

# NIGHT



WELLS STREET JOURNAL

the god of the sun is my father.  
he warms the fields with his almighty  
glow. burnt orange dew  
drops laze upon unripe raw  
stems of the feathered rice plants  
he beckons to grow.

seven horses bow down as he rises.  
refractions bubble up like quartz prisms through  
glass. he reigns destruction with fire  
and his embers can  
blind but the lotus soothes  
out his wrath.

my father named me after darkness.  
he saw the shadows that follow where i go.  
One

Two  
Three  
Four  
they never leave me alone.

my ancestors constructed me like the temples.  
under ancient caves that they carved out of  
stone. charred cinder blocks form my  
body like jagged keloid scars  
i hide and remain safely unknown.

he tells me i'm a reflection of his greatness  
my full moon only shines from his  
glare. the night was created  
to highlight his  
virtue though my beauty  
radiates everywhere.

my fathers limbs were forged into weapons. they scorched him  
as they prayed by his feet. i looked to the sky  
as day turned to night  
and felt his power rise and illuminate within me.

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University of Westminster

**Rajani Adhikari**

surya

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**About**

The Wells Street Journal is a London-based biannual literary anthology of poetry, prose, fiction, and non-fiction run by the University of Westminster's Creative 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 from a wide range of locales and experiences.



# Luwan Wang



## Fully Clothed

Our relationship only existed at night. The first time I went to his apartment, I expected something would happen because I really liked him. At the same time, I knew he didn't like me back. But I was still obsessed with the stubble he had, his fluffy hair, and the mint flavoured shampoo he used. We sat on his bed and watched a film. To make us feel like in a cinema intentionally, we turned the light off. I could only see the screen, and his face seemed gilded reflecting the light from the screen, bright and soft. Then everything happened all suddenly and naturally. We kissed. My reason was eventually conquered by my desire. We rolled on the bed. I didn't know who turned the lights on again in his room. I looked at the white and bright light on the ceiling; it made midnight look like morning. 'What are we?' I couldn't help asking. 'Aren't we friends?' He murmured and then fell asleep deeply. I touched his hair and felt like he was a docile and soft sheep under my palm. The next morning, I was woken up by the sunshine and the birds' chirps. I wanted to say something to him, but he asked me to leave



before his flatmates got up. Over and over again, our relationship started at night and ended in the morning. He didn't want anyone to know about us, so I had to pretend we were only friends in front of our mutual friends. We always met up and hung out at night. I saw him drinking, talking, and socialising with other people. He sometimes played jokes, sometimes being sweet to pour alcohol for everyone, but he never gave me an extra glance as if I was also one of his normal friends. He was a gifted actor and always acted decent and natural. I had a strong impulse to expose him. Why would I have to keep this secret? But maybe I should have been satisfied. At least he belonged to me at night. I was the only person who could see him sweating and hear his deep breath in the dark. I was different from all of them.

I tried to ask him out during the daytime. I imagined that we'd grab a coffee together in a corner on the street, we'd go to the supermarkets and decide what to cook for dinner, we'd go to an art gallery and talk about our favourite works. But he never said 'yes'. He either refused me by being busy or avoided answering me. For a long time, I let myself indulge in those dreams I weaved, and in these dreams, the sunshine was always bright enough to make me unable to open my eyes, and warm enough to make me melt. 'Probably we could go to a cinema,' He suggested. 'In an afternoon?' He was silent. Then I said no. A cinema is also a huge simulator of night. People barely see anything there, so they can touch each other without courage; the secretive feelings are conveyed by their fingers. Couples kiss in the dark and think no one can see them. It's like an unreal dream. Whether it's sweet or horrible, it ends once you go out of there. It's nothing different from me staying in his room. No one understood my feelings, not even my friends. They didn't know why I stuck myself in this relationship willingly with him. I knew I was expecting something. I expected more.

One day I was home alone watching BoJack Horseman at night. Bo-Jack tells Wanda: 'We already had sex, but I still want to spend time with you. I want to do things with you. Fully clothed, sober, in daylight hours.' I felt there was a tepid liquid dropping out of my eyes in the dark. I didn't want to pretend nothing happened between us anymore; I didn't want him to use 'we're only friends' as an excuse anymore...

He finally told me he was only interested in hooking up.

I tried to wake myself up from this sweet dream, but I missed him so much, so we took all our clothes off in his black room again. I lost count of how many times it was, but I was familiar with everything there already. I closed my eyes and mapped his room in my mind: he was used to putting the glass on his desk, he kept an old laptop in the second drawer of the bedside table, and there was a poster on the right wall... I opened my eyes, it was still black, but I tried to read the letters on that poster. I tried to remember everything for the last time.

The next morning, the weather became chilly. I asked him if he could lend me a coat and walk me home, even if I knew he wouldn't want other people to see us. But he said okay, for a reason that I didn't know.

I wore his coat; it was long and big and it was like a boyfriend-style coat for me. I enjoyed the warmth and the fresh scent of it and I wanted to keep it forever. But I had to take it off on the street corner, and was going to walk the rest of the way myself.

He started judging me all of a sudden.

He blamed me for not being a good person and not making him happy. I couldn't believe what I heard and started shivering because of the coldness. I tried to prove myself and explain to him but he didn't understand me at all. Then I cried. At the same time, lots of people and cars passed by us. They might have thought we were only a couple who argued on the street.

Suddenly, I was wakened up. I didn't want to say anything else to prove or explain myself anymore 'Bye-bye.' I said, and gave him a hug. I felt more free than ever.

He was hesitant for a while, and then hugged me back.

The scene overlapped with the scene that I imagined a thousand times being with him: we hugged as a couple on the street in the daytime and under the bright and warm sunshine; we weren't afraid to be seen by anyone. And we were fully clothed.

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# The Call

Bruises swelled among the heavens as the day's lustre tarnished with clouds of age. And while the moon suffocated in silent obscurity, I pickled stale thoughts in my mind. Night's nadir approached, and I faltered, tripping blindly into a shallow dream, but moments later, a blazing brilliance pierced my febrile slumber. As I started, I caught a preternatural halo creeping at the four corners of the frayed blind hung limply before my window. Its blanched synthetic light resonated ominously, writhing at the edge of darkness. As it danced with the gloom, it taunted and beckoned me to join it. Flickering with skittish impatience, it waited, coaxing me from beyond the window's dark silhouette. I resisted the deep urge to move, and soon to my relief, the presence retreated, skulking morbidly back into blackness. Instantly the room shrunk, and I fell once more through unlit freefall into a fitful sleep. But the fragile silence soon shattered with the piercing scream of a juvenile fox. In an instant, the halo reappeared, clawing and reaching out toward me with a multitude of silvered tendrils. Frozen in fear, I stared at the apparition until my gaze sheared with the blinking of my eyes. And then when I dared to open them, the white phantom had once again gone. But this time, its blinding silhouette remained with me, imprinted in brilliant colour over my vision.

Slowly the colour began to fade as rapid footsteps filled my ears, paced in perfect synchronicity with the swift beat of my startled heart. Until finally, a veil of darkness dropped, and the silent creeping shadow of hope began tiptoeing through the pitch of night. And as it did, I whispered a supplicant's prayer, pleading for an end to these everlasting nightly invasions. And perhaps someday soon, serenity's arms will finally embrace me and grant my freedom, as I listen for the sweet sound of the sickle's call... That, or I suppose, I could just replace the faulty security light outside my bedroom window.

# Iain Pinn

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# Watching a Nation Fall Through a TV

On the night of the 9th November 1989, people's lives in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) changed. For 45 years, the German People they were cut off from the rest of Germany, the wealth that West Germany kept accumulating under a capitalist system, and their families. Then, suddenly, a politician made a mistake, revealing information that was not yet official. In response, the citizens of the GDR went to the borders, demanding to be let through.

In Berlin, the wall fell.

I call my grandparents from London. I ask them if they would tell me about a time that I didn't live through, to tell me their experiences, their feelings. They still live in the town they grew up in. A town where they worked, got married, and had two children. They even live in the same flat. I grew up in that town, and even that flat too. I ate lunch there at 11 am every week for years. And yet, when I look at 40-year-old pictures of that town, that flat, I only recognise only a fraction of what was once there. Because that is not my town, but it is my grandparents', and listening to them for over an hour makes me realise how much they loved it.

While big East German cities, like East Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden experienced demonstrations, Rochlitz, Saxony, was a quiet place. Although my grandfather admits that a couple of people walked through the town, putting candles in front of the Stasi (Staatssicherheit: state security), the revolutionary spirit never quite arrived – at least not for my grandparents. They told me that, unlike other people, they didn't have the desire to leave for the West. Emigrating (or, more realistically, fleeing) is unsinnig, was something they never even thought about it. They were happy: they had everything they needed. As happy citizens and because they never didn't express dissent, they weren't watched by the government (of course, as everyone, they were watched by an IM (unofficial collaborator), as it was the norm the custom was for neighbours to spy on each other). And yet, when they watched the events unfold on that 9th of November, something changed.

It started with a sit-in in the West German embassy in Prague, Czech Republic. As my grandparents tell me, thousands of people went to the embassy, a big villa, opulent and completely unreachable.



# Paula Stäbler

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able, protected behind a fence. They stayed there for weeks. As it was West German terrain, it was their government they addressed. Their aim was to be able to leave the GDR. On the 30th of September 1989, they left via Sonderzüge (special trains), driving through GDR train stations where people were waiting to jump up. There were so many people that authorities had to intervene and move/disperse them, as the train wouldn't have been able to pass. Everyone wanted to leave, by any means necessary.

In the following weeks, under pressure from the continued demonstrations more people demonstrating, the East German government discussed a change in current governance/government., New laws around emigration, and freedom of travel were proposed. Throughout the day, radio hosts would announce press conferences in the evening, and so my grandparents deliberately turned on their TV. On the 9th of November, Günter Schabowski, the Secretary of Information, announced, to the surprise of everyone, that permanent emigration was now possible. After exclamations and questions from many reporters, he started

reading from the new law, startled that they hadn't received a copy. My grandfather tells me Schabowski hat's selber gar nicht so richtig begreifen können, he couldn't believe it himself, stumbling over his words, pausing when asked if this would take effect immediately. When I watch a video of that press conference now, I can imagine how my grandparents felt. It was sudden, and Schabowski's stuttering – Das trifft nach meiner Kenntnis – ist das sofort, unverzüglich (“as far as I know – this takes effect immediately, promptly”) – almost undermined the importance of this life- and nation-changing announcement, but somehow my grandfather can still quote him word for word.

How does one do you react to this? All of a sudden, you are allowed to cross the border, the border that was closed for decades, the border the government forbid/forbade you to cross regardless of reason even if you had relatives on the other side. My grandparents didn't move. They were shocked. Overwhelmed. Speechless. Stunned into inaction by this spontaneous decision. They continued watching the broadcast. Schabowski triggered

a mass of people swarming towards their nearest border crossing, demanding to be allowed to cross. They were met with yet another surprise: the border guards didn't know. Schabowski shared information with the public that authorities weren't aware of. Instead of celebration, the streets were filled with more confusion, more tension. My grandparents still sat on their couch, just watching. Watching as people were finally let out. Watching as people fell into the arms of West Germans who welcomed them with a pat on the shoulder. Watching as the Blechlawine, an avalanche of Trabant cars, rushes over the border.

When I first asked my grandparents to have a conversation with them, I felt anxious. Maybe they didn't want to talk to me about it. I had never asked them for help with an article: they would be my source and my subject, and I was afraid it would somehow change our relationship. Of course, I shouldn't have been anxious as my grandparents are not only great people who love to help their granddaughter, but they also love to talk – which in this case is a problem. I try to corral them back to discussing the day the wall fell. They keep talking about the before, how the government forced them to cut all contact with West German relatives, about Klassenfeinde (class enemies) and Punktesysteme (point systems).

I love listening to them, I could have stayed in this moment forever. I am fascinated by the history of East Germany; it seems so distant and dystopic, and yet if I had been born 13 years earlier, I would've been a part of it. But I don't want to talk about the before though, I want to talk about feelings. How did they feel when a government official announced unrestricted travel, which then turned into a revolution of the people and somehow ended the existence of the GDR?

I said that my grandparents never had the urge to leave – yes, they couldn't but they tell me that they also didn't want to. They were happy with what they had. All of a sudden, their world grew. Suddenly, they could.

Schock. Überforderung. Wo läuft es hin? Was passiert jetzt?

The demonstrations, the revolutionary spirit – everything was about freedom, about a better life. Niemand dachte an die Vereinigung. Nobody thought about unification.

In the next weeks, millions crossed the border.

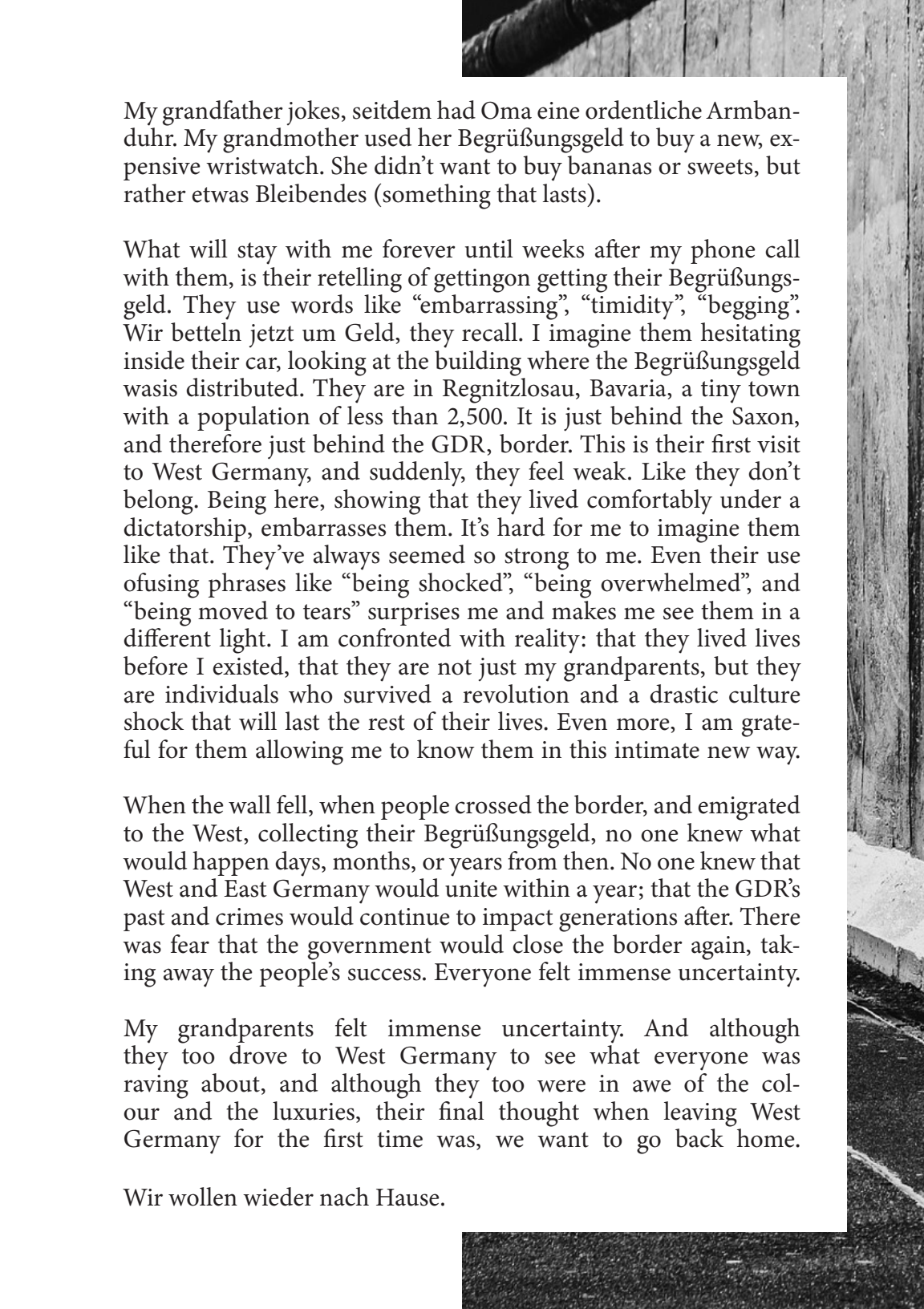
They crossed the border, being welcomed by West Germans and receiving Begrüßungsgeld. (welcome money). As the separated Germanys had different currencies, visitors from the East received D-Mark to spend in the West even before the wall fell. This was continued for a brief time afterwards. Not only did everyone cross the border to see West Germany, experiencing what had been kept from them for decades, but also for the economic benefits that awaited them in the West especially because of that money.

It took my grandparents weeks to decide that they would visit the West. There was no immediate urge; they didn't want to abandon their workplace, and more importantly, because so many were already visiting the West, the Autobahnen were full of traffic jams, some with families even having to sleep in their cars. My grandparents took their time, waiting until the streets were emptier. It was curiosity that eventually drove them to go. They had heard so much from colleagues and friends and, finally, wanted to see it for themselves.

They tell me they were still overwhelmed. Wir waren fast zu Tränen gerührt ("we were almost moved to tears"), they told me, als wir über die Grenze gefahren sind ("as we crossed the border").

Imagine this moment.

Remember: the majority of the GDR population didn't know what awaited them in the West. Everything was brighter; the houses were painted in colours rather than their dull grey in the East. There were fruits they had never seen before, sweets not available to them in their countries, luxuries they could have never imagined.



My grandfather jokes, seitdem had Oma eine ordentliche Armbanduhr. My grandmother used her Begrüßungsgeld to buy a new, expensive wristwatch. She didn't want to buy bananas or sweets, but rather etwas Bleibendes (something that lasts).

What will stay with me forever until weeks after my phone call with them, is their retelling of getting on getting their Begrüßungsgeld. They use words like “embarrassing”, “timidity”, “begging”. Wir betteln jetzt um Geld, they recall. I imagine them hesitating inside their car, looking at the building where the Begrüßungsgeld was distributed. They are in Regnitzlosau, Bavaria, a tiny town with a population of less than 2,500. It is just behind the Saxon, and therefore just behind the GDR, border. This is their first visit to West Germany, and suddenly, they feel weak. Like they don't belong. Being here, showing that they lived comfortably under a dictatorship, embarrasses them. It's hard for me to imagine them like that. They've always seemed so strong to me. Even their use of using phrases like “being shocked”, “being overwhelmed”, and “being moved to tears” surprises me and makes me see them in a different light. I am confronted with reality: that they lived lives before I existed, that they are not just my grandparents, but they are individuals who survived a revolution and a drastic culture shock that will last the rest of their lives. Even more, I am grateful for them allowing me to know them in this intimate new way.

When the wall fell, when people crossed the border, and emigrated to the West, collecting their Begrüßungsgeld, no one knew what would happen days, months, or years from then. No one knew that West and East Germany would unite within a year; that the GDR's past and crimes would continue to impact generations after. There was fear that the government would close the border again, taking away the people's success. Everyone felt immense uncertainty.

My grandparents felt immense uncertainty. And although they too drove to West Germany to see what everyone was raving about, and although they too were in awe of the colour and the luxuries, their final thought when leaving West Germany for the first time was, we want to go back home.

Wir wollen wieder nach Hause.





**In Berlin,**

**the wall**

**fell.**


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professional writing at the  
University of Westminster

# Roberta Shavenko

## BONN(ENNUI)T

Bonne nuit, followed by a hint of a smile. That's how he would usually answer when he wasn't coming with me. He was sick of everything. Tedious illness I call it, or simply "ennui". He was the type of guy who thought he had seen it and done it all. Every night I would ask him to go out with me, with us: "Come on, we will have fun, I promise!". But he would get bored before I even asked. He got bored of me as well.

There was only one woman who was able to still pique his attention. She was tall and always wore black. She was persuasive, and so charming she could literally take your breath away. Mysterious, smart, unpredictable. The type of woman who you could never get bored with, and also the only one who was able to make him feel alive. He was always thinking



about her, it was annoying. "I keep postponing my date with her, I can't make her wait too long, it's rude." He would say. "Oh come on, please, forget about her. Go out with me, let's dance, let's spend the night together!"

He did, for a while. Even if with other women. But eventually, he would always end up thinking about her "You can't escape her you know".

So just one year later, on the eighth of June, he finally decided to go on a date with her. He came at night, with a stool and a rope, instead of a tie, and waited, until he finally met her.

To this day, he hangs with her.

I only saw him once after that. It was also at night. He was happy, I could see it in his eyes. I will always wonder if he saw me as well.

Roberta is a MA student in professional writing at the University of Westminster



# Mya Guardino

## Rituals

My god, it's embarrassing how many rituals I've done just to make you love me - how much sacred energy I've sent out just to have you.

I've made such a fool of myself, the moon has even started to laugh! Absorbing my wish, before squeezing out a simple "no." I can hear the stars crying "It doesn't have to be this hard!" which I know. I know it, I really do, but then she comes out and I'm back where I started.

All my 11:11's, 2:22's, 4:44's - I've wasted on you. Wishing for your return and hoping you'd feel it too. I'm fed up with my desires, exhausted by my wants and sickened by my cravings. My cup is too full of you, to hold anything for me. It's a shame how quickly I'll ditch myself for us to not even be.

Last night I wrote your name 10 times on a blank sheet. By 4 my pen grew heavy, by 7 it felt like a test, by 10 I knew it was time I finally put you to rest.



I Finally  
put you  
to rest

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minster

# Nemeche Blake

## MY OWN DEATH

There were two pieces of artwork that inspired me at the Mori Art Museum in Japan.

I initially walked into the museum smiling ear to ear, feeling lucky. It was an hour before closing so I had just enough time to listen to the 500 yen audio tour blast through my red Blitz headphones. I tried to preserve a faux pensive look on my face as I admired all the art. The first piece to catch my attention was the literary composition “Human Dust.” It was based on a man’s life and the numerical value next to each of his accomplishments.

The next art piece “My Own Death” will forever be embedded in my mind. It was simply a small four wall room made from beige metal panels. It had one entrance and one exit and above both sides were a sign with English and Japanese translation explaining the artwork and what the artist intended by making this. As you walked across the room, one end to the other, you were supposed to think about your own death and all the other human beings that have done the same. That should be the only thing on your mind as you made your way across.

At first, I was stunned by the forwardness of the piece. I knew art was “deep,” but this was too much. Next, I was scared. Thinking about my death was off limits to me. I didn’t want to one day be fragments of someone’s memories; slowly distorting between what was reality and what they were able to somehow piece together. The time she danced on tables in Seoul until the sun rose the next morning. When she walked into a pole and chipped her left front tooth. When she got her favorite flavor ice cream, strawberry, and flirted with the cute young owner.

*I hated strawberry flavored ice cream.  
I got a chocolate vanilla swirl.*

I have only ever been to one funeral before. A high school friend of mine. He unfortunately drowned on Memorial Day freshman year. It was my first time even thinking about death. Not its existence, but how permanent it was. That one day not only I, but all my loved ones will be gone. That thought alone sent me in a spiral of confusion and conflicting thoughts with no clear answers. Could I avoid death? If I prayed hard enough, could I save myself? Friends and family comforted me, reassuring me that this was just another part of life. Their attempt at consolation didn’t help. The day of his funeral, while I listened to his mother’s wailing next to his lifeless

body, I cried as well. Not only for him but me and my future loss and pain.

I stood in front of the open panel walls. Staring at the exit. No more than fifteen steps and I would make it to the other side. It was so close, yet I realized it would take all my energy to make my way across. Taking a deep breath, I lifted one foot to take a step forward and dropped it right back into place. I felt my eyes well up from my persistent resistance. Another deep breath. Why couldn't I go through with my own death? "Breathe in. Breathe out." Why can't I, at twenty-four years old, accept the reality that someday I will die? Damn it. I forgot to breathe out. The first tear fell on my cheek, and I realized that I was standing in this very public museum, crying. I froze as my headphones blasted mindless garble about how long it took the artist to be able to produce his work. Was this the true effect of art? To be so beautiful, so powerful, so frightening that I tremble in front of it. I wiped my cheeks and turned away from the panels, refusing to confront my fears that night. Refusing to confront my own death.

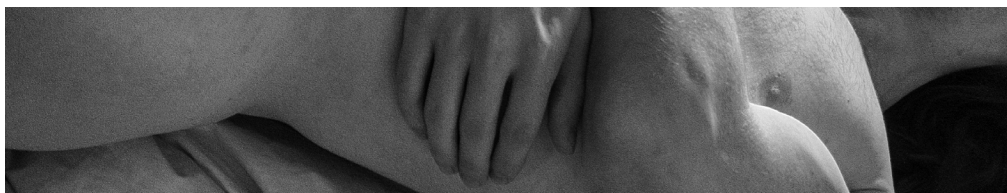
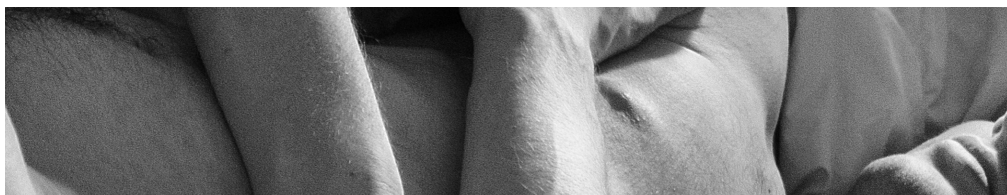
**'I hated  
strawberry  
flavored  
ice cream.  
I got a  
chocolate  
vanilla  
swirl.'**



Nemeche is a MA student in professional writing at the University of Westminster.

# **Daniel Ray Cuhen**

## Late Night Confessions



Daniel is a MA student in creative writing at the University of Westminster.

It's **dark**

The sink faucet in the bathroom is leaking

Drip  
Drip  
Drip

I can't sleep

I never can

However, tonight is different

I am not awake stressing over the things

I can't control

No, Instead I feel content in this space

*Overly excited (maybe)*

I FEEL WHOLE AGAIN

Centered around the decisions I have recently made

Decisions that were not based on things that  
should have been dead and buried long ago

Yes, I am happy now

I say this to myself again  
to remind myself that I am...

I am happy

Unwanted grey gardens now filled with delphiniums

*Endless starry nights remind me of home*

It is hard to see stars in London

I can see them now in the memories I cherish so dearly

Happiness, overwhelming happiness

I look at you as you sleep, peacefully

I am in LOVE.

# Valerie Paul

## Overnight Shift

It's three thirty in the morning and the clock matches the numbers written on the corner of each coffee canister. The morning rush will pick up in a half hour. I've seen only party-goers and insomniacs for the last two hours. That count includes my sole coworker, squirrelled away in the kitchen assembling breakfast sandwiches and icing donuts.

I cross the store, passing paper-wrapped chicken melts, a still-empty doughnut case, and the soda machine that has three kinds of cola but no root beer. My mask is full of the stinging scent of cleaning supplies, the tang of hot metal, and the leftover dregs of whatever snack I had around midnight. Tinny top-40s pop blends with the buzz of the lights overhead. Night doesn't mean silence here. The hours between ten and six aren't allowed to fall quiet.

The routine is simple: haul the half-full, three-hour-old canisters off their warming perches and drain them into the shallow sink. Watch the dark liquid swirl, ignore the caramel-colored pools that gather in the uneven corners. Put out plate-sized filters and three packets of each flavor, tops torn off. The scent of ground beans breaks through

everything else flooding my nose. It's much more palatable than the stale brewed soup that now drips through the pipes. Line the baskets with the filters and pour in grounds that look for all the world like fresh soil. Lift the canisters, empty and light, back onto their stands. Press start. Use a thumb still damp with condensation to swipe the numbers off the corners of the stainless steel. These coffees will run out before they time out, but I write the number on the corner anyway. It's routine.

It's three forty-five in the morning and the store is clean. Garbage is empty, shelves are stocked, creamers are fresh, and the tobacco display is as full as it's ever been. I take my break.

The back room is chilly, a reprieve from the heat that lingers everywhere else this deep in July. Nights are cooler, yes, but not cold. I pull a sandwich from my lunchbox, assembled hastily this evening because I took a nap after dinner. I don't like to buy food here. It's a mix of distrust, overexposure, and stubbornness.

Almost all of my friends are asleep, and I try not to bug the insomniacs too late in case they're having a good night. I add an opinion to an in-



ternational group chat, finish my newly available daily sudoku puzzle, and refresh all of my emails. I have no homework, no tasks to complete, and the buzzing of the lights clashing with the humming of the walk-in freezer forms a dissonant chord that empties my brain of creative thoughts. The scrap receipt paper I leave by my register for jotting notes is most often used to test my pens.

The boredom is the worst part of this job. I prefer it to the people problems of the day shifts, but those at least are all-encompassing and tend to tug the linearity of time into a slightly faster pace. Here, now, too far from the end to count in minutes but too close to count the hours, the clock crawls along like it's racing a snail for last.

In the well-lit storeroom of a twenty-four-hour gas station, I contemplate life after dark.

It's four-thirty in the morning and the flood has begun in earnest. My first regular is an athletics instructor, always in branded gear and making protein-heavy choices. The coffee cups of three construction workers land on the counter and I tell them their total in Spanish. Businessmen in navy suits blink blariness from their eyes as I count up their box of doughnuts.

The sun stains the sky orange, darker and warmer than the shade the hunters come decked in. The store's front faces southeast, the perfect direction for sharp rays to stripe my face when the sun decides to peek over the highway. Out back, though, by the carwash, the stars cling to the horizon I cannot see with desperate glimmers that match the trembling in my weary fingers. Shaking or not, I can key in barcode-less orders with barely a

glance to the computer whose screen is no longer the brightest thing in view.

Maybe morning comes early to a place like this, well-lit and occupied even before the earliest risers. Or maybe night drags on, trudging its feet until my coworker and I clock out sometime after six, when the sun has heaved her way into the open sky and the next shift of workers is mixing cream into their thermoses of complementary coffee.

The humidity hasn't set in. The world outside the front doors is warmer than the back room, but not as blistering as the blinding sun would suggest. I smell like frosted donuts, coffee grounds, and the sharp undertone of a flyover state.

It's six in the morning. I'm free.

# **The boredom is the worst part.**

Valerie is a MA student in creative writing at the University of Westminster.

# **Dominique Haussmann Gutiérrez**

## **The Night Cafe**

I had forgotten how it felt to think  
so much of someone new; my dreams were made  
of endless stabs that filled the place with ink  
but O, your sweet embrace, the night cafe,

the little laughs from time to time, were light  
reborn in me. The bloody gashes heal  
now you have come; more stars are shining bright  
at dusk that when I look it seems unreal.

Shall this illusion be just that? Alas!  
I trust not me to judge the thought of you  
nor right it is; to love the love perhaps  
and part in time if us should reach that doom.

I didn't give my lips your touch but O,  
how I regret it! Dawn be fast, be bold!

Dominique is a MA student in professional writing  
at the University of Westminster.

# Magdalene A. Bahago

## How beautiful can the night be

I wondered what the world would have looked like without the sun having to relinquish its hold on the sky. It surely would be a perpetual realm of unceasing brightness where darkness never descends.

A world without night would disrupt the natural course of life, and affect ecosystems, and sleep patterns. In other words, the whole world wouldn't have had the opportunity to undergo a metamorphosis. What about the stars? They wouldn't be able to paint their celestial masterpieces; their beauties and the restorative power of a tranquil night would be lost and this would automatically alter the balance of harmony that the alternating cycles of day and night provide the world. Also, Astronomers would've been denied the privileges of studying such beauties and wonders in the sky.

When I was a child, I thought that the night was evil because most narratives suggested it to be that way. For instance, it is mostly believed that demons attack at night, and robbery is also synonymous with darkness, else, who wants to be caught while deliberating deciding to do away with someone's belongings?

As I grew older, however, those narratives are being replaced as I think of the beauty and blessings that the night holds in it. The night's beauty, the calming influence of darkness, and the quieter ambiance contribute to a balanced environment. For humans, it offers a period of rest, deep reflection, and regeneration. Of course, not all animals are active during the night, but the night does offer rest and sleep to other animals.

In the stillness of the night, rich stories are told, deep secrets are shared, unbelievable confessions are made, and writers draw inspiration and pen down their tales. Funnily, I wrote this piece in the embrace of the night.

Magdalene is a MA student in professional writing  
at the University of Westminster.

# Jack Potter

## Samuel's Lake

Living in this eternal damnation is my heaven. I see a black lake, freezing fire, flaming ice, and solid mist across the horizon. Nothing is located here on this lake, but me; a hopeless dream motion, making it seem like I'm reliving the same day again over and over again; most likely for all eternity. Every time I hold my hands to the bitterly sweet wave of division, it's as if I'm mourning my own living consciousness threaded with inevitable scars. Placing myself in front of a mirror, I reflect my own dignity and magnify my inner desires. A sanctuary is what this place is. My lake, Samuel's Lake

Looking at the many slashes across my arms, my own life is stuck in the balance of a blood vessel and a sunken boat. I am the sunken boat latching onto the shore; I feel broken inside. I have a diploma in allowing my thoughts to overtake me, like a possessed ghost trying to claw its way out of a trapped body. My mind has already ignited into happiness whilst anticipating my negative thoughts. Loneliness holds me close, ready to take me down memory lane. I'm not alone. Like an unforeseen premonition buried somewhere in the wil-

derness, reality. Is the Angel of Death my saviour? Nearly dying, I've never felt more alive sitting above Samuel's Lake.

Trying to grip onto reality (which feels like nothing but a fantasy), I start to shake, slowly shattering, sharply suffering in silence, but somehow smiling as if I'm on my own highway to hell. My own judgement is clouded by the despicable morality which is suffocating me like a kid's inner demons in the closet. With my stomach churning, the moon dancing, and the sun suddenly vanishing like my father did, I have no reason but to believe that I will become real in my next life. Being the outsider, I might as well dress up in a way that stands out, (maybe a hippie to a funeral for example, which would get people to actually realise that I exist). But now, I am sick -- sick enough to let any negativity consume me here on Samuel's Lake.

Picture the moment you get trapped in a high school locker, fearing nothing but the air strangling you with everything it has. Picture the moment your dad argues with your mum, punches her in the face and runs off with a new family, leaving you like a piece of trash being tossed into the bin. Picture the moment your circle of "friends" stabs you in the back

and reveals some of your darkest secrets for the entire world to see. Picture the moment your inner emotions hold you at knife point, rejoicing in cutting the cords. How does it feel to let the darkness consume you? I know how it feels sitting here on the dock above Samuel's Lake.

In this bottomless pit, I once, just once, knew this girl, Olivia. The sun in her eyes told a completely new story. I loved her so much but and then she packed her cases and left me and never came back. Every time a tear rolled down her eyes because of the pain she was in, I gripped her hand, which was as fragile as a snowflake on a winter's day. It's as if I'm grieving for a part of me that died when she left. Everything is now lost; in the world - yes. In my dreams - yes., literally everywhere. Lost in the flames of the burning torment of this summer's day, I feel like a nameless day player because nothing appears the same without Olivia here upon Samuel's Lake.

Why is this called Samuel's Lake, you ask? This place was our second home, but she's gone and she's never coming back. Now she's an echo of the past and I'm just a walking puppet being played and controlled by an anonymous party. Am I really stuck in this time-loop in which my own existence is going to end up as perished as a vanquished demon? Normally what happens is that the witches say a chant and the demons burst in agony, (normally flames which is how I'm feeling inside). I feel nothing but pain sitting here on Samuel's Lake.

With my eyes gently rolling back, I start to feel a rush of fatigue. My head touches the ground and then the darkness merges around me. When my eyes open the next time, there is a glistening blue sky. Now Samuel's Lake is more dangerous. I get up to leave the dock and I see a man in the distance. This is the first time in a long time that someone's spoken to me, which instantly leads me to believe that there's foul play here.

"Are you alright?" the echoed voice questions me with a gentle deep tone. "Yeah, I'm alright," I reply whilst leaving Samuel's Lake until the next moon.. "Look after yourself until I return. By the way, who are you?"

**'I've never felt  
more alive  
sitting above  
Samuel's Lake.'**

Jack is a MA student in professional writing at the University of Westminster.



# Safia Wright

## Tormented Nights

Memories find vitality in the dark.

When the motion of the day comes to a halt,  
The peak hours of grief begin their haunt.  
Long-dead stars harboured by the daylight,  
Come out to remind us that they once existed –  
This is what happens at night.

The sparkling spirits of kind eyes.  
The shattering spectres of the cruel ones.  
Twinkling stars crossed.  
Supernovas of stars quashed.

Tiptoeing through mental passageways, recalling memories for dreams –  
Stumbling into nightmares, or so it repeatedly seems.  
A wronged ones' long-lost essence,  
Illuminated by the streetlight's incandescence.

Injustice can be seen better in the dark.

When the mind catches up to the axis and  
the moon surfaces from the mist.  
The peak hours of processing.  
When you can suddenly see all the signals misread.  
Only to discover what you really should have said.

More attune with the creaks of coercion.  
Wishing you could take back what you let happen with that person.  
When you can just about distinguish the ambiguous  
outlines of manipulation.  
And realise that the heat of the moment is the perfect  
condition for exploitation.

And so, we murmur to the moon.  
Scream mute soliloquies at the ceiling.  
To ghosts of conversations past.  
For all the questions unasked.

We lay our heavy heads on our light pillows.  
No longer able to suppress our sorrows.  
Our bed companion is Torment,  
Suffocated by words that carry greater weight than they did in the moment

# Darcy Morgan

## Just Before it Gets Dark

Just before it gets dark.

I was always told to be home before it got dark,  
before the daylight dropped and the wind picked up, today will  
be different.

I will face the chill that came when the sun went down, stay  
until the very end of the sunset; I often wonder what comes  
after.

Aquila watches over me tonight, her wings spread protectively  
across the night sky.

I'm grateful for her.

The moon will guide me across the path, along the  
stones and through the trees. I will embrace the fear of what  
comes after the day disappears.

I often wonder what would have happened if I had let sleep  
take over me instead.

I wouldn't be seeking the eyes of  
nature but instead the inner thoughts that dwell deep in my  
mind.

They keep me awake.

Just before it gets dark the world seems different  
in familiar places.

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professional writing at the  
University of Westminster

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University of Westminster

# Shelby Rodger

## Might Drown Myself

you think this is funny.

I'm moving with you in a basement that has  
ruined my sneakers and lungs,  
curling nearer to you so we can hold each other,  
so I won't let go of you. I couldn't bear to  
leave you to the whims of this uncontrollable current.  
let's do something stupid.

another plastic cup?

one shot,  
    two more,  
        three, four, five, six, seven, eight

another,  
    another!  
        another,

another,  
    another?

it's a divine miracle for all of us to be here together  
at the same time in the same place.

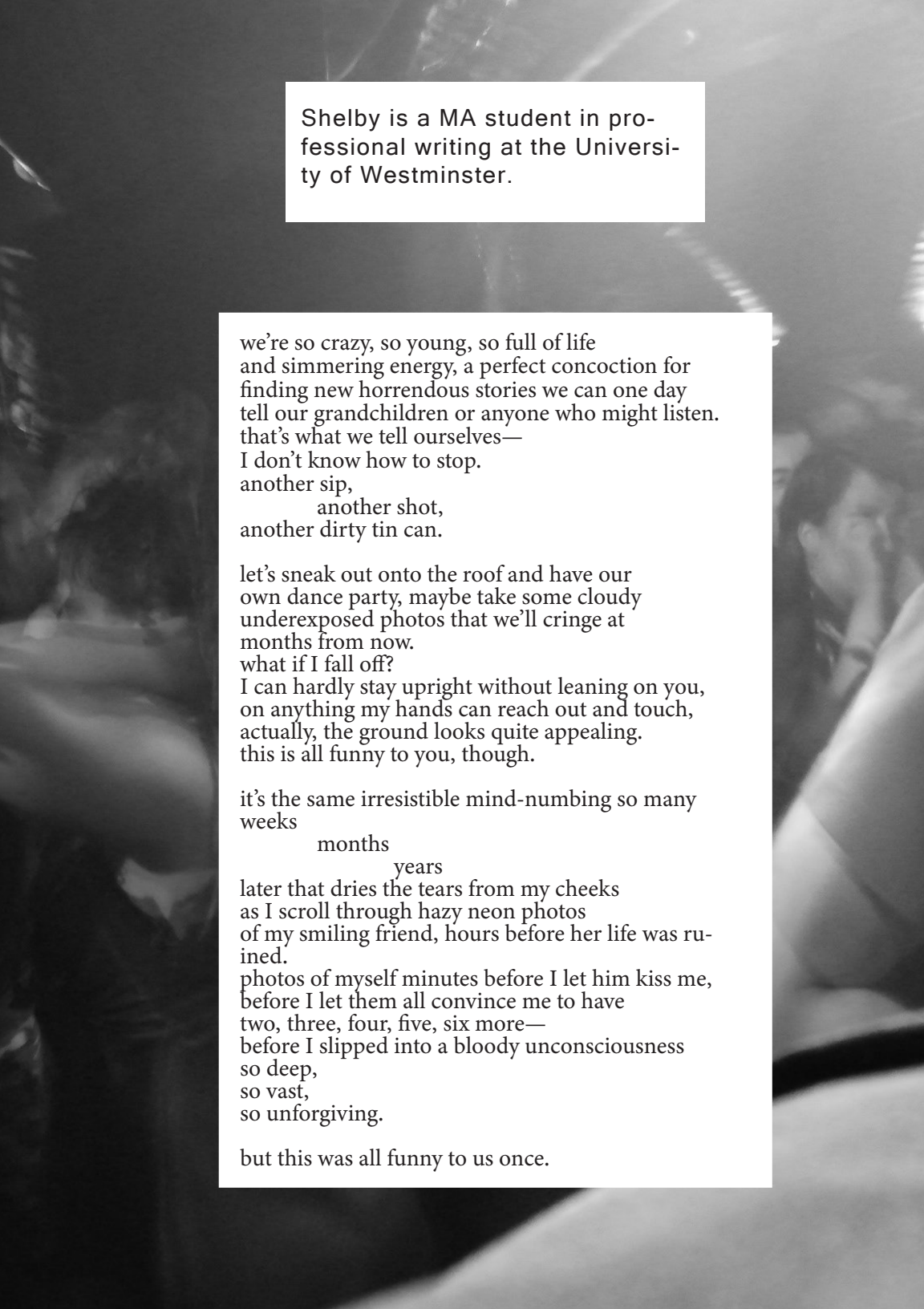
I don't know what it's like to have a best friend—  
you could be my sister.

I try to freeze the image of you, of all of us, these  
probing lights that shift from purple to red across  
our melting features; I silently pray that we'll  
remember this night for years to come,  
but I know I won't be able to stop it from

blurring,  
    blurring,  
        blurring.

I'm slipping away from myself—  
afraid to look in a mirror.

I don't know what I've become



Shelby is a MA student in professional writing at the University of Westminster.

we're so crazy, so young, so full of life  
and simmering energy, a perfect concoction for  
finding new horrendous stories we can one day  
tell our grandchildren or anyone who might listen.  
that's what we tell ourselves—

I don't know how to stop.

another sip,

another shot,

another dirty tin can.

let's sneak out onto the roof and have our  
own dance party, maybe take some cloudy  
underexposed photos that we'll cringe at  
months from now.

what if I fall off?

I can hardly stay upright without leaning on you,  
on anything my hands can reach out and touch,  
actually, the ground looks quite appealing.  
this is all funny to you, though.

it's the same irresistible mind-numbing so many  
weeks

months

years

later that dries the tears from my cheeks  
as I scroll through hazy neon photos  
of my smiling friend, hours before her life was ruined.

photos of myself minutes before I let him kiss me,  
before I let them all convince me to have  
two, three, four, five, six more—  
before I slipped into a bloody unconsciousness  
so deep,  
so vast,  
so unforgiving.

but this was all funny to us once.

# Eugenia Sestini

## New Year's Resolutions

The champagne buzz hasn't worn off so I'm still laughing – I probably have a good forty minutes until it dissolves and my bloodstream is flooded with a jolt of sober thoughts and regret. The music is still ringing in my ears, that and the laughter, the fireworks, the teen-like whoops that now seem so hard to understand. A minute ago, or so it feels, we were welcoming the new year, and now, as I sit here, my forehead leaning against the stone-cold window at the back, my eyes fixed on the moving landscape outside, my mind elsewhere altogether, I feel that this could be any night of the year, nothing special about this particular one. Yet something must be special about tonight, or it would not prompt us all to behave so irrationally, to make promises we cannot keep, to put pressure on ourselves to feel festive with a mere three per cent left, June has taken it upon herself to watch over me so that I save and jolly and full of resolve in the middle of winter. Now my phone has run out of battery, and this precious leftover charge in case I need it, and I am not allowed to go online until I am at home and the phone is plugged to a charger. "Please, June," I pretend-implore, pouting like a toddler, then laugh; June shakes her

head, and looks out the window too. I think she is smirking or maybe she really wants to let out a very loud laugh but keeps it in with the self-control of someone who has had three glasses of champagne less than me.

Or maybe she is trying to suppress a loud laugh because June, unlike me, doesn't know how to have fun. Live a little. It's a new year, for god's sake. Oh well. Well played, June. I'm sure her phone still has at least half of its battery life. I hate June right now. June has probably paid off all her student loans, which is why she can afford to offer champagne at a party instead of a headache-inducing knockoff version.

Another ten minutes until the driver drops me off at home – June has promised to walk me to my room, not just my front door, and will make sure I lock my door as she leaves. She has, however, not made any promises as to what she will do with regard to my phone. Will she help me find the charger? Will she stand by my side while I try to undo the damage already done? June is not a good friend, but she feels bad for me and I will let her pay for the cab.


I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Or maybe it's just one of the street lamps so that means we're close to home. And the booze is still



dancing around my body so my mind is pretending to be metaphorical. Light at the end of a metaphorical tunnel. Or metaphorical light. I have walked these streets countless times, but from the car they seem different. Maybe I won't be able to find that charger after all. Maybe I'll just stumble my way into my apartment, my room, my bed. I will let June look around the place and feel sorry for me once again, for the tiny room I rent and carefully keep untidy, for my inability to walk in a straight line on the first day of January, for the immaturity that permeates my entire life, while hers is essentially perfect. Picture perfect. Maybe I'll wait until tomorrow to charge my phone. Then go online. Delete that picture of me with June's boyfriend.

Good night, June. Happy New Year.

**'Or maybe  
she is trying  
to suppress  
a loud laugh  
because  
June, unlike  
me, doesn't  
know how to  
have fun.'**



Eugenia is a MA student in creative writing at the University of Westminster.

# Sylvia Amponsah

## Night, Literally.

I am afraid of the night.

Now, don't get me wrong. I like the part where I get to sleep and rest my body but still...

In fact, as a child, I needed people to be around me when I was sleeping, and it was always a nightmare to get up to pee in the middle of the night.

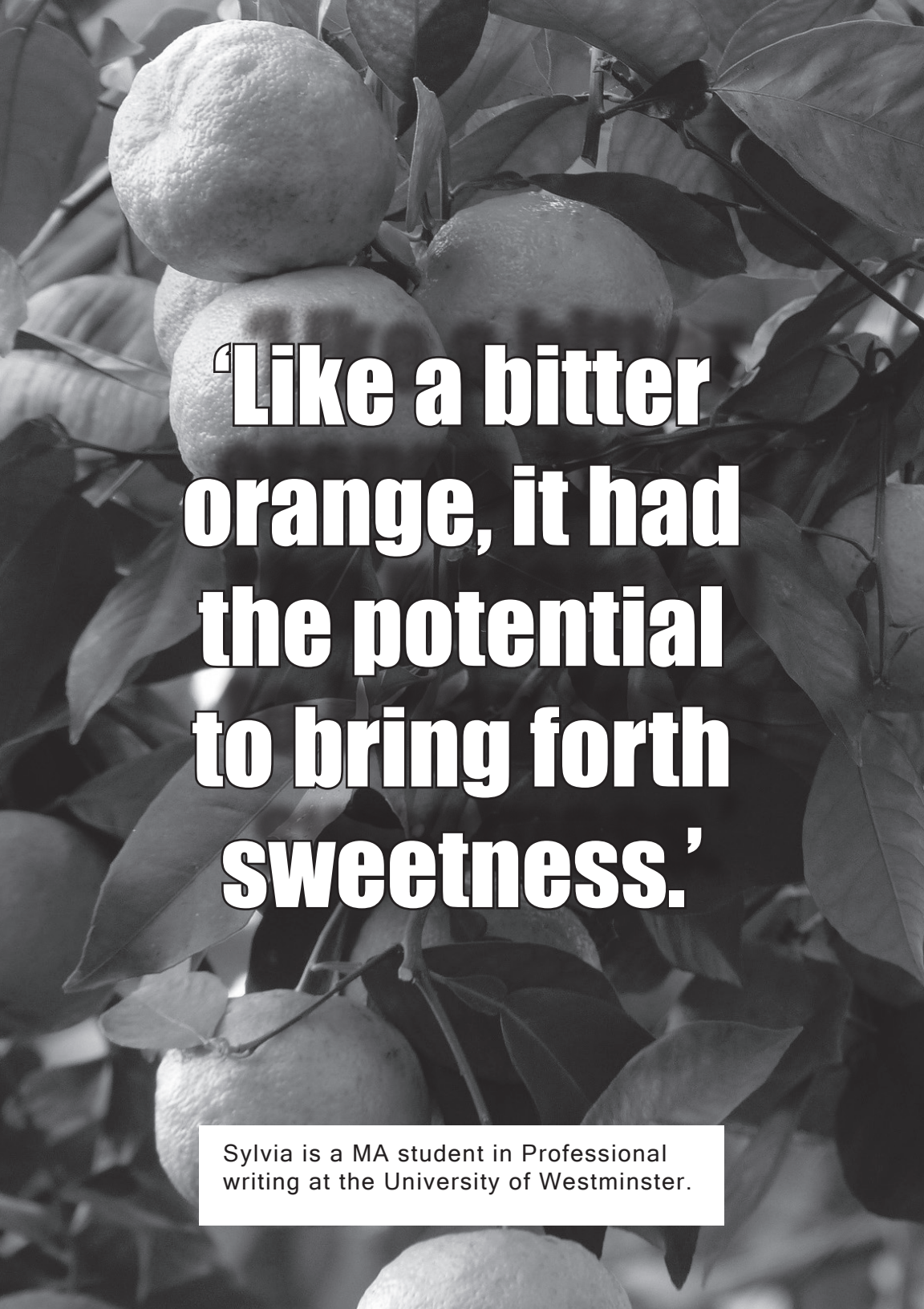
Why did I not like the night? Can't tell.

When I grew up, I realised that the night was not such a bad thing. Like a bitter orange, it had the potential to bring forth sweetness. It had the potential to bring forth day.

It was a good thing after all.

But just like I don't need a thousand reasons to like a dish that doesn't grace my taste buds, my knowledge of what the night brings forth hasn't changed how I feel about it, because I'm still afraid of the night.

Yes, even now.



**‘Like a bitter  
orange, it had  
the potential  
to bring forth  
sweetness.’**

Sylvia is a MA student in Professional  
writing at the University of Westminster.

# Lavi Bachchis

## Coherence of The Dark

the urge to suspire,  
beneath the twinkling blanket,  
festinates the RBC, with every passing day.  
the urge to cachinnate,  
volcanoes the surge to be free from all the pain.  
we, the youngsters,  
are crowded on the outside, but lonely on the inside.  
somehow boast comes first,  
so we have learnt the glib to hide.  
we deliberately look for truth in others, but  
do we exhibit ourselves without masticating reality,  
isolating us, we point out world's cruelty.  
are we any different?  
do we not lie about happiness  
i think it's high time,  
we fancy ourselves to,  
overcome this mess!

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sional writing at the University  
of Westminster.





# Eleni Karelis

## London Skies Aren't That Different

I've always felt like Orion is my friend, my lips curl around the words quietly, ashamed he might hear me.

Your laugh brings me back to a January night, mist seeping up from the bank and a quarterly chime punctuating your mirth. The chilly evening carries us forward, closer to our train, further from the water.

Rivers feel like oceans when night slides across the city, running in bends out to sea. I navigate my attention to the stars, to Orion's feet, his belt, his hands stretching behind the tower's face. He does not need the time, but he holds it there for me.

Born of the sea yet inescapably man, I feel as though he knows what it means to be pulled in separate directions. One hand in yours guiding me down the stairs of Westminster Station, the other gripping to the edge of the river, the stars over the city, an Atlantic shore four thousand miles away. There are no scorpions in London, yet I am also bound to my fate. I shove my hands into my pockets but follow nonetheless.

Eleni is a MA student in Professional writing at the University of Westminster.



# Marilyn Ama

## Interlude

Marta had been pondering the same questions over and over for weeks now.

“Why am I here? Why did I uproot my perfectly good life and move thousands of miles across sea and land to be here?”

Life...was...good back home. Or at least that’s how she felt now through the lens of her current experience. She had done everything she could to prepare herself for the lonely years abroad in this foreign country. Her YouTube watch history testified to the endless story-time videos she had watched about life in South Korea—the raw, unforgiving and unedited realities relayed by the other others who had gone before her. Yet, here she sat, in a bug-infested cold studio flat she rented, feeling more other than the others had described feeling.

For miles, it was hard to encounter others who looked like her. It had been months since she had seen another brown skin. Desperately searching for any string of hope to grasp onto, she had, on several occasions, mistaken some Koreans for others. This desert was beginning to play tricks on her mind, and mirages were becoming a common part of her weekly treks outside her flat. She had succumbed to ennui and despair.

ground her and help her find inner peace and happiness in the chaos. She turned to look for her phone and found it next to her laptop. She grabbed it with eager longing as a child would grab onto their mother’s arm amid a crowd and, clicked it open. Swiping through the screens, she landed on the screen with the podcast app and tapped it open. Pausing at the search bar, she wondered which words she could string together to populate the results that would help her in her predicament. After a few minutes of thinking, she typed in three words, “Peace, tranquillity, joy.” Twenty-five results. She sighed. Scrolling through what felt like an endless list of suggestions, she finally came across an episode that caught her eye. It was titled ‘An Escape.’ “Yep, this is the one,” Marta thought as she clicked on the episode.

“Imagine yourself walking, a nice leisurely stroll...” the podcast began. Marta slowly walked back to her bed and slipped under her duvet. The heat from her electric blanket embraced her as she comfortably positioned herself and closed her eyes.

The podcast continued, “You can keep your shoes on, but the ground beneath you looks so inviting that you decide to remove your shoes to feel the crunch beneath your feet.” She wriggled her toes under the duvet.

“As you step onto the ground barefoot, the invasion of sand between your toes immediately brings warmth to your soul. It’s been a while since you felt like this. Stress slowly begins to wash away. What was bothering you again? You can’t even remember.” She couldn’t remember how she felt a couple of minutes ago.

“You walk on, and with each step, your feet sink deeper into the sand, embracing your feet and bringing a warmth you wish could enshroud your entire body.” She felt her body sink deeper into the springs and foam of her mattress as though she was truly there.

“Somewhere close, you hear humming, gurgling and then a final gush of something that immediately draws your attention. You turn towards it and are amazed by its boundlessness. Parts of it swell up, towering above the rest, pulsing until finally falling back into sync with the flat plane. They come transient yet constant, creating an almost hypnotic murmur of sound and sight. They scatter light and yet always remain the colour blue.” Her heart began to beat in sync with the imaginary beat of the ocean. She felt sudden, inexplicable peace come over her.

“As you stare into the captivating light of the deep blue, some of it makes its way towards you, crashing on some pebbles not far from you. Joy washes over you as you watch foam collect around the pebbles and quickly sizzle away, leaving the pebbles brighter than when contact was first made.” Marta squinted her closed eyes as though truly looking at glistening bright pebbles.

“Captivated by this beauty set before you, you edge closer and plant yourself on the sand. You stretch out your feet towards the deep blue and feel it

coolly wash over them.” Her toes involuntarily jerked back as though cold water had indeed washed over them.

“Ahh, there is nothing quite like this feeling. A seagull cries as it glides through the vast blue sky above you. Life.... is.. ... good.” Marta did feel good. Joy, somewhere deep within her, began to bubble to the surface. Involuntary movements of the muscles surrounding her mouth formed an expression she hadn’t in a while - a smile. The truth was, she felt happy, and her body was reflecting this truth.

“Wow...” Marta exclaimed inwardly, “How can simple words affect me like this?” She had genuinely felt as though she was at a beach staring into the deep blue. She could feel the warm sand beneath her feet and toes. Her body shook with delight. This was what she needed. This is what she needs.

Slowly opening her eyes, she pulled her arms out from beneath the duvet and brought her phone screen closer to her face. Clicking the phone open and tapping on Apple’s internet app Safari, she typed in ‘Google.’ The words ‘beach near me’ looked back at her as her fingers tapped the letters. ‘Gyeongpo Beach, Gangneung’ popped up as the first result. It looked like the beach described in the podcast she had just listened to. She booked her bus ticket for the following day.

Stepping out of her taxi after arriving at Gangneung Bus Terminal, Marta took a deep breath, filling her lungs with the ocean air. She exhaled. No words could express the relief and overwhelming peace that washed over her with that one simple breath. The sound of crashing waves reeled her in as her feet began to walk toward the sound. Each footfall made a crunch owing to the brittle gold, red and brown autumn leaves that littered the ground. The crisp sea breeze met her

as she drew closer, causing a shiver to run down her spine. This was followed by an immediate rush of warmth, which surprised Marta, considering the drop in temperature.

As she neared the sand, she began taking off her shoes. As though possessed by the captivating ocean scent, Marta heard and saw nothing else but the soothing lapping waves before her. Her feet touched the powdery sand, and she felt like she was walking on clouds. The golden clouds of sand beneath her feet were a beautiful contrast to the ocean's deep blue. "As you step onto the ground barefoot, the invasion of sand between your toes immediately brings warmth to your soul. It's been a while since you felt like this. Stress slowly begins to wash away." The words of the podcast replayed in her mind.

She sat down near the boundary where water and land met and stretched out her feet. She leaned back, sinking her hands into the mottled sand, letting the sun's warm rays caress her face. This was home. Without warning, memories of her first few months in Korea came flooding back, inhabiting her mind. The tears she had cried, the realisation that she was truly alone, with no one to help her.

She had been under the impression that upon admission to the university, she would be appointed a liaison who would assist her in settling into the new chapter of her life as an international student. She had been wrongly convinced by the school's English website that there was a large community of other others on her campus. Still, at an elementary level of Korean, she had struggled to understand the various important documents sent to her by the admissions office. Papago,

the Korean AI translation software, and Google Translate were two tabs that remained open on her laptop.

The international student orientation was conducted in Korean and Chinese. No provision had been made for an English interpreter, and Marta had found herself lost in translation. She picked up keywords during the orientation and knew the information discussed was important. Things such as visa expirations and renewals, part-time work, laws she needed to abide by as an international student and much more. Yet, an attempt had not been made to ensure she fully understood. Her heart sunk, and her head hung low as she watched the confident nods of the Chinese students around her, chorusing what seemed to be an acknowledgement of understanding. Lucky them! The information seamlessly entered their minds through the medium of the Chinese translation.

This othering carried over to her social assimilation on campus. She was always the other. The moment she stepped out of her dorm room, she was greeted with various expressions from all the Korean faces that looked at hers, intently. Their externalised expressions engendered a mass of internalised emotions within her. Each day filled her heart with more anxiety, fear, disdain, anger and extreme frustration. Worst of all, she had no one to confide in or find solidarity with. Amidst the thousands of people on campus, she had never felt so alone, seen and yet so unseen, heard and yet wholly unheard. She existed much like tinted glass, upholding a façade of a calm demeanour as those who scrutinised her forgot that a person existed behind the bronze tinted glass.

The pang of sadness from the surge of memories ultimately brought her back to her current reality. As she opened her eyes and took in the beautiful sight of rolling blue before

her, she looked around and noticed that there were very few people. The beach in autumn was filled with tranquillity and stillness, a world of calm. The sun was setting. Here, in this very moment, the memories of the distant past could not overwhelm her. She was instead overcome with inexplicable peace and joy. The sound of the crashing waves, the cries of the birds above, the feel of the sand in her hands, she couldn't have imagined a more perfect moment if she tried.

This was her interlude. She had found her place of contentment, where her heart found peace, tranquillity and joy. As night fell, she stood and walked towards the sea, feeling embraced. She looked down as the waters rushed over her feet and saw herself reflected at the water's edge. As the sea rolled back out, they took with them her internalised emotions and crashed on the rocks, letting out a roaring surf. For the first time in a while, she felt heard.

**“Why am I here?  
Why did I  
uproot my  
perfectly good  
life and move  
thousands of  
miles across sea  
and land to be  
here?”**



Eleni is a MA student in Professional writing at the University of Westminster.



# Nadja Lima

## Solitary Confinement

Plaster beast sat on the lawn  
Flimsy gated, trembling wood  
Dwelling marked by sheer regret:  
Splinters, pebbles, plastic, soot

The square hole is haunted by  
Longing for untaken flight  
Beauty rests there, golden-haired  
Spoons past lips warmed sloppy dread.

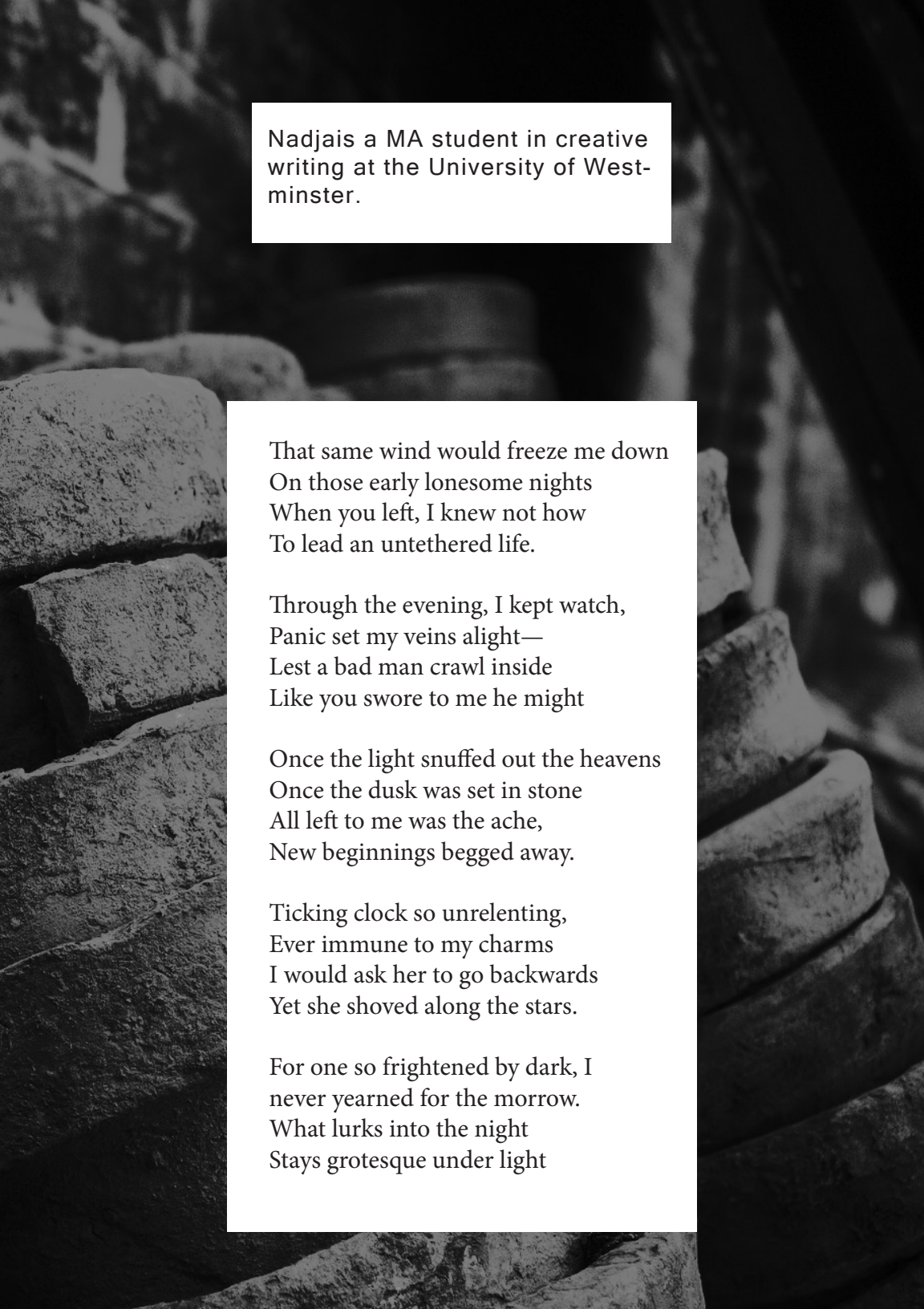
As the blue fades yet to orange,  
Skies pink, purple, then pitch black  
As the clouds darken to mist  
And the red satellites flash,

I bolt down the iron clasps,  
Frozen still three paces back,  
Eyes tracking off-white squared  
Doors, unsteadied by faulty locks

Rumbling wind sweeps through the nooks  
Of uncharted, unbraved lawn  
Rustles weeds unplucked, un-  
fulfilled oaths to the empty pots.

Lemon seeds and stems of leeks  
Half-submerged in mucky dirt  
Rotted down, encased in clay  
Watered by none but the rain





Nadjais a MA student in creative writing at the University of Westminster.

That same wind would freeze me down  
On those early lonesome nights  
When you left, I knew not how  
To lead an untethered life.

Through the evening, I kept watch,  
Panic set my veins alight—  
Lest a bad man crawl inside  
Like you swore to me he might

Once the light snuffed out the heavens  
Once the dusk was set in stone  
All left to me was the ache,  
New beginnings begged away.

Ticking clock so unrelenting,  
Ever immune to my charms  
I would ask her to go backwards  
Yet she shoved along the stars.

For one so frightened by dark, I  
never yearned for the morrow.  
What lurks into the night  
Stays grotesque under light



# Henrietta Galdunova

## Your beloved, me

At first, it was day. I pretended to be alright. Then...the night came. And I felt the nightmare coming.

Life.  
Love.  
Death.  
Memories.  
Emotions.  
Sadness.

At night, the reality punched me in the face. I cried. I screamed on top of my lungs. This couldn't be real. The deep sadness that feels like death. Blurry and shaky vision that accompanied my every move. My head... spinning. The never-ending headache. Everything just kept moving and changing. Yet, everything stayed the same. Emotions. So strong. Such a power they hold over humans.

I remember I decided to take a shower to calm down. It helped, and it also didn't. Sadness kept occupying my mind. My thoughts were pure chaos. They were all changing at the speed of light through my head. The whole night is still a blur. All I remember is too many thoughts, a headache and the person lying down in bed without any movement.

Out of all the days I have lived, the one my beloved person passed away was the most memorable. The most painful. The day I will remember forever. At least, I would like to think that. To be honest, with each day passing by, the voice, memories and dates are slowly fading. Memory... It is such a mystery. I want to remember every detail... but it's not possible.

Henrietta a MA student in  
professional writing at the  
University of Westminster.

**'It is never too late. Live  
like it's your last day.  
Get that yummy food.'**

After years, I still search for every last bit of memories left. I try to remember the person's voice. What were they like? Did I actually know anything about their life? They told me so many stories while I was growing up, but I can barely remember any. Did anyone around them know anything properly?

Day after day, I wonder what the person wanted to tell me. What were they thinking right before? Did they know? Did they want to tell me the last I love you? I sure would like to hear it. One last time. And I can't. I can't say I love you back.

Being young was such a blessing... but such a curse. All these years that I cannot take back. So much more I would like to know. So much more there is to know. But not anymore. No one can know more. No one will know more. So many regrets are left. You can try to tell yourself the person would forgive you. Unfortunately, you will never know. Never again.

Death. This part of life taught me new things. It is never too late. Live like it's your last day. Get that yummy food. Tell them that you love them. Nothing really matters. Just like we are born, we will forget and memories will fade. In the end, we remember the good memories. Or, what is left of them.

So many questions unanswered. All I can do is wonder. I hope one day, my questions will find answers.

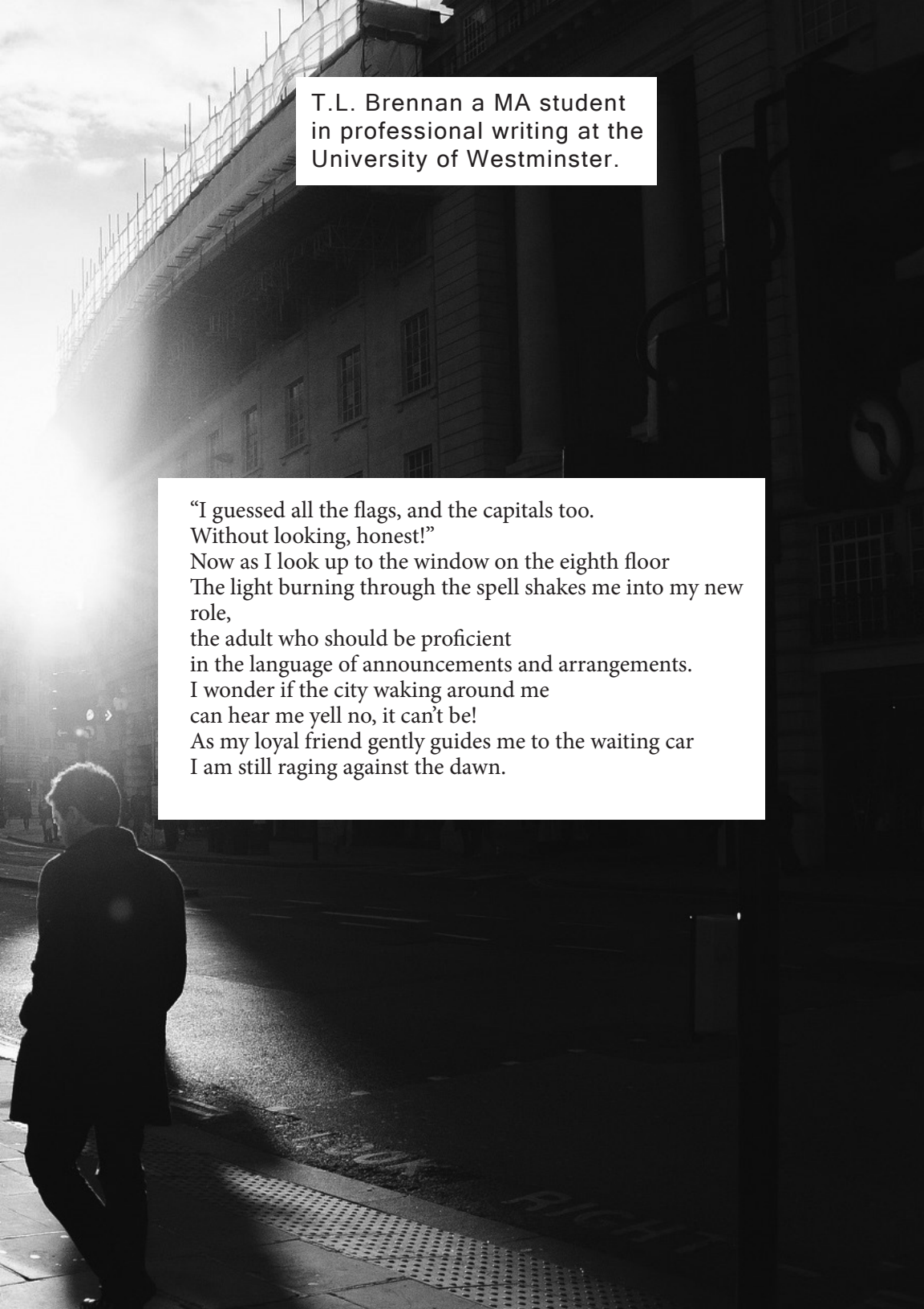
One day. When the death arrives at my door.

Hope you are doing well, wherever you are. With lots of love, me. I will always miss you.

# T.L. Brennan

## Solitary Confinement

I blame the dawn  
that shouldn't have shown its face at all  
and yet inexorably it did  
as I looked up, squinting  
against its onslaught, to the window  
all of eight floors above,  
the room on the far right.  
Excuse me -  
Isn't the dawn aware of the struggle,  
the metamorphosis that has just unfolded there  
with me as a stoney witness?  
From patient to body -  
yes, corpse - let's not mince our words here.  
The script of a death foretold  
in the nurses' nods and soft steps -  
and later in the futile flurry of activity.  
Afterwards, I was allowed back into the room  
to sit and cry and remember.  
Because the script could not be changed,  
the night kindly promised me to stop the reel  
at the last frame of the movie,  
with the characters forever frozen  
where and when the camera left them -  
say, forever walking on a dusty road,  
or - why not? - forever mirroring the stillness  
together in an eighth-floor hospital room.  
Under the aegis of the night I allowed myself  
to time travel in the only possible direction  
when the sky has fallen in and time has ended -  
to the distant call of childhood memories,  
pointing at an open atlas,  
when time and space were mysterious and endless  
and they were ours.



T.L. Brennan a MA student  
in professional writing at the  
University of Westminster.

"I guessed all the flags, and the capitals too.  
Without looking, honest!"  
Now as I look up to the window on the eighth floor  
The light burning through the spell shakes me into my new  
role,  
the adult who should be proficient  
in the language of announcements and arrangements.  
I wonder if the city waking around me  
can hear me yell no, it can't be!  
As my loyal friend gently guides me to the waiting car  
I am still raging against the dawn.

# Iliya Urazova

## Two Lives

Night is something you wish for and praying at day. It destroys you physically and mentally and you as a drug addict are searching for more and continue killing yourself. Night is not a romantic bullshit as many people imagine it or even dare to live like that. That's not funny and that's not a phase. That's a problem. How many of you had an addiction to something or someone that gives you a feeling of life and a slightly tiny winy belief in living like a normal human being with a normal human life. Funny.

When did it start? What was the reason to be up to midnight or sometimes even till the morning? I was living my normal life, but things have changed at some point of life under certain circumstances that made the living itself a completely unbearable challenge. What was that again? What was that... I wasn't always like that, I had hope and a wish to live and I was motivated to change things and become someone. And now night is my only companion and the witness of my downfall. I stand up from the bed for the numerous amount of time and go to the kitchen to take some water. No sleep again and yet you wish for another day and finally close that phone and get free. You are drinking water when suddenly something catches your eye outside of the window. It's something black as coal that scratches into the

window with the hope to be noticed. If it really wants to be noticed at all. You come close and then realise...

A crow flew away from the nest to take a long ride around the city. She was nesting for a long time and finally got a chance to stretch her wings one more time before midnight. Being a night bird she preferred to spend her the most active part of the day in silence, dark, and loneliness. The other reason that night gave her a huge advantage in front of these two-legged creatures. They are terrific. If in the daylight hours it was a bit challenging to grab a piece of bread or cookie from the tables in the cafe, it was not a big deal to catch it in the dark when night itself served as a disguise from others.

A crow flew away from the nest to feed and to rest, but everything changed essentially during her fly. Not that she wasn't a crow anymore or she got herself in some kind of bird situation. She just changed and changed her something in dark when nature of all living creatures is usually comes out in its true terrific beauty. A flight at the beginning has gone wrong when rainy heavy clouds covered the moon and deprived the only light that came out of the sky. The night city was ready to go to the sleep and the crow was ready to start her day.

By casting rare glances on the ground she noticed with relief some cafe tables with leftovers on it. Automatically the crow swooped down and froze. A huge black cat was sitting on the chair next to the table in a jump position and only by the total luck a crow was able to turn on another side on the fly that save her Little life. Unfortunately, cat was able to scratch her tail just a bit and was left alone in confusion. Another saved day full of danger and fighting for survival in a crow's world. She already flew away on a long distance to start searching for the food when she noticed some cookies left on the window. She started go down slowly with warily look around and sat only when it was completely quite. Her tail was still messed up and it was difficult to manoeuvre around the city so one more dangerous trip might take her life next time. A crow was pecking cookies when the window opened and two-legged creatures was looking at her. She could not fly away instantly since her tail was damaged, but staying terrified her even more. A girl was already stretching out her hands.

That was a crow. I have never sow crow's nearby so that must be from countryside. A crow that was completely different from others with those dark shiny feathers, strong beak and shiny eyes. She seemed to be on alert, but didn't try to fly away. And then I noticed her tail being a complete mess and I made a decision that changed afterwards both of their lives. I took her inside of my home and started healing her tail. Not that I am an expert in how to give first aid for birds, but I genuinely wanted to help. Even though a crow was trying to fly away, I was still trying to help.

After a while I managed to feed her and bandage her tail. However, it needed at least a week to heal it so I stayed all night with a crow and a crow became more and more trustful to me. And a week after in the night i let her finally flew away not realis-

ing how much that visit has changed my perception about the night and healed me from my addiction. A crow in return learned how to trust humans and that night is full of surprises. Not to mention that crow started visiting me once a week with happy corking, while I could finally feel alive and sleep well at night. Well, if you still have any problems or felling dismotivated or sad, night may become something you wish for and praying at day with a smile on your face.

**'night is  
my only  
companion  
and the  
witness of  
my downfall.'**

Iliya completed her B.A in English Language Teaching at Eastern Mediterranean University and got a distinction in a Creative Writing Masters there. She is an aspiring writer who is totally into writing fiction stories and novels.



# **Alison Marciana Pustai**

## **The Sun Burned My Fears**

I watched the sun burn my last tears,  
Its last ray of desire  
Until I was surrounded by the darkness.

I watched you go  
And the light inside of me evaporating  
To the sound of the night.

Without hope or shine  
I keep moving  
In the dusk.

Unanswered questions and a last goodbye  
I let myself tremble  
With fear of losing you for good.

So I decide to pull you back  
Into my arms with forgiveness and ardour  
And remind you of us.

To make you remember  
The night will pass  
But we will continue,

To exist, age and perish  
Together, until we're not  
Until the night lights the day again.





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# Elisabeth Connell

## 2 Dead Men Speaking

"I'm just not sure I understand what you mean," Will tells Alex, keeping his eyes fixed on the dark sky above them as his fingers tear at the grass beneath them. "What is it exactly about souls that you don't believe in? Like, why can't you accept the possibility that we have them?" Alex doesn't respond straight away, obviously trying to think of another way to explain his beliefs to him in a way he'll finally understand. Silence is the only one talking.

I refuse to speak first, Will thinks, continuing to uproot the small green strands for no apparent reason. It calms him.

"I dunno," Alex says finally after a few minutes of silence. "I just don't think we're all that important, you know? I mean, what's the point of living beyond all this? Would you want to stay alive somehow, even after you're dead?"

Will turns this over in his mind, moving his arm behind his head, allowing himself a better view of the sky. "Yes, and no." He responds suddenly, unsure of why but sure that it's true. "I mean, sure, I'm scared of the idea of nothingness—who isn't? But why would you not want to continue living, if there's something for us? You'd rather cease to exist completely—"

Alex interjects. "If – and that's a very big if – there's something else after this life, then what's the point? What

makes this one special? If there's a life after this one, then what's to say there isn't a third, a fourth? I mean, Christ, the first one's shitty enough as it is. Would the universe, or whatever you believe in, be that fucking cruel, to condemn us to not just one life of wake up, go to work, come home, kiss your wife, go to sleep, repeat, and all the other bullshit?"

Will winces at the thought of Alex going home to anyone else, let alone a wife. "I don't know," He admits. And he doesn't.

"I definitely wouldn't want to exist in that kind of way forever." A wife. A wife. The words burn in Will's brain. "But if having a soul means I get to create something bigger than myself, to take part in things, to leave something behind, then I think it'd be worth it. Don't you?"

He turns to look at Alex, the moon making his skin shine with a pearl pallor. Will doesn't like it. Alex doesn't look quite human as he gazes at the night sky and only his lips move as he responds: "I don't know. An eternity of the same life over and over, of becoming lost in your own consciousness, forgetting the lives before you? Why would life even matter if it ceases to exist anyway? Is that really worth it to you?" Alex asks him, turning his own question back on its head.

Will watches him swallow as he whispers, "I think it's worth everything,"

"I'm not being negative. I hope we have souls, I really do. I just don't see how it's possible." Alex feels bad for not understanding him. He feels like that a lot, Will thinks. No one really ever quite understands what he's trying to say.

"Okay, well then how do you explain love?" Will asks him, apprehensive of his answer, desperate for it to be the right one. "How can we love if we don't have souls?" He watches Alex working his jaw out of the corner of his eye, thinking hard. He always thinks hard before he speaks: Will likes that about him. Most people are too quick to respond to everything. Will thinks that's because nobody ever really has anything interesting to say. They all just repeat what they hear others talk about: opinions, gossip, ideas; none of it is ever original, so why would any of it require an original response?

Alex speaks slowly, choosing each word with care, causing Will's heart to squirm in his body: "I think we love one another and can relate to others through it because we all have similar experiences, and that makes us feel close to each other," He explains. Will likes listening to him talk when he's not looking directly at him; it makes him feel like he could be having a conversation with anyone, even though he'd know his voice anywhere. It's easier to be vulnerable with someone when you're not looking directly at them.

"None of us are really that different, and I think love shows that: we all live extremely similar lives and have extremely similar thoughts and emotions."

"See, but that couldn't be clearer evidence of souls," Will responds, getting excited at the opening in conversation. "I think we can look back two hundred years and read a book or

something that feels like we wrote it because we're all connected. How else could we possibly create anything, if not for the souls of people living inside of us, inspiring us, spurring us on?" He pushes himself up onto his elbows now, looking at Alex determinedly. He thinks that if he looks at him at this moment, he'll understand. He doesn't, though. His gaze stays locked on the sky, its blackness swallowing up his eyes whole.

"Maybe you're right, William. I hope you are." He says, and Will can tell he's starting to tire of the conversation.

"I know I am. Don't be such a cynic." Will replies. At that, Alex smiles.

"Don't be such a romantic." He says, but kindly, and with humour. Will smiles back. "The cynic and the romantic." He muses as he lies back down, fisting his fingers again in the damp grass.

"If there is a God, he's got a wicked sense of humour." This is all Alex says before falling silent, the sounds of late evening enveloping the two boys, wrapping them in shadows that hum with the invisible noises of the night.

Alex's hand twitches in Will's peripheral vision, and he thinks he might reach for his hand to hold it.

He doesn't.

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# Nagma Chowdhary

## The Silent Vow of The Fallen Empire

Let me tell you the tale of whispers,  
The hush of twilights,  
The winding path,  
The poverty,  
the pain,  
The endless drain,  
The fall ushered,  
uninvited guests,  
Claiming the place where summer warmth has been.

From the Atlantic to Egypt,  
the sand stood wide.  
The death of Germanicus stretched the land, where time  
and tales abide.

Giving rise to Caligula,  
the Roman Empire had its mad king.  
The empires, grand walls kissed fate  
Relentless orchestrated its descent from high,  
All the innocuous people had to die.

Turning the abode into brothel oak,  
Roman royals sexualised relations within their kinfolk.  
As the shadow saw the fall within imperial sprawl, The  
decline within the marbles began to fall.

The murmurs of tales echo ancient vow As the saga writ-  
ten is silence now.





Nagma MA student in professional writing at the University of Westminster.



# Pan Yuxuan

## Itchiness Lurking in the Night

"It is past midnight in the small but cosy student dormitory by Pitfield Street. From where I live, I can easily capture every pedestrian with my eyes. Even though it is late, there are still people drunk outside singing fragmented songs with a twisted tune. I can never understand the vague lyrics that pop out of their mouth, nor can I understand why the street-lights in London are always so bright even when it is very late at night.

I close the window and draw the curtains. It somehow blocks the sound and shields the light. Laying down and sinking into the soft mattress, I fall asleep rapidly before slipping into a state of altered consciousness. Every inhalation and exhalation transformed my body and soul into flowing time in the void. It seems that my body is floating in the air covered with a blanket weaved by the surrounding darkness. Suddenly, a sensation sneaks into the blanket and spreads out around my left nipple. The skin around it prickles and tickles, and generates an intense and fairly strong feeling I can be perfectly aware of - itchiness. Pulled back from the unconscious void to the sensible reality, I fall back into the soft mattress and immediately open my eyes.

Itchiness in the midnight darkness is the most obvious and also the most annoying.

Everything is quiet and serene except for the relentless, persistent and flaring itchiness that can never be silenced. Lurking out there in the darkness and waiting to stir me from sleep, itchiness is much like a naughty boy keen on playing childish pranks. I have gotten used to being woken by itchiness at night for the past six years, for itchiness has accompanied me through every day and night in high school and university, and probably still will the rest of my life. After trying almost every solution in the first three years - anti-allergic injections, doctor-prescribed creams, ointments, herbal potions, elimination diets, or even weird folk remedies, the itchiness has only been relieved but never disappeared. It has been reduced from an all-day torture to an intermittent and latent threat.

I first learned the word eczema from my mom during one of my middle school summer vacations. That summer, my hometown was burning hot. However, my father would only turn on the air conditioner when the temperature was unbearable because he believes that sweating in summer does more good to health than the cooling air produced by the air conditioner. Nothing happened until two days later when I woke up and saw that the skin of my father turned into a canvas patched together with cloth of two colours: pink and yellowish-brown. The white paint was covered all over the back of

his knees, the waist, the inner and outer side of his elbows, up to his neck.

Probably because the whiteness had weakened the visual shock of the oozing cracks and blistering redness underneath, I was more curious than frightened. I asked my mother. That was the first time I knew the word eczema. I also knew that it was a chronic skin disease bothering my father for a long time, and the so-called pink paint was one of the therapeutic ointments which killed the itchiness effectively but only worked for a short period. She warned me of his bad tempers during acute flare-ups when he would suffer from itchiness-led insomnia at night. So I made a connection between eczema and an impatient and hot-tempered father who I was always afraid of as a middle school student. Naturally, I tried to keep a distance from him by not speaking to him or locking myself in the bedroom when his symptoms of eczema were the most noticeable. The same distance I tried to keep when he was drunk, with a huge red face, extremely swelling eyelids and protruding eyeballs, easily irritated. It's like a time bomb. Once it exploded, he ceased to be my father but a stranger.

"You - the red, the overheated, the flaky, the splotchy, the peeling, the rashey, the inflamed, the irritated, the angry, the bleeding, the bruised, the raked over." In 'Ode to the Itchy', Andrea Goetz (2019), a lifelong eczema warrior, looks back on her itchy life and writes everything about eczema - the unbearable itchiness, others' misconceptions with this skin disease, the awkwardness of dressing when the rash is oozing and sticky, endless invalid treatment, and the fake reassuring smile towards people caring about her...

I still get every bit of her words in this witty, heartfelt poem and I am struck by its vividness and accuracy, although several years have passed since I found a similar itchy rash as my father's on

my skin and then was diagnosed with eczema. I have also gone through the same irritating flare-ups as my father did. Suddenly, my father and I became comrades, standing shoulder to shoulder.

Erupting without warning, the flares of eczema are just like wildfires. There were times when my father's period of flare-ups overlapped with mine. Once a sanctuary, our skin turned into a battleground where the lines between self and affliction blurred. The flames caused by the itchiness were invisible but fervently felt within our bodies. At that moment, just like what Ruth Holroyds (2011) says in 'StopScratching - A Poem about Eczema', the relief for this itchiness is pain from scratching. She describes the exact feelings of intense itchiness which conquer her mind and body:

The itch is consuming  
It takes over my brain  
My skin I am tearing  
The relief is the pain  
Thickened and swollen  
Red and sore  
Constant skin crawling  
I can't take any more

However torturing, these were the times when I understood my father and his past bad temper the most, and we were brought closer by the same eczema where we were estranged by. Human's vulnerability and weak willpower against itchiness do bring us together.

Unlike Andrea Goetz, Ruth Holroyds, and other eczema warriors who are brave and frank to expose their "scars", I have never initiated a talk with anyone about my eczema. Partly, it is because of the fear that other people may consider it as contagious. It is more about the site of lesion, or the infected areas. It is not the inner and outer side of the elbows, not areas behind the knees, not the scalp, not the wrist, not

those common infected areas, but the breasts. To be more specific, around the nipples.

Andrea Goetz is positive enough to compose an ode to the itchy. However, what she focuses on is the skin that can be seen, such as splotchy things on the face. She is there to tell people that they are beautiful, even with that kind of eczema. But when it comes to my type of eczema with sore itchiness around the nipples, the “velvet smooth and silky skin”, which conforms to the beauty standards of flawless and white skin, is not what I want to pursue. I just want to kill the itchiness in a normal way.

Although I have been fighting side by side with my father for the past few years, we are actually on distinct battlefields. When my father wants to scratch, he can just reach the fingers to “normal” areas that everyone would scratch, even though they don’t have eczema. Nonetheless, things get more complicated when I have to scratch. It seems weird to touch my breasts from time to time or rub my nipples with the clothes I wear. Besides, the protruding nature of female breasts serves as an essential prerequisite for the fluid from cracks to stick to my underwear, and any movement at this point will lead to a messy mixture of oozing and crusting skin with blood.

To avoid bleeding and hurting, in high school when the symptoms were the most serious, I gave up being the old self - a confident girl who used to laugh a lot and walk with her chest throwing out and her head holding high. I avoided doing vigorous exercise which I loved so much before, and stooped slightly to draw in my breast. I had to hide my awkwardness and weird facial expressions whenever my skin was tightly stuck to my underwear. The act of hiding and behaving normally took me too much attention to interact with others. Thus, in some of my classmates’ views, I was born to be introverted, silent, and unsocial.

Gradually, night, when I feel safe and “normal” to face my type of skin disease (scratch or deal with my infected areas secretly), has become my camouflage. In the dark, differences between me and other eczema patients and those between me and healthy people are wiped away. We are equal, free to expose our fear, irritation, and weakness - the weirdness in others’ eyes. Nonetheless, that is the authentic self - I, suffering from eczema on the breasts, stirring up at night for the lurking itchiness, and relieving it with the pain from scratching.

The midnight itchiness drives me crazy, but the midnight darkness reassures me. As for me, night is the best time as well as the worst time.

Pan is a MA student in professional writing at the University of Westminster.

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# María José Toledo Abán

## Wake Up

The shadow lingers on the corner.

You're back where you started not knowing how to get out. You can't get out. Your inside burns, it all falls apart. Your body trembles and your mind begs for an escape, but the pain has thrown its roots through your legs, planting you on the ground. Your face twists, and your lungs contract, until they go loose and you lose control. Wake up.

The shadow strays closer.

Its presence suffocates you. You turn your eyes upwards, demanding yourself to get back in control. Begging for it to go away, for you to find a way out. Silence hangs from the ceiling as air leaves the room. You can't breathe, you can't see, you can't think. You don't feel. Loneliness stands underneath and the ground opens at your feet.

Wake up.

The shadow holds you by the arm.

You shake your head, and your chest tightens. With fear of it letting go, with fear of going with it. Not knowing what's best, not knowing what's worse. You're now agitating, paranoid of going back to that dark and incomprehensible place the shadow promised to take you out from. Terrified by seeing its hand turn into a claw, you push away from it. Wake up.

You let go. It lets go.

You fall. It fades.

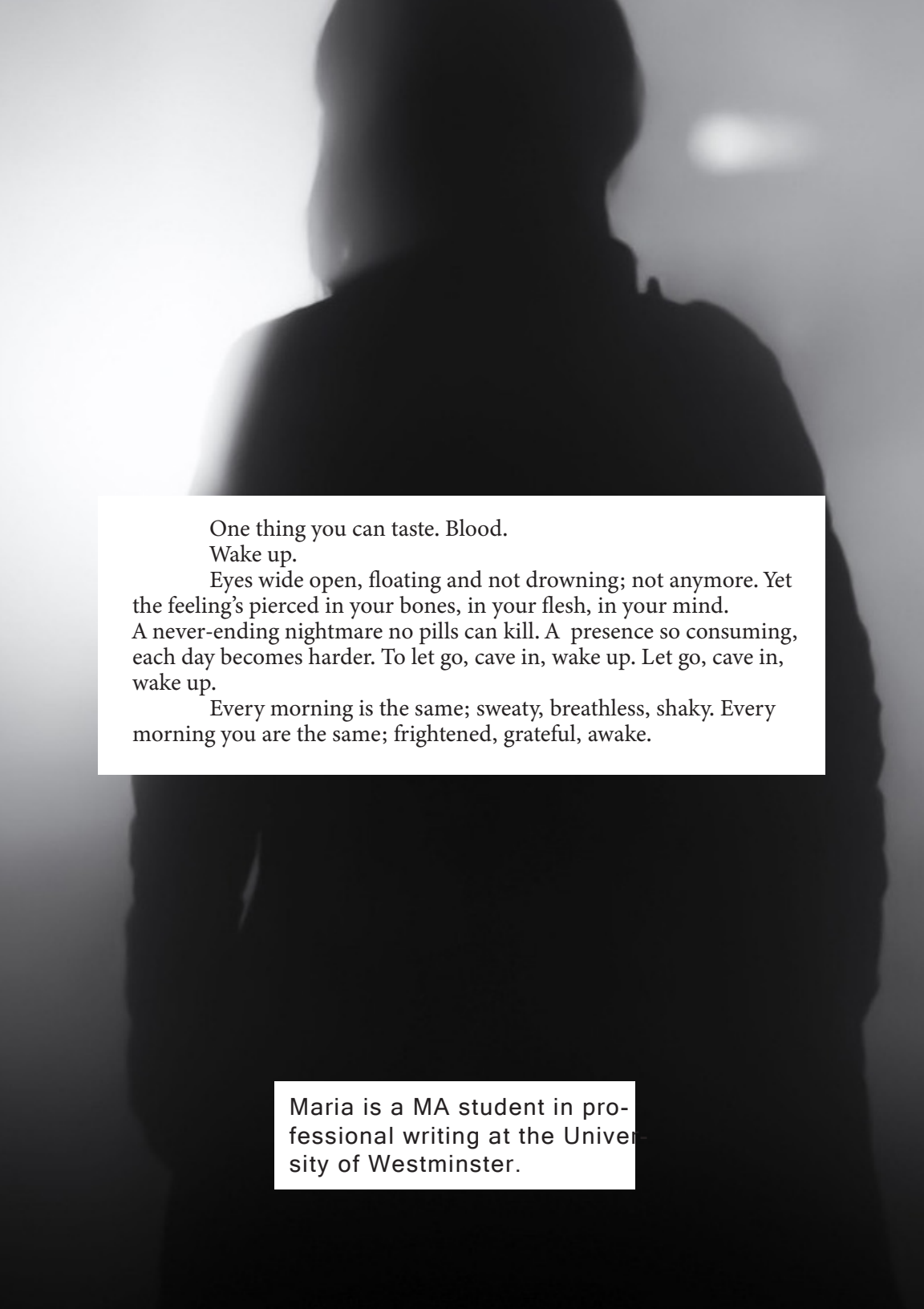
You're out, yet not able to breathe.

Five things you can see. Moon, books, pictures, a lamp, clothes.

Four things you can touch. Sheets, pillow, hair, wall.

Three things you can hear. Footsteps, birds, locks.

Two things you can smell. Sweat, detergent.



One thing you can taste. Blood.

Wake up.

Eyes wide open, floating and not drowning; not anymore. Yet the feeling's pierced in your bones, in your flesh, in your mind. A never-ending nightmare no pills can kill. A presence so consuming, each day becomes harder. To let go, cave in, wake up. Let go, cave in, wake up.

Every morning is the same; sweaty, breathless, shaky. Every morning you are the same; frightened, grateful, awake.

Maria is a MA student in professional writing at the University of Westminster.



# Kiti Misha

## Evenfall's Blight

The sun was setting on the crowded streets, an orange light covering everything and imbuing even the grey concrete with a semblance of life. In a corner of Hammersmith, the quiet residential streets filled with people exiting Ravenscourt Park. The clamour of the diurnal activities left a void of sound as people rushed out, and birds roosted away together ready for the night. The rising moon shone weakly in the smog-covered smog covered London sky, but where its light touched the ground, it revealed a wonderful sight: as human presence exited the park, an explosion of pale shimmering white flowers covered the ground. So pale and delicate that they usually go unnoticed and hidden by modern lights, they flowed over the trees, ground, and grass.

A rustling of leaves, and petals hitting the grounds, preceded the coming of a small creature exiting the shrubs. A humanlike small frame straightened itself. Its wings caught catching every light and transformed it into a magical aura, lighting the night around the small fairy. As he shook off sleep from his tired wings and numb limbs, the fairy looked up at the night sky. Searching in vain for the moon and failing, he sank sunk toon the grass and as he brushed his fingers on the petals of the delicate blooms a deep melancholy overtook him:

I wish people would always sleep, and

it would always be night, so I can hear the song of an age far gone even in the hellscape that's become my living tomb.

Sometimes, I barely believe the memories of the old days when the night sky shined so bright, it almost rivalled daylight.

Tonight, I sit in a shadowless tree, and see moths burn in the streetlamps thinking they found the moon.

I look at what used to be our home, the forest surrounding this town; when humans closed their homes for the night, my kin came out in a procession lit by fairy lights light dancing and singing under the moonlight.

The night used to be a happy thing because we gave a helping hand to ease strife and imbue new life.

However, sadly, it's not so today when my kin are suffocated with smoke and denied the bliss of a tranquil life under the starry night sky.

They poisoned our wells.

Killed every green space.

And lastly, they extinguished the stars.

Their faith diminished, killing our lifeline. By negating belief in magic, they cut the ties to the fantastic.

Tonight, as every night, I try to find peace in a hidden crevice; trying to escape the wall of fire that by the night grows more near.

A rustling of leaves at the edge of the park stirred the fairy from remembrances and nightdreams. As the comforting veil of night won its battle with daylight, a tiny creature dared to put his nose out of his den, wiggled his moustache and smelled the night; silent to all but the delicate fairy hearing. Hunger made the little mouse dare to leave the safety of his den, and as he rushed to make his way to the park, his tail got stepped on and the poor soul was almost crushed. He wiggled his way between giant feet, and the deafening noise of the infernal device with which the humans lit the night.

As he ran to the safety of the closed park, he remembered the memories of when as a pup his mother had explained the world. She used to warn him nightly that mice and fairies worked on a different clock. Her words still clear were a constant warning:

"Fairies are magic and all us small creatures do their bidding. Especially us dwellers of the night.

The moon rains nightly its life-imbuing shower, the fairies harvest it up, and we deliver the magic as people sleep at night.

Once upon a time, humans respected this silent pact.

Again and again, she would remind him that, as the moon showered the world every night with the magical essence for life to renew its pact with nature.

Anima rains down, fairies jump from flower to flower collecting the precious blessing, and then critters distribute it to everyone as they lay peacefully sleeping.

Sometimes it's a ladybird, or a robin, or a mouse, and even the occasional

snail delivering the unknown bounty to humanity".

The fairy intercepts the mouse by leaping and letting his wings gently lower him to the ground.

"Hello, old friend!"

"Good evenfall to you, my fay friend," said the little mouse as it settled near the fairy.

They both sat down and enjoyed the tranquil onset of the night, away from the human invasion in this leafy suspension of the city.

After a long silence, the mouse looked over and asked:

"I was thinking back to how my late mum used to tell us about people who turn bad because the snails can be too slow with delivering the crucial life force. If a delay is enough to corrupt a human, what happens to the countless souls that we cannot reach through the grey towers and their evil auras?"

The fairy took a long time to respond:

"My friend, that's an easy question that has a tough answer. Here we are again, night after night, seeking a shelter that's always smaller and rarer. I wake up every night and can't see my stars or the night sky. I watch the specks that have taken the place in what used to be a silent sky lit by starry light.

The bright wall in the distance closes nearer by the day, assaulting the safety of our last safe haven. As the wall of fire grows nearer everything becomes more scared.

My kin and I tremble as our domain shrinks. And as our lives are lessened, so is our sacred task diminished. The

fear that fills each night, corrupts the moon-dew.

Even your kin have trouble walking the boundary between the human realm and ours in this corrupted night that's blinding the life out of us.

Limited and fading,  
we cannot see,  
we cannot see the moon-dew in the same way as before.

Our paths are traced by the vanguard of the great killing light as the blinding wall consumes us all.

The old times when we could run, hunt, and play are gone. The plague that blighted the skies, earth, and water, is also poisoning us.

"So, humans have doomed their own kind?"

"Yes, until they give back the night sky..."



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# Dr. Ijeoma Ugwu

## Medical Genuis By Night

In the stillness of the night, underneath the moon's glow,  
As the world finds its slumber, my mind begins to ponder.  
Amidst the serenity, my thoughts unfurl and dance,  
For in the embrace of darkness, I find my chance.

As a healer of bodies, by day I tend and fix,  
But when night descends, my spirit finds its mix.  
In the depths of midnight, my creative juice sparks,  
A symphony of ideas, painting the canvas of dark skies.

The stars above whisper secrets, the breeze a subtle inspiration,  
In the silence of the night, my inspiration raves.  
The challenges of the day fade into the dark,  
Leaving space for imagination, a journey to enjoy.

In the sanctuary of the night, my mind is free to ponder,  
Exploring realms of wonder, making thoughts just mine.  
With every quiet moment, my passion lands its place,  
For in the arms of the night, I am truly alive, igniting my light.

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# Allison Galinsky

## 10 Hours

8:12pm

I ran. I ran and ran as quickly as I was able. I was being weighed down and my whole body ached. My mind raced so quickly that it made my head pound and my palms sweat. What I felt I could compare to no other earthly sensation. Nothing of this world compared to this insufferable pain.

I ran. I started to fade, decay with each exhaustive breath I gave out. The body that had taken me this far, that had pushed me to this place. The body that brought me here – it was dying. My body. My body felt a bitter numbness and with each slap the wind landed on my face. I felt my body giving out; I felt death's hands grasping hold of me, tightening his grip. The dusk was turning to twilight and my vision could no longer make out the small objects around me as I continued quickly into the wood I had known for so long. The snow reflected the moon and served as my eyes.

I ran. Exhaustion turned to fatigue and fatigue turned to hallucinations. I saw stars falling from the sky and hit the ground like the snow. I could smell our fireplace and taste the wine on my lips. I felt a warm embrace – I could feel being held tightly as I picked up my legs and put them back down – attempting to move further forward. I tried to speak, but was struck down by a hard branch. The body fell. My

body fell. Roll, roll, roll; down, down, down. Everything was black.

9:02pm

The world was utterly quiet as I awoke. The nightingale had stopped chirping and the lake moved without the voice it typically possesses. The trees refrained from whispering. Silence was something that was foreign to me — something I had heard of but never experienced. The sky seemed to will everything under it to stay perfectly still. I was a cynic to the idea of this phenomenon. Of a silence that made grown men feel peace and allowed the forest to rest. There wasn't another sound as I stood up, no other sound but my own breath. The lack of sound made me feel as if I was stepping into something reverent; like some external voice told the forest "quiet now, let her not hear you." The silence was tranquil. I thought of nothing and everything at the same time. My mind was allowed to wander: to escape. I had a constant thought that this was the only place I had ever truly felt the noiselessness – and I embraced it. I pulled it in close to me as if it were an old friend whom I had not seen for years. Slumber was the only place I had ever heard silence, but even then it was constantly interrupted. In the quiet I noticed the stillness; the forest's motion was obsolete and the body was still for the first time. The body was as white as the snow that had fallen on the ground all evening, but it was still. There was no loud yell coming from its lungs, no fist swinging in the air.



No movement at all — stillness. It was an unconventional idea that a place with such constant movement was subject to such stillness. The wind was hushed, the frogs no longer croaked, and the winter snow fell so softly on the ground it was as if it hadn't landed on the ground at all, instead hovered the ground like an angel would hover the Earth.

10:29pm

The silence continued and brought me comfort in the cold crisp air. The lake hadn't gotten any louder, the wind never howled: it was complete stillness. The snow helped to mask any movement that could have occurred as I sat there. It wasn't a question of if it was entirely still or if sounds had missed my earshot. It is absolute stillness here, I thought to myself, complete and utter stillness. The growing night was draped over me now, and not even the snow could be eyes for me anymore. The darkness of the sky continued to cover the woods like a blanket; the way in which a child would use it to hide from monsters. I decided to lie on the ground and allow the blanket sky to cover me. The stillness brought a calmness to my soul and the feeling of death which I carried was gone from me. I was vulnerable, but not afraid of it that surrounded me. Death had passed along and I could no longer feel its presence over my shoulder. While the trees around me did not move or make any noise, they had a smell that took up the air around me. As I sat, a haunting realisation fell over me: I felt nothing. The stillness had entered into my mind and taken over. There was no sense of urgency as I sat, staring at the lake in front of me. Anxiety, happiness, despair: emotions were now foreign to me. I allowed my mind to think for itself. My mind took whimsical turns to the most unthinkable ideas.

The guilt and fear I had felt — they were gone. I felt no remorse. I thought to myself, more and more and more. Could this stillness last forever? Does the stillness truly exist? Is any of it real?

11:37pm

The silence that once brought me peace began to make me feel deranged. The silence started to form itself into a noise. This noise of silence became louder and louder and louder until it felt like it was screaming in my ear. The scream caused me to jolt up with an unrecognisable speed. I didn't recognize myself anymore. What had I done? The calmness I had felt was becoming fear. Where was I? A sudden feeling of realisation pervaded my spirit. An unshakeable panic lingered in my chest. I ran for so long and ended up here. Here! I was trapped — I was a caged bird.

Why was I calm? How was I calm? I had not felt peace in years, years! Yet tonight, for mere hours peace was a wave that washed over me. How could it? Peace, calm, stillness — on this night of all nights? I had to have been in some unshakeable dream. My hands, which had found a home in the snow, began to shake. The cold crept into my fingernails and seemed to drag up all the way to my heart. The intake of air into my lungs had gone from scheduled breaths to erratic gasps. The chill was unbearable now and the moon rose higher into the sky, taunting me with the idea of sight. I could no longer sit or stand, my bones felt as if they were breaking with every move. "I must lay down," I said to myself silently. I laid my head in the snow and allowed it to dampen my hair. The chill continued to consume my body and I let out a scream. As I looked at the blanket sky, I realised I was not hidden as I had

thought before. I was exposed. The monster could reach out and grab me now. My mind continued its descent.

12:43am

Was the moon lonely? As I stared up at it, now at its highest point, I wondered this thought over and over. Was it lonely? Was I? I again felt nothing. Not the peaceful nothing the stillness had brought, no. This nothing was void of anything at all. The thought of being alone brought a discernment of gloom to my entire body. It was my only wish for years to be alone, so what made me scared of it now? Perhaps it was because I was not truly alone. I didn't sleep alone. I didn't eat alone. I didn't yell at imaginary friends for the past two years. I didn't fight with air. I hadn't been alone. I still wasn't alone. I screamed again, desperately trying to find release again. The moon allowed the snow to become bright, as to act like my eyes again. I had to get up now. I had to get up now. As I rose, I saw the body I had dragged for so long lying next to me. It was still colourless, void of any knowledge as to what had happened. Surrounding it was its own red lake and, like the lake adjacent to it, did not move or make a sound.

2:01 am

There is a stark contrast between the colours of red and white. The moon-rays illuminated the snow, which made the blood more apparent. The more I stared, the more I started to dislike the pairing. White and red. He and I. Truthfully, I didn't remember it. I remember the words leading up to it; the feeling of fear and acceptance of the end. I never dreamt that it wouldn't be my end; that I would be victorious in the war. Winner! Free! The caged bird — released! I had to do something, something with the

body. Bury it? That seemed to be the humane thing to do. Was I truly now concerned with being humane? Ha! Oh you caged bird, I thought to myself, you will never be free. You will never be free while the body exists.

6:11 am

As I wash off the red from my skin, I look back on the night. Our house was no longer red with vengeance. My hands had not shaken in hours. My skin is still faintly pink, but returning to its normal porcelain with every scrub. The night camouflaged my escape; my return to freedom. As the sun begins to rise I think about the moon sending a farewell to the sun, returning to its solitude. I had solitude now — an all-consuming solitude. I felt it in every fibre of my being; my lungs were rested from yelling, and my skin was letting go of its normal shade of purple and blue. I almost began my first day released from the cage, but as I walked out of my bathroom door I noticed the dirt from the lake under my fingernails. I interrupted the stillness last night (oh forest, forgive me!). I made the lake wave to me. As I gave the body to the lake, I forced it to wave to me. The light from the moon danced on these waves, like crystals shimmering in a well-lit room. It waved and continued to wave until it had taken the body to the bottom. Oh, the lake — my partner in this crime. The body that I had held onto for so long. The lake wanted it now; the lake seemed to tear it from my hands. The body now belongs to the lake — and in the lake it shall be. In eternal loneliness.


# Rebecca Harding

## Night

Night, you are the whispers of sentiment in my ear,  
a tender touch to know you are near,  
and you are the tears on a pillow that wash me away  
to the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Night, you are the brooding of last month's supper,  
you are the tip of Mount Fuji,  
where I wait at twelve thousand feet.  
You are the plotting of a map on a shipless sea,  
with no compass to guide me,  
You are an overfamiliar tenant who talks  
of the bathtub that needs mending,  
of the lies and the pretending,  
of the truth you curl around your little finger.

Night, you are the umbilical cord of surrender,  
and when the day births, I wake to find  
all these p i e c e s of my mind  
I have to sew back together.



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# Nel Herche

## Fade to Black

The flood of her fellow elevator passengers forced Sadie into a sloppy queue that halted before the only two functioning exit stalls leaving the tube station. It was a miniature mechanical Scylla and Charybdis, everyone frozen in indecision before settling on one of the two. Sadie chose Scylla to the left, since it seemed the lesser of the two evils. Charybdis was backed up by a man still trying to pull a card from his wallet.

Her turn, and after a close call with her messenger bag snagging on a door flap, she made her way to the open archway and out onto the pavement. Rushed along with the crowd of bodies flowing out onto the street, Sadie found the sky visible above the familiar red brick buildings outside. This evening sky gleamed with a showy bright blue at the apex of its luminosity, perhaps even already dipping over into edges of a deeper sapphire. The waning or waxing gibbous moon - she could never tell which was what - was large enough to see its lunar seas against the whiter glare of its higher surfaces. A single star winked. The clock face on the tower glowed like a phosphorescent sticker against the darkening heavens.

She had to pick up a few things for dinner, but she should pop over to Mitch's to see if he could squeeze her into his schedule next week. Sadie ran her fingers through her hair and turned onto the smaller walkway lined with shops and daytime cafés.

The pedestrian avenue was already a dimmer sketch than the main street. Shadows heavy, and a snappy wind blew open her coat. Folding tables, whose contents drew the eyes of lingering wayfarers, were being cleared of the champagne flutes, piecemeal tea sets, tattered biographies, framed antiquarian postcards, and scenes of hunting dogs. A man with a thin spray of hair standing up against the breeze turned sideways to pass through the doorway. Sadie caught a flicker of her boot and ankle in the wide gilded mirror held in his thick hands.

Looking through the glass door, she could see Mitch reclined in the hair-washing station chair. She sighed when she saw the two women already inside, knowing that she would have to be polite.

"Sadie, this is Nisha, and she is just about to leave on a big trip."

"That's great," Sadie said softly, gracelessly. She inquired about the Nisha's itinerary, feeling strange inserting herself into this person's personal comings and goings. However, Nisha seemed more than happy to share her adventure over the next six months with a complete stranger. Sadie's eyes darted from Nisha's face to the waning light behind the glass. She could barely discern the bulky figures passing by the window.

A darkness swallowed each form as it briefly touched the warm light filtering thinly from the single bulb inside the shop.

Sadie pulled her small appointment book from her bag and cast around for her pencil.

Mitch took pity on her, and wrote her name in his book, freeing her from a lifelong friendship with someone leaving town tomorrow.

"Your roots are terrible," Mitch announced. Sadie stared at her feet, defying an absurd shame. How dare her hair grow efficiently over the last three weeks.

"Are you tired?" Mitch studied her face closely.

"Yes," Sadie responded, not having been aware of the feeling until he named it. "I am a bit tired." She laughed it off, over her shoulder whilst making a hasty retreat backwards. She pulled the door shut tight and turned into a draft that smacked her cheeks with its chilled hands. It had been stuffy inside the shop. She let the wind kick around her coat, ruffling her shirt against her warm belly.

She turned back to face the high street. The wind drove her hair forward. Most of the shops were dark now, pitching the path into a cavern of murkiness. The cobblestones shone in the weak light, but everything else was dark. Sadie wished she could go straight home. She ran through the list of ingredients she needed to buy for the night's dinner - beef mince, onions, mushrooms, courgettes, and maybe some pomegranate seeds. She remembered to check her wife's additions to the text thread she had sent earlier- sliced bread, napkins, fruit, maybe a pack of smokey rashers for breakfast?

With her two bags, Sadie began the trek uphill to their flat and was struck with the impossibility of rising to the challenge of that insurmountable incline. She hadn't done much that day,

just attended an afternoon class, but her body ached like she had finally used the pilates class coupon gathering dust on her nightstand from her birthday.

Sadie gained some traction as she passed by Amélie's bakery. It seemed like years since she had asked for a tomato, mozzarella, and basil sandwich on an olive baguette earlier in the afternoon. Usually, it was her favourite quick lunch, but today it had tasted of sour milk. She ate half of it and threw the remainder into the bin on the train platform.

She stopped to change the bags in her hands, switching so the heavier one was in her stronger hand. She wondered if she could begin walking again

After they sold their car and had to walk everywhere, Sadie and Meg's daughter had divided the journey to and from their flat into four distinct sections. Sadie had just arrived at the beginning of the last chunk - the home stretch. The gloom enveloped her in a heavy weight that prevented her from moving through its density. Sadie paused. She set her bags next to her legs and leaned against the tall stone wall next to the narrow pavement running alongside the road. She had never thought to place her shoulder on the algae-coated stones before but felt ravaged by the ethereality of her dizzy head.

The black night was lit occasionally by the passing cars playing chicken on the single-lane two-way road, but mostly she felt hidden in the arms of the shrubs overhanging the walkway. In a brief quiet, Sadie could hear a robin singing gayly to herself in the dark behind the leafy foliage. Sadie thought it strange that she was sweating in her light raincoat, with the cool air blowing and rattling of the autumnal leaves.



After a short rest, Sadie breached the crest of the hill and coasted in measured steps down to their row house. Night swirled at her feet threatening to trip her as she felt her way blindly down the steps, gripping a rarely used handrail to avoid tipping down the stairs. At the door, she rang the bell. She couldn't be bothered to try to find her keys.

Meg's brown bobbed hair and big smile met her at the door. The smile slowly began to fade when Sadie handed over the two bags.

"I'm just feeling a bit tired."

Sadie sat on the end of the couch she rarely used, propped rigidly upright against one midcentury block arm.

Meg brought her Prosecco in a champagne coupe dotted with floating pomegranate seeds. Sadie sipped. Meg put on her favourite Hank Mobley album *No Room for Squares* before returning to the kitchen. The sounds of muffled chopping filled the room.

The sparkling wine tickled her stomach. She joined Meg in the kitchen. Pressed the beef mince into thin steaks, seasoned the patties with onion powder, salt and pepper. Poured the filtered water into a pot to boil for the rice. Dripped some oil into the pan for the vegetable stir fry. Couldn't follow a word Meg was saying to her. Gave up. Wanted to sit down. Frustrated with this everlasting standing and stirring.

Once everything was stable, nearly ready but waiting on the steaks, Sadie felt a restless pacing dominate her limbs. Instead of sitting back down on the couch, she wandered through the lounge past Meg, who now scrolled her phone absently while clicking an

ice cube around her glass of bourbon. Sadie wiggled the key in the French doors and pushed them open.

"Bit cold for the open doors, don't you think?" Meg asked her, yanking her cardigan tighter around her shoulders.

"The air just feels stuffy," Sadie said, ignoring Meg's shiver and nudging the doors a little further open. "And the scent of cooking grease from the steaks is... unappetising." She moved back towards the kitchen. Leaned across to reach her glass and took a sip, hoping to catch one of the floating pomegranate seeds, but it bumped against her lip and swam away before she could catch it.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Your cooking always smells appetising." Meg glanced up from her phone. "Look at your shadow."

Sadie turned and stared at her perfect silhouette cast behind her, slightly larger but holding the coupe glass gracefully in an open palm away from her body. She took another sip. Got a seed without even trying. It exploded in a rush of unpleasant fruitiness. She coughed and swallowed.

An immense night had settled into the back garden. She could no longer see the outline of the trees that bordered the roughly cut lawn and reached high up to the sky. Even with the doors wide, she could not hear even one chattering bird, although the foxes would certainly start their screeching soon.

Sadie returned to the kitchen to pull the tray of steaks from the oven and placed them on the hob to cool. She looked at their sickly brown flesh with disgust.

towels for a makeshift pillow and shivered mightily under a robe she had thrown over her body. Her stomach flip-flopped again.

I think it was the sandwich. Carry on without me. Goodnight xo

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