant bow, his eyes as green as track signals.

As he disappears from view, she is reminded of a time when a locomotive swept past in an attempt to set a new speed record. The slipstream had whipped at her skirt, pulled strands of hair over her eyes, and left a kaleidoscope of butterflies in her stomach. Strangely, though, there’d been no fear. On the contrary, she’d imagined how it would feel to be borne along. Thrilling, no doubt. Thrilling, and an arrangement that would remain that way for as long as the train continued. Carefully, she folds the receipt, slips it into her breast pocket, and presses the button for the next customer.

Daniel McKay teaches at Doshisha University, Japan. He is no good at writing catchy bios, preferring instead to horse around and watch the world go by. He neighs objectionably when politicians make asses of themselves, but, against the odds, does not believe the world is going to hell in a haybasket.



Anthesis

Victoria Trentacoste

Penelope pulled at her favourite yellow socks, but they just wouldn't stay put. Every time she let go, the heel slipped off like a slinky down the stairs. Her five-year-old face wrinkled as only a five-year-old face can and her nimble, little fingers gripped the socks harder. What was going on? She stomped her feet on the Berber carpet.

In rushed her mother, a half-clamped earring in her hand. 'What's wrong, Penny, dear?'

'They won't fit! They won't fit!' Again Penny's feet percussed the carpet.

'Well you probably just grew out of them. Let's find you some other socks, we have to leave very soon.' Her mother made her way over to the dresser and absentmindedly slid her hand over the small balls of socks.

Penny rolled onto her stomach and shouted into her arms. 'I can't wear other socks, I have to wear these socks! They're Grandma's socks!' Her mother watched as the too-small socks continued to slide off Penny's too-big feet. She knelt down and laid a hand on her daughter's head. 'She made

them ah-specially for me, I have to show her how much I love them!’

A scratchy feeling caught in the back of her mother’s throat.

‘Grandma would love that you want to wear the socks she made you, but... she’ll understand if they don’t fit anymore. I’m sure you don’t need to worry about not wearing them today.’ Sniffles continued from the daughter. The mother sighed. ‘How about we find you a small bag to put them in so you can bring them with us?’ The head of hair nodded slowly under her hand. ‘Alright then.’

As her mother left the room, Penny curled onto her side and yanked off one of the socks. She fingered the tiny loops of wool, remembering the awe she felt opening the gift and discovering her grandma had made them with her own two hands. It was magic, like the tricks her grandfather used to do, pulling wildflowers out of thin air.

She wondered where her grandfather was now. He had spent all day yesterday asleep in a box and today her mother and father said they were going to see her grandma for lunch because Grandfather was gone, but they didn’t say where he was going or when he’d be back. Very odd.

From her parents’ bedroom she could hear murmurs. In another moment her father was calling out that he was starting the car and her mother had returned to slide fresh socks onto Penny’s feet and slip the knitted ones into a cloth bag. Then they were off.

Penny stared out the window, both hands holding the cloth bag. She knew when they turned onto the right block because the slightly bent green street sign on the corner told her so.

Penny’s aunts and uncles had already arrived, as Penny concluded by seeing their cars parked on the street and hearing her cousins’ chattering coming from the backyard. She followed her parents into the house.

Her father asked one of her uncles about how ‘she’ was today.

‘Not one of her best days. She’s asked for him twice,’ he responded. ‘She’s been sitting at the window box all morning.’

Penny pulled at her mother’s dress. ‘I have to show Grandma my socks.’

‘Maybe later, Penny, dear, I think Grandma is a bit, well, tired at the moment.’ Penny’s mother twirled a curl on her daughter’s shoulder.

‘Go outside and play with your cousins.’

Pouting and holding her cloth bag close to her chest, Penny stepped through the back door onto the porch. The sun was lifting into a high noon height. She sat down on the wood steps to enjoy the warmth on her face.

One of her older cousins came over and asked what was in her bag.

‘It’s socks that Grandma made for me,’ Penny answered. ‘I have to show her how much I still love them even though my feet are too big for them now.’

‘Grandma won’t remember she made you those socks.’ One of her other cousins paused from his game of tag to sneer at the yellow socks Penny had pulled out. ‘She didn’t even remember me when I got here, and I saw her yesterday.’

‘She called me Billy and I don’t even know a Billy!’ Said another cousin playing tag.

Penny pursed her tiny lips. ‘Well she’ll remember these socks, she told me that an artist never forgets her creation.’

The two cousins shrugged and continued their game. Penny looked down at her beautiful socks. Her older cousin rubbed her back. ‘I’m sure Grandma will love to see them,’ he said and got up to help with lunch.

The sound of clink’ing plates, tink’ing glasses, and silverware rattling in drawers echoed from the house. Outside cousins shouted in their games of tag and Red Rover. And on the wood porch steps sat Penny, quietly counting stitches like beads on a rosary. She’ll remember. She thought. She’ll remember.

Lunch was laid out on a folding table in the backyard. Penny sipped some lemonade and iced tea, being extra careful not to spill any on her socks bag. She turned toward the house and could make out her grandma’s face through the window as one of her uncles carried over a plate of food for her.

Penny asked her mother if she could show her grandma the socks now. ‘Not now,’ she said. ‘Maybe later, after lunch.’

After lunch came mint brownies and oatmeal cookies. Her cousins grabbed fistfuls and returned to their games. The aunts and uncles began clearing plates.

Penny again went up to her mother and asked about showing her grandma the socks. 'Penny, dear,' her mother said, 'Grandma isn't remembering everything right now. She might not remember that she made the socks, she might not remember you even, but she still loves you very, very much.'

'Why can't Grandma remember? Is it because Grandpa isn't here? I know Grandpa always tells her where her glasses are.'

'Grandpa not being here has made things a little harder, but she's been forgetting things for some time now.'

Penny gripped her cloth bag. 'I know she'll remember these, I just know she will.'

'Alright,' her mother said.

The light was waning from the living room, but there was still some piercing through the window where her grandma sat.

'Grandma Nell?' The woman turned slightly but said nothing. 'Grandma Nell, this is Penny, your granddaughter. She has something she would like to show you.'

'Hi, Grandma!' Penny stepped forward and gently laid the cloth bag on her grandma's knee. 'I'm sorry I couldn't wear them, they don't fit anymore, but I wanted to show you that I still love them so much.'

The grandma turned a pair of milky eyes towards the girl and then down at the bag. A shaky hand dipped into it and pulled out the socks. She kneaded the wool between her fingers and traced the outline of the stitches. Then her eyes narrowed. 'I made these,' she whispered. 'I made these.'

Penny looked up at her mother and smiled. 'See, I told you she'd remember them! An artist never forgets her creation.'

The grandma looked at the little girl in a peculiar way. Her eyes were hard and yet not unkind, searching and yet almost knowing, they even had a hint of clarity, of colour, in them. She shook her head and put the slippers back into the cloth bag. She muttered something to herself as she got up and made her way into the living room. Penny's mother grabbed her arm to steady her and asked if she was alright. The old woman leaned over a large, wicker basket in the corner of the room. Her wrinkled hands rummaged around the innards of the basket, her mouth still muttering, before finally producing a cloth bag of her own. She placed them into Penny's

mother's hands along with the cloth bag of yellow socks. The old woman was still certain it's what she wanted, but it was becoming cloudy as to why.

Penny watched as her mother stood confused for a moment or two before finally accepting the gifts. Then her grandma gingerly made her way back to the window seat.

She turned to the window and her eyes once more became a milky grey. 'Where's my Hank?' She asked. Penny's mother quickly shuttled Penny out the backdoor as her father began to speak to her grandma.

'That was very sweet of you to show Grandma your socks,' her mother said as she fixed Penny's curls. 'But let's let Grandma rest a bit now, alright?'

'May I have my socks?'

A phone rang inside the house. Penny's mother placed the bag of socks and the bag her grandma had unearthed from the basket into the girl's hands before returning inside to answer it.

Sitting back down on the porch steps, Penny pulled out her yellow socks, stroked them gently, and inspected the tiny flower buds knitted into each side. After seeing that they looked as they should, she returned them to their bag and carefully lifted the other bag onto her lap.

This one was much bigger and quite a bit heavier. There was something round inside and two sticks were poking out the top. Penny opened the bag and saw a long, yellow string going into a large, yellow ball. At the end of the string was a row of stitches just like the ones that made up her favourite socks. It was even the same colour yellow! Next she pulled out the thin sticks. One end was very pointy and the other had letters etched into it.

She tried to sound out the letters one-by-one. 'Puh, puh,' she began. Then seeing the next letter she altered her mouth. 'Peh, pehn...' Penny went through letter-by-letter three times, just to be certain, and by the end of the third time she was convinced she had it correct.

Satisfied, she returned the sticks to the bag and pulled out a piece of paper from an inside pocket. The paper was creased and slightly faded like it had been printed many years ago. Penny unfolded it. On it were many words and a picture of socks, much like her own, as well as a pair that looked larger with bigger, full flowers.

The backdoor swung open and Penny's mother came out to tell her they were leaving soon.

'Mommy, mommy!' Penny called, 'look at this!' And she held open the pictures of the socks.

'Where did you get that?' Penny's mother asked.

'From the bag Grandma gave us. I want socks just like these,' she said, pointing at the ones with the full flowers.

Penny's mother sat down on the steps and read the words on top of the paper: Socks to grow with your little one. 'Grandma only ever had sons, I guess she never made any of these for them.' She paused. 'You're her first granddaughter.'

Penny smiled up at her mother. 'They have my name on them.' And she held up one of the knitting needles for her mother to see. 'I read it three times, I'm sure I did it right.'

Penny's mother looked at the name etched at the top: Penelope. A mist came over her eyes. 'Grandma Penelope, of course.' She smiled. 'She would love for you to have them.'

'Can I make them myself? I promise to practice again and again until I get it right!' Penny looked down at the pictures. 'I want to learn how to make big, beautiful flowers like this.'

'Of course, Penny, dear.'

They crossed back through the house, gathering bags and Tupperware on the way. As her father spoke about the 'she' again to her uncle, Penny walked over to where her grandma still sat.

'Thank you, Grandma Nell,' she said. 'I won't forget, even if you do.'

Her grandma looked at the bags the girl was holding. She reached out and gave the girl's hands a squeeze. Penny smiled. She wouldn't forget, she'd remember.

Victoria Trentacoste. A longtime lover of the arts, Victoria's creative outlets include writing, illustration, photography, and dance. Her work experiences and travel adventures provide much of her inspiration and often find their way into her stories. Victoria strives to find her own voice in everything she writes and creates.



A New Sort

Buddhima Weerawardhana

Dinna knew the jungle paths like the back of his hand – he had committed the crisscrossing game trails of the Kandyan hills to memory, long ago. Today his mission was simple, he had to find out if foreigners really were probing their way up the mountain paths. He knew he wasn't the only one out there on that day either – each of the mountain pass garrisons, all across the kingdom, had been ordered to sniff out any form of intrusion. If his garrison chief was to be believed, the order had come down from the King himself.

Dinna himself couldn't comprehend what all this fuss was about. Since as far back as he could remember, foreigners had been making forays into the Kandyan hills. If the tales from his childhood were true, they had been there for close to three centuries now. In that time, their goal had always been the same – find a pathway through the mountains into the Grand City where their weapons of smoke and powder could finally be put to proper use.

In certain parts of the island, there still existed whole villages of people who hadn't even seen these white men up-close. To them white men

still meant demons that feasted on rock and stone while quenching their thirst with fresh blood.

Dinna knew different.

The white man was no demon; just a man that bled like all men do. Dinna witnessed this first-hand twenty years ago, the first time he had ambushed a Landesi expeditionary force. The rocks they ate were not hard at all, but soft and tasty. The blood they drank was sweet and warm, and Dinna had always made it a point to loot as many bottles of the liquid as he could after a successful raid.

For Dinna, this order by the King to scour the edges of the Kingdom was a pointless exercise. There was no doubt that the enemy was there, so why bother with this futile reconnaissance – they needed to strike, not spy. Of course, it was not the place of a commoner like himself to question the orders of better men. Still, he found time to complain about the situation with his fellow garrison members over a meal last night. Everyone else agreed, save for Old Gune. He was a senior member of the garrison and a veteran of over two dozen raids against the Landesi. He heard from the garrison chief that the white folk who were supposedly making their way up the mountains were of a new sort.

Dinna scoffed at the idea then, and he scoffed at the thought now. Still, it was something to ponder on as he scraped his way through the narrow game trails that overlooked the mountain pass below. The path he was ghosting winded down in snakelike bends as it slowly descended into the lowlands that marked the edge of the Kingdom. Shrouded amidst twisted tree trunks and overgrown thickets, Dinna moved unseen as his eyes constantly scanned ahead for any hint of movement. It was his ears, however, that picked up the first sign. The alarm call of a drongo rode up the path from below and it was answered by several more in quick succession. Only two things could cause these birds to stir up such a racket – a leopard or a man. The big cats around these parts commanded their own form of respect, but only the most bold among them would consider using the footpaths during the light of day. And as the sun was now nearing its zenith, Dinna had no doubt that the cause for the drongos' calls was climbing up the mountain on two legs.

Dinna crouched low and inched himself forward until he reached a precipice that offered a good view of the valley that stretched below. Here he lay prone on his back unmoving with his eyes trained at the visible edge of the mountain path before it winded downwards. Limiting his breath to

slow rhythmic puffs, Dinna waited for the men to come into sight as he had done many times before.

The first to make the bend was a group of Sinhalese. The first among them was a stout man, barefoot and dressed like Dinna, in a white loincloth that covered his extremities. A guide, Dinna surmised. The others were of a different sort. Most of their bodies were covered in clothes of green-grey. They carried heavy packs that were strapped to their shoulders and each of them had the dreaded powder sticks slung across their backs. Behind them marched men that Dinna had never seen before in his life. Like the Landesi, these men were white-skinned but they wore bright red coats cross-strapped with white. Black boots covered their feet while the odd black headwear they wore made them seem even taller than they already were. One of these men – a commander, Dinna guessed – had heavy ornamentation on his red top, the sort of which Dinna hadn't even seen on the Disaves back in the city. Packs and powdered sticks were slung across their backs as well while a couple also held towering pikes in their hands.

As Dinna let the sight sink in, he realized that only the guide was making an effort to look for trouble. As he stepped along the path, the guide's eyes were constantly scanning the forests for trouble. The rest all had their eyes trained on the ground, taking care not to place their feet on a loose rock or get entangled in a rogue vine. Only the keenest pair of eyes would have been able to distinguish Dinna from the undergrowth of the precipice and he knew it. So, he stood low and observed.

As the party began to move right under Dinna's vantage point, he could hear their voices. The man at the front was speaking Sinhalese though Dinna couldn't quite make out what the exact words were. He was talking to the Sinhala men in uniform who relayed the message to the man in the ornate red coat. To Dinna's ears, the words did not sound Sinhalese or even Landesi. It was something new, he realized.

The party made slow progress with all except the guide making constant stops to catch their breath. Only then did they even take a moment to take in all the sights that surrounded them. Still, slow as they were, they eventually made a bend at the upper edge of the footpath and disappeared from view. With practiced care and caution, Dinna stood upright and brushed off the dirt from his body.

'It is a new sort,' was the only thought running through his mind at that moment. A queer sense of unease began creeping up along his back but he quelled it quick. All men die the same, he reminded himself.

Foreigners had been coming up these mountains with hopes of conquest and riches for centuries, after all. And for centuries, men like him had been driving them back. This was the way of things; it would be no different this time.

Reassured, he turned back and stared into the darkness of the forest. A moment later he began his journey back to the garrison.

The British first arrived in Sri Lanka in 1795. Prior to this, both the Portuguese and the Dutch (known locally as the Landesi) had occupied the island's maritime regions. During the time of the Dutch occupation, the central region of the island remained an independent kingdom – the Kandyan Kingdom. Though technologically outmatched, the Kandyans were able to resist Dutch encroachment by resorting to guerilla warfare which was aided by the natural terrain of the region. As such, for a regular Kandyan, the arrival of a new Western power on the island's shores may not have been cause for much concern. Unfortunately for the Kandyans, political instability and the clever use of espionage by the British would eventually lead to their kingdom's demise and the island of Sri Lanka being added to the growing list of colonial possessions under the British Empire. Under the control of its new overlord, Sri Lanka – like so many other colonial states – would enter a period of unprecedented change and growth. Sometimes for the better, and many times for the worse.

Buddhima Weerawardhana is a Sri Lankan writer that is interested in everything to do with history, science-fiction, and horror. Originally from a business background, he is currently pursuing his MA in Creative Writing at the University of Westminster and plans to transition into being a full-time writer in the near future.



Seven Going On Seventy

Airana Ngarewa

The streetlights glow in the darkness, nursing a modest playground, illuminating the red plastic tunnel that conceals a young girl hiding from her sisters. The darling wee thing is as safe as could be, covered from every angle. It would take a conspiracy of scent hounds to seek her out. Or a pair of sisters who know her habits well. Her favourite hiding spots. The long grass behind the diary, the dirt pile across the road, the red plastic tunnel only a half-block from their house.

‘I know you’re in there, Grub,’ the oldest sister announces. ‘Mum says you’ve to get your butt home.’

‘Yeah,’ the littlest one repeats, only four years old, basking in the authority of her tuakana¹. ‘You’ve to get your butt home.’

‘I’m never coming home. Ever. This is my home now. And you’re not allowed to visit without a proper pōwhiri².’

Cars blow gently by, charmed by the theatre playing out in this run-down place, a tween and a toddler shouting at a peeling red plastic tunnel. Their heads rubber neck and they slow almost to a stop, turning

their radios down so they can see better. The children in the back seat glue their faces to the windows, delighted to see their friends from school, the adults in the front endlessly reminding them to stay in their seats.

‘Come on, Grub. You do this every frickin’ Wednesday. And for what? Cause you don’t like seafood?’

‘I hate it. And I hate the cleaning and the talking too.’

‘It is what it is, Grub. Ain’t no such thing as a Wednesday without kaimoana and kaimoana³ without company. Get over it.’

‘Yeah. Get it over it,’ the littlest one repeats, always looking for a chance to jump in.

‘I am over it. I’m so over it I’ve become a grumpy old lady. And this is my grumpy old lady home.’

‘You really want to live here? In the cold and the dark, with all the creeps hanging around?’

‘Yes. And my name isn’t Grub anymore. It’s Nanny Grub. And I’m a witch now like Mahuika⁴, so if any creeps come my way, I’ll just set them on fire with my fingertips.’

Today’s escape was an attempt quite unlike the others. Nanny Grub had spent a whole week scheming, reading and rereading the stories of old, collecting all that she would need to become the lady of fire. Nail polish, a Sharpie, scissors. She painted her nails red and drew koru in the space between her eyebrows and cut her hair so that it hung across her face. She had made herself Mahuika, she who set the earth aflame. And to bring her home, the sisters would have to become Maui.

‘Well, Nanny Grub, guess all these lollies are ours then?’

‘What lollies?’

‘Mum gave us two dollars to share, and me and Pōtiki bought a lolly mix from up the road.’

‘A big as one, aye, Sis?’ Pōtiki adds, seeing her tuakana wink.

‘Yup. The biggest one they had. And we were gonna save you some but you’re an old lady and old ladies have no teeth, so I guess we’ll have to eat them all ourselves.’

Ocean and Pōtiki wait for no reply, feigning to chew as loud as they can, singing songs of joy and deliciousness. ‘Yumm.’ ‘Rekareka⁵.’ ‘These are really good, aye, sis?’

‘Wait, wait, wait. Did you save any sour ones?’

‘Heaps.’

‘I knew you were lying. The shop up the road doesn’t even sell them. The owner lady reckons sour lollies make sour kids.’

The sisters pace backwards and forwards, frustrated by the failure of their first trick, angry at Nanny Grub for making them come all this way to fetch her. Again. For a moment, they consider leaving but for the wrath of their mother decide against it. They would be better off moving in with their sister, finding their own dingy red plastic whare⁶ than returning without her. Still, from their desire to leave, they hatch a second plan.

‘Fine, you can just stay here then. Me and Pōtiki are gonna go home and play on the game and wrap ourselves in blankets and eat all the fry bread.’ (There is not a Māori⁷ in the family who could turn down fry bread. And just as surely as Wednesdays meant seafood, it meant deep-fried dough.)

‘Yeah,’ the little one shouts. ‘And we’re going to use all the golden syrup, aye, sis?’

They pretend to march off into the distance, stomping four and five and six steps away, hiding behind a nearby bin in hopes the temptation would get quickly to Nanny Grub. In hopes she would try to beat them home. One minute passes, then two, then five and nothing changes, the frigid night filling with the waiata⁸ of the old lady fire goddess.

‘I saw a taniwha⁹. When swimming in the Waikato¹⁰.’

The hide and wait and see game isn’t going to work. Or it isn’t going to work fast enough, anyway. They will surely see the fire of their mother’s eyes before they saw the fire of their sister’s fingertips.

It is time to try something else. A traditional trick of the tuakana.

‘I know why you run away now. You’re scared. Scared of a little seafood and a little kōrero¹¹.’

‘Yeah, you’re scared,’ Pōtiki teases.

‘Who do you think you are calling yourself Mahuika when what you really are is a fraidy-cat?’

‘Shut up,’ Nanny Grub growls. ‘I’m scared of nothing.’

‘Prove it then. Come home with us. Eat a cray’s leg.’

‘Yeah, prove it.’

‘I don’t have to prove nothing to no one.’

‘Told you, Pōtiki, she really is scared.’

The taunting continues and Nanny Grub is slowly worn down, the call to defend her reputation irresistible, the fire from her fingertips now burning in her cheeks, the flustered thing ready to march her way home just to make the point: Nanny Grub is no coward. Nanny Grub is the bravest, strongest and most fiery old lady on this side of Taranaki Maunga¹².

Impassioned, she reaches for the edge of her cave-tunnel home. But before she can depart, she sees again the embers on the ends of her hands. And so, cooler heads prevail, and she retreats into her tunnel like an eel back into its burrow.

‘You really thought you were going to get me, didn’t you? Not even the real Maui¹³ could trick me. Let alone two girls half as smart and twice as smelly.’

A silence reigns, the sisters outside trading looks of desperation, the older one checking her phone, seeing the night grow late, the street behind them grow busier, the passers-by grow more suspicious. They allow themselves a moment to think, to quietly conspire, and they see a police car circle the block. The sisters are sure they know what it means and doubly sure, trick or truth, Nanny Grub will not hear a word of warning. They will have to try something else before it got too late – before they really found themselves in trouble.

‘No more games, Grub. Either you get your bloody butt down here or I’ll come get you down myself.’

‘I’m never going home. Ever. And if you try to make me, I’ll throw my fire at you.’

‘Oh yeah?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Then you better bloody hit me. ‘Cause if you miss, I’m going to drag you home by your ears.’

Pōtiki circles the playground like an octopus, stalking her prey, and Ocean takes chase, throwing her body up a slide and running the short bridge an arm’s reach from her sister. Nanny Grub, ready to pounce, leaps from her burrow, launching the nail polish at her pursuer, missing with the bottle but staining the tips of her shoes.

‘Nobody can stand the fire of the mighty Mahuika!’

‘All you did was stain my shoes, you witch.’

‘And now they’ll be red forever.’

The sisters trade fierce looks, Ocean getting ready to pounce again, Nanny grub now brandishing her sharpie like a mere.

‘Come closer, and you’ll get it.’

‘Just cause it’s called a Sharpie doesn’t mean it’s sharp, you doughnut.’

Ocean dives through the tunnel and Grub climbs it, taking a short moment to taunt her sister – ‘Down low, too slow’ – then leaps from the top of her red plastic home to the bark below. Unbeknownst to her, Pōtiki watches it all unfold, positioning herself beneath them, emerging from the darkness in a full dive, wrapping her tentacles around the ankles of Nanny Grub. The fire goddess replies with speed, swinging her arm wildly and drawing a thick black line across her sister’s upper lip.

‘Sorry about that, sir. I thought you were my sister.’

‘I am your sister, you grandma.’

‘How come you have a moustache then?’

Outraged, Pōtiki sinks her teeth in the calf of Nanny Grub, the middle sister howling, Ocean sailing down from above, putting her sister in a headlock, the whole of them unable to keep their balance, rolling into the bark, trading all sorts of schoolyard smacks. Charlie horses. Snake bites. Wet willies. In the chaos of it all, all direction is lost and all alliances are compromised, Pōtiki sticking her fingers in the ear of Ocean, Ocean putting her hands over the eyes of Pōtiki, Nanny Grub drawing a monobrow across her own forehead.

So it goes, the three warriors wrestling, trading blow for blow, position for position, nickname for nickname. ‘You dumbbell.’ ‘You dog’s butt.’ ‘You tarau tūtae¹⁴.’ The police car drifts by again, pulling onto the grass, the driver inside fixing her vision to the distracted three. A long moment passes before she makes her move... In an explosion of sound and light, the playground glows red and blue, the woman announcing himself with a short siren. The girls freeze, tied up in all sorts of knots, their fingers in all kinds of unpleasant places.

‘Time to head home, I reckon, girls,’ the intercom blares, their aunty, the policewoman, trying to keep a straight face.

The sisters stand up. Waving. Faking like they were playing, Nanny Grub throwing her Sharpie into the shadows. Auntie shakes her head, trying to make certain the seriousness of the situation they are in, silly as it appears.

When the police car departs, so do the sisters, drying the spit from their ears and checking their wounds (nothing more serious than a couple of bite marks) and trying to stop laughing while Auntie could still hear them.

‘Reckon she’ll tell mum, Smelly?’

‘Probably has already, Whaea¹⁵ Monobrow.’

The sisters cross the road and see their auntie parked in their driveway, their cousins drinking in the shed, their mother standing on the porch, giving them the pūkana¹⁶.

‘Still reckon you’ll run away next Wednesday?’

‘By the look on Mum’s face, don’t think I’ll live that long.’

‘Well, if you don’t, I’ll try to sneak you a couple of extra fry breads.’

‘Really?’

‘That way you won’t have to have any cray, and I won’t have to hunt you down again.’

‘Chur.’

‘You still have to help clean though. That’s just being a good Māori.’

‘Yeah,’ the littlest one adds.

1 Older sibling

2 A traditional Māori ceremony of welcome

3 Seafood

4 The Māori goddess of fire renowned for having had the secret of her power stolen from her

5 Delicious

6 A Māori hut or house

7 The indigenous people of Aotearoa-New Zealand

8 Song

- 9 *A supernatural creature in Māori lore similar to the serpent and dragon*
- 10 *A river in Aotearoa-New Zealand*
- 11 *Conversation*
- 12 *A mountain in Aotearoa-New Zealand*
- 13 *A Māori demi-god famous for his sense of humour and strategy*
- 14 *Poo pants*
- 15 *Most often translated as aunt but frequently used as a term of respect for women older than the speaker.*
- 16 *A wide-eyed expression intended to inspire fear or awe in its recipient*

Airana Ngarewa. He (Ngāti Ruanui) is a New Zealand writer of Māori descent. His work has appeared in *The Stand*, *The Spinoff*, *Newsroom*, *Landfall* and elsewhere.



The Play Room

Shane McDonnell

1. Many years before we stopped speaking, my sister and I would sit in the play room and build Lego. This room was where I noticed the critical differences between us. The Lego Space Station, to my eyes, was a feat of engineering mastery. It required attention to detail and much patience. The steps were laid out, clear as day, in the instruction pamphlet. In this equation, the steps in the instructions acted as one variable, as did the method with which you followed them. The only constant were the pieces themselves. They remained as solid as they ever were, no matter what else changed.

To my sister's eyes, the Lego Space Station remained intangible. I could imagine the structure in its entirety, deconstruct it and reconstruct it and rotate it in my mind. I knew each piece's place and could piece together the structure long before laying a single brick on the board. My sister had no interest in such endeavours. These pieces had no proper place in her mind, to her it was something of the future, something that time would take care of.

Left to my own devices, I could have constructed the set in good time. With my sister at the table, the process never took off. The sections

I put together would be tampered with; the pieces moved out of place.

Cohesion, I learned, only serves to root out the incohesive.

My sister never had time for instruction pamphlets. She preferred to start the job blind and to see where it would take her. Oftentime this caused friction. Though the Lego Space Station was a shared commodity, I saw it as my own brainchild; I wanted to see it fully formed in its perfect entirety. My sister simply wanted to build, build until no bricks remained, and then she would take them down again.

2. When I was ten, my sister and I would sit in the play room and take turns playing the Nintendo. The boxes of Lego occupied a corner in the attic. We would race twice on Mario Kart and then swap. The hours that slipped away from us in that room never lined up with how it felt.

On my turns I usually chose to play as Mario. There was never any movement on this issue; Mario, Standard Kart M. I played with the nunchuk accessory, something I later learned was not in the spirit of the game. My sister provided commentary and advice throughout my turns on the Nintendo - none of which I listened to. When my turn finished, I unclipped the nunchuk, passed the controller to my sister, and spent the time before my next turn remembering the turns and corners and power-ups that were favourable on each track. On my next turn, I hoped for the same tracks as last time; I had quietly become friends with its quirks and tricks. As my sister howled and berated the television, I gazed contently past the screen to the outside world, where I could see the cranes and imagine the JCBs and lorries that hunkered the country to where it was being built. I watched the skyline fill up with the buildings that began to light it. I imagined those buildings forming from the ground up, each beam, each girding and each wall that rose from concrete blocks day by day; it was here that I decided I wanted to be wherever these structures and buildings were rising. Wherever I went, these upshoots seemed to be there already. From the classroom window, the bus, the play room, I always made out the outline of another building coming together piece by piece, as if on a Lego board, in the near distance. I would snap from these thoughts when my sister shrieked her mock disapproval as she was struck by a red shell on Mario Kart, and she would finish near the foot of the leaderboard and hand the controller back to me. I would clip in the nunchuk, remembering my analysis of each track and course, ready to go again.

3. Some days, after school, my sister and I would sit in the play room and ignore each other. The Nintendo was back in its box on the shelf. We were teenagers and we argued regularly. When we did, our mother would send us into the play room and not allow us to leave until we resolved our dispute.

My sister was a gymnast, a singer, a dancer and a writer among other things. I was nothing of the sort. The silence between us seemed a near-physical entity. We pretended to ignore each other's existence. She would hum.

Do

Ti

La

So

Fa

Mi

Re

Do

She would start with her back against a wall and pace gently towards its parallel, finishing the scale as she arrived. Then she would find another spot and begin again.

I stared out the window as she did this, selecting buildings in the distance, imagining their conception. Cranes no longer flecked the skyline. There was an abandoned, unfinished building not too far away, protruding like a thorn from the centre of an industrial area. I imagined what this building would look like, fully-formed. Each time, it looked different to how it did before. It was then that I realised the unending potential of how things could be. I desperately wanted to deliver this building to its entirety, where I could stand at its feet and gaze upwards, knowing where each piece had slotted into place.

Around the time my mother sent my sister and me to ignore each other, I was discouraged from my ambitions. My father, a builder, told me that nothing was being built in Ireland anymore, that becoming an engineer would be to buy a ticket to the further clutches of Europe, America, or Australia. I imagined myself in these places and, despite my guilt for it, I wanted nothing more than for my father's prophecy to come true. I would

imagine that structure, off in the distance from my family's home, and place it in Berlin, or Sydney, or Chicago. I would place it somewhere new with myself central to its construction.

Lost in the midst of our youthful trappings, my sister and I would emerge from the play room and escape to our bedrooms. She would compose some new tune. I would lie in bed and watch skyscrapers emerge from the ceiling with whole cities forming in my imagination.

4. My mother drank. On those days, my sister would come to my room and lock the door behind her. She would sit with me, and we would fall asleep watching an old DVD. In the morning she would leave quietly. As we walked to the bus, she would stay a few steps ahead of me the entire way.

5. When I was twenty-one, my sister moved away to university. I remained in Dublin, studied Engineering and drank heavily at parties and elsewhere. When she left, my parents turned the play room into a study. We sorted various tokens of my childhood into black plastic bags and replaced the furniture with flat-packed effects and a swivel chair.

I slogged through tasks and assignments and projects and multiple-choice-questionnaires, and waded through marshes of partying in between. In my final year of college, I looked up from it all and saw nothing but the thick mist around me. I searched for a beacon in the distance - the unfinished building not far from my house. But it was hidden from me, I could no longer make it out. On these nights, I would ring my sister, promising to repay the overseas call charges, and ask her to hum scales over the phone for me. The two of us would sit in our rooms, an ocean between us; a bridge constructed with notes rising from the currents.

6. During the summers, I worked with my father on construction sites. I would mix cement and shift cinder blocks and barrow piles of debris around the site.

In my earlier days, I stuck close to my father, finding work to do in his vicinity. As I grew older, I roamed the sites more freely. I observed the many men who passed through these sites and how they worked differently to one another. Some worked in near-silence, conversing only on lunch breaks, while others distracted themselves with constant chatter.

The summer before my final year at university, we worked on a site in the city centre. The structure was not tall, but it was wide and deep. Scaffolds ran alongside it, holding aloft the men who pieced it together. One day, as the sun beamed onto the site and I lumbered hardcore from one spot to another, a scaffolding collapsed. A mist of debris rose from the site floor and suspended us in time for brief moments. Its crashing echoes faded into the humid air and the cries of a worker. His legs crushed beneath a pile of metal and timber, rang out. Work stopped for the day as he was carted to hospital. As the site emptied, I remained, looking from a distance at the collapsed scaffolding. I contemplated how, hours before, it stood steady and well-bolstered, and was now crumpled and spineless on the site floor.

7. When I was no longer very young, my sister married a man from Belfast and I married a woman from an estate not far from where we grew up. At my wedding reception, my mother drank orange juice and basked tearfully on the occasion. In our separate marriages, I noticed again the critical differences between us. My sister travelled with her Belfast husband and delayed buying a house. We did not see each other for many months at a time.

While they travelled, my wife and I bought a house near where we grew up; from the end of the garden I can see that abandoned building in the near distance. Now I often retreat into my office, in the deeper reaches of the house, beside the utility room where I hear the whirr of the washing machine as I work or daydream. In its monotone drone, I hear my sister humming scales as I bleed over maps and plans and blueprints and models. I quietly recite them as I work.

Those distant echoes fill the spaces in which our conversations used to linger. We haven't spoken since shortly after my father's death. I took time off work to be with my mother, although I suspect it was a more selfish decision than I let on at the time. My sister flew home when she heard of it, stayed for the funeral, then packed up her life into a suitcase alongside her Belfast husband and left once more for another part of the world. She was already a continent away, or she might as well have been, when I found out she had left. I called and told her what I thought of her and her husband, leaving how they did. She hung up and did not call back.

My mother has filled me in on her life since: about her new job and her house and how she has finally settled down someplace in the States and about my three year-old nephew, Jonathan, who I have not met yet.

The hours in the office slip away like they did in front of the Nintendo. I can still recall each corner of every track; they come to my mind as readily as my own name.

I imagine sitting at my desk, working on delivering the abandoned building to its entirety; my wife, with a gentle knock, will poke her head into the office.

‘The phone for you,’ she’ll say, ‘It’s Alice.’

I’ll put down my pen, retrieved from my daydreams.

‘Coming,’ I’ll say.

Shane McDonnell attempts to write about the everyday difficulties that we shy away from in conversation - something all too common in Ireland.



The Little Girl

Sophie Harris

I watch the little girl excitedly open the carefully wrapped present. Her little hands pushing the yellow bow to one side and tearing the red Santa paper so she can get to what's inside. I watch her as she extracts the box from inside and with an excited squeal rip open the top, making a jagged tear as she bypasses the flapped opening, too greedy for what's inside. I watch as she pulls out the baby doll from the box. A mound of hard plastic with a scrunched-up face, eyes which open and close and weighted arms and legs so when she cradles it, it feels like a new-born baby would. I watch the little girl as she takes the new pram, pink bow still attached to the hood, and prepares it, carrying the baby doll in one arm, shushing and rocking her gently. She lays the baby doll down into the pram, wraps her in a blanket and starts pushing her around the living room as Christmas songs play in the background and all her other gifts lay unopened.

I watch the little girl sitting in her room, an array of plastic toys in front of her: a bowl, spoon, a bottle, a dummy and pretend food. I watch as she takes the spoon and bowl and feeds the baby doll placed inside a purple plastic highchair.

‘Here comes the aeroplane. Whoooooosh,’ she tells the baby doll, circling the empty spoon into the doll’s mouth.

I watch as the little girl dressed in 101 Dalmatian pyjamas feeds the baby doll a bottle of milk. She winds her, gently patting her back and exclaiming, ‘Good girl!’ as the baby doll does a pretend burp. I watch as the little girl gently lays the baby doll down into a yellow cot next to her bed, changes her nappy and puts her into pyjamas. She pulls a blanket over the baby doll, tucking in the corners. I watch as the little girl kisses the baby doll’s head, whispering, ‘Good night sweetheart,’ before settling into her bed as her own mother kisses her head and says, ‘Good night sweetheart.’

I watch the little girl pushing the baby doll in her pram on a hot summer’s day, talking to her as they walk around the park. I watch her sit the baby doll on her hip as she shows her the world around them. Pointing to the birds, the ducks, the water, the trees. I watch the little girl soothe her baby doll back to sleep pushing her back and forth in the pram.

I watch the little girl run into a lounge full of happy birthday banners. I watch her as she sees the new double pram with a purple bow attached and jumps up and down in excitement. I watch as the little girl grabs her baby girl doll from Christmas and places her into the front seat of the new pram. She places the new boy baby doll into the back seat. She drapes a blanket over each of them and pushes the pram around the living room.

I watch the little girl taking care of her baby dolls. As she carries one in each arm, she makes them cry and then gives her attention to them, settling them down each time. I watch as the little girl places the baby dolls inside their cots — one yellow, one green — and pats their back until they fall asleep. She lays a purple blanket on top of the boy doll and a green blanket on top of the girl doll.

I watch as the little girl helps her father push the supermarket trolley, her dolls strapped into the seats. She chatters to them and takes turns to get each doll out feeding and winding them as she wanders through the aisles. She cuddles them back to sleep before putting them back in their trolley seats.

I watch as each year passes. As the little girl's doll collection grows. I watch her flicking through the toy catalogue, in awe with all the new prams.

'Look mummy, I can have triplets in this one.'

I watch as the little girl grows into a bigger girl and still, she asks for a new baby doll and pram. I watch as she turns to an age where dolls and prams are no longer considered suitable, yet she continues to care and tend to the plastic dolls with eyes that open and close and with weighted legs and arms to feel like a new-born. I watch her continue to push around the pram and hold her baby dolls in secret, in the privacy of her bedroom.

I sense the urge in the now teenage girl as she desperately wants to keep playing with the dolls but leaves them gathering dust in the attic because 'she is too old to play with dollies now'. I sense the pull she has to cuddle the baby doll and pretend it is real. I sense her maternal needs kicking in as she dreams about how it will be when she has a child in future.

I watch the teenage girl bring home a plastic baby for a school project. The doll programmed to act as a real baby would, teaching teenage girls the reality of motherhood. I watch her hold the head, change the nappy, wind, feed and bathe the baby doll. I watch her get up during the night when it cries. She yawns with tiredness at being woken at 2am but takes to the role with joyful ease and a deep longing for it to be real.

I watch the now twenty-year-old girl play the sims. I watch her as she creates a sim version baby to carry, feed, bathe, look after, help grow. I watch the twenty-year-old girl live her motherhood dream through a pixelated sim version of herself.

I watch the thirty-year-old woman see those around her find partners, become mothers, get married, settle down into family life. I watch the thirty-year-old woman scroll through her news feed, liking the children and baby photos of her friends and family with a sharp pain of envy. Her heart aching to be the one to share the happy news, the blurry scan photo, get excited at declaring the name she's chosen for the bundle of joy. I watch as the thirty-year-old woman lets the dream pass by, floating like a lonely leaf on the river, further away as her body ages. As her mind still hasn't healed

enough to trust a man. As she struggles with the fact that even if she had a partner, her body just isn't made for creating babies, no matter how much she prays for it. I watch the thirty-year-old woman sigh and walk away from the mental images of motherhood she's held on to for so long, finally accepting it's not to be for her.

I stand in front of the mirror. I see the little girl looking back at the thirty-one-year-old me. I grieve for us, for our lost motherhood dream. I grieve as I come to terms with the fact that my body is broken, and my circumstances didn't fit the mould. I grieve knowing I won't get the chance to try again. My time for doing so is nearly up, the already broken body clock ticking louder and faster each day. I grieve knowing that even if I could try right now, the odds are stacked against me.

I grieve for the little girl inside of me who just wants to be a mother but will never be.

I stand and admire the room.

This was the room kept aside for the baby who was never to be. The one I had left empty, ready to decorate, ready for cots, toys, a tiny little girl or boy. After many tough years and with all the strength in my body, it was time to stop waiting. Waiting for the sound of tiny feet running across the floor, for den building or dragon slaying, coming in at night to take the book still held in my child's sleeping hands, pulling blankets over them as I had with my baby doll all those years ago. Time to stop imagining the laughter from inside as they play with their siblings, a little boy wrestling with daddy, a little girl tending to her own baby doll. I closed the door on my dream of motherhood, and the room laid as empty as my womb.

But today, I opened that door. I adapted, even with the pain of the dream never meant for me, I moved forward with a new one of who I was becoming. I painted the walls, two red, two cream. I built the furniture: a bookcase with a seat built in, a desk with space for my notebooks, pens and laptop. I fixed my favourite Film and Television posters to one wall and mounted the projector TV to the other. I unpacked my array of cameras, setting them in a corner. I built my arts and crafts cupboard, plugged in my record player and placed comfortable chairs around the TV.

As the sun set on an unusually warm autumn's day, I stood back and admired the room's new purpose. A new dream, a creative arts dream,

a dream of helping others through their pain, and this room was going to be the hub for it. My heartache, my grief for the little girl holding her baby doll, led me to the page. Writing became my therapy. The creative arts understand, immerse and heal a soul. I wrote about the little girl and her lost dream, finding a way to express my emotions and carry my pain in a way that inspires and supports. I have learnt to accept that this new dream is where I am supposed to be.

I watch the people in front of me. I share their pain and stories. For the women whose bodies don't work properly, for the women who haven't found the right partner in time, for the women whose bodies shut down prematurely, for the women who lost their precious babies, for the women who just ran out of time, and even for men who can't produce. I watch them all as they carry their pain, as they adapt, they grow and try to find a new dream through the therapy of arts. For life has a funny way of creating change when we least want it, but when we most need it. For the first time in years, I found comfort in this room again. The little girl who had been in so much pain has found some peace at last.

Sophie Harris enjoys exploring and writing about the world around her. She is a keen screenwriter and short story novelist who likes to raise awareness about topics of importance to her.



A Light Bulb

Afshan Sayed

Tara was making a trip to the hills of Shimla to meet her happiness, her school friend, Anjali, a happily married young woman, mother of three delightful children.

Tara traveled all the way to the holiday home, breaking down into tears in between. She reprimanded herself to stay collected until she met Anjali.

The house in Shimla was draped in milky white. It looked tranquil among a good number of tall snowcapped pine trees. The sounds of nature echoed from the nearby hills. Tara entered the house to see life all around her giggling, playing or prepared to go out in the snow. The happiness and warmth in the otherwise cold region melted Tara's heart. She wanted this.

Anjali and Tara hugged. She shook hands with Vivek, the husband. The children, two girls and a boy, yelled welcome from their respective hiding places.

'You look like such a mess,' Anjali whispered to Tara.

'Yes, I know,' she nodded.

‘Why don’t you go upstairs and freshen up? Vivek and the kids are readying to go out and play.’

‘That would be perfect. I want to talk to you.’

Tara walked up the stairs to her room. She took a long, hot shower to smoothen her fallow face and refresh her teary red eyes. She dressed in her perkier best and came down to a small meal and a hot cup of coffee. Anjali was waiting there alone by the window, keeping an eye out for her children playing in the snow.

As Tara took her seat, Anjali asked, ‘He’s left you again?’

‘We had the most horrible fight. I called him names and he called me some. He said it’s not working out anymore between us. And he doesn’t have the strength to carry on.’

‘This sounds like the usual Alok. What was it about this time?’

‘Anjali, I badly want what you have. A family of my own to love and to care for. Alok seems like the perfect fit for me, but he doesn’t think I am ‘it’. I told him he was a skirt chaser though he is loyal. I told him that he was passing time with me for the past four years deliberately though he is confused.

‘Alok is a lot of things, loyal, confused, vulnerable, afraid to commit. I’ve heard this over again in the past year that we’ve reconnected. The point is where do his insecurities leave you? Have you thought that through?’

‘What about me? I try to mend my ways and ask him out for fun every time. Whenever I look into his big brown eyes, all I see is love. Whenever I notice his huge spread of arms, I see the father of my children. He doesn’t feel the same way.’

‘There is no love here, there is only affection. No matter how big and wide his arms are, they are never going to cuddle your children. Isn’t that obvious to you by now? He does not want to commit. At least not to you.’

‘That somehow doesn’t stop me from trying.’

‘Try waking up at 5:00 am for the children and husband. Try working at the office and then run household errands after returning from work. That should awaken you from your silly beliefs that my life is the epitome of happiness. It is hard work!’

Anjali broke into whispered confessions. 'Sometimes I feel like I would have been better off without Vivek.'

She sipped her coffee, straightened her back and continued, 'Look, Tara, you're the one who ends up feeling sad, sorry, upset every time you and Alok break up. You're a good teacher at a reputed college. Unlike other women, you have a social circle and a large, maiden, extended family. Why do you need a man like Alok? Why do you need a man anyway?'

'To change a light bulb,' Tara said without thinking. This amused Anjali. And they had a good laugh. 'You want to make a snowman now?' 'Sure.'

The summer holiday came to an end. No more making snowmen or cooking chicken steaks or eating candle lit dinners or reading Anjali's children's bedtime stories. Tara was on her way back to the city. She had to cure the itch of wanting to connect with Alok again. She'd had a bit of personal time and a while to rethink the last fight. She was determined not to worry about any future whether it was with or without him.

Lectures at the college ended the tedious day. Tara returned to her studio apartment. She made herself a cup of coffee. And when she removed her phone from her bag she thought, 'Dash it!' To every word of advice and recognition of self-esteem that Anjali had talked about. She was going to swallow her pride, beat her ego, kill her dreams and make that call to Alok. She was going to patch up things with him for the ninth time.

Tara placed the call. There was no answer. She tried texting. The grey ticks on the message app did not turn blue for a day, two days, and then a whole week. She tried texting again and calling. She realized Alok had blocked her. She dialed frantically in panic, but was met with a block-ade.

Tara picked up her house keys, bag and phone and made her way to Alok's home. She reached his apartment and rang the doorbell. A strange, old woman answered the door, 'Is Alok Mehta there?' Tara asked.

'The previous tenant has given up this flat and gone, if it's him you're referring to,' the old woman replied.

'Is there a forwarding address he may have left behind?'

The old woman shook her head. 'No. Try the landlord if you'd like. He's on the second floor.'

‘Yes, yes I know,’ Tara left with a sinking feeling. But she reassured herself. She knew where he worked, what his hot spots were, where he liked to drink and eat and go dancing. She would find him.

She inquired with the landlord, but he too did not have a forwarding address. Tara wound her hair in a bun, put on her running shoes and ran pillar to post trying to track Alok at all the familiar spots and places they had visited, eateries they had been to, and clubs they had danced at. Tara left a word for him everywhere that Saturday evening.

Exhausted and drunk, when she came back to her empty studio apartment, Tara felt pathetic, needy, clingy and was teary eyed. To add further fuel to her misery, the light bulb in her bathroom died as she was inspecting her haggard face.

She was by then furious with herself. She went searching for the stock of bulbs in the kitchen cabinet. She found one. Tara carefully removed the cover and fixed the light in its socket and turned it around to secure it in the holder. She then switched it on. The bulb glowed. Tara beamed with an idea.

The next day, Sunday she spent with herself going out to brunch, a stand-up comic show, a peep into her favorite bookstore and a late evening dinner. She did every- thing all by herself. She realized this was going to be difficult. But with a little bit of practice she’d master the art of being on her own. She finally took Anjali’s advice seriously. It took Tara close to three months to be at ease and form a friend- ship with self. She thought simply, if she could change a light bulb, what was a man?

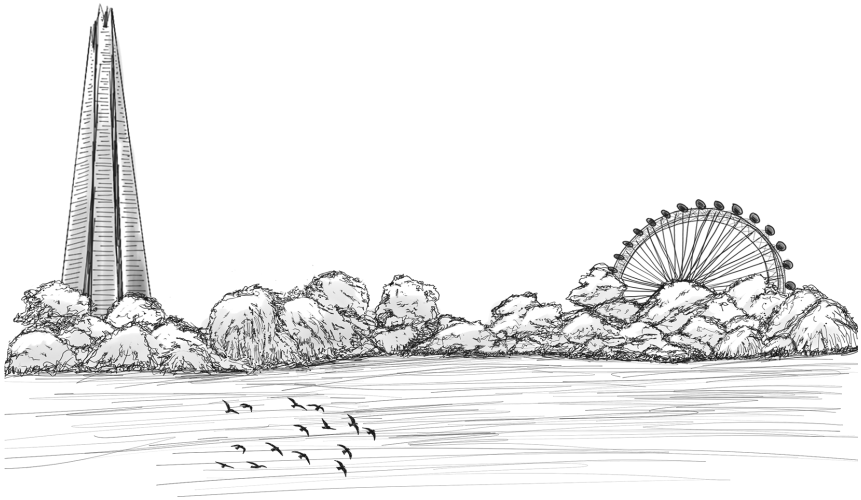
She seemed to take a keen interest in her lectures at the college now. Tara found her colleagues stimulating, her friends dependable, and her maiden family much more supportive and cooperative. In a bid to get rid of a man’s memory Tara had regained control of her life and rediscovered her world.

One particular Saturday evening, Tara entered a café and took her regular seat. She had her regular decaff and sat watching the sights before her as she settled down to read. When she raised her head, she noticed a strange young man holding a book upside down, peering more at her than at the book.

Tara met his gaze and smiled.

Afshan Sayed is a screenwriter. She lives in Mumbai, India. She maintains a blog of short stories 'headsupmumbai.blogspot.com'.

Non-Fiction





Denouement, but not Quite

Aran V. Hernández

‘You could die. You could literally get up from this chair and drop dead,’ my doctor says to me. I stare at my legs—bony, knobby. At my arms—littered with scars, my wrist bones jutting out.

I let out a quiet huff. Of course I could die. That’s what I have wanted all along. This is just my long-term plan. Slow starvation, slowly killing my body in a way no one really notices—until it was too late.

But they noticed. They noticed.

Now I’m sitting in a doctor’s office, wearing three layers of clothing and two pairs of pants to try to keep the cold out, pouring out my life story. A life story of abuse, of horrifying acts against my person, of not being allowed to be my own person. (A little paper. The diagnosis: Complex Trauma.)

Looking back on it, the last bit is probably the least important one.

‘Why are you doing this to yourself?’ she asks me. I pause.

Because I hate myself. Because I don’t deserve to exist. Because I am a fat, disgusting, greedy pig. Because, because, because—

Why shouldn't I be doing this to myself? It feels easier to just shoot back than to answer the question, because all my answers seem to wallow in self-pity.

'I don't know,' I finally say. It's not true. I know exactly what triggered it: My old boss calling me fat. Even when I was never particularly fat, even when I was hardly pushing 50 kilos on a good day, that was what came out of that old hag's mouth. You're fat, and you're hurting my horses. You. You. You you you. Not me, not me overworking them. You and your fifty kilos of uselessness.

But it feels childish, it feels weak to admit to it, it feels like I'm pushing my own mistakes onto someone else. So it's easier to shrug, easier to keep my eyes on my bony wrists. It's easier to lie.

There are other reasons, of course. My father dying and my mother suddenly caring about him, my sister's mourning, my indifference towards his death. The cat, too, of course. A bland replacement for our dog. A chance to not feel, to have a reason to not feel.

Here's the thing no one tells you about trauma—it never leaves. It's an insidious little thing, lurking in the darkest corners of your mind, ready to strike when you least expect it. You can prepare yourself for it, you can make your little plan on how to get through it, but it will never leave you. It will keep you rooted in place, it will trap you in its tendrils, it will make you sit down and watch, watch, always watch, while everyone else moves on.

My father died. My father tried to kill me and then he died. But he still haunts me, he still watches over me, somehow. Not in the Christian sense, not in the 'he's taking care of you from heaven' sense. He's watching, ready to strike, ready to hold me down whenever I think 'I am ready to move on.'

I will never be able to move on, I will never be able to move past the night he chased me with a kitchen knife, past the night he tried to choke me, past the night he bashed my head against the wall.

Sometimes my right eye stops working. A reminder of those nights.

And when my eye stops working, terror seizes me. He seizes me.

'You could die,' she repeats, again.

'I know,' is all I manage to say, because what else is there to say to that? I can't say 'I'm trying to get better' because I truly am not. This is just

my way of screaming and punishing myself, all at the same time. Screaming and silence intertwined.

‘You do want to leave, don’t you?’ she asks. Her voice is kind and I flinch, because I don’t deserve kindness. And even if I did deserve kindness, kindness was what came before the storm.

I know better than to trust.

‘I miss horses’ I manage after a long while. It’s the one thing no one has been able to take away from me. Not my father, not my boss, not my ex-girlfriend. It’s the one thing I have that tethers me in place, it’s the one thing that holds me down.

I miss horses, and the thought of getting back on the saddle, of running my fingers through their coarse manes, of letting their soft snouts sniff me is almost enough to make me smile. I miss the speed. I miss feeling like I could fly.

‘You can’t ride like this,’ she says, her voice still kind. ‘You need to get better if you want to ride. You need to let go.’

I swallow. I know I need to let go, but I simply—I cannot. Trauma is horrifying. Trauma holds me down. Trauma keeps me down, like a stick ready to strike. Like a snake poised to attack.

But it’s my trauma, it’s what makes me, me. I can’t let go. I can’t, I can’t, I c—

‘I will try,’ I say.

She nods, but I can tell she doesn’t believe me. I don’t believe myself, either.

‘There are good things in the world, Aran,’ she says. ‘There are things that don’t revolve around the pain that’s been inflicted around you. You deserve to experience those things.’

I swallow. I don’t believe I deserve those things. I’m a bad person, and I don’t deserve kindness. I deserve to stay rooted, to stay in my place, to know my place. And my place isn’t in the sunlight, my place isn’t outside, enjoying the sun and warmth the world has to offer.

No, as cheesy as it sounds, I deserve to stay in the darkness.

‘I’ll see you in a month. In the meanwhile,’ she says, ‘You should get a call from nurse services.’

I nod.

The sun warms my black sweater as I make my way outside. It doesn't quite reach my skin, doesn't warm me up.

I don't deserve warmth, and I don't deserve kindness.

And I don't deserve to move on. What I deserve is to be left alone, to try to pick up the pieces the ones who have shattered me have left in their wake.

And then maybe, when I'm something close to whole again, I will deserve kindness.

Or maybe I'll just turn myself into something monstrous, something that should be left alone and never ever be touched, both out of fear of that thing striking back like the snakes poised to attack and because it might shatter again into a thousand pieces.

Both options seem likely, all things be told.

Aran V. Hernández is interested in trauma, regrowth, kindness, and morally gray characters. When not writing, he can be found riding horses, thinking about writing, reading, or thinking about medieval Welsh legends. Sometimes doing more than one at the same time, which may or may not have resulted in walking into a streetlamp (or fellow horse-rider) more than once.



Flower Power, or How I Defeated the Victim in Myself

Hanna Komar

September 11, 2020. Prison in the town of Zhodzina, Minsk region.

Three women – 22, 31, and 37 years old – on a metal bunk, armed with a pencil, doing crossword puzzles... to fill the time between wake-up at 6 am, lunch at 1, dinner at 5, and bedtime at 10 pm. The time between anxiety, humiliation, anger, and helplessness. The time in prison.

The ex-president, tyrant, and murderer Alexander Lukashenka compared my country to ‘a beloved woman’ and promised to not let go of her. On August 9, 2020, she made it clear: it’s over. On the night of the rigged presidential election, we stepped out of our safe shells, catching our breath, lighting the space above our heads with hopes and torches in our phones, ready to forgive Lukashenka if he resigned. When the first stun grenades cut the air around Minsk Hero City Obelisk, some ran, some stayed, some froze, some cried, some yelled, some got scared, some cursed, some couldn’t believe their eyes, some loved the adrenaline, some were ready to fight, some were deafened, some were concussed, some were bleeding... But in the entire country the internet was off, so we didn’t know that.

We didn't know that 3,000 people were detained in 33 towns and cities of our motherland. And the following night, more of us took to the streets — some curious, some naive, some full of good intention, some overwhelmed, some defenseless, some outraged, some prepared for a war, some armed with helmets, knee and arm protection, some carrying medical kits in their backpacks, some volunteering to help the wounded, some driving cars, some building barricades, some taking over the streets, some ready to win.

Some bullets were rubber bullets, others were lethal.

The internet was blocked across the whole country, on the order of the dictator, for three days and nights. Using VPN, from friends and families abroad — that's how we knew 6,000 people were detained, mostly in Minsk. Like shatters — terrifying news, our hearts were bleeding — fifty people in a cell for four, a bottle of water for all, no food, beatings, rapes...

Thousands of people went missing. We didn't know if they were alive. We didn't know what we could do. We didn't have the right to stop, but we had to stop the violence.

August 12, 2020. Women in white clothes form a human chain near Kamarouka market in Minsk. It's the fourth day of protests against the falsified election results and the 27-year rule of the dictator. A chain of women armed with flowers, white robes, and courage against the water cannons, stun grenades, bullets, torture, and suffering of our people.

I questioned the white colour, the flowers, and the conventional feminine image. I wasn't even certain I believed in the peaceful protest. But we needed flowers because our voices had been taken away from us. And we needed white clothes to shout, 'Stop it!' And I was there to cry, 'I'm with you, sisters...'

Never had I seen anything like that in my life, so much beauty. What made those women so beautiful was their determination to uphold their values. Their reluctance to agree to the terms of the aggressor. Their resistance...

It's personal.

Violence has been an everyday reality in my family. Since I moved away from my parents, I was proud of Mom only once — when she filed a lawsuit after my father had gotten physical again, and when she went all the way despite the immense pressure from him. In my family, I only learned to be a victim. The women's protest was an example of resistance to abuse.

Countless solidarity chains and marches, day by day, the entire country turned into a chain of solidarity. I started noticing a change in myself. On the evening of September 9, 2020 at the sight of the gang in black uniforms approaching us near the Red Church, I didn't run away – together with the others we locked our arms, formed several circles, like a rose, the older women on the outside circle, wrapping us tightly. We sang, and sang, and sang, until the crows flew away. A journalist asked me if the protesters won that day. 'They did,' I said, not yet aware it was the night when inside myself I had defeated the victim.

September 5, a big women's march in the centre of Minsk. I find myself standing in front of one of the OMON officers, shouting, 'You betrayed us! How could you? You must protect us!' Shouting to the other women who scattered at the sight of the police van driving towards us, 'No running, stand together!'

The evening of September 8. We're trapped between the factory wall on one side, and the wall of police vans and uniforms wearing human faces on the other side. I'm not going to run.

'You can go.' They let me and the other women leave. But it's I who decides for myself whether to leave or stay. If you run away from the aggressor every time, he gets used to having power, which makes him stronger and stronger. I made a decision and was prepared to take responsibility for it. I, suddenly mature, was defending the little girl inside me, doing for myself what my mother had never been able to. I was doing it for her, too.

Fourteen months later, I'm still fighting, and this means I've won...

Hanna Komar is a poet and translator who's taken to nonfiction to reflect on the revolutionary and dramatic events in her home country Belarus. She found herself on the barricades, and that changed both herself as a person and her writing. She believes her mission as an author is to help people express their deepest traumatic experiences, talk about the unspeakable, and heal their wounds.



An Impermanent Life

James R. W. Hayward

London. A nondescript day in a nondescript street.

No wait, not totally nondescript.

Wardour Street, Soho. London's pleasure district. Sin City. Liquor, ladies, and vice, if one knows where to look, down alleys, up stairways, in garrets and cellars. Upmarket restaurants and coffee for those who would elect to remain on the lighter side of the city, a world of pastel colours and kerbside seating, shopfronts displaying their wares to the passing world.

There exists, in a place nobody might otherwise bother to look, a brightly neon-lit gambling arcade called the Las Vegas. It has a basement, dark but inviting and that is where he would go, not to blow his money on slots with rigged pay-outs or to bet on sports he took no interest in, but a lively, bright assortment of strobe lights, music, and fun.

London's sole remaining dedicated video game arcade, the beating heart of a community of people: anime fans, gaming enthusiasts, and many bemused tourists among the throng.

The intersection of the geek, the gamer, the ordinary citizen.

A place where all come together in momentary unity in the rapid flow of a city in perpetual motion.

He stood intently in front of a giant plastic Japanese taiko drum, pounding away. The soundtrack to the anime Neon Genesis Evangelion blasts with heavy bass from built-in speakers, part of the rich musical soundtrack to his life, played on his way here through winding streets and alleys via his AKG headphones.

They were bought specifically as they were the same headphones owned by a character he liked, Futaba Sakura, a young, geeky Tokyo girl from Persona 5, a Japanese game for the PlayStation.

He would dress up as her soon, for Comic-Con, defying any expectations others had of him, and even the expectations he had of himself, showing social norms the door, which was something he had apparently done since an early age, scarcely realising his very existence broke all kinds of expectations and norms until recently. Why follow what people expect?

It might shock people at first, but such is life, given it was a shock to many outside his close-knit sphere that he had even gotten into University, much less was now working to earn an MA degree and planning on applying for a PhD. The experts had written him off years ago as being incapable of thinking and feeling, because apparently Asperger's is a death sentence for such things, yet here he is.

At this point, a little light cross-dressing in the interests of cosplay looks like small beer compared to years of defying the odds and showing expectations the door, surely? Years of change had hardened him to the realisation that he had a choice: evolve to fit the world's needs or figuratively die, swept away in the tide of the outside world. Except, he didn't evolve to fit the norms. Oh no. He was gonna evolve to be what he wanted, consequences be damned, because while it wouldn't be easy, he had pledged to himself some years prior to become the person he wanted to be, after years of denial of that most noble goal.

Besides, in a world always changing, he had to seize the chance to achieve this odd goal now, one of many odd goals he had, lest he ignore the chance further down the line. Such was life. Like the games he played, once you start, you have to see it through to the end, and do it your own way. You'd not get another chance if you screwed it up, more so with life, where you can't just insert another coin and start again, correcting the mistakes you made before.

This man, young, average height and averagely built, was the

perfect definition of average, if he had chosen to be, or if life had let him. Indeed, he was as ambiguous as he was easy to read, if you chose to not look any deeper than surface level.

But no, life by averages, life by numbers, is life by boredom. Under the black leather jacket was a t-shirt with Sailor Moon, another Japanese character, printed on it. On his right hand, an assortment of gothic style chains, rings, and wristbands. On his left, rubber wristbands collected from an assortment of charities, video game arcades, and other assorted locales. Average, he was not. Not if he could help it. Not now, not ever.

An evolution into the perfect storm of light & dark, colour and plainness, ordinary and different, a person, a soul, a being, that was all contrasting and yet also with a strong definition, a strong character under the surface, hidden to all but those who he wanted to see that side of him, a protective reflex from years of being derided at school for simply existing by other people who were probably as insecure about their own little lives.

These games, to him, they felt like his life's work, his religion, his meaning at times when the world felt like somewhere he couldn't fit into, when he had spent weeks rushing from work to home to work and not heeding his need for rest and fun, all part of a never-ending quest to keep going and working to his plan.

Not quite true. He had more meaning than just games.

Was there meaning in the family that awaited him at home? Of course. He'd never forget that they are one of the things that means the most to him. No matter where the world takes him, he would always carry them with him, in his thoughts, his deeds, his actions. Same with his friends. He felt they were like a second family to him too, and he would do anything for them too.

Did he seek meaning in the inordinate amounts of work he did, desperate for the succour of self-betterment and the chance at a decent future career? Of course.

After all, it was this work that gave him the purpose to get up every morning, prise himself from the loving embrace of one of his 33 dakimakura 'girlfriends' (a type of pillow with an anime character printed on it, used as a form of exceedingly geeky companionship, so to speak), neck a Prozac to keep his recently diagnosed depression in check and a vitamin pill to try and counter the myriad side effects of the Prozac.

He'd then clean himself up with a pound shop razor and then go

to work via the red and white sardine can of the Tube, and the creaky glide of an old British Rail express train, squeaky and bouncy with age, but with a character all its own, incomparable to the various trains he owned scale models of at the home he was always fast leaving behind on some business or another.

What reason would he have otherwise? In a world without reason, purpose is the logic that often keeps us going, and this was his: his pills, his studies, his fictional women, his music, his anime, his family, his friends, his trains, his books, his films and many more fleeting comforts in his world, always in flux and never in permanence, whirling and spinning in a constant dance of activity.

But what is hidden behind his eyes, buzzing with a million neon colours? Hopes? Dreams? Love? Or perhaps a soul still trying to find his calling amongst the ant-like masses blinded to the world around them and doggedly going about their own business, missing all that goes on around them. The song ended.

Another. And another, and another, and another.

The beat and the lights, the lyrics, and the melody, blurring together dreams and reality, taking him on a trip beyond imagination, till reality knocks again, and he runs out of coins, leaving the only jangle in his pocket being that of keys against phone, against railcard, against yo-yo, against chewing gum packet, against dog-eared train ticket.

Home calls, for it all to begin once again in the early morning, leave the girl, take the pill, ride the train, read the book, play the game, walk the walk, talk the talk, live the sublime life, in its own special odd way. A way that was never the same twice, no matter how familiar it felt, an impermanence with the everyday familiarity that made it feel permanent, a world and a life that often felt the same, but always was a surprise too.

James R.W. Hayward is a 22-year-old Master's student of Creative Writing at the University of Westminster. He uses what he experiences to write with, reflecting on life in London that many would say is 'unique', to put it mildly, and trying to capture the details of the city. When not writing, he is either ridiculously busy with work, or in the free time he can spare, watching anime, playing video games, or working on his model railway, amongst other things.



The Growth We've Grown

Kerrie Portman

Birthdays are a classic time to reflect back on who we were last year and our hopes, dreams and ambitions for the coming year, the coming age. The growth we've achieved.

I'm getting older in the evermore daily sense but it is also my birthday. I am in the hospital, five people have wished me Happy Birthday, the first time anybody has done that in three years. Last year I was in a very different position; a different city, studying different subjects... It feels like I've become a whole different person this past year. Or, more accurately, the past six months.

See, there is a good change and there is a not-so-good change. About six months ago, someone I loved started a domino effect of mental and physical trauma that completely changed my entire personhood for survival. She pushed the first domino, which crashed down on my job, my health, my cat, my home, my trust, my safety, my freedom, my hopes until I was left homeless, uneducated, unemployed and regularly in hospital for suicide attempts. It wasn't just the tangible things she took but everything inside me as well. At first, it was just gone, like she'd scooped out my

insides with a spoon and left me a hollow shell. I'd lay in the dark and just stare. I felt like a non-person. In some ways I was. I didn't do anything. I didn't really interact with anyone. I existed almost entirely alone. If a tree falls in a forest, does it really make a sound? If I don't see people, do I still exist?

I slowly began gathering snippets and trinkets to fill the ragged, scared and sometimes still-bleeding gap inside me. They were joined together, completely different from who I'd been before. I stopped doing anything I'd liked before because she taught me to be frightened of happiness. She always took everything away, and liking something, feeling like it was stable and safe, just made it hurt worse when she - inevitably - took it.

I still don't really recognise myself. I think I don't want to. I think if I start to recognise myself in this shabby collage I've assembled from survival and trauma then it will have become something I'm used to and that terrifies me. The impermanence feels comforting right now, but it also keeps me numb and too detached from the world around me to feel connected to it or invested in it.

I wished on my last birthday, and the one before that, three years before that, five, that I would know I'd be doing it by myself. I had an epiphany during the time of hollow nothingness, while I was still homeless for the first time that year. I'd done and achieved so much more than I could have imagined for myself because I'd so desperately wanted to be good enough for her. I longed to be someone she could be proud of. But still, I felt like she had the sole verdict on what it meant to be enough, and without her approval, I simply wasn't enough. My epiphany was that, despite the fuel, I'd been the one driving the car there and if I could love myself as much as I loved her, I'd be okay. I could be proud of myself. I could deliver the verdict that I was enough. 'I need to be my own Kerrie now,' I told myself.

Strangely, while things around me continued to get worse, I felt better. I enrolled in college, started applying for volunteering roles, jobs and opportunities to put myself out there. No, it was not easy to do this while homeless, in unsafe accommodation and then facing rough sleeping. No, it wasn't easy to be constantly rejected when I begged for help. But that epiphany did help me put new fuel in my car and tentatively start driving again, perhaps needing to pull to the side of the road or shine the hazard lights more often.

Growth can be good. It can be vital. It can be necessary. It can be hard. It can happen fast or slow. It can happen with excruciating clarity

or through whispers in the background. It can be so subtle that when you look back on who you were on your last birthday you don't even recognise yourself. That girl was crushed by the dominos and crumbled into the abyss.

Kerrie Portman is an autistic care leaver. Her love of writing originating from the desire to raise awareness of discriminatory practices in social care. This led to her main writing accomplishments, including two published articles in The Guardian, and co-authoring a chapter of a book alongside guest writing articles for an array of publications.



How Not Being Beautiful Has Empowered Me

Zhuotong Hou

I noticed the fine line between good-looking girls and plain-looking girls when I entered sixth grade at age 12, and that I had been categorised as the latter. Girls' beauty is always related to boys' validation. Beautiful girls would always find letters proposing relationships in their desk boxes, or find themselves surrounded by suitors, declaring their love after school. Sometimes there was a bunch of boys around to cheer for the suitor, whereas I took on another role: a gossipier, albeit an incompetent one. Boys' affection crowned those pretty girls as princesses, whereas I could only try my best to eavesdrop on their overt stories which also separate girls into two groups: the know-it-all and the trying-to-know-it-all. In this girls' society, the former is above the latter. It is another type of recognition.

During middle school, a boy would always point at my face and pose this cruel question: have you ever noticed that you are ugly? During those years, which were crucial for me to develop self-awareness, I did not receive any compliments on my appearance but only 'have you ever noticed that you are ugly?' Although we girls grew up over time, the structure of that pettiness did not change until university, where good-looking girls still

enjoyed the spotlight. It is just that affection was no longer kept a secret because universities allow students to have girlfriends and boyfriends. Still, nothing much changed for me. Even though almost immediately after high school graduation, I bought many dresses and had a perm with the wish that I would start a romantic relationship at university, it changed nothing. And yes, I did start a romantic relationship. But the relationship did not give me the validation I craved. Instead, it added to my self-doubt and the insecurity of my looks. I was compared to the girl he had once chased after in high school, and I was told that he had lowered his standards just in order to have a girlfriend. Suddenly, all those terrible memories came back to me. I was again interrogated by the voice, 'have you ever noticed that you are ugly?'

I lost heart after breaking up with him, as the 'me' when I was with him, was already a polished one that spared no effort to leave her 'ugly' cocoon with a new hairstyle, slimmer shape and refined makeup, that unfortunately became smeared by tears from the vain attempt to be beautiful. In fact, all my endeavours to be beautiful are linked with men and their evaluations, because I wanted to find a partner. So I tried my best to please them in the most 'superficial' way - yet still, I failed.

Since I could only perceive that the rules of relationships enshrined beauty from my past, I could not fathom one while being told that I was ugly. I decided to give up and prepare myself to be single forever. I had arrived at another extreme. No more makeup or dressing-up. I did not buy any new clothes except for some essentials during the last two years at university, and I found that no makeup was good for the library. Usually I would stay the whole day in the library and take a nap at noon. No makeup meant no need to worry that it may stain my books or clothes. I saved the time it took to dress myself up and contributed more time to my studies. After obtaining several professional certificates in a row, I found a subtle change in other people's perception. A perception that was thankfully not focused on my appearance but my achievements. I even felt complacent when a friend told me she was envious of me. She was the girl who had been chased after by that boy who bullied me in middle school. Although I felt somehow liberated from my appearance because I became able to play my abilities and they brought me money, I was still trapped by this girls' competition, and this time I was the winner.

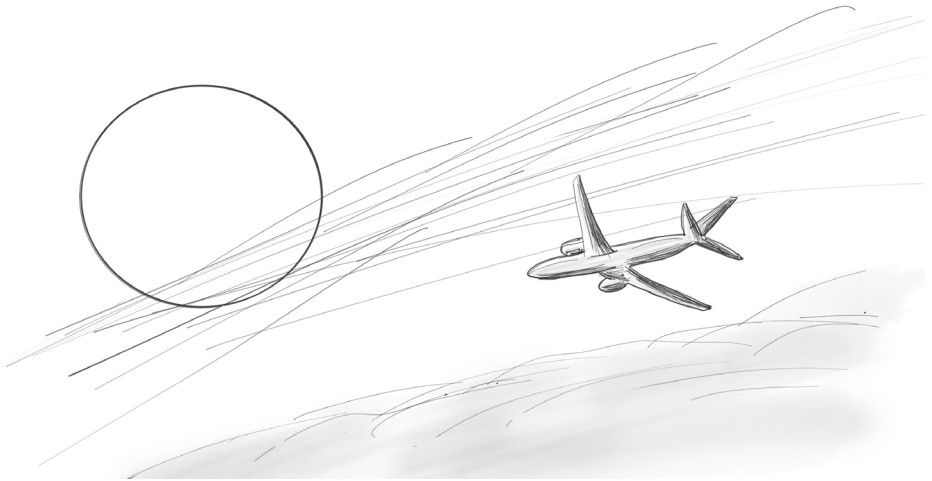
I did not know that I could somehow be popular among boys in the UK. When I first started dating boys, I told them I only want to find friends to hang out with, because I never thought my appearance was qualified enough to lead to something more. I was quite surprised when the first

boy told me I was beautiful... and then the second... , and then the third... , with compliments pouring in. They were British, Italian and German. When I talked about the flaws of my face and my figure, they told me I looked perfect; they did not even believe that I was considered unattractive in China. One even built an album of my photos in his phone. This shattered the self-perception that defined my adolescence. To make up for my non-existent beauty, I used to work hard to get recognition in other ways. But now I have been told that I am perfect enough by myself. Although I had been longing for those compliments since the day I noticed I was categorised as 'not beautiful', I did not choose to take their words seriously. I don't want to let the judgment of beauty whirl around me again, although I am the beneficiary. It is okay to not be beautiful, and this is my accepted destiny.

Over these years of struggling with being beautiful or not, and seeking my value from elsewhere, I have begun to view 'not being beautiful' as an identity, something that together with my other features distinguished me from others. This recognition from myself has empowered me to face the world alone rather than with someone to rely on. And it was when I chose not to care that I found out that the self-consciousness about my appearance never stopped its endeavour to erode my life ambitions, gripping my attention to focus on my face and figure, and that the more I tried to shape them, the more they shaped me and eventually pointed to an opposite direction, towards a future yielded by something refined over time and not the other way round. I feel lucky.

Zhuotong Hou. English has helped her shake off her second nature, one that is shared by most Chinese people – never speak publicly about sensitive issues. That's why she fell in love with English and creative writing.

Comic Strip



Metamorphosis

Story and Picture Collages by James R. W. Hayward

Life....

It very rarely gives you distinct direction.

One day you wake up thinking you know everything about you, your life, everything, then you step out the front door, and realise nothing is what you once knew.

But, the acceptance of this inevitable change, that is the key, the key that opens a thousand invisible doors,

Just like this.

Like a river, a constant flow,
people, trains, time, buses.
They don't stop, but go ever
onwards.



I am part of that flow, but I flow against the rest.

I stand out, not by necessity, but by choice, by doing what I feel is right, after years of trying to go with the flow, and finding that I wasn't happy.

It's an irony, how I go against the flow of the world, while always being caught up in it, having to join it in order to carry on.

But, that's the challenge, is it not?

The challenge everyday to be my best self, an always changing goal, in an always changing world, fitting in while not fitting in.



I'm not always like this. I choose when to be,
where to be.

She is me, and I am she, a secret between
myself and me.

Perhaps that is the best part of being in such a transient place, like the city.

No two crowds the same, no two days the same.

In a place like this, you don't stand out, even if you do stand out.

And thus, a door to opportunity, one of many is opened, one that I never had before.

People caught up in the flow of life, who see only what they want to see.

So, she can come out of her hiding place in the back of my wardrobe, and become one with the world, from far-fetched dream to reality.

I am not who you think I am.
She is not who you think she is.
They are not who you think they are.
But then, is anything in this transient place what we really think it is?
Do people notice? Or do people not see? Do I want people to see? Or am I better hidden?



No more hiding.

She might be a he. He might be a she. They might be a them. If what we wear defines who we are, then so be it. The consideration should be what makes us happy.

But like all things, the spell is temporary, and moves with time.

With a little make-up, some creative dress, and a lot of courage, anyone can be anyone, and glass boundaries shatter into tiny pieces, with the process reversed as soon as one requires, if needs be.

We don't have the time to waste deciding if we should be who we want to be, while letting life go by, letting the world decide how we look, what we wear, how we live.

We need to live for who we wish to be, and make the best of the time we have.



I am me, the one and only. There are none exactly like me, and never will be again, as time will show. Therefore, it's up to me to enjoy what I have, and blaze the trail for those to come in the future.

I am whatever you think I am, a he, a she, a they. I don't mind, whatever you say.

I don't mind, because time won't forgive me if I waste it waiting for approval that may never come.

Connect



thewellsstreetjournalsubmit@gmail.com



facebook.com/thewellsstreetjournal



twitter.com/WellsStJournal



instagram.com/thewellsstreetjournal

UWSU
UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER
STUDENTS' UNION

