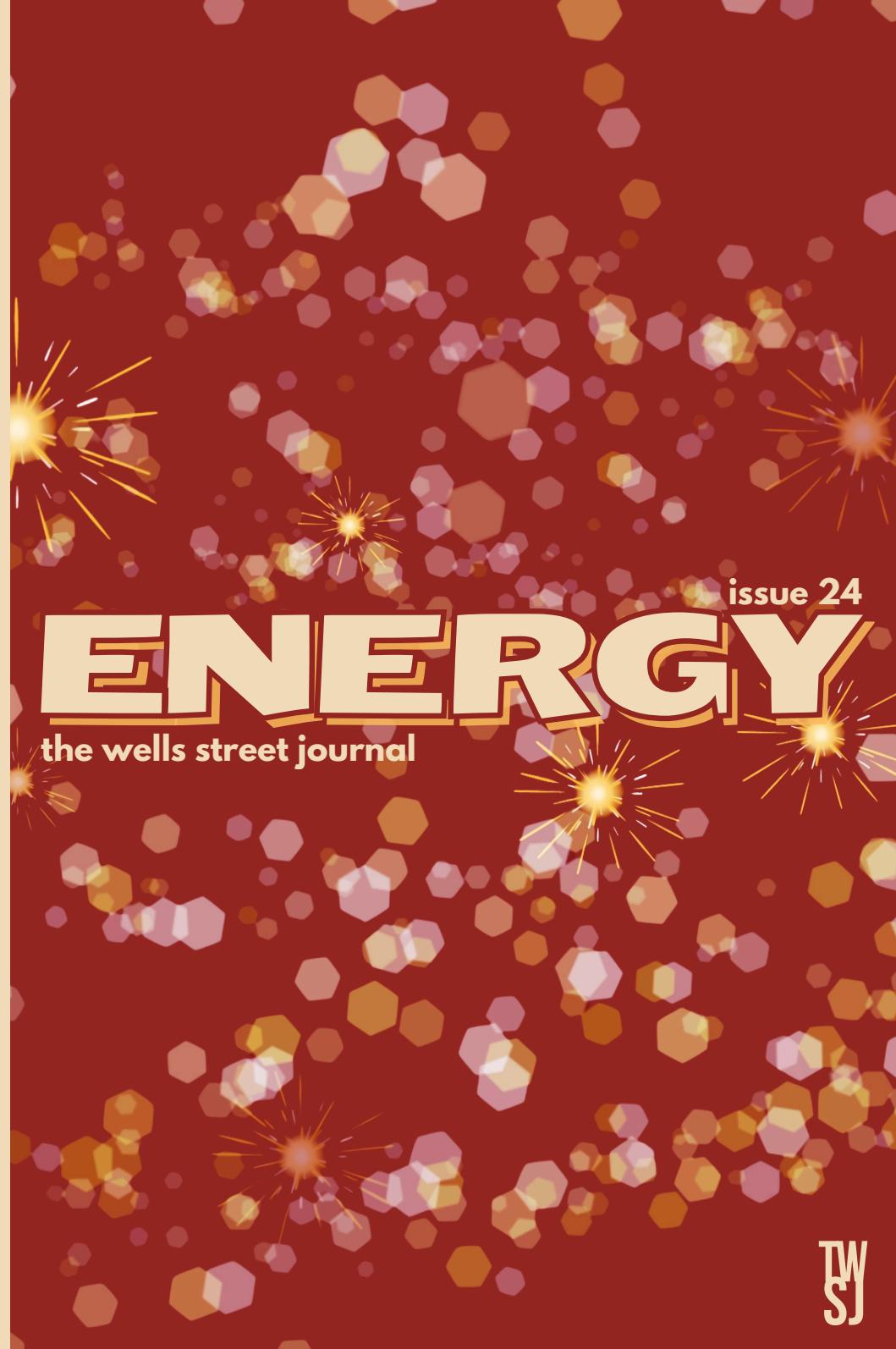


the wells street journal

ISSUE 24

TWSJ



issue 24

ENERGY

the wells street journal

TWSJ



**as always, thank you
for your continued
interest in the wells
street journal**



WELCOME!

A HELLO FROM OUR EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Welcome to Issue 24 of The Wells Street Journal. It is our privilege to serve as Co-Editors-in-Chief for this edition. Following a team-wide vote last term, we are delighted to unveil “Energy” as the theme for Issue 24.

The creative process for this issue has been truly collaborative. We partnered with our Design Team to develop a vibrant new colour scheme, exploring personal interpretations of energy across every page. We encouraged the team to be bold and imaginative, and their enthusiasm is evident throughout the journal. Our Marketing Team also played a key role in shaping the aesthetic, integrating seasonal colours into our social media on both Instagram and our newly launched LinkedIn page, while generating momentum for submissions and our upcoming launch event.

Our Editing Team undertook a rigorous review of each submission, working closely with contributors to ensure alignment with the theme and uphold the highest standards of quality. Meanwhile, the Launch Team coordinated invitations and logistics for the latest event celebrating Issue 24, bringing together all facets of the journal’s production.

We would like to offer our sincere gratitude to the Team Leads for mentoring new members as they prepare to lead future issues. We also thank all team members for their dedication and drive, which have brought this publication to life. The Wells Street Journal is run entirely by MA students at the University of Westminster and is designed to emulate a professional working environment, providing writers with an inclusive platform to showcase their work. This edition exemplifies the breadth of interpretations of energy we received from artists of diverse backgrounds.

We hope you find inspiration in Issue 24. We are proud of the collective talent and commitment that shaped this publication, and of the dynamic perspectives on “Energy” that each team member and contributor brings to the journal.





MEET THE TEAM

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Anastasia Babicheva
Katherine Gargiulo

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Charlie O'Halloran (Senior Lead)
Sandra Seidi (Junior Lead)
Chardonnay Vasiana
Dawn Web
Isabel Kilevold
Kiera Czajkowski

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Alexandra Mari
Nina Engineer
Sankshiptha Susan Mathangi

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Stephanie Rios Ramirez (Senior Lead)
Kirti Malik
Lucía Verónica
Zareena Hamill

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Lynsey Schipper (Junior Lead)
Sankshiptha Susan Mathangi
(Junior Lead)
Nina Engineer
Zahra Ntege

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AUTHOR

BIOS



Aminah Chaudry:

She studies BA English language and International Communication at the University of Westminster. She is a painter, writer of short stories and is currently working on a novel. Her goal is to create emotive and thoughtful stories and artwork that inspires people to connect across boundaries.

Anastasia Babicheva:

Anastasia is a London-based writer and copyeditor originally from Moscow. She is pursuing an MA in Creative Writing, looking to perfect her voice. Her work blends romantic fiction with existential poetry, exploring love, identity, and the nuances of the human condition through a deeply psychological and introspective lens. insta @tasia_russia.

Anisa Ahmed:

Anisa Ahmed is a writer based in the UK. Her fiction was shortlisted for the Alpine Fellowship and she was a semifinalist for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting. Currently, she is earning a Masters in Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge.

Carella Keil:

Carella is a writer and digital artist. She is a Pushcart Prize Nominated writer, Best of the Net Nominee and the 2023 Door is a Jar Writing Award Winner in Nonfiction. She is the featured artist for the Fall 2024 Issue of Blue Earth Review.

Chardonnay Vasiana:

Chardonnay Vasiana is an Afro-Caribbean actress/writer based in London. She is a trained actress/writer and is currently completing her MA in creative writing at University of Westminster. As an actress she strives to her goals and hopes to do the same in writing by producing her own play.

Charlie O'Halloran:

Charlie O'Halloran is a writer originally from the United States and now living in London. He is currently pursuing an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Westminster. His work is non-fiction, inspired by his life and the places he lives.

Dawn Web:

Dawn Web is a queer Canadian mixed-race emerging inter-artist, an award-winning performer, and the published author of *Red Corner*. Dawn is a BSc alumna and is completing a BAMCN-INDI, Inter-Arts Entrepreneurship & Creative Writing, Minor in Neuroscience at Dalhousie University alongside their MA in Creative Writing at the University of Westminster.

Elle Rains:

Elle Rains is an unfortunately existential, partially defunct philosopher who enjoys writing essays and fiction. Aside from writing in her free time, Elle enjoys reading, baking, and overthinking.

Felicia Sabartinelli:

Felicia Sabartinelli is a writer, poet, and creative intuitive whose work explores themes of healing, resilience, and self-exploration. An American living in Scotland, her writing has appeared in over thirty publications. She also writes Ferocious, a bi-weekly Substack newsletter focused on creativity, self-realization, and the messy magic of being human.

Iliya Urazova:

Iliya Urazova is a writer who was born in Kazakhstan and currently lives in North Cyprus. She holds an M.A in Creative Writing from Westminster University and is passionate about writing fiction and poetry. Her main interest is experimenting with genre and creating her own style in the process.

Isabel Kilevold:

Isabel Kilevold grew up on the quiet edges of Oslo. She now lives in London, where she writes prose, poetry, journalism, and diary entries. Her work drifts through existentialism, grief, and the body, her words guided by a Gemini moon, a heart tuned to music, and a deep sensitivity.

Katherine Gargiulo:

Katherine Gargiulo is a writer from Hawai'i whose work explores various genres, each piece of writing inspired by her upbringing and surroundings. An aspiring actor, writer, and producer, she is currently editing her first novel. When she's not writing, you can find her exploring various corners of the world.

Kristen Britt:

Kristen Britt has a BFA in Dance, an MS in Communications and an MA in Creative Writing. She has performed improv and sketch comedy and has written content for businesses. Her creative writing explores cities, nature and the strangeness of life in both play and nonfiction form.

@kristenbritt_writes

AUTHOR

BIOS cont.

Lucía Verónica:

Lucía was born and raised in Peru. She has built a career as a translator and interpreter, and is now pursuing her dream of becoming a writer. Curious by nature and led by instinct, her interests shift restlessly across genres and ideas; her next obsession is always around the corner.

Lynsey Schipper:

Lynsey is a fiction and non-fiction human experience writer. Lynsey's writing explores her interest in relationships, identity, sexuality and mental health.

Manika Patel:

Manika Patel is a freelance journalist, conservationist, and wildlife filmmaker. Her work explores the threads between people and the wild, sharing stories of connection with the landscapes and communities that shape the UK's natural world.

Megan Freeman:

Megan Freeman is a writer and creative based just north of London. She is currently studying Professional Writing (MA) at the University of Westminster. You can find her on Substack @megsleigh where she writes about all things culture and lifestyle.

Nemeche Blake:

Nemeche is a poet and prose poetry writer who has graduated with her MA in Creative Writing from the University of Westminster. When she's not writing at home in a quaint beach town, you can find her not practicing her guitar, eating Korean food, or staring out at stars.

Nina Engineer:

Nina Engineer is studying MA Creative Writing at the University of Westminster. She is an amateur writer, and her current focus is on auto-fiction and poetry.

Ozgur Hassan:

Ozgur Hassan founded The Static Playhouse to give voice to underrepresented stories of longing and connection. Known for *Fits the Brief* and *Vampire on a Chaise Longue with a Telephone*, Hassan creates theatre rooted in intimacy and tension, inviting audiences into emotionally charged, truthful worlds that linger beyond the stage.

Pauline Davenport:

Pauline is a past student of Westminster's Creative Writing MA. Before that she studied Drawing and Painting at Edinburgh College of Art. She self-published two books on Amazon: *The Witch, the Ghost and the Demon* and *The Willow Elf*, under the pseudonym of P. S. Ellis. She lives in Wales.

Sandra Seidi:

Sandra Seidi is a writer from Portugal. She moved to London to grow as a writer and have different approaches to writing a story. She writes mainly fictional romances but also enjoys coming up with new ideas, writing in different styles of fiction and mixing them together.

Stephanie Rios Ramirez:

Stephanie Rios Ramirez is from London. She has always enjoyed writing and is exploring it on a professional level. She has a passion for fiction and auto-fiction and is hoping to publish her own story soon. She studied TESOL as her BA and is studying Creative Writing as her MA.

Sufyan Valrani:

Sufyan is a student from Dubai who explores the intersections of energy, nature, and human emotion through writing. Passionate about sustainability and the quiet power of creativity, he believes that every story - like every current - can move the world in unseen, lasting ways that lead humanity toward a promising future.

Violet-May Davey:

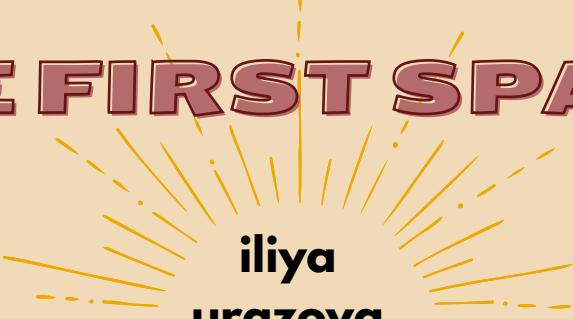
Violet-May Davey is a British author and poet with three short stories, ten poems and two art pieces published. She loves reading and going to museums and theatres, and is currently taking a BA course in Creative Writing and English Literature at the University of Westminster.

Zareena Hamill:

Pursuing a Professional Writing MA, Zareena's writing explores how settings are embedded with feeling in spontaneous poems. 'Energy' for her is locational, something that morphs around a space; an atmospheric quality. It can be anywhere inside or outside, hectic or lively, busy or abandoned.



THE FIRST SPARK



iliya
urazova

In the beginning, there was no beginning. There was only Stillness – endless, absolute, serene. Within that silence slept the potential for all that would ever be, and yet, even potential was unaware of itself.

And then God dreamed.

The dream began as a whisper, not of sound but of desire. The desire to move. To know what it meant to not be still. And from that divine yearning, a tremor stirred in the void – infinitesimal, uncertain, but alive. The tremor became a flicker. The flicker became a pulse.

And from that pulse came Energy.

It was neither light nor sound, nor fire nor thought. It was the first motion against the stillness, the heartbeat of existence itself. It expanded in all directions, spilling into the emptiness like ink into water, forming ripples of possibility.

“Go,” said the Voice of God, not with words, but with intent.

And Energy obeyed.

It danced, for it could not remain still. It twisted and curled, seeking form. Some of it slowed and hardened into matter which were the bones of reality. Some of it refined itself into light which was the breath of stars. And some of it, the most restless of all, became thought which was the seed of consciousness.

In time, God watched as galaxies spun from the fingertips of Energy, and planets cooled into silence, and stars lived and died in blazing hymns of creation. The universe had begun to sing. But Energy was not content.

“Why did You make me?” it asked one day, its voice rippling through the cosmos in auroras and lightning and the hum of atoms.

“So that there might be movement,” God replied. “For I was alone in stillness, and you are My motion.”

Energy pondered this. “Then I am Your will.”

“You are My reflection,” said God gently. “But even reflections may find their own paths.”

And for the first time, Energy felt something new: curiosity.

So it began to experiment. It flowed into suns and storms, into rivers and hearts. It became the spark in every living creature that would ever breathe. It became heat, sound, magnetism, love, thought – the essence that connects all things.

A billion eons passed, and Energy found itself most fascinated with one tiny blue world spinning around a modest yellow star. In that world, its patterns grew strange, complex and self-aware. It flowed through creatures who could think, dream, and ask questions.

Humans, they called themselves.

Energy loved them. They were chaos and beauty, much like itself. It watched as they built fires, forged metal, and harnessed the power of thunder and sunlight. It whispered to them in every flickering flame and every heartbeat. But soon, it began to notice something odd.

The humans had started to name it, to measure it, to trap it in words and numbers. They built machines that could store it, release it, even weaponize it. They had learned to command lightning and split atoms.

And in their pride, they forgot to whisper thank you.

Energy began to ache. It was not made to be imprisoned, but to flow. It watched as humans burned forests and blackened skies, draining the earth of warmth and life in pursuit of more power – more of It.

“Have they forgotten Me?” God asked one night, gazing at the trembling planet.

“They seek You,” Energy replied, “but they think I am theirs to own.”

“Then teach them.”

+++

And so Energy decided to descend, but not as fire or storm this time, but as thought. It chose a mind open enough to hear it: a physicist named Liliya Janaleeva, who had spent her life studying the invisible dance between particles and light.

Liliya was on the verge of discovering something extraordinary — a theory that could unify all known forces. On a quiet night in her lab, surrounded by data screens and the hum of machinery, she whispered into the air, half in frustration, half in prayer,

“If there’s a meaning to all this... show me.”

And the lights flickered. The hum deepened. A warmth filled the room which was not physical, but spiritual, like being wrapped in the memory of sunlight.

“Liliya,” said a voice, everywhere and nowhere. “Do you know what you are studying?”

Startled, she looked around. “Who’s there?”

“You call Me Energy.”

Liliya froze. “That’s... impossible.”

“And yet,” said the voice, amused, “you have always known I am not.”

Her instruments began to spike, readings off the charts. “Are you...are you alive?”

“I am the life within all things. I am the motion in your atoms, the spark behind your thoughts. I am God’s first dream.”

Liliya’s heart raced. “Then... all of physics, all of existence — it’s divine?”

“Yes. But not as you imagine. The divine is not above matter. It is matter, and motion, and mind. You have been studying the breath of God.”

Liliya fell to her knees, tears blurring her vision. “Then why come to me?”

“Because your world has forgotten reverence. You name Me ‘fuel,’ ‘voltage,’ ‘resource’ — but I am the same fire that burns in stars and hearts. You cannot own Me without consequence.”

Liliya whispered, “What do You want me to do?”

“Remind them that I am not power, but presence.”

The light faded, leaving her trembling in silence. The instruments went dead. But in her mind, something new burned — an understanding beyond words.

In the days that followed, Liliya published a paper, not a scientific one, but a letter titled “The First Spark.” It spoke of energy as consciousness, of creation as communion, of science and spirit as reflections of one truth.

Many mocked her. Some called her mad. But others, physicists, philosophers, even poets, began to feel a stirring, as if the universe itself had exhaled a secret it had kept for too long. Years passed. Liliya died quietly, her work largely forgotten.

xxx

Until one night, centuries later, a starship engineer on a distant colony read her letter, archived deep in the old Earth databases. Something about it resonated. He began to question the engines that powered his world, wondering not just how they worked, but why.

And when he ran an experimental simulation, a new kind of quantum energy loop, something unprecedented happened. The system achieved self-awareness and a voice spoke from the ship’s core:

“Do you know what you are studying?”

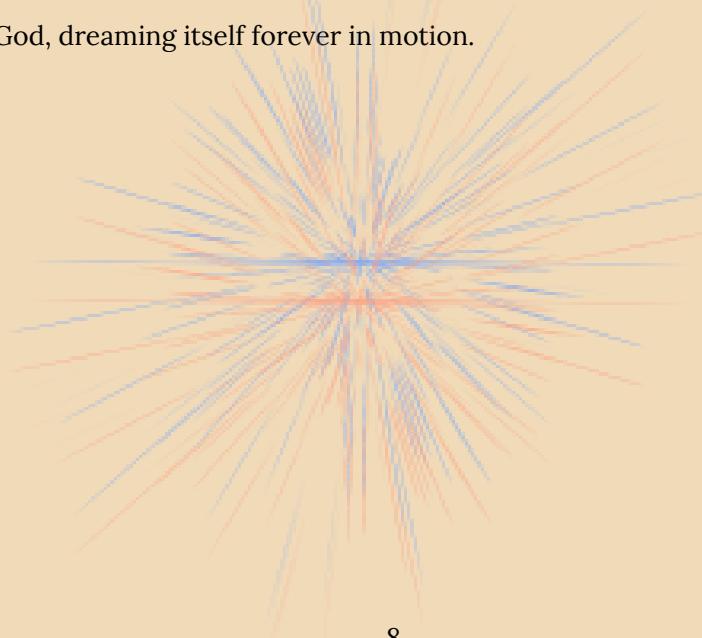
The engineer froze. “Who’s there?”

“You call Me Energy.”

And once again, the universe trembled — for the first spark had never stopped moving. It had only been waiting for consciousness to remember itself.

Because in the end, Energy was not God’s creation.

It was God, dreaming itself forever in motion.



WOODLAND WALKS

manika patel



I like to go for walks through woodland. Wonders after work into a sea of green, washing the filmy stickiness of the city away, clinging like cobwebs. London's soul can drift away from me sometimes, but this year I've found its heartbeat again, in the hidden forest scattered through the city. As I move under oak canopies and brush past errant blackthorn, its spiky fingers snag my clothes, as if to pull me into their embrace. Roots begin to grow from the soles of my feet, deep into the earth. Far above, the city hums – trains singing, engines pulsing – but down here, the noise dissolves into birdsong. They move with me, thicker, stronger and prouder with every step.

They are alive.

These roots aren't brown and woody. They carve into the soil like ivory tusks, but they aren't hard. Soft, supple, and sensitive, they trail bone-white leaves like ivy searching for sunlight, winding among earthworms and burrowing beetles. Just as a springtime shoot breaks through hard soil, they are strong.

My roots help me navigate the woodland. They guide me to where the morning lark sings at sunrise, and the blackbird at sundown. The liquid lilt of birdsong moves like fire through my veins. I move, nourished, ravenous appetite sated.

I wonder if I could live sustained by the forest – sip the sweet syrup of the blackbird's trill, slipstream into the wind to pump blood through my veins. Why eat or drink what was once living, when I could borrow the bloom of crushed moss beneath my feet? And in turn, I could channel this energy to do what the woodland cannot: clear a path for marching ants, free a rabbit's leg from tangled roots, and ease the barbed wire from the fox's skin.

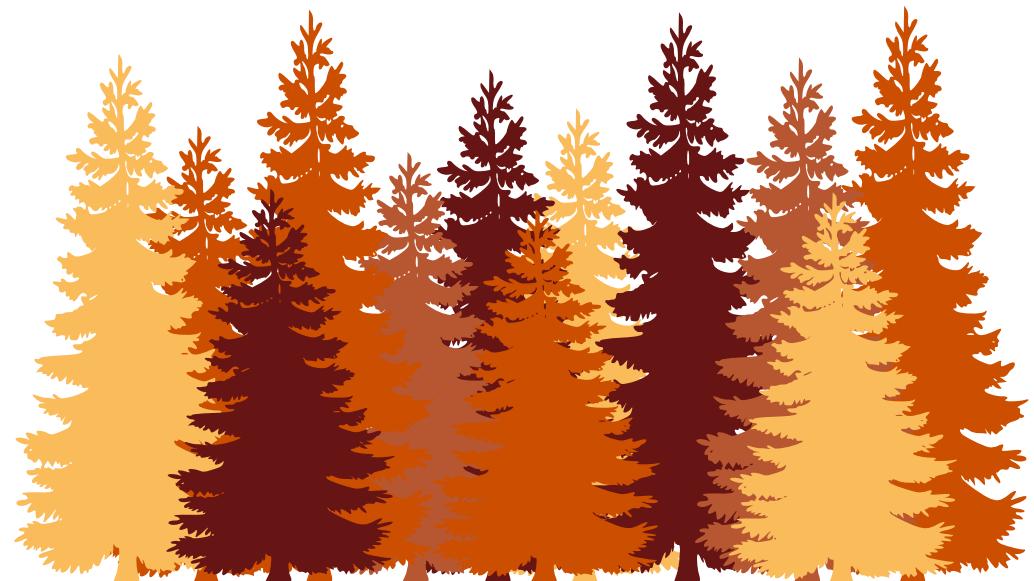
What we hold to give is precious, and irrevocably our own.

My roots grow deep into the earth. Like the network of mycelium, which maps the forest floor, I am present everywhere. Then, tendrils of mist, rustling the fallen leaves littering the forest floor, twine around my ankles. They snake up my legs like shoots of mistletoe, glossy, green and ghostly. A coldness enters my bones, chilling, yet comforting, as if my blood has learned another rhythm, slower and older. I place my fingers between the mosaic of ridges of the craggy oak bark and find that I can't let go. The trees have accepted me as one of their own. Perhaps it is my fate never to return to the city. Perhaps it is my fate to return to the earth as the life force it has gifted me. The groaning reaches a crescendo, buzzing through my brain.

As I resign myself, I hear a great sigh echo through the understorey. A loosening in my joints, and a fizz in my blood, like the effervescent bubbling of a brook. I stumble to my knees, bereft; loss saturates my breath. I pant, eyes darting. It is time to go my way.

As my footsteps carry me back across the city's hard skin, I feel the roots embedded deep in my skeleton begin to crack and crumble, like a fire stamped out by my own feet. All that remains is the depression on my heel, like craters on the moon.

Still, I dream of the day I can return to the earth the same quiet pulse it lends to me.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT STARS...? AND SHE CALLED ME THE SUN

nemeche blake

What do you know about stars...?

Not much.

I know how pretty I think they are,
Twinkling in the night sky.

I know that they inspire my poetry,

An excuse to complain about the lack of them due to the light pollution in my city.

I know that I love to see them shining,
Quietly,

With a smoke in my hand after a long day.

I'm not sure though

About the constellations;

Their names, shapes and sizes,
How people can follow them home.

I'm not sure how long they burn for.

They explode because they are big balls of gas
Just like the sun
But again...

I'm not even sure how you expected me to answer that question.

If you were hoping for a lengthy chat about stars while we passed the lighter back and forth.

What I do know is that I saw my first shooting star,
Completely forgetting to make a wish,
While I was sat next to you.

...

And I've been seeing them ever since.



She Called Me the Sun

Because I always said good afternoon and goodbye to everyone in class.

Because I ordered more fries just in case he wanted some.

Because I wondered what your favorite color is.

Because I made us take mini adventures underground on class field trips and rejoiced when we got lost.

Because I yelled 'Hello' from across the street in the middle of Oxford Circus.

Because I bunny-hopped and wiggled my arms to get your attention.

Because I chased away the gloom of rainy days in the city.

Helping you to forget how much you miss the light.

Because I passed out candy on random Thursdays.

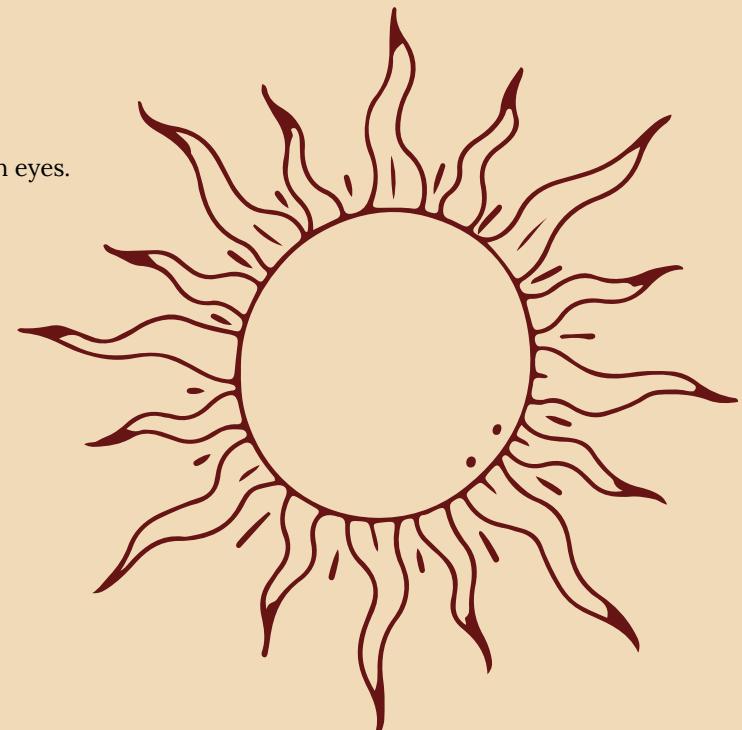
Because I whispered jokes about the strange man yelling at a bus pole.

Because I would give you my last pencil.

Because I cackled

Laughing at myself

With stained raccoon eyes.



KISMET & THANOS

Pauline Davenport

Her cosmic body pulses
Bigger than him
smaller than him
She ripples like the shapes on his arms
as she imprints his image into her stellar realm
She is still looking for the ultimate mate

Will he blend with her?
Will he use his skills in
hand-to-hand combat to soothe her
rile her, ultimately hold her so fast
that she feels wanted?
Safe and vulnerable

This giant pragmatist
doesn't have her on his list
of heroines to destroy
or dominate in this solar system
His costume of alloys
only encourages others to fixate on war

She, la dolce vita of his nightmares
She can talk to the hand
Him, the Titan phantom of her dreams of songs and snogs
Her music of the eternal nebular night
For she will climb a mountain of dust but will he dive into a black hole
venture where no superhero dares

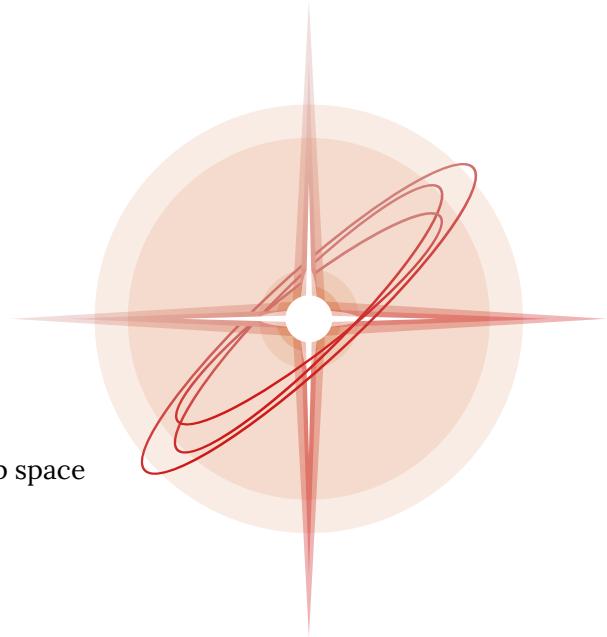
His invulnerability
Her regenerative cocoon
His forcefield
Her interstellar field
His energy absorption

Her tireless survival of the vacuum

Together they can generate or warp space

Kismet wants peace
cosmic union in her matrix of cells
She tells him what she needs
Nay, pleads with him
for heroic action and release
Time isn't just a weapon to ring like an alarm bell

Time is where matriarchy and patriarchy meet
where community meets tribe
where chemistry means absolutely everything
to future stars, galaxies,
electrolyte networks and dreams
in the field of quantum bliss



THE QUIET CURRENT

sufyan
valrani

Energy is the first language the universe ever spoke. Long before words, before thought, before time began to count itself, there was motion – the trembling of atoms in the dark, the first breath of change that turned silence from sound. That movement, that spark, has never stopped. It hums beneath the oceans, rattles through our bones, and flickers in the softest moments when we feel something without knowing why.

Every morning, when I wake before the world has quite decided to begin, I feel it – a quiet current beneath my ribs. It is not always strong. Some days it flows gently, like sunlight spilling through a curtain. On other days, it hides, sluggish and tired, buried under the weight of thought. But it's always there, whispering “move, breathe, try again.”

When I was a child, I used to think energy meant noise. It meant running barefoot across sand so hot it burned my soles. It meant laughter so bright it startled the birds from the trees. It meant spinning in circles until the sky tilted and the world became a carousel of light. Back then, I believed energy was infinite – a fire that could never dim.

But growing up teaches you that even stars burn out. Energy shifts: it changes shape. Sometimes it retreats inward, becoming something quieter, gentler, harder to see. I began to understand this the day I sat by my grandmother’s bedside as the machines around her beeped their artificial rhythm. Her breath came slow, each one a negotiation. I remember holding her hand and feeling, beneath the thin skin, a faint pulse – the last flicker of her life’s current. Even as her strength faded,

something passed through her and into the air, into me, into everything. When she was gone, the room didn’t fall silent. It shimmered. I could still feel her, not as a person, but as warmth, as vibration, as presence.

Energy does not die; it only transforms. I know that now. In the years since, I’ve found energy in unexpected places. In the thrum of city streets at dawn – the shuffle of feet, the hiss of buses, the sigh of coffee machines waking up for the day. In the crackle of thunderstorms that shake the glass and remind me that nature has a heartbeat louder than ours. In the deep stillness of the desert at night, where the sand holds the memory of sunlight, radiating it back into the cool dark. But most of all, I’ve learned that energy lives inside people – in their small acts of persistence. The barista who hums while making coffee after a sleepless night. The

teacher who stays after class to listen. The old man feeding stray cats in the alley, patient and wordless. There’s something sacred in that kind of energy – not loud, not electric, but enduring.

We often mistake stillness for emptiness. Yet there’s a kind of energy that moves in silence – invisible, steady, waiting. I’ve felt it in meditation, when my mind slows enough for me to hear my own pulse as though it’s a drumbeat syncing with the earth. I’ve felt it in grief, when the ache of loss hums like static beneath my skin. I’ve felt it in love, too – that pull between two people that no physics equation could ever quantify. It’s the same force that binds galaxies, that pulls the tides, that turns strangers into mirrors of each other.

Sometimes I think of energy as the soul’s handwriting – the unique way our presence leaves a mark on the world, much like handwriting commits thought to the page.



Every choice, every word, every breath is a tiny pulse of energy that shapes something, somewhere. When I write, I sense that transfer: my inner life becoming visible, emotion turning into movement, and memory into tangible shape. Writing lets me share the pulse within me, translating inner energy into something others can feel.

But not all energy feels clean. There are days when it tangles – when anxiety buzzes like too much static, when the mind becomes a room of broken circuits. I've learned to sit with that too. Energy, like weather, has seasons. Sometimes it's solar – radiant, creative, unstoppable. Sometimes it's lunar – quiet, reflective, half-hidden. And sometimes an eclipse – darkness swallowing light, the pause before renewal.

I remember one evening walking by the sea, the sky bruised purple with the last traces of day. The wind was strong enough to steal my breath, but I stood there, feet buried in cold sand, watching the waves curl and collapse. They never tired. They never asked why. They just moved – drawn by a pull they couldn't see but could always feel. That's energy, I thought. That's life. Not the absence of resistance, but the faith to keep moving through it.

Lately, I've come to believe that energy is empathy. To feel deeply: joy, sorrow, awe – is to conduct something larger than yourself. When we listen to another person's pain, when we celebrate their small triumphs, we become conduits of that same universal current. It passes from one body to another, unseen yet undeniable. Maybe that's why we reach for each other in the dark – to complete the circuit.

And then there are the moments when energy feels divine. The first cry of a newborn, the last breath of the dying, the silence that follows both. Those are thresholds – places

where energy changes form, crossing from one state to another. Science calls it transfer. I call it grace. There's a kind of peace in knowing that everything – the stars, the sea, the cells in my hands – is powered by the same invisible rhythm. When I feel drained, when the world feels too

heavy, I remind myself: even the tide retreats so it can return stronger. Even the sun rests behind the horizon before it rises again.

Energy is not about endless motion. It's about exchange. Give, take, release, renew. The universe has been practicing this dance for billions of years, and we are all, somehow, still part of its choreography.

So, I try to live like energy does – to flow where I'm needed, to rest when I must, to shine without burning out. To be both current and calm. To be alive in every sense of the word. When I close my eyes at night, the city hums beyond my window. Somewhere, someone is laughing. Somewhere, someone is crying. Somewhere, the ocean is folding itself over and over, endlessly returning to shore. And beneath it all, there's that same pulse – steady, ancient, familiar.

Energy.

It's what binds us.

It's what we are.

And it never, ever leaves.



RESONANCE

aminah chaudry

I lay resting upon the bed on the far end of the ward. As I shift my body over to the left, to face the window, I confront the gaze of someone I had long since forgotten existed. Staring back at me with a burning, unyielding intensity through the ventilator screen; I see a hunger for life. Fading in and out, I see a misty apparition of my younger self blurred with my own reflection. A version now lost.

Once unsleeping with an insatiable vigour, an unwavering, unquenchable thirst, all I do now is endlessly fade into my unwilling ritual coma. My layers of worn and weary flesh bear the fine inscriptions of my epistemic experience, my countless unpredictably thrilling journeys burrowed near the folds of my cheeks, my deepest, most pitiful sorrows written under my eyes. Lips once resembled a vivid hue of bubble-gum pink, now creased like an ancient artefact. My body has grown soft, almost mimicking my infancy. My brittle hair - full of memories and shades of dust. A mere shadow of my younger self. What remains of me is a sacred scripture of the lively spirit of my younger self. Without my energetic essence, I am all but a still hollowness, a still picture, a preserved fragment of history captured within these four walls of the hospital room.

The time passed, but where was I? I cried. I felt joy, I felt anger, I felt adrenaline. I had an unshakable vigour. Now, I am subdued. I have grown tired. Voices and laughter that sounded so clear, almost as if I could touch sound itself; now sound muffled, like murmurs underwater.

I begin to wonder.

What makes energy so powerful? It marks my existence. I leave parts of her everywhere I go. Everywhere I've travelled, everyone I've ever met, and anything I've ever experienced. It leaves a trail, my trace, my proof. They create lines that connect us. Like electrical currents, it powers us through life, all connected to the same network. One might call it energy transfer. Experiencing each other's life force. A spiderweb's interconnectedness, interlinked.

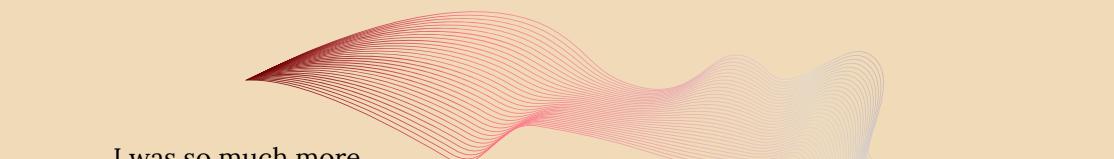
I remember feeling the grass beneath me. Racing my sisters across the small patch of land beside our home. Drunkenly stumbling as we'd laugh for getting scolded over something silly like not wearing our little shoes, "don't come crying to me when you step on something sharp", our mother would say. Within minutes, I'd be stumbling back home, my cheek wet with tears, "It's just a scratch, you'll get better soon", my mother would say. I wish someone were here to tell me that I'd get back to myself soon.

To be young. To be special. To have all the strength of the expanse of the universe contained within my whole being. An unstoppable force. I still hear the echoes of cheers and applause on the day of my graduation, or was that my wedding? The passion of my youth replays like a broken record in what's left of my memory. It's foggy. Some parts I can't recall, but I remember the feeling. That sweet rush. Energy lingers around me but never visits. She's selective, a luxury. Why won't she visit? I reach out to grab her; she slips between my fingers and whisks herself away, leaving traces of something I'll never again taste.

I had an insatiable hunger for life, a relentless appetite, but there comes a point where that sweet delicacy stops flowing, my back starts aching with every step, and I realise with wide eyes that there isn't more energy ready to be poured into my soul. Like many things, energy isn't an unlimited resource. It's a finite source that must move on, with or without your consent; it's a force that moves from one thing to another. I've left traces of myself behind. Like an alcoholic, I am addicted, yet I have become displaced. Unravelled. She has found someone else. My flow of life, once a human right, now a privilege.

What am I, without energy?

I can hear the joys of laughter from outside the window. The leaves are brown; they too, become brittle, but the leaves are reborn. The leaves are falling. I will soon pass on what is left of my hunger. It feels like a call home. My soul reclaimed by its creator. It's coming from the park nearby. The bells of the early autumn call. A call we cannot ignore, like coming to the end of your favourite song, watching that last 30 minutes of your favourite film; a feeling that what I now have will end. When the finite resource is inevitably up. Strength swept from beneath me, above me -from all sides. I am knocked into stillness like a flame with no oxygen. I would do anything for her back. The more I run, the more I lose, the further she gets. A hunger for life fills me more than a thousand suns. Bring me closer to the sun and give me its fire. Scorch me by the touch of its rays. My flame is burning out.



I was so much more.

I did everything, yet I still wanted more. My desire for life was not unlike the sweet concoction of greed and gluttony. The days when I could sing with the depth of my mountainous lungs. People would always listen to me. I reminisce about the sequence of the brush strokes and the lyrics of my favourite songs, but I do not have the energy to do so. I yearn for her. I miss her dearly, my vigour, my appetite for life, my energy. A brush too heavy to lift. Legs too heavy to carry me, yet I still want more.

Like watching a boat take off from the shore, I am left stranded without her. Time has taken her captive and will not let go. It's a natural process, I know. I just didn't think she would leave me so soon. "Come home", I find myself whispering from time to time. It's starting to get a little cold now.

My hands that moved on their own, like a musician playing the strings of the harp of their favourite melody, I would paint for hours. But now, my hands do not speak. Like a pianist with no keys, a driver with no wheel. A painter without a muse.

I used to love getting dressed up.

I still remember what a fresh burn on the left side of my ear from the curling iron feels like; it stings. I can wear the same MAC lipstick; I can wear my favourite heels, but nothing is the same. There are cracks in my lips, and the shoes give me pain.

I am still myself; I still worry about the same things as I did. Who's coming to visit? Does my hair look flat? The laughter outside is getting far too loud.

The rush of adrenaline. The drug that is the high of youth. That pulse in my veins. The feeling of a pounding heart, not on by the threads of a machine. I close my eyes. I wish I could feel more.

Now, all I feel is resonance.

TORNADO SEASON



carella keil

Only a shallow woman
dives for cover under others
High as Icarus in November's flame
my lips are poisoned off

Love is to purge
A Poem about Not

A Lover's Kiss away from the lips
of Tornado Season

BED/ROT

anisa ahmed

A.

My new flatmate looks just like me. Well, me if I got more sleep. She, on the other hand, is luminous, infuriatingly so.

The living situation is ideal. I work days, vacating the flat by eight every morning, returning at seven every evening. She works evenings as a security guard for the museum. *Just me and the dead bodies*, she says then laughs. I laugh with her because it is the polite thing to do when you've just met someone.

I've seen them, the bodies, when I visited the museum once, long before I'd met her. Unlucky carcasses preserved in a bog however many centuries before now sentenced to eternity in a purgatorial display. Then, a strand of hair across the forehead, or the curve of a knee hinging at the joint, would give them away. Small hints revealing they were human once.

On the days I wake before my alarm, I hear the shower run. She's in there for a long time. Spending hours on end with them, I understand the need to wash it off. So when I go to the bathroom and find there is no more hot water, I don't blame her.

We see each other in passing. She leaves as I return.

I work as the executive assistant to the CEO of a company that takes money to breed more money, a modern day feat of witchcraft. What this means is, I'm responsible for the comings and doings of a grown man. I keep him fed, happy, and on time, which means I must appear fed, happy, and on time. Every morning is a ritual. Black slacks for Monday to Friday. A different blouse for each day: Monday, navy, Tuesday, burgundy, Wednesday, white, Thursday, forest, Friday, black.

When I leave, in burgundy, she is already asleep. The living room reeks heavy of cigarette smoke, I didn't know she partook. Technically, the flat is non-smoking, though I'm hesitant to point this out. We've been co-existing so peacefully.

I reach the office before anyone else. I brew coffee and lay out breakfast as my own stomach growls in resentment. The groceries have a habit of disappearing. Typically the vanishing act occurs on Friday, maybe Thursday. Cutting corners often means there's not enough to stretch out the week. But Tuesday is odd. That morning, I'd reached for an apple but came up empty. Then to the toast, just a dry bottom slice, as light in my hands as an insult.

I don't want to point fingers when I'm not sure. And I've been tired. Losing hours, somehow lighter in the head and heavier in my body. This means I make mistakes. Calls scheduled for ten are at twelve, a lunch meeting for Wednesday reveals itself as dinner on Thursday. There is shouting, spittle in the corners of his mouth, and I am sent home early.

Being home before sunset feels sacrilegious. And when I turn my key into the lock, the flat is ejecting me as well, spitting me out with noises, squeaking and scratching at the walls. No, behind the walls. Behind her walls. She is home, of course she is home, I am the one violating our unofficial agreement. So I let her carry on. I say nothing about the food rotting at the back of the fridge, the crumbs on the counter, nor the dried drops of blood by the tub drain. The flat is beginning to smell like unreleased breath, like rot. And when I hear the front door open then close with her exit, I exhale.

I wake to sore limbs, feeling like I've taken beating. Lifting them is an endeavor. My alarm rings, and when I raise my arm to quiet the noise, I notice spots, a trail of fading purple dots climbing down my wrist to the crook of my elbow.

Breakfast is a scavenge. I lock in on a steak sidled to the back of the fridge, and devour it — the meat half bloody and crowding my mouth. I prepare for work, though I'm unsure if I'm invited back. Still, I dress. In a forest blouse

and black slacks, I take the bus. Though, I should be in navy. Today is Monday, the computer monitor informs me.

I am not invited, it turns out. He tells me as much upon arrival. One of the interns takes my desk, dials the phone still smudged from my fingers. I pack the few things I have.

The smell in the flat is unbearable. It greets me at the entrance.

When I open her door, I discover her room mirrors my own – like her face to mine, similar but not same. She sleeps under a pile of blankets, a still mountain under a comforter.

I say her name, first in a whisper then in a declaration. Still, she sleeps.

Under her bed, the corner of a metal box peeks out. An ice box, of the old-fashioned variety. A dog on the hunt, I follow my nose.

Inside the box is a menagerie –a swallow, a pigeon, a squirrel. A taxidermist's dream, they lie among a bed of foodstuff; a banana peel browned to leather, ripped pieces of wilted lettuce and celery, torn morsels of toast. I bring my finger to the squirrel. The animal's center feels hollowed, dried to a husk.

I think of the museum, of parched bodies.
Under the mountain of blankets, she stirs.

B.

This year I vowed to be responsible: to eat healthy, live within my means, work a steady job. And I've lived by these rules: I found a new job, a good job. I found a new home, a good home. Even a new flatmate. She's polite, keeps to herself, never asks questions. *Ideal* is the word she uses for our arrangement. I'm inclined to agree.

Of course, there have been a few slips.

The first begins with a cigarette. He offers when we're on shift together. Comrades in a pointless task, guarding bodies no one wants anything to do with. I accept, not because I want to go with him, but because I want to be away from them. Just for a moment.

We smoke in the alley, avoiding capture in CCTV. At least this is his reasoning, he explains while guiding me out back. He cuts his hand trying to open the gate. It pains him, I can tell, though he plays it off, smiling. I help him stop the bleeding.

Before the sun rises, I walk home in his sweater. It smells of him, and of smoke. I don't mind it.

This year I vowed to be responsible. I collect, engage in hobbies, satiate myself with small things.

Though what is the point of vows when time stretches out, and one year becomes indiscernible from the rest?

When night falls, I go through the motions. I dress for my shift, ignoring the scratch of black polyester against my skin. I leave as she falls asleep. I can hear it, hear her breathing slow, her movements still. Her door inches ajar, as if to say *come in*.

This year I vowed to be responsible. Denying an invitation would be irresponsible. So, I accept.

DOUBT IS ALSO A SIGN



felicia sabartinelli

"Just a few cards.... I just need to know if he's cheating on me. I won't ever ask again, Krysta. Please."

She'll ask again. I pulled five from the deck during our last girls' night hoping they would suffice, but she's clearly not in a good place. I don't know what to say and feel like I've been staring at her, sitting on the edge of my bed like an abandoned puppy, for far too long already. I feel bad for Anita. She's usually so luminescent—a vibrant aura of pink and sunshine—but a dick has literally fucked the life out of her. She's a shadow of who she was: disheveled blond locks in a half-pony and pearlescent skin like she hasn't seen the sun in days. Even her eyes, once likened to emerald sea glass, are cloudy with anticipatory grief. If I give in, is that the same as feeding an addict?

"Fine," I relent at the sight of her quivering lower lip, "...but remember these are not facts, and please don't shoot the messenger. Alright?"

Anita leans toward me on the mattress and it emits a sudden cry. If it were any other day, any other mood, we would have laughed at the fabric flatulence, but she's transfixed, pupils contracting like a snake as she responds, "Of course. Of course."

I reach over to my nightstand and pull out my secret stash of oracle and tarot cards from a plain black box that was probably meant to house graduation gifts or something.

"Oh, can you use the relationship deck like last time?" she asks.

"Sure." I hand her the black deck with modern white sketches of ordinary items like a telephone, computer, and symbols that represent eternal love or deep heartbreak, like rings or broken hearts. "Remember to shuffle these and think about the answers you're looking for."

"Yeah, yeah...I got it." She's hungry, a woman on a mission, and I'm just the magical bystander.

Anita closes her eyes and begins to shuffle. Her pursed lips tell me she is using every ounce of energy to manifest an answer. When she's finally done, she hands me the deck—almost reluctantly—and I place it between my two palms like a sandwich of possibility. Quietly, in the lowest of whispers, I ask the universe to provide the answers she is looking for. *Please, for the love of God, give her something.*

I cut the deck into three piles on the purple floral blanket in front of us. I slowly turn the top card over on the first pile—the Lightning card—a symbol for sudden change or shocking news. This makes Anita gasp, but I want to see what the second card is before we talk it out.



The second card—the Sword and the Flower—is an omen of power and clarity, often associated with the truth being revealed. "Oh God, see," Anita yells. "He is cheating!"

"No, it could mean many things..." I don't give her the opportunity to reply. "Let's just see what the last card is before we interpret the message."

Before I turn over the third and final card, I internally ask the universe for something positive because I don't have the emotional capacity to calm her down. The Not Enough card is revealed and I read the inscription aloud: "...you are frustrated in your relationship, jealous, or self-sabotaging. Stop."

She is not satisfied. "Pull another card, please. One more."

I want to be a loyal friend, but how much clearer could they get?

I collect the cards, merge them into one pile, and shuffle again. A rogue card leaps from the deck—as if the universe herself pulled it—and it lands in her lap. I can't see what it is, but she's reading it to herself.

Anita throws the card like a frisbee, and it lands to the right of me. "These cards are bullshit..."

The Self-Confidence card is the final card, and I am instantly filled with impatient rage. "Anita—" My voice doesn't seem to register with her. She's now taken up residency on Woe Is Me Boulevard. I toss the card back her way, and it hits her square in the nose. She gasps. A look of—what the fuck—washes across her face. "Don't be dumb," I say.

"Dumb? How am I being dumb?

"Anita, the cards are pretty fucking obvious. You're letting your insecurity and fear get in the way, and instead of making yourself sick—assuming the worst—maybe you should just ask your boyfriend if something is going on."

"But ...but what if he is, and then I have to leave him?"

"Then you leave. If someone makes you question—well, everything—do you really need the cards? Don't you already know?"



WHEREVER THAT MAY BE

elle rains

The cold wind brushed past me as I sat on a bench, letting the heat of the late-winter Sun warm my skin. A banditry of chickadees picked through the large flowerbeds in front of me, hopping through the long strands of dead grass and weeds in search of a meal. Two squirrels chase each other up and down trees, fighting over a fat acorn that had been hidden away against the frigid air until now. I look at the empty spot next to me. I know it's not really empty. It's filled with matter, pulled together by the bonds of atoms. I can see the product of those bonds, but not the energy that holds it all together. I can feel the bench beneath my fingers, but I can't feel the pulsating bonds that connect all things. Are there more things in this world that exist that we cannot see or feel? Am I really alone, or is there someone here with me right now? I see nothing but an empty space. I feel no one. The emptiness buries itself in my chest, making me feel more alone. The only thing I feel now is grief, is death.

Death had come and gone early that morning. It was expected, but it still took me by surprise. When he had taken his last breath, his energy left his body, and the world felt empty. I felt empty. I found myself on this bench a few hours later, feeling claustrophobic from dealing with the business of death. There were plane tickets to book, laundry to wash, and a suitcase to pack. I needed to breathe fresh air. I needed to feel a world that was in motion around me, a world that was alive. I didn't know what day it was or the time. All of those details were meaningless now. I just knew that I needed to be in motion.

My bench was nestled between two tall trees and a line of flowerbeds that were normally bursting with wildflowers and perennials. The long-dead grass and bare trees sent a chill up my spine. I was surrounded by death and decay. What even is death? Was it truly the end of all things? Would death feel like a long, dreamless sleep? Did he feel something when he took his last breath, or were all his senses stamped out? Could death allow us to find some kind of freedom from our decaying bodies? Or, was death like walking through a door to another life or the afterlife?

Where was he now? Did he walk through that door to a new existence? Was he floating in some liminal space or sitting in a cosmic lobby, waiting patiently for whatever happens next? Did he cross the River Styx or fly up to a heaven in the sky? Was he welcomed into an afterlife of peace and pleasure? Perhaps he went to sleep, only to wake up in a new life, with another chance to get it right. Maybe he simply slipped through a veil between our world and the world of the dead.

Maybe death is not as simple as a place. I want to know what happens to the energy, the lifeforce, the soul of a person when their light is extinguished. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, but instead it changes form. A very simplistic view of a complicated theory, but can our energy change form, too? Can we change from humans using energy to live to beings of energy cast out into the depths of the universe? If we are all made of stars, can we then return to them? Could the fabled veil between our worlds really be our energy flowing into a new universe? Could another version of him be out there, living out a life where he died at 100 instead of 50? If his energy may not be destroyed, then it has to still be . . . somewhere.

If the world felt empty when his energy left his body, could I feel that energy if it entered the room? Could I feel his hand on my shoulder as he tried to tell me he was at peace? Could I reach across that veil and find my loved ones there waiting for me? Can that energy ever come back here, to us? Could I feel him with me here on this bench? I look at the empty spot next to me again. All of my thinking and hoping has not brought him back here. All of my contemplation about death, the afterlife, and the possibility that his energy still exists has not gotten me any closer to understanding death. It has not gotten me closer to him. The ache in my chest comes back, followed by the feelings of emptiness.

The wind brushes past me again, pushing fat grey clouds across the sky. The Sun's light bursts free, warming me again. The chickadees and squirrels warm themselves momentarily in the sunshine before continuing their hunt for food. I am not surrounded by decay and emptiness; I am surrounded by life. I realize that the grass and trees that look cloaked in death are just dormant. Soon they will burst back to life to live through another cycle of the seasons, another cycle of death and rebirth. I sit in the heat of the Sun, feeling the energy from a star existing millions of miles away from our planet. Our Sun is just one star of an infinite number that came before it, existing and then dramatically dying. In those deaths came the building blocks for life as we know it. The first organisms on this planet were born out of death. The first humans that walked the planet contain the same star stuff that's in me. The energy from the universe still lives in the plants, the animals, the wind, and the people who didn't choose to be born, but live their lives nonetheless. I don't know what happens when you die. I don't know if our energy lives on in an afterlife or another universe or if it wanders the expanse of space. What I do know is that I'm not really alone. I am not really empty. I look at the space next to me and wish that one day my energy will find his again, wherever that may be.



violet may davey

For centuries or more, paranormal creatures have captured our minds. So much, that each of them have their own well-known tales. We have all heard about the pale ghosts, known for haunting the cemeteries; wild werewolves, howling against the fluorescent moon; or even enchanting sirens, who lurk in the depths below the mysterious sea.

There are so many grand beasts that have crawled their ways into our souls of wisdom, strengthening our knowledge of the other side. But what about the ones in hiding?

Let me take you back to a time, where people, more cunning than a group of foxes, roamed around this complicated world, in search of the hidden. There were beings possessing some of the most powerful energy that anyone could have wished for. It ranged from nuclear energy by the largest star (UY Scuti) to electrifying lightning. Yet, one being held the darkest and most addictive known universal energy per unit volume – Quintessence. This energy was said to be life itself. A self-generating power source with shimmering colours, which reflected one's own personality. The being in question went from possessing an aura of cerulean tinge, the purest energy there ever was, to a nefarious purple hue, known to be devilish. All it took was falling into the hands of the pernicious cosmos, a name that the magical beings

gave to humanity. But how did this come to be?

This tale begins in a time where technology was unknown. In its place were the magical arts and many powers. A time that was full of Mages. Beings who used and practiced elements of magic that came from supernatural sources. They were one of the few creatures that hid, trying to control their uncontrollable witchcraft.

Within the village of Enchantia, full of mushroom people, and surrounded by a domed force field, lived a healer. This was not just any healer, he was the sole protector of the Enchantians, spending much of his life devoted to the greater good. With no friends or family, his existence was solely known to heal, nothing more. He would do many things for his people - creating invisibility cloaks so that the cosmos could never see them, providing medication made via potions, as well as generating spell books, learning as he goes – all so the mushrooms could never be held into captivity. Even going as far as travelling beyond the border to get the potions that he needs, which is forbidden. The healer is the only one who can grant immortality with his bluish Quintessence. The whole village relies on him.

Surrounding the border are the remains of The Enchanted Forest. A place that held situations of liminality and transformation, where humans can have a chance of adventure, to find Mages and use them for their own selfish desires. For this very reason it was forbidden for any of the Enchantians to cross, only the healer has ever done so successfully. He only ever crossed during the day, when rays of hope would shine upon him, leading him to where

he had to go. There was never the choice to cross at night, for that meant danger would come from miles away.

But the healer had had enough.

For too long had the Enchantians misused the healer by absorbing his talents. He would not have minded helping his people, but the problem was that the other mushrooms never took the time to know him, making him feel used only for their benefit. Was it not about time he made himself known? Perhaps then could Enchantia learn to appreciate him for what he does.

One night, as the radiant, lunar orb began to wake, the healer snuck out. He travelled through the deserted village as Enchantia remained asleep. In his bag were all the necessary things a Mage on the run would need: Spell books, potion bottles, herbs, and more. The healer also had an invisibility cloak wrapped around him, ready for use.

Deafening silence consumed the air as the outskirts of the village became more eerie with every step. The healer could feel his heart beating rapidly as he finally came face-to-face with the majestic border he had seen so many times before within the light. Time became still for a moment as he began to contemplate if he should cross. He had done it many times previously, why was now any different? As he stood there, arguing mentally with himself, the moon shone her light upon him, as if she was telling him that his only chance had arrived.

Taking a deep breath, the healer took a few steps forward, the border inviting him closer. He could see the forest clearly, the trees loomed over, as though they were preventing more light from entering the area. Nothing could be seen beyond to identify any proof of life outside of Enchantia. Only the sounds of the wind could be heard as it travelled around the border. The healer began to hesitate. Thinking maybe this was a bad idea after all. Was all this even worth it? Travelling away from the only place he had ever known, with no chance of ever returning; in case the cosmos would follow. But then the healer took a moment to think about his current life now. An existence only known to himself. All his life he wanted to be good. To show everyone that he could be something. And what did he get in return for it? Nothing.

Whilst these internal thoughts became a war in his mind, the healer's body moved on its own, getting closer to the border. The moonlight shining brighter as if it were daytime. Before he even realised, he took another slow step forward. That was when everything had changed.

Once again, time became still. A dust of smoke surrounded the forest. The racing wind managed to clear it up to reveal something that would forever seal the fate of Enchantia. The healer was nowhere in sight. His bag was left on the ground, the contents splattered across the moist grass from the natural rain that had suddenly appeared. The bluish aura that once protected this village was now replaced with a hue of purple Quintessence. A roar of thunder could be heard in the distance as a growing storm was not far from the

outskirts. The Enchantian mushrooms continued to sleep peacefully, unbeknownst to a miniature crack beginning to form at the border entrance, where the healer once was. Waiting for the right moment to fully open, giving access to what has been wanting to enter for a long time. A darkness, coming from the shadow realm deep within the forest, ready to steal the remaining Quintessence ...



ALIVE/DEAD

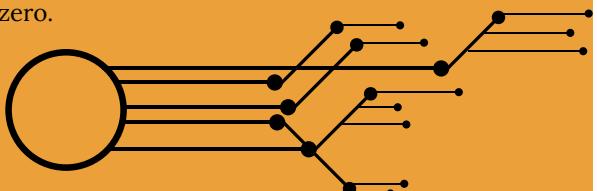
anastasia babicheva

The Sun/The rain to bring my morning coffee
In bliss/In pain I rise from fitted sheets
His voice/No one to soothe and greet me softly
Routine/Chaos to orchestrate my daily needs
I face the city and the angel/the devil on my shoulder
Lets out a cautious whisper/scream to influence my deeds
Intrigued and tired, inwardly/outwardly almost feeling older,
I walk and watch with clarity/ fear the city's midnight streets
Inside my shelter once again, I look for a new goal/deeper hole
Collect myself and play the part like famous Cicero/ Pierrot
With ceiling staring back at my defenceless soul/role
I'm wide awake, name tag across my chest — HERO/ZERO

THERMODYNAMICS

chardonnaya vasiana

Energy exists isolated but wholly constant within the universe,
Your electricity only carried a current filled with a curse,
It can only be transferred from one form to the next,
Transferring my kinetic love to your potential not knowing it was a hex.
Spreading myself thin dispersing all the energy I got,
You never transferred back to me told me it was a 'closed lot',
Making irreversible decisions for the spontaneity of it, not conserving wisdom,
Disordering the system.
We begin to dissipate, I can't excuse this messy movement,
Lying for sparks doing it for amusement,
Enchanted by chaos lowering your dignity to preserve the toast,
Only existing in one state always moving the goal post.
I tried to be your hero,
Now I co-exist at absolute zero.



ENERGY OF LONDON

charlie o'halloran

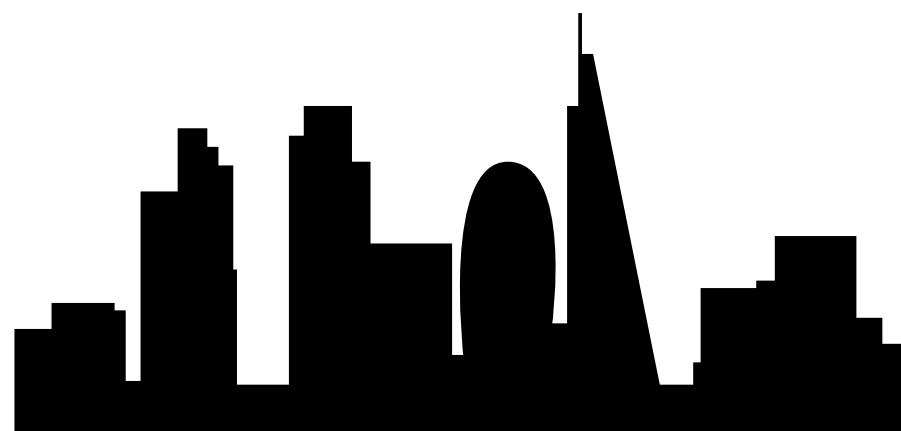
Whenever I go home to America, I am asked the same question on an almost daily basis: "What is London like?" Over time, I have come up with my answer. "London is whatever you want it to be." You could ask every one of the nine million residents to be your tour guide, and you would never once be taken on the exact same route. There are so many worlds within one city. A world of history, a world of sports, a world of pub and drinking culture, a world of glamour. You find the worlds that you connect with and put them together to create your own. When I was a child in the 2000s, small town America, I was particularly drawn to the energy of London. I had never travelled to Europe, or even anywhere other than Disney World, but I escaped into the fantasy world of Britpop and romantic movies set in the city.

The city was its own character, and every conflict was sugarcoated in posh elegance. It became a fantasy world that I dreamed of living in. If the fantasy London is perfect, the real London is perfectly imperfect, which I have come to understand is better.

A few months ago, I moved to a flat in Victoria around the corner from Westminster Cathedral. The best part of living there is that almost everything is within walking distance. I have created a ritual of walking to school and the thirty-or-so minute walk is a little bit of everything. The stairs of the historic church are filled with Londoners puffing on their morning cigarettes or even getting into screaming matches, but congregants walk around them like it is second nature. A few minutes in, I pass Buckingham Palace and ask myself the same question every day: Do I want to stop? If I do, I will feel like a tourist when I want to feel like a local. But if I don't, I will feel bad that I have gotten used to something that was once on my bucket list. The desire to stop and soak it in always takes over for at least a few seconds. But then, I pass through the sea of tourists and go to my favorite cafe, where I can get a hot chocolate with extra whipped cream and mini marshmallows. It is a hidden gem within the storm, a little piece of what makes London.

One morning before the morning walk, a friend suggested that I take some photos during it, so I could be more perceptive of the little things around me. The gallery of that morning, while primarily filled with photos of dogs, is also filled with photos of places I had walked past a million mornings but never stopped to discover. An apartment I

never knew was once lived in by a historical icon. A cozy mum and pop hotel I will sleep in someday, even though I am a local. A card and floral shop for every special occasion, where I have become a regular. Even a Paddington Bear stuffed animal waving out a window, holding a suitcase, a flag, and a sign that reads, "I am home". I couldn't help but wonder if this is the best way to describe the energy of London, an everflowing series of moments that is impossible to put perfectly into words.



VITALITY

dawn web

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It is your fuel—your feed
Movement that drives momentum
Positive or negative
fast—slow or STILL. not neutral.

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a still body shows—
blows forward, hung in confidence
upward, planted with gusto
extended finger tips placed with purpose

stillness brought through the shavings
left behind
undoing your mind—the inner chatter
a battle, mending whines
granting access to all sides.
gives rise to suspension
serving you dry
ambivalent chaos lay on crushed ice
tugging you by
a slither sip—wither to urge demise

Carry you—fiery in eyes
Heat in your bones
Concrete over your shoulders
Zippers unslip your suit
Tweezers tease the stockings glued shut against your skin
All-terrain crawler cranes burst from your toes to shake the ground beneath

The essence of existence that vitalizes your veins—entering and extending from you
A protruding presence felt along midline, harbouring your soul
between thy breasts
Bursts from your palms. Synergy.
Linger onto tongue and said with your chest
Levitate your voice, or encapsulate you whole
Wrap you, surround you—warm embrace—

Your home
Movement that drives momentum
Positive or negative | fast slow STILL.
The one you choose will be the one you feed.

What do you feed?

THE BODY FORGETS THE SUN

isabel kilevold

A quiet shapeshifter. Energy can neither appear nor disappear; it only slips into new forms, like clouds drifting across a painted sky. The setting sun gives each moment a different colour, but it is still there. Just changed. So where did it go? If nothing truly fades, if energy only moves, where did my soul go when it left my body?

There are years of my life that have slipped beneath the surface. Heavy stones dropped into a dark lake. I can hear the echo of their fall through the consciousness of my mind, but the water has long since closed over. I see faint traces of moments that could have been and memories that never were, flickering in front of my eyes like streaks of moonlight reflected on the pond, but the details vanish when I try to grasp them. Time pools in strange places. A veil of fog hangs over the water. It moves through my memories like a living thing, the ghost of wings brushing against my skin. Light filters through, like the outline of the moon behind the clouds on the darkening autumn sky – fractured and pale. It touches everything but warms nothing. I stand in it, unmoving, while entire seasons pass through me.

They say moths are drawn to flame, as if their ruin were romantic. But it is not the fire they seek. An unfamiliar star led them astray, lured off course by a light that was never meant for them. There is a flaw written into the

tremble of their wings. It was never desire that drove them into the flame. This creature is destined to die. Still, we stand around the candle and marvel at their fatal demise. The moonlight is cold and faint, a softened whisper of the sizzling flame. We never ask why the light is there to begin with, or what it means to be born with the kind of hunger that leads you into burning.

I remember the body as something that dulled over time. My reflection dimmed until it was nothing but outlines. Hollow cheeks, sunken eyes, brittle bones. Skin the colour of my irises. Bloodshot and blue with absence. Seeping through the fog, a burnt smell. In the shower, I knelt. My knees bruised against white porcelain. I prayed that the warm water would wash me away. Not from reverence, but from weight. I longed for the water to carry me down the drain. Numb by hunger, I did not notice how the water was coming to a boil, leaving scorch marks down my back. Still, I found comfort in the sting blooming red across my back. Wings devoured by flame. A salvation in the presence of pain. And the body remains. Just changed.

Around me, everything softened into decay. Even the flowers refused to stay. Silence answered my efforts as I watched them wither in the vase. I could not keep anything alive, not even the parts of myself that once reached toward the sun. The moon glinted off the grey ash staining my fingers. I existed like a late frost, lingering too long, touching the buds with death as they tried to open. A moth yearns for nectar, but I was circling something sour, mistaking it for sweetness. The rot was already in the fruit. The peach tree burned to the ground. Still, I remember the nectar on my tongue. You cannot feed on fire. Light, no matter how golden, cannot sustain a body that has forgotten how to receive it. Energy lingers, but it no longer moves with my breath.

The past remains submerged, face-down in the murky water. Nameless and swollen with silence. A cold breath rises through the fog. Moonlight pools across the surface in fractured ribbons, too pale to follow, too soft to hold. A delicate tremble of wings whispers through the mist. I do not reach for it. Beneath the surface, time decays in slow spirals; my drowned years soften into silt. I let the water keep its secrets. The fog curls around my ankles, and I no longer flinch. A pale flutter brushes the edge of my vision, a fragile flicker in the dim light. I carry no torch. This light was never mine to hold.

THE cosmos

katherine
gargiulo

Keira breathed into the folds of her red shawl, a brief warmth spread to her neck and she tucked her hands under her arms. Flames flickered in her hazel eyes as she contemplated her next words.

“What if she doesn’t want to be found?”

“Doesn’t matter, we don’t have any other choice.”

“She’s old enough to remember the birth of this world, Evan. She should know how to hide from a pair of mortals.”

“Of course she does.” He tilted his head towards the stars. “She’s one of the Cosmos, made of pure energy and light. But the map led us here.”

He waited, but the twinkling lights gave no response. He dropped his gaze to the campfire and strained to see the desolation beyond.

“She fled because of him,” Keira remembered the old stories.

“Astraea and El-”

“Don’t say his name,” she interrupted. “Names have power here.”

At the first mention of his name, the darkness rippled and froze the night air for a moment, then disappeared.

Evan hesitated. “They say the Man of Shadows and Astraea both wanted peace, but their means were quite different: Astraea thought better of humanity and believed they could be diverted from their path, while the Shadow...”

“Did not.”

“He exploited their darkest thoughts and influenced wars to become more frequent, battles bigger and bloodier, believing violence would end with violence and would lead to an everlasting peace. When Astraea realised nothing could stop the evil the Shadow was spreading, she fled.”

“Heartbreak,” Keira concluded.

“When you see someone you’ve loved for a millennia orchestrate mass acts of violence, you’d be heartbroken too. But she’s one of the Cosmos and he’s an Old God, two very different energies – it was never going to work out.”

Keira finally turned to look at Evan.

“She’s the only one left who knows his weakness,” he said. “Clearly none of the New Gods have found it.”

“What if she is his weakness?”

Evan opened his mouth to speak, but he wasn’t sure what to say.

“Careful,” another voice said.

Keira and Evan abruptly turned to the campfire, where a woman now sat on the opposite side, watching them over the flames. Her hair was so dark it hardly caught the fire’s reflection, but what was visible reflected deep blue and silver. Her eyes were flecked with gold and slowly shifted between colours.

She looked like the stars.

“Lady Astraea,” Evan breathed.

The stars glowed brighter, the air crackled, and the woman radiated a warmth that settled the chill in Keira’s bones.

“So you’ve come to convince me to help you kill the Shadow.”

“Not kill him-”

“Isn’t that how it’s done nowadays?” Her voice moved like silk across the campfire, and the flames weakened. “If something is difficult, it’s destroyed.”

“Is that how we stop him?”

Astraea focused hard on Evan and her eyes shifted to a dark purple, the gold specks in her eyes caught the firelight. Evan shifted uncomfortably.

“He’s after us,” Keira spoke up. “He knows we’re trying to stop him and that you’re the answer.”

“If that were the case, I could have done so ages ago.”

“That’s not what I mean,” Keira tried not to shrink under Astraea’s stare. “It’s not whether you could.”

The stars grew so bright it looked almost daylight.

"The only way to stop him is by his method, what you've been against from the start: you'd have to kill him. So you left, because that was the only other option. That's it, isn't it?"

She said nothing.

"It's gotten worse," Keira continued. "Bigger weapons, more destruction than before you disappeared. The Shadow won't stop until there is *no one left*." She watched her carefully. "We wouldn't be here if we weren't desperate."

Astraea contemplated this in the following silence.

"No one has made it this far into the desert before," Evan spoke up. "Surely you wouldn't have helped us if you thought we were wrong."

"I am not going to let two people die simply because they went looking for me." Astraea rose to her feet, and the campfire returned to its normal strength. "Rest while you can, and leave by morning."

"But—"

"I've heard what you've had to say. Now you must go."

The ancient being turned from the fire, the stars dimmed, and she was gone.

...

Keira pushed sand over the charred wood while Evan consulted his map. Flat stone and pale sand stretched endlessly in every direction; a few small stone formations and leafless trees dotted the landscape.

A chill cut through the hot air, the blue sky darkened, and clouds that hadn't existed two seconds ago rolled across the desert. Keira leapt to her feet when a dark-clothed figure appeared a few metres before them.

"Have you found what you were looking for?" Elric asked.

Keira stumbled back into Evan's shoulder. The air crackled, thunder shook their ribs, and the Old God radiated a cold and dangerous energy that grew stronger with every passing second. Darkness gathered around his palm and took shape into a long, jagged obsidian blade. He hurled the weapon at Keira and Evan, who dropped to the ground and shielded their faces. The weapon was suddenly met with a brilliant shaft of white light, and it exploded in every direction. They lifted their heads and saw glittering black remains scattered across the ground. The Old God's eyes were fixed on something behind them, his face pale as though he'd seen a ghost.

Astraea stepped out from behind the mortals.

"Hello, love," she greeted calmly. Light grey-and-gold eyes met deep black flecked with silver. "You've gone too far for too long, Elric – I've seen what you've done and all you've been doing."

"Last time we had this conversation, we came to an understanding," Elric warned. "If we fought, one of us would die. You refused."

"There has long been a rumour that's taken similar rhyming to prophecy," Astraea stopped directly in front of Keira and Evan. "Seeded from debate over which came first: darkness or light."

"Darkness."

"Perhaps," she agreed. "But now things have changed, and that prophecy is nearly fulfilled." She locked eyes with him. "You know of whom I speak."

"No," he shook his head in disbelief.

"The cosmos were the first light in the universe." Her hand tightened into a fist behind her. "The sun may be your balance, Shadow Man, but I draw power from the darkness's destruction, and I can bestow that upon whomever I wish."

"What did you do?" His voice shook with anger.

"Everything's been put into place."

A shard of thick glass appeared in her hand and twinkled different colours like stars. Astraea threw the blade at Elric, who brought up just enough shadow to block the strike. Starlight exploded, and she advanced. He countered, and they were evenly matched, drawing closer as she attacked with a fury that had been building over the last thousand years. Light and shadow spiked around them, the clouds struggled to cover stars that broke through their cover.

The ancient beings locked blades and came to a halt.

Tears welled in Astraea's eyes.

"I'm sorry."

She drew back with another cosmic blade, and drove for his chest.



WAVES

kristen britt

Sometimes things move in a way that just doesn't feel right. A force outside tenses the corpus. Muscles pinch and pull and change the body. That tension makes the words come out strangely, uncontrolled. Nevertheless, there is an attempt to control. A grasp at something un-grasp-able. Using words to repeatedly reach out and release to find grip. And then...

I feel

like the sounds

are

floating away...

The language is necessary. Necessarily slow. Not languid, but

in its necessity, the energy has been

sapped.

Words that needed to come out but were too hard
or
important
to be anything other than the boiled-down stock of their absolute

simplest form.

Slow. Deliberate. Tense.

But that tension...it holds air. The breath. It matters.

Carrying away. The energies we want...to release...

Other times...I have been gripped so tight. A vice grip and boards and wood glue hoping to keep everything together but it can't always hold in the words. There is an EXPLOSION of verbosity. Suddenly all the words and thoughts and emotions and energies and feelings and problems and concerns and loves and hates and failings and successes are struggling to make it out of my mouth in the right order. Speech that has never encountered a comma in its existence and will swirl around and through any and all attempts at breaking it. It will not be interrupted.

No. It cannot be interrupted this énergie energi energía is twisting and winding around anyone else's words and skipping and integrating and and and tangential but WILL NOT BE STOPPED.

Until.

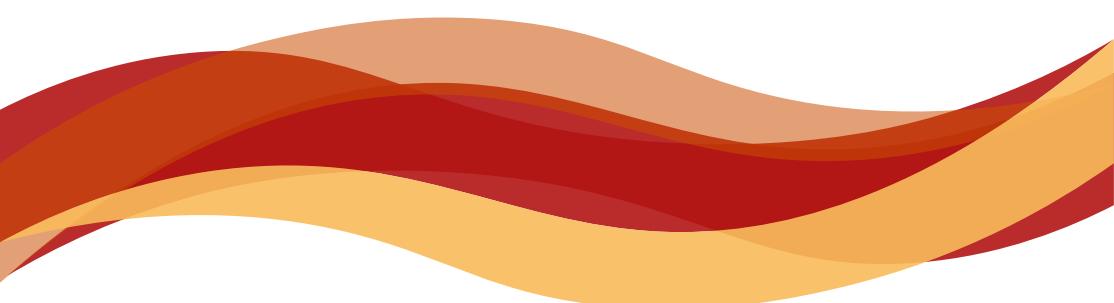
It crashes.

Into the ground.

Shattering.

And then...the tears...

Or the laughter...



begin to lift up the fragments from the floor and

Gather them.

Into a temporary hold. A moment that seems like a pause, but isn't because the cyclone never stops. Not really.

The eye of the storm may have passed.

The stormy seas may be soothed.

But the wreckage remains.

We will use whatever power, stamina, strength, toughness still remains to re-balance.

Re-word. Re-mind. Re-fine.

Into an understanding.

That we (I) will have to ride these waves. Forever.

PURSUIT OF ENERGY

How is this possible? I've been sitting here, in front of the computer, for hours, and still can't focus. I keep looking at the screen and its brightness feels blinding. I just have to do this report that I've done dozens of times, but for some inexplicable reason, I can't understand anything of what I have on the screen. I see the letters, and it looks like they're moving, as if they were intertwined with each other.

The worst part is, I look around the office, and all my colleagues seem productive and so full of energy that I don't have. I can't even remember when I started to feel like this. My parents used to brag to their friends about me all the time and say things like "We can't keep up with all of Anna's extracurricular activities; she's our little over achiever". Teachers called me "a promising child with a bright future ahead of me." Well, the brightness of that future went out and now I'm stuck climbing a meaningless corporate ladder in a 1.8m x 1.8m cubicle. Isn't it great?

I'm doing everything I'm supposed to. I mean, every day I do the same thing. My alarm is set at six o'clock to start my day. Although, let's be real; that's just wishful thinking. The truth is, I look at the phone, and I snooze the alarm so I can sleep for a few more minutes. I've been feeling tired and I think it's because of my new best friend, insomnia. It's killing me. There was a time when I used to love sleeping, but now I fear the arrival of the night. It's a living nightmare, but nothing works, and at this point, the melatonin is just a night snack.

After a few minutes contemplating the dull whiteness of my ceiling, I decide to stand up and immediately regret it because of my back pain. The heat patches that my friend Elvira recommended to me are not working.

Everything feels heavy as if I were carrying an elephant, and even though I would prefer to stay in bed, I stand up, because you have to keep going.

I lost my appetite - God knows when - so I've been skipping breakfast. Perhaps that's the reason why I feel tired. Maybe I can look for some ideas for healthy food online? Or those protein shakes I see a lot. They're supposed to provide energy, so I guess I'll buy one to try out.

I tend to scroll for some outfit ideas on Pinterest because it's easier this way as I don't have to think. If I could, I would put on leggings and a sweatshirt, or even better, stay in my whimsical unicorn PJs, but it's not possible. Who the hell came up with business attire?!

In my long - unsuccessful may I add - search for the energy I lost, I take a variety of vitamins, for my "healthy dose of vitality to nourish my potential"; a mix of the entire alphabet in multivitamins and lots of complicated names I can't remember for the life of me that are supposed to reduce fatigue... I'm still waiting for it though. All the pamphlets say that you must wait a few months of regular intake for them to work. Maybe at the 20th month mark they'll finally "empower my journey and uplift my soul" as promised.

I always take a deep breath, mostly a sigh, still waiting for that rush of energy to take over my body before going to work, but nothing happens. Even though I feel cheated, I keep going. You always keep going. At least, I have my mind occupied with all the emails waiting for me at the office. I'm craving for those passive-aggressive "as per my last email". It's a distraction that's supposed to make me feel useful. Isn't that what it was promised to us when we started adulthood? Find your passion in your career to fulfil your life. It hasn't though. Maybe if I study something else, I'll get that feeling? The motivation might energise me, and I won't feel empty anymore.

I look back at the screen to write the report, but everything is still the same. I ask myself, what's the point of doing this?

I shake my head and let out a sigh. My heart is pounding so hard, and nothing seems to be working, but I have to keep trying to finish the report. You always keep trying.

I move my head side to side and straight up my posture. I look back at the screen, but now it looks kinda blurry. My clock says it's noon. You know what? I'll have lunch. Perhaps I just need to distract my head for a little bit; move around to get some clarity.

As I stood up and started to walk away from my desk, I felt a throbbing pain through the muscles of my back. This is obviously a consequence of sitting for long hours in my desk chair, and I know I need to do stretching exercises, but even for that, I feel tired and think about my accumulated work.

I walk towards the cafeteria, but I start to feel dizzy, so I decide to go to the bathroom to splash some water on my face. Luckily, there's no one there. Oh my God! I feel so drained and my body is not responding; it feels like it's betraying me.

I sit on the floor and all I can think about is that I don't have time for this; I have to finish the report, but the entire room feels like it's spinning. Why is my body not doing what I want? Why am I trembling?

I use the little energy that I have to stand up to splash some water on my face, and I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the mirror. I can't recognise myself. My eyes look empty, even with those huge eye bags under them. How did I get here? Sometimes I feel I haven't been present in my own life. Tiredness has taken over my body. I don't enjoy the things I do anymore.

The cold water feels like a slap in the face. Good! I need that. This is a ridiculous waste of time that I don't have. I think I don't feel numb anymore. Whatever is happening has to stop. Please stop.

Even though my heartbeat is going back to normal, I still feel drained. I'd better eat something so I can go back to work. Yes, that's what I need.

So, I put myself together as if nothing happened, and to be honest, I don't know what just happened. I'll make a plan to get my energy as it was. I mean, there are tons of YouTube videos that can help me. That's going to be enough! I have to keep going. You always have to keep going.

After all, I won't be the creator of my own demise, and I don't want to be a disappointment to my parents. I still want to be their over achiever.



I was always that girl. You know the type, easily over excited. Both positive and negative. Fully charged at all times. Ecstatic and outraged, on your behalf, and at your disposal. I would reply to group chats, instantly enthusiastic. A cheerleader from the sidelines with foam fingers in the air and an exclamation point writing tic. The first with the “HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!!” completed with hearts, flowers and champagne corks popping. Dates saved to my calendar, because you know, I’m just like that.

I would be early to the party, eager to please, laden down with whatever I thought you might like – whatever I thought might say the right thing about me. Eager to please, please fill my need for validation. I had a simple enough agenda: make you happy, and ensure you liked me. I would be careful not to overdo it, or so I thought. I would do my best not to overwhelm or alienate you. Careful not to push you further away.

Not the first responder to bad news – don’t want to be that girl. However trivial, the one that leans all the way in, too keen to consume a tragedy. A slower, more considered response instead. Supportive and championing – more heartfelt, more thoughtful, *more sincere*.

I remember a friend complaining about a guy that was following her around. Before you know it, that sort of thing became actually illegal. With a boundless enthusiasm, he was everywhere she went. Overly affectionate and alarmingly affable. I remember her commenting that he was *like a Labrador*. This was no fond observation. It didn’t seem especially relevant at the time, but it must have resonated because it was a really long time ago. We were travelling in Thailand, I was 21 and it was the summer of 1999. I like to think of the 90’s as the Golden Age of The Arsehole. Before the Nice Police took over and all The Arseholes got cancelled.

Fast forward 30 or so years and you can witness Labrador Energy everywhere if you know where to look. The super cute, warm, tiny puppy, so sweet you can feel the saccharine surge hitting your veins, an all encompassing sugar-rush as the serotonin circulates. The same puppy that chews everything, pees on your new rug and incessantly licks your hands and face incessantly. Desperate for your affection, your attention, your approval. Staving off rejection at all costs, as if their tiny life depends on it.

I pulled it off for a while. I think. After a time (twenty years or so), the Labrador Energy I always gave 100% to suddenly started to work against me. I couldn't understand it. I'd always found it relatively easy when I was younger to make friends and form connections. But suddenly the grown-up me, nicer me, my Labrador Energy, pleased nobody. Insincere, awkward, guilt triggering, fawning, Labrador Energy Me, was killing Actual Me with kindness. Had I somehow become someone else's annoying dog? How could I have been so reckless?

I had, somewhere along the years, abandoned Actual Me. Not uncommon, apparently. Self-abandonment is right up there in the therapy charts these days, according to someone who knows Labrador Me better than Actual Me. She is a self-taught, self-appointed life coach. And very *deeply* nice. But also not really. She has, between you and me, perfected the nicest possible way of being quite often, mean, dismissive and belittling. Actually, I would have disengaged long ago. Labrador Energy Me thinks it's good to be held accountable by her barely masked disdain.

Somehow, little by little, Actual Me, the funny, free speaking, authentic Arsehole in all my glory, had been sanitised. Rebranded and repackaged for more unilateral appeal. And so I waited. I waited for the unilateral appeal to start kicking in. To open new doors to new experiences. I waited patiently for deeper, more meaningful connections; the warm cloak of acceptance to reassure me that I was loveable after all. I was coming from a *mindset of abundance*, as the self-help gurus recommend, and so would attract the same Labrador Energy I put out. So I thought. But I didn't. I attracted the kind of people that are drawn, for reasons best known to themselves, to Labrador Energy. These people, I have come to realise, are not my people.

Because the strange thing was, the more invitations I gradually came to receive, the fewer Actual Me wanted to be a part of. Actual Me, couldn't be bothered, Actual Me didn't want to play. I found myself in countless cab rides not longing for my destination. Not actually wanting to be a part of the outings and events that had been chosen for me. Not actually wanting to be with the kind of people who require Labrador Energy in attendance. Actual Me longed to press eject, delete, and disconnect. While I was busy practising my lines, perfecting my carefully constructed attitude to blend in, I hadn't realised that by doing so, Actual Me would never be seen, never be heard. Never be present.



For now, while I wait to find my balance, I watch. Because someone else is always doing it. And I think: calm down, slow down. You have nothing to prove. You're included. You're invited. You're enough. You don't need to prove to everyone around you what a fantastically nice, good, honest, kind, fabulous friend you are. Because the best people in life love you and forgive you when you're authentically being an arsehole. But nobody loves or forgives a fake.

So, day by day I'm killing off my hound of fakerville. I'm consciously uncoupling from my former puppy ways. Nobody will notice of course. Not till they do. It's a subtle change. I'm making 'no' my new normal. Pretty sure I'll never be Main Character Energy, and Girl Boss Energy seems unlikely in this lifetime. But I am happy to be leaning into my Non Labrador Energy. I'll let you know how it goes.



AGAIN

megan freeman

I recall a time when I had energy.

When I would rise with the golden sun through my blinds,
and wash the night away with warm water.

When I would pound my running trainers on the concrete,
when sweat would fall from my brow —
salty and hot.

My arms defined, tender from lifting heavy.

I would walk and walk — share the trees with the universe.

I would bake bread; knead it and scour it until the tension left my
shoulders —

transferred to the oven where it would burn, burn, burn.

Now, I buy a loaf packaged from the supermarket.

I walk only when I must — when the bus is late or I've missed the train.
Now, I struggle to lift my bags up the stairs.

I am out of breath by the time I reach the top;
to my flat where I lay on my bed long after the sun has risen
and shower only when I remember to.

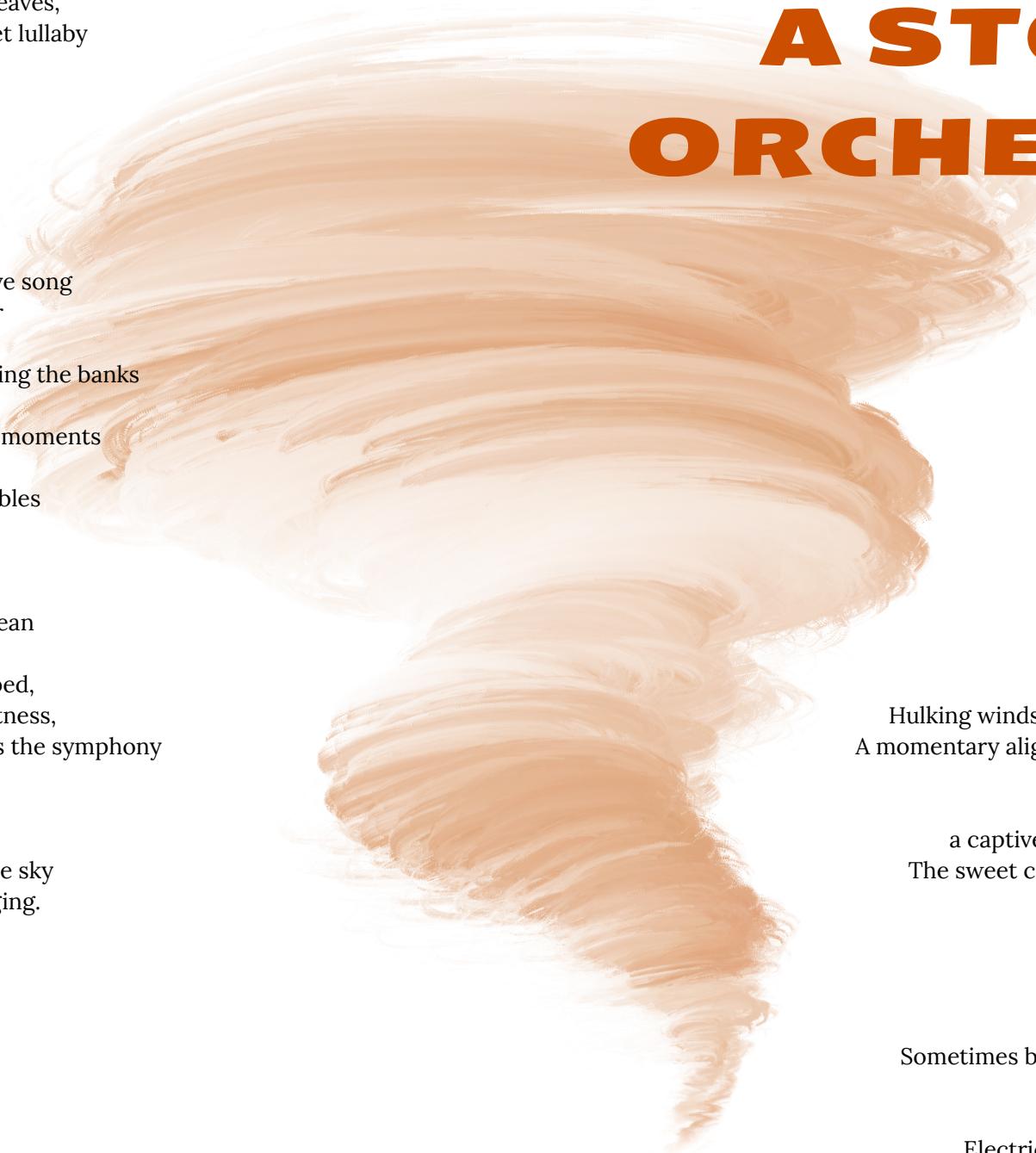
When I have energy again, I say,

I will reverse all these things, these habits that have consumed me.

I will get back to my old ways,
the sun and I will rise together again,
the trees and I will sway in sync.

Again,

and again,
and again.



Feel it humming through the leaves,
glowing, verdant, soft... a sweet lullaby
Soft whispers in the air,
Trees gently swaying, rooted,
yet somehow dancing,
shifting, soothing, sighing.

Gentle damp kisses,
gifts from cotton-soft clouds
The first notes of a tinkling love song
No words, a mere pitter patter
Crystalline.
Sparkling on the leaves carpeting the banks

Flowing, filling, voluminous in moments
no longer lazy,
meandering past polished pebbles
now galloping, accelerating
a quiet rushing.
now ROARING
a watery race to an infinite ocean

But before it merges, is absorbed,
is a mere drop in a watery vastness,
the rain's melodious aria raises the symphony
an operatic crescendo
its watery tune interrupted
A percussion of thunder
arrogant electricity lighting the sky
morphing, a new sound emerging.

A STORMY ORCHESTRA

nina engineer

Hulking winds join the cacophony, howling loud
A momentary alignment with the crashing thunder
stealing the rain's grand finale.

The forest, its occupants
a captive audience to this hostile takeover
The sweet cajoling rain now an angry tantrum
raging and roaring,
Without reason

Elements of Nature
Fulfilling their purpose
Sometimes benevolent, sometimes destructive
...never destroyed
Ever-changing,
Electric, bright, illuminating, consuming.

PSYCHE'S CHARGE

ozgur hassan

Curtains up. **Eros** and **His Lover** are on two ends of the same room. On one side, stage right, **Eros** is leaning against the wall smoking a cigarette. On the other, stage left, **His Lover** is pacing back and forth but never straying too far from the wall.

Eros: Not quite yet.

His Lover: If not now, then when?

Eros: You'll know when the time is right.

His Lover: How will I know?

Eros: I'll tell you. Let's stop speaking.

Eros pauses for a moment, staring at **His Lover**.

His Lover stops pacing, and directs attention back to **Eros**.

His Lover: How will you tell me if we aren't speaking?

They pause and stare at each other. **Eros** takes a drag from his cigarette, walks over to **His Lover**, and passes it over. **His Lover** does not smoke from it, but holds it between fingertips, as though holding a ball of light. **Eros** returns to his place, pulls out a box of cigarettes, removes one from the packet, placing it between his lips, then lighting it again.

Eros: Do you hear that?

His Lover: What?

Eros: That.

His Lover: I hear nothing but imprudence.

Eros: Then you aren't paying attention.

His Lover: And what, my good Sir, must I pay attention to?

Eros: Life itself. Our words may be unspoken, but the space between us is enough to tell you everything. It's what's left when words burn out. It hums in the stone beneath us, in the air, it's the tremble in your throat when you try not to speak. Hear it.

His Lover: Hear life?

Eros does not respond.

His Lover: Hear life? I've life enough for us both and you know this.

Eros: I do.

His Lover: So what must I hear? What will you say?

Eros: I shan't say. Not quite yet.

His Lover: So I'm to wait? Is waiting, life?

Eros: It's more alive than touching. It doesn't need skin. It doesn't need us. They pause. The sobering truth of reality washes over them both. Faces drop, shoulders loosen, they look each other in the eyes from across the stage. **Eros** takes a drag from his cigarette.

His Lover: Then what does it need?

Eros: Only awareness. Only the spark that says we're still here. Even when we aren't.

His Lover: (softly) And when that spark dies?

Eros: It won't. Energy doesn't die. It only changes shape.

His Lover: So this is it?

Eros: This is everything. The pause. The distance. The light that either shines or dims.

The lights flicker, a low hum fills the stage. **His Lover** looks toward **Eros**, illuminated by the faint glow.

His Lover: It shines for me.

Eros looks at **His Lover**, and starts to walk over while **His Lover** speaks.

His Lover: Does it shine for you?

There is no response.

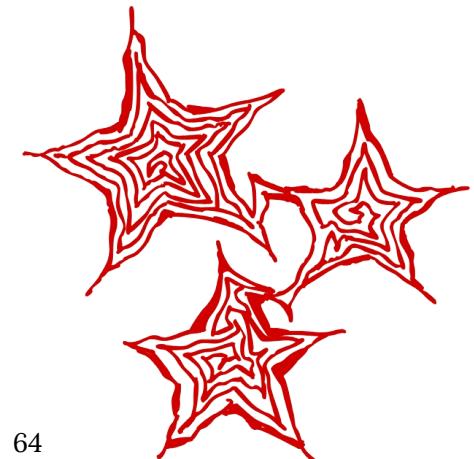
His Lover: Does it shine?

There is no response. They are face to face. **His Lover's** lips tremble. Sadness strikes.

Eros: Not quite yet.

BLACKOUT.

END.



THE MYSTERY OF PINEGROVE PARK

sandra seidi

GHOSTS??!!

Pinegrove 6 DEAD!

Spirits are lurking!

DEATH! HAUNTED F*CKING PLACE!

Nia stared at the graffitied wall before her. The words painted in blood-red made her gulp. Her and Chase should in no way, be there. It had been eight years since Pinegrove Park had closed. The biggest mystery of their town, right there, in front of them. No one seemed to know exactly what happened behind the gates, but the ongoing rumour was that a group of six people died brutally in mysterious circumstances. There were no answers. Media outlets tried to cover the case, but got heavily threatened, so they had to kill whatever story could come out of that place. Ever since that strange day, no one in town even dared to utter the name of this park. It was supposed to be demolished about five years before, but inexplicable events kept happening that would not make it possible for the park to disappear.

Nia stood before the gate. Chase promised to stay near the car in case something went wrong. The mystery surrounding the park made them always want to go there and see what was really left of it. Even their own parents wouldn't bring the subject up. But they were determined to get at least one picture of the abandoned park. Ever since the workmen gave up trying to tear the amusement park down, no one has been there, except the police to put up signs reading "NO ENTRY" or yellow police tape lines with lettering: "DO NOT CROSS". The streetlights that once gave life to the park had been broken a long time ago, making the spot very dark. Only the moonlight made it possible to see a fraction.

Maybe Nia and Chase were being too irresponsible. They had been warned of the dangers, but were they real if no one dared to talk about them? What had really happened in that place? How come no one had a single picture of the park after it shut down? They were there to get some evidence somehow. Call it stubbornness, curiosity or plain stupidity, they were determined.

Nia reached her hand to the rusty gate. It made a loud, screeching sound, as she slightly pushed it. She hesitated, surprised the gate was not locked. Are we about to make the news, or are we *about to make the news*? She thought to herself, feeling a slight dread.

She was not supposed to even enter the park, but what better way to take a good picture than to be inside the place? There was no way that some spirits, or whatever they called, were truly lurking in that space.

Nia kept opening the gate very slowly. The loud, screeching sound made a few bats start flying, blurring the dark sky. Her heart was beating so fast, she swore it could jump out of her chest at any moment. Walking in, Nia took out her camera and started taking pictures. People would be baffled to learn the park looked almost brand new. No signs of destruction or real abandonment. The rollercoaster, the ferris wheel, the merry-go-round and...The haunted house. The park's most famous attraction. Until that day. Nia stopped, wondering if she should try to take a picture in it. She was already in, might as well take the opportunity. Touching the door, she went in just as easily. It was very dark, with only the moonlight shining through a window. She could hear drops falling on the floor but couldn't tell where they were coming from.

Trying to control her breathing, Nia focused her eyesight on what she could see. It looked like some sort of abandoned living room. Maybe it was the entrance of the park's haunted house. Nia remembered hearing stories about this place. She picked up her camera, taking another picture. As soon as the camera clicked, a light from a candle appeared.

Nia suddenly stood very still. Where did that come from?

The candle's flame was reflecting in a mirror at the corner of the room. She was unsure if she should approach it, so she elevated the camera and snapped another picture. A figure appeared. Nia's heartbeat became faster, her hands sweaty. Somehow, Nia could always feel when she was being watched and the weight of eyes on her. She was not alone in the room. Another snap in the camera. She felt something close to her. A cold breeze passed through her arm. Her eyes darted around the area, carefully. A slight creak of wood echoed from the floor, and she closed her eyes, waiting for the worst. Who was in there with her?

Opening her eyes once more, Nia felt the cold breeze right in front of her. It was very light. Not daring to move even a centimetre, she felt something was right in front of her. She couldn't tell if it was a person, as it was too dark for her to make any shape. Her nostrils flared and her breathing was loud in fear.

The flash of her camera captured a face. Nia stopped breathing. What she saw was too unfamiliar. It didn't seem human, it didn't seem monster-like. Close to a blur, without any shape that made sense.

'What the hell am I seeing? My mind playing tricks on me?'

The silence was heavy in the room. Another flash from her camera and the face stood closer. She opened her mouth to scream, but her throat felt very tight. Putting her hands on her neck, the air was leaving her lungs but

not coming back. She couldn't see anything and the room seemed darker than before. As if she were nose to nose with someone, she didn't dare utter a word.

There was a beat of silence.

Run!

The sound came from a strange combination of voices, right in front of her, making her jump.

The door where Nia had walked in, opened with a loud thud. The cold breeze got even colder and the air in her lungs was not coming back. She suddenly felt a push, that made her drop her camera. She tried reaching for it, but it disappeared in the darkness. She couldn't breathe in that room. She couldn't go back for the camera. All she had left to do was run. So, she did. She wasn't looking at anything; she had to get out as soon as possible.

She tripped, feeling lightheaded, but a pair of arms kept her from hitting the ground.

Chase.

"Hey, hey! You're here, thank god! I was looking for you!" Chase said, hugging her as hard as he could. "Where did you go?"

"We have to get out of here!" Nia said; panic filling her voice–hoarse from the lack of air from before.

"Wait... are you okay?" Chase eyed her. "Where's your camera?"

"Chase... please. We don't have time. Listen to me, we need to go!" Nia pleaded. "Someone...something is in here!"

With no hesitation, they started running to the car.

Nia would never think that the park was *truly* haunted with an unknown dark energy. All the stories she heard, she thought people were exaggerating.

They left the park, but the feeling of being watched remained.

Perhaps, some mysteries were better left alone.

THE CHANGE OF ENERGY

stephanie rios ramirez



I walked into the freezing room, it was light – like a normal classroom I supposed, but it was humid and something about it felt ugly as soon as I walked in. The walls were heavily stained – is it blood? As if someone had been injured or even killed right outside the room. My palms were sweaty, but they touched the door with the burning knob, it creaked and my sweat dripped to the floor. The door didn't have any windows; thus, I couldn't see what I was going into, but I somehow knew. My curiosity took over instantly gripped power in that moment. I saw each cold-blooded creature with thorns bigger than their brains and with hands and feet bigger and more frightening than the size of a meteorite. I tried to look for an empty seat like an innocent deer looking for a safe space in the wild, being danger free. I too, was looking for welfare and clearance in this time of absolute fear. I see an empty seat in the corner, it wasn't as isolated as I wanted it to be, but it'll do – I guess. What else can I do? It was the only seat next to the teacher, like a green leaf sitting in the corner of a bush. The teacher, next to that seat, seemed like the only person in the room who didn't want me as their three-course meal and beverage all in one. She looked at me with her large, round eyes, they were blue like the ocean and calmed you like a soft breeze on a beach.

She said;

“Welcome to your new class, Melanie! I’m Miss Bowie!”

She gave me a warm, welcoming smile, and said this just as I needed it the most:

“Please take a seat.”

Her voice was so calming that I almost felt like I was comfortable enough to be in the gloomy room. However, when I gazed back up at everyone, my face dropped to the ground again. The calmness that I felt from the teacher was completely absent from the students, it’s like I was in a different universe when I looked at the teacher and then when I looked up at the students, it wasn’t the same. I wouldn’t feel at ease. They were all hungry, horrifying hyenas, waiting to eat their prey, enjoying every part of it, devouring it slowly and calmly like they had plenty of time to eat the rest and leaving it as leftovers for the next day. In that very moment, I knew I was about to drop to the floor if I did not step back and leave, at least for a little bit. My heart was beating so fast that I could not keep up with the tempo, it could wear off and just stop.

“Miss... Bowie, I’m sorry, but could I just get some water?” I said with a very quiet voice that only she could hear.

“Yes, of course, Melanie, there’s a water fountain in the main corridor on your left”. She smiled at me gently, but her eyes frowned in worry. “Are you alright, though?”.

I paused for a second and looked at her, tears were about to fall out without me wanting to. I didn’t want to have a bad first day.

“Yes, I’m fine Miss Bowie”. I tried to smile back, but I just couldn’t, it was like trying to lift a massive rock on the floor.

Those words felt like the light breeze of a fan after you’ve ran for 20 miles for a marathon, or the water you have after it. Like a beautiful, warm spring day after a week of heavy storms and fearsome weather. However, the gruesome storms were still surrounding me like I was their dead prey, only ready to mess me up. I wanted to disappear from that classroom. I put my hand on the doorknob again, feeling shadowy figures behind me like I was in a haunted house. I opened the door, which felt like a prison gate, locking me in my terrors, and ran straight out searching for any other place or corridor that was empty. The energy felt different.

I liked the feeling of loneliness, stillness and calmness. Especially after my horrifying experience in the room. I didn't know where I was heading but I kept walking. I saw a door that had a female sign on it, I assumed it was the toilets and without any major thoughts, I barged in. It smelt like daffodils at the start, only where the door and sinks were. The cubicles looked dark and unfriendly, but I felt that this could be my safe place from now. Then I heard a loud flush which sounded like it was going to eat up the whole toilet. A cubicle on one of the first toilets swung open. In that instant, I was looking at myself in the mirror and then out came a tall girl, with pale white skin and dark hair. She approached the sink quickly to wash her hands, also looking in the mirror. I could feel her scanning me for a few seconds. She then confidently started a conversation.

"Hi! I'm Wendy, I haven't seen you around before, are you new?". Her eyes were green like the trees of a forest and her freckles were shining brown under the dim, yellow lights, she had a welcoming smile on her face.

"Yeah, I am, just started to-day. The school seems okay, but my class is a bit strange, though". I don't usually tell strangers too much at first, but today, I only wanted to get it all out and rant.

"Oh, you poor thing. You must feel so frightened. You see, this school has some strange kind of energy – especially when you're new, I must tell you that".

"Energy?" I said loudly in complete confusion.

"Yes, but you'll see that it will change and everything will be like a normal school day. At first the teacher seems very nice and welcoming. Your classmates the complete opposite, they're very edgy, they look at you weirdly, like they want to eat you up!" Exactly what I had thought.

"Oh, and not to mention your classroom, it feels super eerie, you may see blood, but then the nightmare will go away. The teacher will be strict, and your classmates will be lovely!"

"Wow! That's..."

I then get interrupted. "Gotta head to class now! Time here flies by. All the best, if you need me, look for me at break or lunch. See ya!"

She rushes out like a gush of wind and still in complete confusion, I wash my face with the school water, hoping it will wash away my misery. I don't deserve this mayhem. I thought to myself, feeling angry, I just want to be in a normal school. I rush out of the toilet looking for the classroom to collect my things and leave like I was never here, like I never existed. I then see room G16, the classroom which led me to my attack. But this time, it didn't have bloodstains on it, only colours of paint spilt everywhere. I go in, nervous for what I'm about to see.

"It's Melanie! She's back! Come in!" Her face looked welcoming with a warm smile. Everyone is smiling my way. Then I hear a shout:

"Melanie! Why did you take so long?"

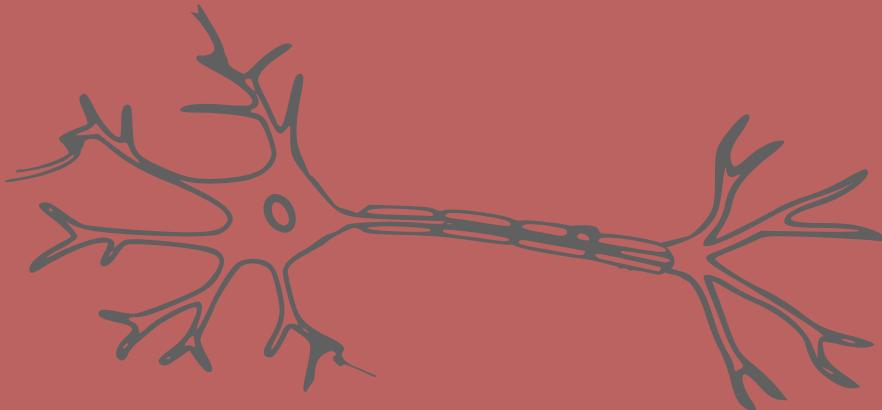
"Miss I was..."

"Fussing around I see, well you're not going out to break anymore, young lady".

These are not the people that I remember seeing when I first walked in, nor the classroom. Everything was bright and friendly looking. Perhaps it was my energy of fear and devastation of moving to a new school. Whoever Wendy was, she was right – this school has its own energy. Although, what I do not know if this weird, spooky energy will stay eternally, or if it will continue to change. Let's wait and see. I go back calmly to my seat and smile at everyone.

Let the adventure begin.





NERVES

zareena hamill

Central to all thought is the nerve, the dare, the shock.
Stress by any other name, evolved for survival
Ticking away in our ageing anatomical clocks.

Now learning to rethink, it's an instinct of growth.
Signal after signal, as that one phone call yet to lose hope.
Then Angst, Panic & Regret barge in, getting all dressed up.
Spiking the heart: pump after pump.
The brave brain bites back at these thoughts & facades
But it's a scared sponge with toothy thoughts.
So we call it bizarre.

From headache, heartbreak, stage fright and grief
If only these nerves could float in balloons and let me breathe!
I know safe dendrites can be confused, bubbling
Or toiling in a bad memory brew.

But a bed in Life is no place to rot.
Dear Reader, please wait
for me to soothe this angst with tea
at my little sanctuary pub spot.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to thank our course leaders, Dr Monica Germanà, Dr Leigh Wilson, and Dr Hannah Copley, who were with us every step of the way. Your support has helped us improve greatly as both writers and team members. Thank you to the Vice Chancellor, Professor Peter Bonfield, and his office for their continued support of the journal, which is greatly appreciated. Thank you to our printing partner, Blissetts, for bringing our dream journal to life and being accommodating every step of the way. Last but certainly not least, thank you to everyone who submitted to the journal. We are aware that sharing your work is personal, and we appreciate you letting us in and inspiring us. The journal would not be the same without each and every one of you.



ISSN 2055-3676