

A photograph of a beach at dusk or dawn. The sky is dark with a bright light source behind a cloud, creating a silhouette effect. A person is walking on the sand in the middle ground. In the foreground, there are wooden lounge chairs and a thatched umbrella. The ocean waves are visible in the background.

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Cover image by Pradeep Maheshwari

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ROOTS

RECLAMATION

by Chia Amisola

Only one name can save us now. This mouth runs for a mouth: spitting, stacking, some dire rundown like he knows our pain. This graveur can save you; there, still semblance of planetary forgiveness. A lost

rundown on fortitude. A breaking of sin, or the palate cleansed with the rapture of the slums. A white tent parade amidst old money streets. Local engraver is tired, built moulds for their names are all the same anyway.

End dirt promises at “*Ramos*” and “*Cruz*,” bled syllables to bartered cents for candlewax. Almighty Father discards his robes along the mangled tarpaulins, helps grab rubber slippers buried under for the Santos family--

an eschewed pilgrimage that could only smell of carcinogen, dull blood, and musky breath. Almighty Father watches the recitations of the litany, fight brewed over ash and flower. These streets are teeming with jackpot dreams,

noontime Sunday television, a licit stillness wrought for devotion. *Ganun talaga ang buhay.* Almighty Father guides us towards burial of these roads; says this godly disposition is empyreal, is freefall. Move the hospice,

I would trade this chasm of God and false salvation
for a keep of home. This lies education stilled, chalk
fuming at concrete, birth certificate misspellings, an
existence with no record. Our execution is dire; first

paradise of smog and gutter, second nameless, illegible,
illiterate. Almighty Father blames it on predictability:
God forbid we hadn't done enough to save ourselves.
All we knew was blind falling, fastened promises, the

words of money men. Almighty Father taught us the
meaning of the word "free" in all the wrong ways, hid
3PM prayer for us to not think poverty. Said a gunshot
was like a miracle -- we could ignite sin out from

this system, peso or uneducated from some weekly
tithe. Almighty Father taught us how to live in our
own coffins and bury our own sons. Said that this sun
dies like broken horizon on wire and gas leak -

it kept no earth or memory anyways, or relic of
time on the throes of Satan himself. Said that we
belong in the white tents; we'd rival the white guts
under the Sistine's pews.

IT'S BRITNEY, BITCH

by Deidre Z. Camba

When you are finally tired
of inventing bodies for things
you don't believe you can
touch, perhaps you will

pause long enough
to see the best metaphor
die. Consider semiotics;
everything you've learned

points to the inevitable.
The most archaic philosophies
will agree: this chair is not
chair. Love is never really

love. What is meant can
never really become, and
other various italics.
Think of your favorite

poets and remember
that they are just as dead
as yesterday. Go on reading
their most beautiful words,

those coldest organs,
and feel yourself
still sitting alone
in front of your television

where Britney Spears springs
divinely: still alive, luminous
and blonde after
two failed marriages,

a clinically diagnosed
emotional breakdown
and the now infamous
VMA fiasco of 2012.

What do you really know
about grief? While you were
weeping over the futility
of words and every poem

You couldn't write, bitch
she was working in Swarovski
encrusted bra tops and thigh-
high leather boots: navel

exposed to every burning
gaze. The belly ring promises
a captive audience. Prompt them
and they'll sing right back. Listen.

This is everything you ever
wanted to be, considering
sound and tenderness,
considering every metaphor

that couldn't quite warm
you in the frosted lucidities
during which you realize
no one wants to be lonely;

*end. Pull out of words
their most wretched
simplicity; do not be
afraid of finding nothing*

*there. Gravititas is a myth.
Britney spears is skin
and bone and toxic
kiss. The poet's tragedy*

is no heavier than a shotgun
wedding corrected by divorce
papers under 24 hours later.
We're all trying to sing

the same song We're all weeping
over the same hand we can't
hold. Britney Spears implores you
just as truly as every great poet,

every weepy Anne from your
contemporary anthologies.
from the metaphorical bottom
of her metaphorical heart,

she is sending you a letter, hoping
across radio frequencies, That you
will hear her words, and from the farthest
aways, that you will finally ache.

MT. ALVERNIA

by Jonathan B. Chan

i sit amidst other
worldly quiet, there
is a woman perched
on her knees and a
man straddling sleeping
and talking, there is stained
glass through which the
rumblings of traffic and
grandeur of highways
and bridges suddenly
seem minuscule and
mechanical, through
which there is a sudden
serenity in duress, a
calm that emanates from
a boy with a tube in
his lung, or the melting of
despair from the brow of
his father. i looked and saw
with the same pair of eyes,
in sickness, in health, in
to midnight sighs.

LONG TIME NO HEAR

by Yuan Changming

Never did I know the names of
These birds, but their voices are far, far
More familiar than my late playmates'

One sounds like a soprano
Though with only one high-pitched note
Another like a three-toned frog
And a third like five-fold whistling

After nearly half a century, this is the first
And very last time I return to
My native village, in the right season

ROCK PAPER BIRD

by Lyn Li Che

I used to play a game called rock, paper, bird:

bird kills paper, tries not to choke on the pulp;
paper kills rock: swallows it whole -

but who knew there were other ways to destroy
the indestructible? Like rusting steel.

Like hammering diamond. Like sitting there

that summer learning smallness:

your hands teaching my body the art
of choking and contraction.

My memory is the clop clop of dusty hooves
and a horse with two riders -

one a shrinking mountain, the other a scroll

of unfurling rice paper. These days,

the only fingers in my pockets
are my own, the only games I play end

with the roll of die, the folding of a board.

But what of the bird: she who gathers herself
for the ill-timed hurl, the manic flutter of wings -

what of she who sings for the park bench
and the man fresh out of bread: he who empties
his crumbs, these tiny specks of paper.

WHEN MANNY PACQUIAO SPRAINED

by Lawdenmarc Decamora

the noise jamboree in toda terminals , our regular Sunday
afternoon scared the neighbourhood children for seeing blood

drip from his head, all the force and feeling swam to the floor,
parents cried, and street by arcane street the whole town

buried the fear in its throat, freezing the clock to stop the hurt
of austral error; that loss was the injured sound of an engine

failing to drive families to church, to a nearby shop after mass.
I've felt my skin fumble when I heard a song from the speaker

of a passing car, a very familiar song I could remember
in the instance of a straight punch combination made possible

by retirement, as winning, according to critics, shouldn't be
compressed on a tiny screen. Whatever that means—

the boxer breaks the mirror of the modern man, comes down
to realize why the future is written in his signed armistice.

BLUEPRINT

by Christine Imperial

Three doves perch on the railing of my neighbor's balcony.
Whatever sign from above this is I'll take
half-heartedly. Across the building,

an advertisement for Snow Caps,
a skin whitening pill. Beautiful
billboard boy stands above traffic

as if to say "Here we are, bound
by whatever acts as design." Apparitions

of your name make themselves known to me
in the sari-sari side streets
only the GPS could find. The house I grew up in

is no longer mine when I stumble
upon a closet filled with the shining sheer dresses
of my father's lover. This crystal ball

too opaque. I pray,
"Shantih, Shantih" to appease Eliot in public spaces
where erudition is my worth. I am above you
when you aren't in the passenger seat of my car—

where I am allowed to say your name
but I don't. Instead, I remember doves,
no matter how majestic,
are pigeons lacking pigment.

CULTURAL RITES

by Faith Christine Lai

this is a year when we have not yet met,
and one where we are both still discovering

other people. and that love is difficult
but intimacy is easy. that mistakes

are just a part of new year
superstitions, the annual spring

cleaning ritual: after we fight, you turn over
to let me sleep on the cool side of the bed.

CYCLE

by Faith Christine Lai

in this humidity, everything rusts.
the dripping sock under the kitchen tap.
cooking knives. parking coupons. mum's
razor-blade, sitting shameful in the
shower. your ovaries, apparently.
train tracks, apparently.
even amulets.

so turn the pillow over in your
fitful sleep to find the side
that is still cool. in this air,
there is always dust. push
a peacock tail through the
window grilles. let it seed
clouds. the rain will wash away
all the dirt we have left behind.

THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

by Jam Pascual

May or may not be dawning. Depending on who you ask, the things responsible will either be malfunctioning computers, gravitational waves, or rock 'n' roll. Cue paisley and smoke, antennae picking up the sound of cells dividing. In any case, flower child, you will face great challenges today. Watch your temper, and be careful with your money, for all we've learned now orbits around the immense weight of a floating doomsday. Whatever. No one gets a cookie for being this good but maybe you'll pull a fortune out from the crumbs. Whether or not asteroids are coming to check for surviving dinosaurs, you might still dust crater floors for God's fingerprints. So. Dear wannabe mystic: I don't know if it's possible to read the palms of Christ. All I know is the language of wounds was never lost; we just found a thousand weird ways to decipher it. It doesn't matter which house the moon resides—it's just *in the fucking house* so crack a bottle open, let cheap beer spill out through the gates and fuck it,

go stargazing. Our eyes return to the ground eventually—we tiny gods who, when sated on spirit, step out to piss on the nearest tangle of roots. Watch out for the *duende*.

THE NIGHT BUS

by Iain Lim Jun Rui

Nostalgia.
Meat cleaver.
Coins slung on the side walks.
Nighthawks, remnants. Smoke.
The diner is empty.
The Christmas ham stares at you.
Invisible runways.
The bar is empty.
Floodlights.
Between highways. Wood chips.
Champagne flutes whistle.
The sound of the future.
Mint julep. Sprigs. Muddled.
Poker. Barista. Lipstick.
Mistake a malamute for a husky.
A whale boards the night bus.
Reduce speed now.
Tusi couple. Tusi couplet.
Acquire two-tone doorbell.
The spirit of the passengers unfold here.
Komorebi during sunset.
Shiver. As you were.
Burnt rubber smells.
Vulcanise. Whiplash.

Everybody wants to go home.
Helter skelter. Grief. Splash.
Home is where the void is.
Stone. Kiss. Limousine.
Credit cards scatter.
Crickets (as) the last light of day.
Follow/price tag.
Wet grass. Damp grass.
Fresh kale. Pepper bells.
Peppermint.
Petrichor. Port side.
Laneway. Checkmate.
Raw scallops are cheaper.
He who reads Hemingway.
Refrigerator. Time passes.
Bloated after steamboat.
Accident. Barbeque.
One more hot dog. Ash.
There is no music in the jukebox.
Pat seat. Chiffon. Croissant.
Slippers on the wet sand.
The alley strips itself.
Shuffle the dice.
Ennui. Navel piercing.
Take a breath mint.
The night bus arrives.

PARAMESWARA AT MELAKA

by Toh Hsien Min

Those short years when I ruled the diamant isle -
Lord Shiva must have seen me somewhere else.
But whosoever lives by means of guile

should cast his array of protective spells
and sleep with shoes always beneath his bed.
He jolts upright at each peal of the bells.

It is as my old minister had said:
your cunning gives you means to flee the traps
your cunning sets in motion; and I read

that as a sign his loyalty would lapse
and executed him. I knew that ships
seen scudding down the coast meant the collapse

of what I'd strived to build: how fortune flips
her fancy, and how fate denies his favour.
Before the Siamese could tear me into strips

I fled. I thought I would not taste the flavour
of desperation in a flight again;
the fugitive's lot is not one to savour.

But here I sit, a lion without his mane,
beneath a tree that barely offers shade,
not knowing how I'd turned a boon to bane.

And then I see a mousedeer in the glade;
my hunting dog had startled it by a tree.
Though it is tiny it is not afraid.

It fronts up to the dog and does not flee,
but gives the dog a kick upon its snout
such that the dog comes whimpering to me.

At once I have my choices figured out.
I'd picked an animal that wasn't mine.
Here, on this riverbank, I have no doubt.

The city I will build here will outshine
the one I left, whose fate is slow decline.

DEFECT

by Clara Chow

From where he stood, he could see the green pitched roofs of the high-rise blocks. Huddled together, lit by floodlights, they looked like elongated little houses. Concrete versions of Alice in Wonderland after she nibbled on a mushroom and grew a long neck. The thought made Warren smile, but only for a split-second.

Guard duty in Bishan Park was interminable.

When Warren first enlisted in the Eastern army, a lao beng veteran - at 25, the sergeant had eight years' head start on the 17-year-old private - had taken him under his wing, nudging him to go for smoke breaks and telling him dirty jokes. For a while, it made the hours standing around in the undergrowth being bitten by mosquitoes bearable. Then, Lao Beng had been arrested. Possession of drugs in bunk. Detention barracks for three years. Warren had gone back to counting stars on his frequent piss breaks by the silted-up pond, next to the rusty playgrounds.

No stars tonight. Warren took off his cap and ran a palm over his crew cut. The Eastern side was unnaturally quiet. Under his fatigues, beads of sweat rolled down his body, in search of trenches, pooling in his underwear. The flame-resistant, nylon-cotton material was dull grey, with a white crescent and five stars on the back. The soldiers had griped, upon the design's unveiling, that it marked them out as targets, the circlet of white dots aligning from afar with the sniper's sights. But when they saw the red cap, gloves and boots of their enemies' uniforms, they ceased complaining.

Warren loved that spot. An old park bench, long since peeled of paint, stood behind a profusion of bird's nest ferns. It was the ferns that camouflaged the bench, when the Western army swept this area, and saved it from being dismantling. Stumbled upon it one night, on his rounds, Warren now made it a point to trudge through the shrubs to squat on the disintegrating metal perch. It was like balancing on a dirty toilet bowl. The act of near-sitting on a park bench made him feel closer to normalcy, to a time - ironically, he was too young to remember - when this Demilitarised Zone was a place for recreation.

Somewhere above him, unseen, a long-tailed nightjar issued its rapid-fire hollow chirp; an imitation of an irritable car alarm. Warren patted his pockets, looking for a cigarette. "Buy your own, can or not?" the lance-corporal he had bummed the cigarette from had whined. Warren had been about to start his patrol. The lance-corporal was doing paperwork with his stinky feet soaking in brown water in the miraculously working Jacuzzi. The guard house had once been a spa, its owner a former local television starlet. Next door, the equipment, weights and elastic bands from the long-defunct Pilates studio still hung, gathering dust, on the walls. Warren wanted to lie down in one of the mouldy tiled steam rooms, and imagine hydrotherapy jets on his body. Perhaps, if the massaging water-jets still worked, they could blast away the extraneous bits and sculpt him into a new person. Instead, he shouldered his rifle and gave the lance-corporal the finger on his way out.

Of late, Warren was getting tired of being told what to do. His parents were quarrelling a lot more. At first, they had limited it to angry whispers after he had gone to bed, watching for the line of light under his door to disappear. These days, they just let rip at each other. The argument was

always the same. Not enough money to pay the mortgage. The car loan. The old bathroom that leaked and needed fixing for the past ten years. His elder brother's undergraduate tuition fees. Warren lay awake in the dark and listened to the hiss of anger in his mother's voice; the whisky-soaked resignation in his father's.

Occasionally, an East-Singaporean signal broke through the static and snow produced by the Western federation's satellite blockers, and lit up their screens. Miss Marine Parade, now 65 years old but freshly augmented from a trip to South Korea, cooed taunting messages. "Westies, don't you know we could be besties?" she breathed, staring seductively into the camera. The obvious propaganda did little for Warren, but it was the softer stuff that tugged at him some times. A scrap of the latest pop song from the chart-topping Punggol Punks, utterly throwaway and tenacious as a scorpion in the ear. The advertisements from Eastern TV, with glimpses of familiar landmarks just across the border: Changi Airport, Pasir Ris Park and Pulau Ubin. They appeared like ghosts as he scrolled through censored bytes on his smartphone, haunting him with a history from which he had been excised.

Warren fished out a Bic lighter and torched the end of his bent cigarette. He took his time finishing it. There had been a young woman, a celebrity of some sort, who had kept surfacing through the digital interference. She had dazzling teeth and a ponytail. Sometimes, she clasped her hands together and sang the Eastern Singaporean theme song after the 'Majulah Singapura' that both sides knew. The Eastern anthem, penned by the great-great grandson of a made-good-in-Taiwan musician of formely unified Singapore, or "UniSin" in diplomatic parlance these days, was all about following your dreams and spreading your wings. Warren always seized

upon her clear voice when he chanced upon it, paging through the pirate video sites, soaring on the tinny speakers of his state-of-the-art, west-made Akai phone. He thought about her bright, strong teeth, her clear complexion and healthy mane. Her long, long limbs. He liked to inhabit the idea of her, unfurling himself to fill out her skin. She was remote, out of range, unattainable and, thus, infinitely desirable.

As a child, his father would take him to the Jurong Drive-in Redux to watch old Wong Kar Wai movies. One night, they had been deep in the tragic love story of Chow Mo Wan and his myriad Su Lizhens when an ostentatious fireworks display from the east lit up the night, interrupting the picture, leaving the emotionally impotent characters speaking in incoherent burps and farts. Eight-year-old Warren had stared, open-mouthed, at the exploding drops of neon pink; mixed with mists of forest green. The East is red, he thought, not realising he was echoing sublimated nationalist messages in wuxia novels of the 20th century. The East is rad, he decided, message received like a sonic boom, and vowed to see it some day. Something in her voice moved him in the same way.

Things had started innocuously, before fire-balling into conflict.

One year, to celebrate National Day, a beauty pageant was held. In the spirit of inclusion, each town in the country was required to field a beauty queen. Miss Jurong, representing the west, was the hot favourite. At the grand finals, a segment in the national day parade, Miss Jurong and Miss Marine Parade were jointly awarded the crown. West-side supporters cried foul. At first, the grumbling was civilised. Residents of both neighbourhoods fired salvos on social media.

Then, public skirmishes were reported at shopping malls. Civilians perpetuated the violence. Self-styled vigilantes, carrying metal spoons and chopsticks to serve as weapons, patrolled the streets. A man who lived in Tampines was not safe walking in Tuas, on the opposite end of the island. People took to whipping out their identity cards to prove that they lived either in the eastern or western part of the small state.

When unrest refused to be quelled, the world watched in horror as a former bastion of Asian order and efficiency turned upon itself. A pragmatic nation had been undone by something as ephemeral as physical perfection, in the manner of Helen of Troy. Members of Parliament took sides during a special parliamentary sitting. The riot police was called in. A state of emergency was declared.

In an authoritarian crackdown, the country was split literally into two. Citizens woke up one morning to find that a formidable fence had been built overnight. Soon after, good sense prevailed, and the troubles stopped. But the fence stayed up. Nobody questioned it. It snaked, with its copious coils of barbwire on top and around, from Sembawang on the northern-most tip, past Mandai, marooning the Singapore Zoo on the Western side, while leaving the new yuppie towns of Sengkang to the East. The East got the obvious landmarks: Orchard Road, the Singapore Flyer, Marina Bay Sands and the National Museum. Meanwhile, the West received Sentosa, along with Universal Studios Singapore and the bungalows of foreign billionaires. There was no logic to the division. It was as though a small child had taken a black marker and drawn a hasty line down the map.

Bishan Park was bifurcated. Perhaps, the powers that be tussled over it. *Where'd I walk my dog or go jogging, if you guys hogged it? Why should you get Gardens by the Bay and Bishan Park too? Yes, we have Hort Park,*

but it's too out of the way! And so it went, until someone became exasperated, tore the cap off the marker again with his teeth, and amended the line so that it twanged back like a bow string, to cut the heartland oasis neatly in two.

Or so the story goes. Nobody knew for sure. The truth, like family wealth, did not last beyond three generations.

The walkie-talkie in his cargo pants pocket sprang to life. The lance-corporal's voice, from a galaxy away: "CB, where you?"

Warren sighed and pressed the talk button. "Coming back, sir." He smothered the torrent of curses against the thick fabric of his uniform.

He wondered if anyone still lived in those flats, just a kilometre or so beyond The Fence. Long ago, Lao Beng had told him, there had been a famous family whose patriarch had been one Tan Ah Teck. So famous were they, the whole of UniSin had kept abreast of their exploits: a fussy son, another male offspring who was rather thick in the head, a sensible daughter and their stoic housewife mum with a beehive hairdo.

"You mean The Simpsons, is it?" Warren had interrupted.

"Don't be an ass, lah," shot back Lao Beng. "If I meant those yellow cartoon people, I would have said so. This one is not angmoh. Rife action. Okay. Rife."

"Okay, okay," said Warren, backing off. Lao Beng could get quite scary over trifling matters. He slept with a parang under his mattress.

“En. Nee. Way,” continued Lao Beng, rolling his eyes, “The Tans lived in one of those flats over there. I never bluff you.”

The two of them had stood with their fingers threaded through the cold steel diamonds of the barrier between them and the green roofs in the distance. Glittering like the Emerald City.

“What do you think they’ll do to us if we sneak over to take a look?” asked Warren.

“They’ll cut your balls off, I tell you,” said Lao Beng, squinting from the smoke as he held a cigarette butt to his lips. Thumb and fore finger. Pincer grip. Like a child with a small piece of Lego.

Now, Lao Beng was gone. Or at least he won’t be very much the same after they let him out of solitary. Warren did not much feel like going on himself. He heaved himself off the bench and crashed back out of the semi-wild vegetation. So much for maintenance. Eastern Singapore got the Botanic Gardens, and, along with it, the National Parks Board headquarters.

Perhaps, seventeen was meant to feel this way. The endless waiting for your real life to begin. That horrible aching to be anywhere but here. The longing to be someone else. Humid nights listening to the people who decided your biological destiny unloving each other. Testicles crammed into heavy camouflage pants, the memory of a silk slip on his skin, the weight of a wig on his buzzed recruit head, a confounding fullness in one’s heart? Enduring the pin pricks of panic, that you are trapped not just by the binaries that have torn the motherland/fatherland apart, but also the performance of gender. How to be a picayune patriot in a place that keeps dividing like

bacteria, like spores? How to be the opposite of what you've been taught to be? Are borders fluid? Do you defect?

What if Chow Mo Wan had been Su Lizhen, talking to himself in a series of solitary hotel rooms? What if Su Lizhen had been Chow Mo Wan?

The nightjar intensifies its call. A giant flag is slowly hoisted by invisible hands on the top of the great green roofs. The wind picks it up, and then, tiring, lets it fall. Someone turns on the speakers hidden in the grass on the Eastern front, trained always on their beastie besties in the West. The first few bars of the Eastern anthem begins to play. It is her voice. Serendipity does not begin to describe it.

Warren feels for the strap on his left shoulder, pulls it over his head and lets his rifle fall to the ground. He sizes up the porous membrane between him and another world, another self. If he takes a running leap, he might just make it over.

THE WARM TOUCH OF A MIRROR

by Sophia Lee

Your reflection is your only companion.

It sounds pathetic to say aloud, but at least the rest of the house isn't awake to hear it: a trembling admission bursting forth from lips permanently twisted into a frown. Depression. The word, the concept, holds no weight under this roof. And so your reflection keeps you company, offers you silent understanding. Anyone else would call you insane, but the person in the mirror is not like that. It makes the morning more bearable, you think, to indulge in such harmless delusion.

You reach for the toothbrush, bristles in disarray from overuse. Head turning, you reach for the curtain pulled over the lone window in your bathroom, and pull it aside. It takes you a few seconds to adjust to the light streaming in. Your reflection looks at you, unblinking as you are. You wonder what it would say, if given the chance.

And then for a moment, you think you see its lips quirk. Eyes, just like yours, flash with mischief. *Awareness.*

The toothbrush hits the bottom of the sink with a weak clatter. You lean close, neck craning. Your reflection mimics your every move, every flare of your nostrils. Eyes wide, you think to ask it a question.

That question never comes.

You drain the uncertainty and absurdity from you with the flick of the tap. Water hisses and sighs, spilling over your open palm. Cold. For a moment, you think you know peace.

+

“Have you paid the bills yet?” Father asks, brows coming together as he emerges from his bedroom. “The internet is slower than usual today.”

Your gaze lifts reluctantly from the book in your hand. “That’s not how it works.”

“Call up the service provider,” he continues as if you hadn’t yet said a word. “And go buy some lunch for all of us.”

Grandma groans something indistinct from the other side of the living room. You turn, already on your feet, but Father pushes past you. His words aren’t in the least bit angry or threatening, but it’s the way his voice wraps around every syllable that makes your skin crawl, and the fire in your chest jump and leap. The sound of reluctance is not difficult to recognise. *That’s your mother. How could you talk to her like that?*

Already, you are feeling the day waste away. The sun bears down, indifferent, on your back as you take to the streets. Lunch, you think. Lunch would be nice, indeed.

You return two hours later, only to find everything – like your toothbrush – thrown into disarray. Paramedics glance at you from behind their face masks, eyes sharp and inquisitive. Inside, your father is hovering over his mother, attempting to stir her from her deep slumber.

The food in your grip can wait, you figure.

+

One week later, you return to the mirror in the morning.

The house is even quieter than usual. You don't know how that's possible, since Grandma barely makes a sound these days, but it is. The silence presses itself against your ears, your chest. You think about her and suddenly it's hard to breathe. The only thing you have left to hold is your toothbrush. The edge of the basin. You watch little ants crawl towards the bottom, contemplating their existence. How simple. How insignificant.

And then, someone speaks. "How are you?"

You look up and turn around in one wild motion. The door behind you is closed and locked. Beyond the window in your bathroom, you think you hear the freeing chirp of a bird. And that voice— where have you heard it before? It unnerves you, not being able to tell.

Eventually, you resign yourself to the strangeness of it all. A lack of sleep is what you cast blame on. You return your gaze to the mirror.

For some reason, you jump at the sight of yourself. The same gaze looks back at you with an equal amount of consternation. A moment passes between you and self, and you finally let out a breathy laugh. Hysteria comes around the edges of your mind. You're tired— that's probably it.

Except it's not, when your reflection tilts its head.

You stare at it, dumbstruck. Six whole seconds pass you by. And then, its mouth opens to speak with that same voice.

Yours.

“How are you?”

+

You wake up earlier every day. Over the next week, your reflection and you exchange words and thoughts. It baffles you, but more than that, it comforts you to be able to speak to someone. Does it truly matter if that someone is yourself? You keep the doubt tucked away between the rattling cage in your chest. It doesn't really matter, you decide. No one would believe you.

“I think hairstyles won't differ,” your reflection says, leaning forward. “That would be too obvious, honestly. And a little insane if you decided to dye your hair. I'd never do that.” Lips thin in contemplation. “How's your job?”

“Fine,” you say, swiping the hair from your eyes. “I quit last week, actually.”

Your reflection gapes at you. “No way. You did that?”

“Yeah.” You tilt your head to the side. “In a way, you did too. I needed more time to myself, anyway, what with Grandma and all...”

“Oh.” The other you draws back, eyelids lowering slightly. “Yeah, I suppose that would make sense. Grandma isn't here anymore, on my side.”

Your chest tightens. That is not your reality, you have to remind yourself. Whatever this is, it's not *your* life. The reflection is another self, another you— and whatever universe it inhabits, that universe is also not yours.

“I know,” your reflection says. A lopsided grin appears on its face. So much like yours. “It's kind of crazy to hear shit like that. When I discovered it, I was shocked, too. Couldn't sleep for days, actually. Kept coming back to ask

stupid questions.”

“There are others?”

“Others?” It blinks at you. “Of course there are others. Multiverse theory. You know?”

“I know,” you say, half-indignant. “Just... it’s sort of wild. That it’s real, I mean.”

Your reflection snorts— a rush of air through the nose. Incredulous. For some reason, you get the feeling you’ve disappointed it.

“I guess some of us aren’t as certain.” Its gaze softens. It’s strange to find yourself looking like that, so you look away for a moment. Out the window, where the trees are swaying with the wind. “But it’s nice to know what could have been. Is Grandma doing ok?”

“Not... really?” You shrug. “She’s been in the hospital. In and out, over the last few months.”

“And?”

You turn back to meet an expectant face. Your shoulders lift and drop once more. “And... it’s driving me crazy. A little.”

Your reflection nods. “I know. It drove me crazy when she finally passed.”

The words elicit a shudder beyond your control. Your hands come to grip the edge of the basin, lips quivering with a question waiting to be asked. Your reflection leans close, too, with a knowing light in its eyes.

“How did you deal with it?”

Brown eyes flicker away, to a spot just over your shoulder. The hesitation lasts

only for several seconds, before your reflection meets your gaze again. Wistful.

“I don’t know. Just kept talking to my reflection, I guess.”

+

Grandma is strong, that much you can tell.

You, on the other hand— you are doubtful. Nothing but uncertainty lives beneath your skin, embedded in flesh and bone. The cage in your chest continues its incessant rattling in the months that follow. You entertain dreams of death, of running away, of breaking into the mirrorverse and finding your other self. You think it would be nice to finally have someone who understands you without needing explanation.

When she finally does let go, you let out a heavy breath.

It’s hard, so you let the rest of your family surround her while you find somewhere quiet to rest. After the procession and cremation is over and done with, you head back up to the flat. It doesn’t surprise you that you end up in the bathroom once more, bent over the basin, thinking of the Peranakan dishes she used to try to teach you how to cook, or of the way she always stations herself at the large sink in the kitchen, calling out to you to help with some vegetables. You’re also thinking about the time she taught you English with her weak grasp on said language, and the way she asks, expectantly, for you to spell out ‘apple’. You would bite, every time, and spell it out with a proud shout.

Memories swirl and rise with every ragged breath. You’re crying, you soon discover.

Somewhere outside, your phone is buzzing softly over the mattress. You’ll

get to that later, you think. It's a little hard to focus, to organise yourself well enough to interact.

"Hey."

You don't straighten yourself. Instead, you turn on the tap and let the water run.

"Did it happen already?"

You nod, and finally raise yourself to your full height. The face in the mirror is concerned, as opposed to your own—tired, resigned, and a little older. You haven't cried yet. You think you won't be able to.

"I'm sorry," your reflection offers you. "It's not easy. Every other self—some of them kind of... lose it, you know? In the same way, too. I'm glad you're holding it together, still."

"You think?" you ask softly in the half-light.

"Yeah. I did too." Your reflection leans close to the mirror again. "I kind of envy you. You're quietly strong. And you quit your job."

You snort. "That's not really... that's not an achievement. My entire family thinks I just carried out the equivalent of suicide."

"Over here it would be," it replies, grave. For one reason or another, you believe it. "And who cares what they think? I never found a reason to, and you deserve to be your own person. Listen. You take all the time you need, ok? I'm always going to be here."

"My friends want to talk." You shake your head. "I'm not sure what to say. I don't know if I want to say anything."

"Then don't." Your reflection attempts a smile. It never catches on. "Look forward. Think about your dreams, what you want to do in life. Get yourself motivated again."

You sigh. "Are our dreams the same?"

"Maybe." Coy. Just like you, on your better days. "I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours."

"Uh huh." You're interested, though. Despite the slouch, despite the weight in your heart, your curiosity gets the better of you. "I want to write stories that make people feel. Make them think."

Eyes— your own— grow bright. Warm. "Well, what do you know? Me too. I wonder who will get there first."

You roll your eyes. "At the same time, if this mirrorverse thing—"

"Multiverse."

"Whatever. I'm talking to a mirror. You think technical terms are important, here?"

Your reflection raises its hands in surrender. "Don't go calling us crazy, now."

"Yeah, so." You incline your head in a half-nod. You're surprised to find both of you smiling, after weeks of being shuttered away in your own head. "Are we racing or what?"

Your reflection winks. It's odd— you don't usually wink.

"First one there gets a hundred dollars!"

You shake your head, extending your hand. Water spills over your open palm.

A laugh finds its way out of you, eventually. "You're ridiculous."

"Takes one to know one, doesn't it?" A knowing smile. You think, for a moment, you can see yourself in this reflection, but at the same time, this feels like someone else altogether.

You laugh again, holding its gaze. Bright.

The both of you remain that way for quite some time, indulging in absurdity as one.

SINGAPORE 3

by Pavle Radonic

JUNGLE THICKET

Without any other way to record what must be recorded, these fragments continued.

The man with the turned right eye usually found on the Block 2 Void Deck either at one card-table or the other, observing from the side usually. The usual striped red, blue & white polo as he cycled through the estate; sometimes he was seated by the passage legs up on the railing.

Good mornings, Ni haos, Zhao uns and how are yous?

This morning on the return from the teh and newspaper the same. Going out earlier there had been the same.

After the second pass this morning a short wait was needed at the lift, where unexpectedly from around the corner the man suddenly appeared. He did not live in D Block; he had never been encountered there.

– I give you mango. Abruptly thrusting a red plastic bag at the shnozz and pulling back the cover either side.

– Verrrry nice! As if afraid he might be disbelieved and his offering rejected.

After a momentary start it was clear the chap wasn't kidding. Man knew his fruit.

A hard, green specimen on the small size, yet the perfume emanating was difficult to credit. More than substantiating the man's claim. An exploding grenade of richest heady aroma.

Easy to tell this was not supermarket product and far from it. The fellow had access to a tree somewhere in deepest jungle where trunks crowded each other and the foliage shredded the light. He knew where, as the old storytellers would have said.

Like everyone else, the man had observed the fruit carried in hand day after day up to Doreen's flat. Naked oranges, apples, bananas and the yellow Thai mangoes usually that gave only the most trifling scent.

In his keeping this man had an appropriate gift for the stranger. Even late night from the entryway returning housemates remarked upon the powerful fragrance.

How to return something fitting now was the question.

A couple of days later when the man was thanked again for his gift and the fabulous bouquet underlined, chap was surprised it had not yet been tasted. The hardness made no never mind; the fruit was ripe. It was in fact fallen fruit, not picked. After two days it would be "spoiled ready."

In season a fig they used to give as an offering to children, friends and passers-by on the Montenegrin coast between the wars (and proverbially of course one would not give the same for anything less than worthy); an apple, orange or almonds and walnuts too from the fortunate ones in possession.

Kampung folk easily identifiable here over the void decks, sitting on the

steel benches, under the care of the dark-skinned maids and pacing the aisles under the supermarket fluro, the old ways retained.

MARY POPPINS ON THE EQUATOR

The dutiful Filipina maid who sits with Madame mornings at the Haig Road stalls comes by round eleven usually, as she did today. Cloud cover and a nice breeze made it an easy passage right the way along. The pair, Ma'am and maid, are bound for either one of the HDBs above Joo Chiat Complex, or else a house in the streets off Changi. (In Singapore rarely do people walk more than two or three hundred meters.)

Despite relatively mild conditions evidently gaps in the cloud, the maid having unfurled the large red umbrella and raised it on high.

Ma'am being an unusually tall Chinese fetching close on 180cm, the Maid needs to lift the shield skyward. A flag, standard or banner was given this kind of elevation.

As a Filipina the maid herself is tall—possibly chosen particularly. Nevertheless the young woman stands at least six inches shorter than her employer.

Sitting at the morning table at the stalls the maid turns a soft, indulgent face one way and another as the conversation of the old gathered women flows. Every morning on every pass the same as the day before. The maid can offer nothing here; she sits patiently, attentively, phone bulging in her rear pocket. How much Hokkien or Cantonese does she have in any case?

Three, four or more Chinese women each morning, sometimes the adjoining table taking the overflow. The Filipina is the only maid present. All the other

women look as if they are more in need of maid than lucky Ma'am. But Ma'am alone is the one who can afford the expense, having more dutiful children perhaps.

Unmistakable indulgent softening of features one way and the other as required through the teas and cookies. Possibly the maid fetches the drinks for the table, relieving the auntie at the stall. That is common. Serving when there is a maid present is contradictory.

The young woman in her mid-thirties dressed in cheap, featureless apparel, self-cut hair likely and bad skin. Coming past the author's table Ma'am must not catch the quick-fire smile. Care always taken and sometimes the risk is too great. The game is a subtle one, adding another additional pain to the circumstance.

Holding the umbrella on the return home the maid's elbow stands raised above the horizontal plane; an effort and strain to keep it at that height.

When there was not a whisper before, suddenly a strong gust of wind has been released as if from a bag. Soundlessly the Filipina maid lifted from her feet without a moment even for shriek, up above the pavement she is taken across the roadway and high into the sky above Geylang and Changi Roads, over the roof of the market and out toward the prison and the sea. In the water the tankers wait their turn at dock.

Oh dear! a leaf picked from the ground taken away never to return.

Bye-bye to the good dutiful creature. You have served your Madame well, girl, Madame will miss you. Where will she ever find herself another to compare.

A CONVERSION STORY

There have been a good number of conversion stories heard here on the broiling equator.

The cabbie Cha's was the classic of a man searching in need of guidance.

Born into a notional Buddhist practice, Cha examined the Bible, then the Koran. Read some of the Vedas; back to the Koran, Bible, the Hadith and more Koran. Eventually the conversion to Islam, which involves a simple declaration of faith before two witnesses.

Being the earnest, studious type, Cha had pounded the books and commentaries, took beginners' classes at the Converts' Association and passed tests on knowledge and prayer with flying colors.

Cha's Chinese friend with whom he sat at the Mr. Teh Tarik tables mornings converted after a stroke six years ago. Similar to Cha: insufficiency in Buddhism; the Koran and quickly in his case on-board.

A couple of years before Mabel at Joo Chiat reception had told her story of resistance overcome.

Originally from Penang, Christian friends here had long encouraged Mabel. Church visits and reserved judgment. The enthusiasm witnessed at services Mable attended left her cold, until one day approaching the altar herself and feeling the force, the disbeliever fell from her feet in a dead faint. Mable staunch thereafter.

Last night Nancy's friend Doris told her own story. An unlikely story; highly unlikely. The simplicity was striking.

As in previous cases here, little hesitation at intrusive questions from a stranger. None in Doris's case. In these communities what would be considered intrusion and unmannerliness elsewhere was readily received; the interest in the personal story often welcome.

Seven or eight years of age was Doris down at the base of her HDB out in Ang Moh Kio. After school or weekend, mum upstairs in the flat and dad not around.

An auntie suddenly appears before young Doris.

Upon some reflection "Auntie" was quickly revised downward—perhaps the woman in that childhood scene was still in her twenties. Doris now in her mid-thirties was a good deal older than the auntie who had converted her. It struck Doris now that she thought about it.

Traditional communities elders were commonly either "auntie" or "uncle." Teta so-and-so in Serbo-Croat; Cika or Striko male.

A great deal of correspondence and reminding here on the equator.

A younger Malay or Indonesian woman here will, upon an encounter with an unknown older woman, take the latter's hand and bowing, raise it to her forehead as a mark of respect. After almost four years one blinked no longer at the display. Standard ceremonies at the outdoor tables in the Malay quarter.

Doris's young auntie approached and immediately upon the Hello, good morning little girl, young Doris, aged seven or eight, was asked a question.

– Do you want Jesus to wash your sins away?

Memorable. Doris could hardly have forgotten.

On the edge of the bed Doris delivered her brief smiling response immediately, just as she must have all those years before.

Beside her Nancy fully out-stretched. Inquisitor in the swivel chair by the desk taking note.

Nance has possibly never heard her best friend's conversion story; not of much interest to Nancy.

Conversions were common on the equator, a rich, fertile ground. Numerous missionaries of one sort or another, as well as converts, encountered. There were a great number of factors at work. The Malays were mostly rock-solid in their belief and their practices. In the colonies the Christians had been their usual busy selves: conquests and conversions. The Hindus mostly held up pretty well; which left the Chinese with a less firm cosmology rather prone. Shopping, holidays, food adventures sometimes insufficient, especially living cheek-by-jowl with believers often inspired.

What to do? in the common expression here.

Raising up at Auntie young Doris answers, Yes, she would like to have her sins washed away by Jesus. Yes.

...Smiling, affable young middle-aged mother of two still with a fine, open face.

A prayer then for little Doris to accept Jesus. Repeat after me.

The next Sunday Auntie came to collect Doris for church; Baptists out i

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The next Sunday Auntie came to collect Doris for church; Baptists out in Sembawang. The auntie had gone up to meet the mother briefly.

An impressive service. Doris's mother did not accompany her daughter, either on the first occasion, or for a number of years later.

An only child, Doris attended at Sembawang, being collected in a Sunday-school bus that called into Ang Moh Kio for herself and also a little group of other children her own age that Auntie had likewise converted.

The Sembawang attendance lasted a couple of years; another Baptist for a time following.

During this period Doris's mother was eventually won over by another auntie who came calling.

Doris's mother had been losing her hair and the other aunt offered to pray for her. Some kind of hair treatment followed and soon noticeable improvement.

For a time Doris and mother attended church together.

At present Doris attended the Covenant Evangelical Free Church, her children going occasionally and husband mostly at Christmas and Easter. The children were not baptized; that was a decision for them when they were older, mother Doris decided now.

Doris did no direct converting herself, preferring patient encouragement instead.

A few weeks earlier Doris had taken her children on an outreach mission to the Philippines where slum dwellers were visited and various goods delivered. The eldest boy was appalled by Smoky Mountain in the Manila waste-dump and demanded the first plane out.

– I will live two years less now, the kid declared, turning angrily on his mother.

Heaven and hell were definite elements in Doris's purview. How god decided was of course another matter. Doris refrained from condemnation.

Still, accepting Jesus needed to be taken as decisive. Doris's own father-in-law had been a confirmed atheist right up until his dying day. On his deathbed he had converted. There was always time.

Geylang Serai, Singapore

TEACHER-PAPA

by June Chiang

I sit on the silver swing, feet dangling loose. *Que sera sera, whatever will be will be.* My voice glitters in delight. I see me, nicely grown up. Legs stepping out of a nice car, very nice car, not like Papa's, from the front passenger side. The notes roll out harder. *Que sera sera, whatever will be will be.* And then Papa's voice appears from inside the house, *What's June doing out there talking to herself?* A laughter strings to his words.

Papa doesn't get decent very often. It must be his paycheque, he thinks, that courts people to remark, *Still so skinny? You're not eating? On diet?* This makes his anger rise to his lips, and spews out *Fat is disease and short life to return the injury.* But I think his nastiness is about his paycheque and the teacher-authority he brings home. He sits me down when he thinks I need discipline and barks for yes-no answers. I am not allowed to talk back because he is teacher-Papa. I am young and in primary school. I should know nothing, shouldn't talk back to the teacher - to Papa, the adult. And so I am always too shy to answer. But Papa doesn't appreciate my timidity, and he displays his disapproval by putting pain on my skin.

You answer when I ask you a question.

I howl in response to a sting from the cane. *That's not how you reply,* says Papa. Each sting squeezes out more bellows, until they are reduced to silent noises in my throat. The long bruises on the legs beg his eyes to stop. He obliges and then smiles at his authority.

I pity Papa, really. He has not much meat on his bones and he works really hard. In the afternoons Papa wakes up noisily from his deep nap at the sound of the first car door slamming outside the yellowing gate, which announces the arrival of a child attending his tuition class. He gets up to open the door and greet the young child, and walks unsteadily to the dining table to lay out the question papers. I sit on the sofa watching more children come. I mustn't make noise that will distract Papa, because he has to make ends meet. Every weekday afternoon, for two hours. His scratchy voice shakes the drowsiness off him, and squanders the afternoon away from me. There is no room for me to go to, only his room, Mama's room. We share a room at night, the five of us. All the other rooms are rented out, to make ends meet.

Papa's scratchy voice is unforgiveable. It has no gender attached to it because his voice box is broken from too much talking, loud talking. He says otherwise the kids don't listen. There are forty or fifty of them in a class in the government school where he teaches in the morning. I don't care. When his voice locates me, I am always pounding, eyes darting. Pain pricks on my eardrum before the first consonant or the first vowel from his scratchy voice lands on it. He has stories to tell me, but always too many of them. He wants to talk about this pupil and that pupil, and what he teaches and how he teaches. He's a good teacher, he says. I don't care. He simplifies science lessons, he says. The male pees onto the female. That's how you get babies.

I get interested. *Where do babies come out from?*

The belly button.

Sometimes his friends from his Teachers' Training College days come over for a visit because there's nothing to do on a Saturday night or a Sunday afternoon. Mama serves them drinks of iced-Milo.

What did you do with that boy last week for forgetting to do his homework?

I made him run round the school field.

Did you know that Lisa's father is a Director of a company? She's a really rich kid.

Yes, really rich. Her father drives a Mercedes.

Papa lets out a sigh.

My classes are getting bigger.

So are mine.

Mama often helps out with the conversation.

My daughter's dress, Mrs Ho, is really cheap. Only RM9.90. From Chulia Street.

Mrs Ho smiles and nods.

Yes, I should get one for my daughter too.

Papa has never said anything happy. I thought I would never hear Papa say something nice but it happened one day. There were some whispers in the neighbourhood, and the whispers became words. Very soon we too were made aware that our neighbour had disappeared with their grand Nissan Bluebird when their watch business collapsed. *Bluebird, they drive a Bluebird*, Papa had always said. Now a piece of paper carrying a court order ornamented their gate. *Economic crisis*, said Papa. *Recession*. Papa smiled and said it was really good to be a teacher. We would not perish from hunger nor vanish from shame of riches to rags..

Papa's meat still has not grown on his bones. *You're still so skinny. No money to eat? Or no appetite?* Papa throws a punishing glance. *Why, you're fat, aren't you?*

It is Sunday evening and Mrs Ho welcomes us into her house with a wave of a spoon. Her son hops away, cheeks carrying food, and hops back to the refilled spoon.

Just a simple meal. Not much time to cook. Just look at that pile of work I have to mark.

Ah, better than sitting at home like me.

The hungry boy empties the spoon again, and in a proud movement Mrs Ho's hand scoops up a prawn. The conversation lands on the prawn, and then the boy, and the approaching long school holidays. *It's good for a woman to be a teacher, isn't it, Mrs Ho?* Mama puts the permission in my ears.

YAWA (DEMON)

by Jan Angelique Dalisay

When I was in college, I had this friend. I can't recall what we were talking about but I remember this thing she told me: that she saw a yawa (demon) with her own eyes. I've learned later that she was a victim of sanib or possession. Apart from her, I have never met anyone who has seen a demon, heard a demon, or talk to one. Nevertheless, it struck me as odd not that she was possessed by a demon, but by her manner of recalling it: nonchalance. As if being possessed by a yawa was the most natural thing that could happen to her or to any person.

Demons and other "creatures of the dark" are popular on television. If you're a 90's kid, you'd be able to vividly recall the late night show, !Oka tokat (an anagram for Takot Ako which means "I'm afraid!"). It wasn't far from the typical -- a bunch of young adults are thrown in various mysterious and horrific scenarios involving dark creatures. My sister and I were forbidden to watch it because our parents believed that it could cause nightmares. But as all teenagers tend to do, we would sneak and watch it with an accomplice, our yaya.* I don't remember getting nightmares. I was more scared of my father's belt than any creatures of the dark. The belt is corporeal, it leaves a mark and stings; the dark creatures could only be cunning and scary on actors or actresses.

Press my life-tape forward and the teenager who once secretly watched Oka-tokat, , or who went to college with a friend who saw the yawa is a 27-year old adult. The 27-year old me forgot about those kinds of creatures; the only demon she knows are psychotic criminals or drug-high addicts who rape old

women or young children and then mutilate them. The ones who took the life of the innocent, those who enter school premises and shoot kids dead. After seeing or hearing their deeds on television, I could only quietly mutter, "yawa!" Cursing aloud remains to be forbidden at home; it's a rule I often break but my younger sisters love to admonish me. I'm not a role model, seriously. It wasn't until my father suffered stroke that I met my yawa.

I worked as a copywriter for a company based in Cebu. Night shift. Naturally, I sleep during the days and had to be awake and fully functioning at night until 5 AM or more. My parent's room and mine were located at the opposite poles of the house. I slept like always from 9 or 10 in the morning; nothing was unusual until I woke up at 3 or 4 PM. I saw my parent's room's door opened ajar. There was vomit beside the bed. Beside that room is the comfort room, which consisted of a small bangkito, a wash basin -- someone didn't finish his laundry. My father looked sick, like the typical fever. To let him rest, I noiselessly cleaned the vomit. I thought of calling my mother but it was almost 5 and she'll be out from her office soon. So I went to do the chores, folding dry clothes, sweeping our sala clean, cooking rice and struggling to think what to prepare for our viand. I hated cooking. Then I heard my father's hoarse voice. He told me to turn the electric fan on because it was really hot. *Now, that's weird. If this is fever he should be feeling cold instead. I turned it on. I didn't know what to make of it, so I watched the clock and waited for my mother. God, what's taking her long?*

My mother arrived home. Minutes after that I went down to hail a cab that will take my father, mother, and sister to the hospital. They're going in for a check up. That check up turned to him being admitted because the lab results revealed he had a mild stroke. *So... that was it. Stroke. As I lie on my bed... comfortably sleeping, my father was fighting for his life. I shook my head. My mother didn't blame me. My sister didn't blame me. Even my father couldn't blame me. No.* The days wore on. I went on an emergency leave to help my mother care for my father. We took turns watching over him, listening to the neurosurgeon's explanations and instructions. He was always just too drowsy. We were advised to talk to him a lot so he can stay awake and not "lose" it. I did my best, talking to him even though he didn't recognize me, my mother

or my sister. It's awkward, almost like talking to a stranger. But eventually I got the hang of it. This might be what time-traveling would be like, meeting my father when he still wasn't my father, listening to him talk about some other place, and calling me some other name. His phone conversation with my sister who worked overseas was a different story. She had to deliberately cut the call because she couldn't take it, couldn't believe what's happening to him. She couldn't stop crying. My mother and I consoled her, told her that it's the after-effect of stroke. *As I lie on my bed, comfortably sleeping... my father was in his bed, fighting for his life. No. My sisters need me, my mother needs me, my father needs me.* I went back to work. We have bills to pay and we needed every help we could get. It was a first for us. My father who was an all-around do-it-yourself gets various kinds of injuries but not this... this stroke. He was a retired soldier, but the truth is, he never really retired. He had his hands busy -- replacing our old roof with a new one, which was the best preparation against typhoon winds. He would repair this and that. He would drive my sister to school or my mother to work. He also smoked. That, for him, is his only vice. He only stopped after learning about his hypertension. Apparently, that wasn't enough.

Fatigue. I felt like a zombie who still jerks her way across people who needed to line to get inside the public hospital. No matter how tired my limbs were, I still ventured out to buy medicines, adult diaper, and lots of toiletries. I would check up on our youngest sister to see how she's doing. She was a hero. Taking care of the house, of herself because my mother and I are too occupied. Her 16th birthday falls on the 26th of September, and we were still on the hospital. *She didn't deserve this.* And as the pain of it hit me, I heard the yawa again, "*As I lie on my bed, comfortably sleeping... my father was in his bed, fighting for his life.*"

I remember crying. I cried to sleep. And then woke up again. There was no way I'll quit. The lab results showed that the swelling at the back, left side of his brain stopped.

yawa - Visayan term for a demon or devil

yaya - a Filipino term for a babysitter or for someone hired to take care of children

YOU DON'T SOUND THE SAME ANYMORE

(Memory upon entering a Filipino shop in Sydney)

by Ramon Loyola

I.

Compact and ill lit, the shop invites the shadows in from the broken gutter and entices the weary with wares of old: dried anchovies in shrink-wrapped plastic, jars of fish paste, MSG-laden cheese snacks, salty crackers, miniature chocolate crumble called ChocNut, unused irons and rice cookers in faded boxes and even faded labels, dried coconut-leaf mats – banig – and packets of preserved meal seasonings in crumpled states. The fluorescent lighting gives it away and you know it is a shop for the sad, disappearing face of a diasporic tribe in the gritty enclave of St Marys in Sydney. Negotiations are always tricky, full of the wary but silent regard for my face who looks not exactly like that of a tribal member's, for my voice that doesn't literally give away the lineage of a northerner, of a Luzonite's Tagalog. 'You don't sound the same,' remarked the woman behind the makeshift counter engulfed by White Rabbit lollies strewn across it and of Pinoy soap operas and soppy films of old. The ears are burning, prickly ignited by invisible flames. The eyes narrow into tunnel-vision regard for rudimentary chores and obligations. But in silence: *I am the same as you.*

II.

The same crimson blood flows through my veins, my tongue that speaks and violates the English language to our own ends. It is the same set of slanty eyes that used to watch the hoon drivers exploding their turbo machines on empty,

weedy car lots outside grotty, ghostly warehouses and factory monsters from the cold and narrow platform of St Marys rail station. I am the same and the skin I am in is just as cold as your demeanour and empty stare. You don't sound the same, anymore. The snobbish entrails of it reverberate and all I can think about is the glorious, warm welcome given back then upon first setting foot on this carnival of paraphernalia and nagging memorabilia of good old Motherland.

III.

The way to disappear in the landscape of the mind is to act as if you are a stranger, an alien aircraft bearing the weird tidings of an invading race—the same indifference of an indifferent race, of an unconsciously repugnant tribe that pulls you down to the trenches, lest you claw your way out of the basket of misery that travels everywhere like an annoying itinerant. It is no wonder that the shop itself is vanishing in the consciousness of the tribe, this vicious tribe. No matter the courtesies shown, no matter the warm embrace given for the old times of gold, the bestial nature of your own tribe pushes you down to the pores of disillusionment underneath your own skin. You don't sound the same, anymore. And so, I walk away with the pain. Ah, to be in pain, to be in recognition of your own disappearance to the causes of the wind ... It is the ironic way of a big expanding world, where everyone looks the same, everyone sounds the same. This shop full of what it means to be free is now but a memory of what was once me.

BRANCHES

RECOLLECTIONS

by Rodrigo Dela Peña, Jr.

come journey o'clock when the world is in motion
a window brings the street's goings-on into view
fruit vendors money changers the city's et cetera
in a third world opera derived from the latin for labor
the work of memory a motif in *a la recherche du temps perdu*
each scene a digression a remembrance a figment
of the past tense reflecting itself in a mirror
as fleet-footed urchins run from the police bedraggled
behold the mind with its sleights of hand abracadabra
a hand flicks open a switchblade knife alive in sharpness
pointed against an eye the sight of it stings an incision
closer now the face scattered among shards of a broken mirror
see how there might be a choice though mostly a mirage
what spoor has been left to trace a trigger to its source

inventory of things lost or stolen in a hurry

to get somewhere else not here caught in the amber of slippage

souvenir relic salvaged from prehistoric ruin

what to unforget in manifold present gleaming

faithful to impulse the scene changes to flashback

COMING HOME

by Anna Sulan Masing

It was always the mornings.

The soft mornings between seasons,
That stole her memories away.
She got lost in the light, light of the sun
On the clean grass, grown too long,
That always happens when a season is not in full flush,
The air uncertain of where it was in the year,

The sun's cast, a delicate touch.
It was then, that her mother's presence felt so close, soft,
Softly brushing past, just on the edge of her vision.
And she forgot she was no longer there.

**

The sun hit her eye
The same way it did as a child
Through the leaves of the tree, piercing
She held it
Stared back
And laughed at the audacity
Of challenging the sun, even,
In its last rays of the day

It had been years since she had been back to her mother's village,
And still,
The rustle of approaching night whispered magic

SPRING ONION PANCAKES

by Nina Powles

hold stalks under the tap and let the water run over your hands. chop finely with your mother's best knife, all the way down to the white parts.

listen to the sound the knife makes on the scratched polyethylene. let yourself go back to winter evenings spent pulling basil leaves from the dying plant by the window.

tip in the flour, sunlight, onions, salt and rainwater. light the flame, test the heat with the tips of your knuckles. catch your wrist on the wok, gasp, kiss it cold.

remember if you hadn't relearnt how to speak you would still say *scallions*. remember how she used to buy the pancakes from the market every morning, come home

and press the package into your hands, warm sesame seeds falling into your lap. bite and feel your bones turn soft in the heat. collect up the forgotten things,

paper towels turned transparent with grease. gather broken eggshells into a small mountain made of calcium, then sweep the mountain away.

HUNGRY GHOSTS

by Casey Tran

i part lips to

exhale,

only to feel you

press against my chest,

steal breath for your own.

you claim me as your daughter,

whisper wisdom rooted in scars

silence is survival

i swallow my words

back down,

feel them scratch at the back of my throat,

fester into something

we don't talk about

think it will satiate you

instead you are left wanting

more

than my offering.

CANDLELIGHT

by Soo Young Yun

촛불

어찌할까
책들은
아름답고 구조화 된 단어를 내뿜는
환상일 뿐이라면

나라는
금으로 된 수저를 물고 태어난
자들을 위한 기회의
땅이라면
강단 뒤에는
꼭두각시가 웃음을 짓고
대본에서 대사를 암송하듯
독실한 열정으로 실을 다룬다

참 진부한 이야기
아는 것은 오직 그들을 향해 고개 숙이는
머리들
이들 위에 발을 조심스레 얹은다
마치
디딤돌처럼

그러다
불타는 별들은 거리에서 춤을 추기 시작한다
회색 길가는 사라지며
더이상 볼 수 없게 되고
땅은 빛나는 잔물결로 변하며
따뜻한 누르스름한 빛을 낸다

그러면서도
어찌할까
세상에는 꼭두각시들이 수도 없이 많고
어찌할까
다른 수치들이 또
드러나
사람들이 누그러뜨린 주머니 속 깊이
담겨둔 촛불에
불을 붙인다면
언제까지
별들은 춤을 춰야 하는 걸까

What to do
when textbooks are nothing but an illusion
spouting beautiful, structured words of how
things *should* be

When
a nation is a land of opportunity
for those born clutching polished, golden
spoons
And behind the podium
smiles a marionette
Reciting words from a script
The strings handled with religious fervor

A clichéd story
For all their life, only knowing
the crowns of heads that bow to them, placing
their dainty feet on these bent heads, like
stepping stones

But then
Fiery stars begin dancing in the streets, the
gray cement disappearing,
invisible
The ground shifts in shimmering ripples, glowing
in a warm, medallion light

And yet
What to do
when life is full of marionettes
What to do

When another mishap
is revealed, igniting the
candlelight people store deep inside their
melted pockets
How much longer
must the stars keep on dancing

IN SEARCH OF HOME

by Rania Putri

Leaving feels like freedom.

The field is left open for you to take charge of the game. Gone are the constraints of familiarity that have kept you inside your bubble of complacency, caged you within their boundaries that have become suffocating overtime. Now you can get lost in the crowds, carve out a new self without the shadows of the past tailing you like overgrown coattails. Embellish the identity you've spent so long crafting, present the best sides of yourself. Along with the gargantuan collection of books you've amassed over the year, your past mistakes are left behind, too.

It's a chance to shrug off the weights and turn over a new leaf.

One last thing: *the weather*. Nothing can be more satisfying than coming home without your clothes clinging to your skin and the sticky, humid air still lingering between your fingers as you take arduous yet unfortunately necessary night showers. The cold is a respite, the snow a blessing – the heavily padded coats have become an extra limb you don't mind having.

Or so you think before the glimmer fades and washes out, leaving you with a bleak reality. You start to realise something.

Leaving had *felt* like freedom. Now you're looking for home.

The first meal you purchase at the expense of your incredibly tight wallet is the overpriced *nasi goreng*, or maybe the *pho* that hits very, very close to home. They may not be the glossy dishes you see in the equally glossy pages of magazines, but all you need is an echo, a phantom of the tastes of home to last you through the restless days and sleepless nights. A book tells you there's no cure to heartache, and you wish the book had taste buds so you could prove just how wrong it really is.

You find yourself most at peace slipping back into your native tongue around people who laugh at your local inside jokes (peace can be found in dragging your newfound friends into the banter, too, just so you can smear a little bit of your home soil onto them). Sometimes you wonder what it is about words that can slow down your anxiously beating heart, ease a smile on your tired face, even when such words are ultimately meaningless and just a load of silly, empty talk. But you know it's not the words that are putting the smile on your face and ease in your heart – it's the feeling of being understood, of belonging, that makes everything seem a lot less scary to face.

There's something consolatory about staying inside and turning up those old, sad indie music you used to listen to on the radio back home.

The weather is a plus, though. Saving up on laundry by wearing the same shirt multiple times is an advantage you can't find a single reason to complain about. The challenge persists, however, when you try to keep the tips of your fingers from freezing off every night.

Problems never really go away, you soon learn, ranting to your friends over Skype about stressful encounters and appalling stories like a bird fluttering back to its nest for general up-keeping. You've never felt so relieved to have

that momentary illusion of being back in your room, the humid weather outside as liberating as it is stifling.

You realise that there are many leaves to turn over, not just one.

It seems almost passive, the act of getting lost, like you are at the mercy of nature who sweeps you away amongst its unstoppable currents. It suggests that you are losing, has become the loser who gets the short end of the stick. When you find yourself in the centre of a crowded square or amongst a plain undulating as far as the eye can see, flanked by the ocean, a certain feeling sets in. Something has been dropped, cast aside along the way, whether it be direction or a grip on reality, even control – so you try desperately to salvage it, keep it from slipping past your fingers like fine sand and dust, whatever it is you're starting to lose track of.

Maybe it's home.

You look for home, because your heart has never left.

THE HUMAN FISH

by Shristi Uprety

It is said that Kathmandu valley used to be a lake, and because it was a sacred place, even then, and was fed with water from the Himalayas, the fish were fat and plentiful and grew to the size of sharks. The legend goes that a traveling Tibetan saint slashed open a southern gorge, draining the lake and making it habitable for man.

They're in his bed, arms at their sides, facing the ceiling. It's a Sunday, and he doesn't have to pick up his daughter for another three hours. It's too cold to get up just yet, and so they lie on their backs in the semi-dark room - she pretends she's floating - and talk about their childhoods.

"I'd love to visit someday."

She imagines him in Kathmandu, and wonders whether he'd carry a camera on a strap around his neck and wear a fanny pack and flip flops and be delighted by the low hanging telephone lines and the tiny temples, and the monkeys, so many monkeys everywhere. Whether he'd stop to take photos with ash-smearing holy men for 300 rupees, that's like 3 pounds what a steal, and please hold my fanny pack darling. *Fascinating*, he might say. *Just fascinating*.

But they're a world away in a flat in Sheffield, and the man is naked and stroking the back of her hand and telling her about an article he read about these things called isolation tanks and how you just float in the darkness. His chest rises and falls with his breathing. He drops her hand and gestures in the air

above them, as if you could explain *sensory deprivation* with a gesture, but he only makes rectangles, like he meant to say box or TV, a containment of the darkness, trying and failing to show absence.

Later they move to the kitchen and make coffee and eggs and toast - he hates eating in bed - and he shaves in the kitchen sink in his underwear. He needs to leave soon - his daughter, are you sure you don't want to come with me, you have to meet her at some point - but he gives in, and when he kisses her goodbye, he smells like peppermint.

Alone in his apartment she stands in the shower and looks at her toenails. The paint is chipping, and her feet look blueish-green under the tungsten light. Before leaving, she makes the bed and wipes the bathroom tiles, so that when the man returns with his daughter, it'll be like she was never there at all.

*

A different day, she tells him that she's been to the mythical gorge many years ago on a middle school field trip. Her class - she went to an all-girls' Catholic school - rode to the nearest village on a creaky school bus with plastic window shields that rattled in the frames. When the road ran out they beached the bus and hiked uphill in pairs, twin lines of brown girls in plaited braids and grey uniforms, shoes and socks soggy from the autumn dew. She can't remember anyone's names, even though she must've had friends, or at least one; she had liked her partner. She remembers laughing. If he could see her then, he wouldn't have recognized her, wouldn't have been able to tell the girls apart.

*

She doesn't tell him about believing the legend. She was a girl in a grey uniform tripping up a rocky road, determined to find a man-made crevasse where the mountain was cut into two. But the class reached the top of the cliff-side and found just catacomb caves leading to the river below, each cave narrower and darker than the last. She wished she had brought sneakers - it was too slippery for school shoes, the black imitation leather and worn soles- and imagined sneaking away from the group, maybe even slipping inside a cave and climbing down and down, searching for a still bleeding gash in the dark.

*

Once a week she cycles to an artists' studio and undresses behind an unfinished canvas. She insists on doing this in private, even though she'll be naked anyway; she doesn't like being watched as she unbuttons her shirt, zips out of her pants, peels off her socks, one blue with stripes, the other white with a forlorn Winnie the pooh.

It's the usual crowd tonight, a mix of retirees and art students, and the studio owner, Bob who's a sculptor and can't draw, but tries anyway. He draws her lopsided and with two heads and any random number of limbs and eyes and ears and calls it *aesthetically interpretational*.

She'd been an art major in college and her senior project was interpretational too: she grew moss in coke cans, a sort of statement about capitalism, or consumerism, she can't remember which. She didn't drink coke - still doesn't - so that semester she took to dumpster diving outside residential dorms, dredging up expired food, graded papers, coffee grinds, books in languages she couldn't read, photo negatives, takeout boxes, fresh flowers still wrapped in gift paper, broken furniture, soda cans. When she graduated she left the

moss cans in the art department's basement, a spot of green in musty concrete.

She'd been decent at sketching, but she could never get the faces right, the faces or the hands. She drew her figures faceless, hands hidden in pockets, behind heads, tucked underneath armpits.

"Kira" her instructor would sigh. "Not again."

But he wouldn't protest too much, and they knew that it didn't really matter anyway; she was as good as she was going to get.

Between poses she chats with the regulars. They think she's Italian. She told them this when she started modeling here five months ago, she doesn't know why. It just slipped out, and now every week they ask her about her family and her sunlit villa and her three cats and her twin sister who's getting married next July. She's waiting to be found out, for someone to say hold on that isn't an Italian name, or Ciao dove da Italia vieni? - she would be fucked then, this was such a pointless lie goddammit- but they haven't yet, and they shade her breasts and back and buttocks and hope she's not homesick, the poor thing.

Back in her flat she's downloaded Duolingo, the language-learning app, but she likes learning random words off Google translate instead. Patata. Dizionario. Pesce Umano.

*

Also in her flat she looks up that legend about Kathmandu being a lake, because she can't remember how it ends, what happened to the saint, and

and whether there really is a clear incision somewhere in the mountainside, but there is no further information.

She can see it now, water gushing out of an opening, and a man hacking away even as he goes under, the man who destroyed a hill to create a valley. The story ends here for him; no one says whether he survived. She imagines the water swirling around and above him, and him still standing there holding his breath, slashing the hillside with a sword.

*

She's never been to Italy, but she hears it's warm. She finds herself dreaming about the beach. The nearest she's been is Slovenia, a country pressed against Italy, a country she didn't know existed until she read an article about *sightless dragons* that live in Slovenian caves in complete darkness, their eyes atrophied over generations.

A month after reading the article she's in a cave in Slovenia, peering into dimly lit tanks. She can only see two: an immobile pair pressed against each other, entwined rope the width of her little finger, more like worms than dragons. A sign tells her that the dragons only need to eat once every ten years and that they lie still to preserve energy. The locals call them human fish for their pale skin, and they sleep and breed underwater. The man had come with her - I've got vacation days, c'mon it'll be fun - and when they leave, he takes pictures of her by the cave entrance.

That night they drink wine by the city's canals and share a pizza ordered off a menu that neither of them can read. He has never been out of England before.

"I have something for you," he says to her on the flight home, and for a moment she's confused - surely he wouldn't? - but he just hands her a paper bag crinkled from his jacket. Inside is a dragon magnet, green, and with bright cartoon eyes that brazenly smile up at her.

*

She's been in Sheffield for two years now. Before this she lived in Germany, four years as an au pair for two girls with blonde hair and white socks who called her Aunt Kira. Before that she was in Laos, teaching children English. She moved to England on a whim: she applied for a visa, and got one - surprisingly - she had expected to be turned away. In London she spent a month in a shared room, but the money ran out alarmingly quick, and after an interview on the phone she moved to Sheffield for a department job selling makeup.

All she knew about Sheffield was that it was mentioned in Robin Hood, and when she got there she half expected to see a forest growing out of the city grid - a moss metropolis run amok - but of course it was just a town. Here at least she can afford a flat, and she leaves the cabinets open and her coffee cups unwashed. Sometimes she cooks. Her flat is tiny and smells like rubber and the tiles never look clean no matter how hard she scrubs them, but it faces the east, and in the morning the sunlight - if there is any - comes streaming into her bedroom. She sleeps with the blinds open.

*

Late at night she lies on her back with her arms at her sides and looks at the darkness above her. If she were one of those people who spoke to themselves, she might do so now, and be comforted by the sound of her voice. But the

and the slow creaking of the walls all around her.

She imagines Kathmandu draining slowly over months. No matter how large the gorge cut, an entire city of water must take its time retreating. The fish slowly realize that the water levels are dropping, and they crowd beneath the falling surface, trying to hunt and hide, eating and being eaten, until there's no room to swim anymore, and they huddle together, predator and prey under the falling sky.

THE TREE OF DEATH AND THE FIELD OF FORGIVENESS

by Jonaki Ray

The mother's head is tilted to the side, as her hair, fashionably short, curves around the thin shoulders stooped protectively around the baby in her arms. A strand of her hair is tied to a machine behind her. "It kept their heads in place", explains my guide. In the photo, the mother looks straight at the camera, almond eyes half-defiant and half-resigned to her fate. Tuol Sleng, codenamed, S-21, at Phnom Penh was a school that was turned into an interrogation center, and is now a genocide museum. The walls are lined with photographs of the prisoners. The exercise poles were used to tie the "rebels" upside down till they confessed to their crimes, and the classrooms were converted into cells with iron manacles to keep them tied in place. The walls have red patches that look like paan stains making the rooms seem like a government office—but pictures depict the horrors of forced confessions and torture that went on at this school. Two thousand people entered. Seven came out alive.

Once the prisoners had confessed, they were taken to be buried, sometimes alive, in what are now known as killing fields. At Choeung Ek, one of the those killing fields, our guide walks calmly through crunchy fragments of bones and rags, showing me the killing tree where babies were smashed to death, and the mass graves where thousands were buried. The mounds of skulls decorate the seventeen floors of the memorial stupa, each floor witness to different paths to death. Some skulls have holes from blows by rods, some have jaws smashed, and others slashed necks. The UN-based war crimes tribunal is still investigating the cases and so far, three people have been convicted.

I am struck by the pictures of one of the people who was arrested, Ieng Thirith. She had studied at Sorbonne, and was the first female Cambodian to get a degree in English. I wonder at the trajectory of her life, where after that beginning, she became a professor, then a founder of a school, before being appointed as a Minister of Social Affairs in the Khmer Rouge regime. In 2012, the tribunal found her unfit for trial due to suffering from advanced stage dementia. Perhaps her mind finds it difficult to remember such horrors? Only one person has expressed remorse for the deaths of around 2 million people—the exact number is unknown.

Outside, daffodils blaze in the sunshine around the prayer flags and bowed heads of visitors, and the stupa is haloed by a cerulean sky. Despite the tragedy, there is an eerie sense of peace on these grounds.

“We have to learn to forgive and move on,” says my guide, telling me how his family was hiding in the villages, but the soldiers still managed to find them and took his sister away, and she was never found again.

This message is repeated by Chum Mey, one of the seven survivors at S-21, in his memoir. He writes: “I don’t know what I would have done in their (the soldiers’) place. I have forgiven them.” Chum Mey was a mechanic who was arrested and brought to S-21 and tortured with beatings and electric shocks, till he finally confessed to being a spy.

As he describes, “I just started telling them whatever they wanted to hear.” He survived because of his mechanical skills—he could fix typewriters, important for noting down the confessions. The guide talks to him and then translates to us that Chum Mey feels responsible for telling the world what happened, and testified at the war crimes tribunal. He lost his entire family during the Khmer Rouge regime.

Chum Mey comes every day to S-21 and sits outside with one of the other survivors. He nods when I request him for a photograph, and faces the camera. His face is calm and he has a smile on his face.

I come out to a street full of *tuk-tuks* and families milling around. Our driver is laughing and joking that his wife is waiting for him, and that he is very scared of his wife's temper. He talks about his children, and the guide and he exchange notes about the best schools in the town.

Despite the killing trees in the world, life goes on.

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Jonathan B. Chan is an undergraduate at the University of Cambridge reading English. Born to a Malaysian father and Korean mother in the United States, Jonathan was raised in Singapore and sees his cultural tapestry manifest in his writing. He has recently been moved by the writing of Marilynne Robinson, Joan Didion, and Shusaku Endo. His mind is pre-occupied with questions of theology, love, and human expression.

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Clara Chow is the author of *Dream Storeys* (Ethos, 2016), a story collection inspired by architects' imaginary buildings. Her short stories have appeared in the *Asia Literary Review*, *Columbia Journal* and *Litro UK's #flashfriday*, and her journalism in *The Straits Times* and the *South China Morning Post*. In 2015, she co-founded online literary and art journal *WeAreAWebsite.com*. Her second book, *Modern Myths*, which retells Greek myths in a contemporary Singapore setting, is forthcoming from Math Paper Press. More at clarachow.weebly.com

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Nina Powles is a poet and writer from New Zealand. They are half Malaysian-Chinese and partly grew up in China.

RANIA PUTRI

Rania is a first-year undergrad at the London School of Economics (LSE) who is trying desperately to balance schoolwork and her time-consuming hobbies; which include writing, browsing Spotify playlists, checking out free museum exhibits and perusing through second-hand bookshops. Two places currently have a spot in her heart as 'home' - Doha, where she spent most of her time growing up, and Indonesia, where she was born - but Rania thinks she's always open to more candidates.

PAVLE RADONIC

Australian by birth of Montenegrin origin, Pavle Radonic's 6 years living and writing in S-E Asia has provided unexpected stimulus. Previous work has appeared in a range of literary journals and magazines, most recently *Ambit*, *Big Bridge*, *Antigonish & Citron Reviews*.

JONAKI RAY

Jonaki Ray studied Chemistry and Computer Science at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. After a stint as a software engineer, she turned to her first love, writing. Her work has been published and is forthcoming in *Sigh Press Journal*, *The Matador Review*, *The Aerogram*, *So to Speak*, *Indian Literature*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Coldnoon: Travel Poetics*, *The Four Quarters Magazine*, *Kitaab*, and *The Lake*, and elsewhere. Her poetry was shortlisted for the 2016 Oxford Brookes University International Poetry Contest and longlisted for the 2016 RL Poetry Award, while her short fiction was longlisted in the 2016 Writers' HQ International Fiction Contest. She was selected as a Writer-in-Residence at *Joya: AiR*.

IAIN LIM JUN RUI

Iain Lim Jun Rui is a Mass Communications diploma graduate from Ngee Ann Polytechnic and an aspiring poet and filmmaker. He is a winner of the Love Poetry Competition and finalist in the National Poetry Competition 2017 organised by Poetry Festival Singapore. His poetry is published or forthcoming in Love At The Gallery, Eunoia Review and Twin Cities among others. His first documentary short is a finalist at Singapore Heritage Short Film Competition 2017.

TOH HSIEN MIN

Toh Hsien Min is the author of four books of poetry, most recently «Dans quel sens tombent les feuilles» (Paris, 2016), and also editor of the Quarterly Literary Review Singapore.

CASEY TRAN

Casey Tran an emerging storyteller and poet based in the San Francisco Bay Area. I am working on a collection of poetry rooted in my experience as a daughter of Chinese Vietnamese boat people. My writing has been published in Resonate - Global Voices on East Asian Issues, Oakland Asian Cultural Center's Zine, and UC Berkeley's "growing home" zine.

SHRISTI UPRETY

Shristi Uprety is a Nepali writer currently residing in Hua Hin, Thailand. She graduated from Franklin and Marshall College where she majored in Anthropology and Creative Writing. She reads fantasy and science fiction, and writes post-colonial realism.

SOO YOUNG YUN

Soo Young Yun is a writer from Seoul, South Korea. She has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Origami Poems Project, Ann Arbor District Library, Writing for Peace, and Skipping Stones Youth Honor Awards. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Aerie International, Burningword Literary Journal, DU-ENDE, Emerald Coast Review, Hawai'i Review, Red Weather, among other journals and anthologies.

