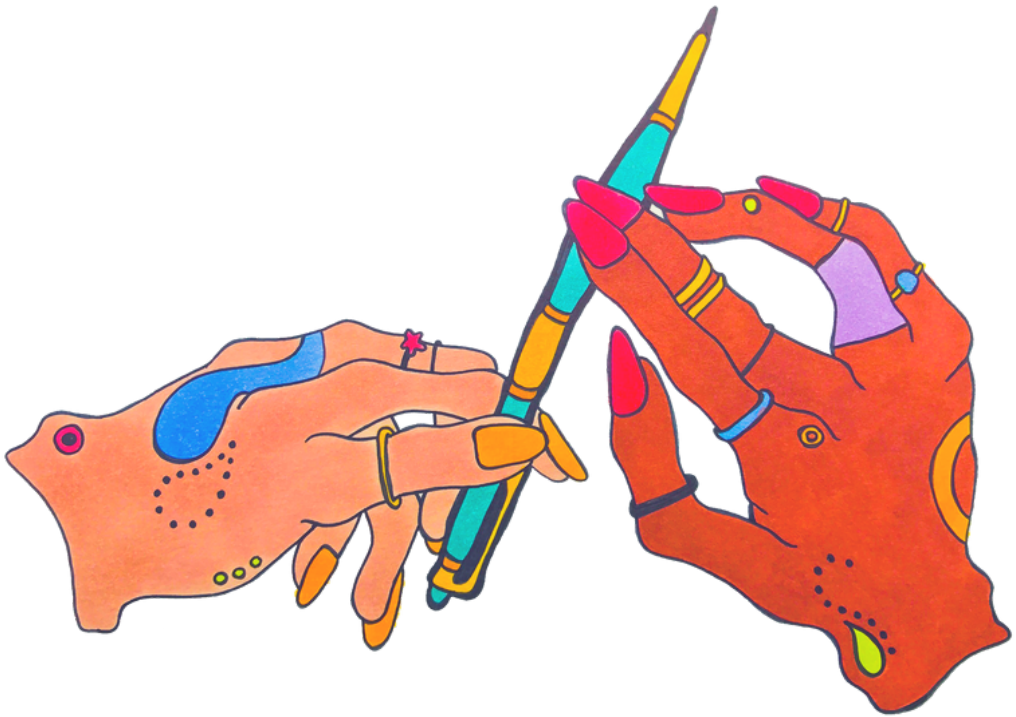


Issue No. 1

Tuste Milieu

a literary zine



Featuring indie authors
from around the world

Submit your

poetry

flash fiction

literary critique

illustrations

photography

sketches

justemilieu.lit@gmail.com

6.15.17

We run. Summer solstice is the season.
The blacktop path, a petrified snakeskin,
Sweat and sunscreen discharge from brow to lid,
Squint-eyed, blurred field, a shrinking world, lies hid-
How desire outstrips every reason

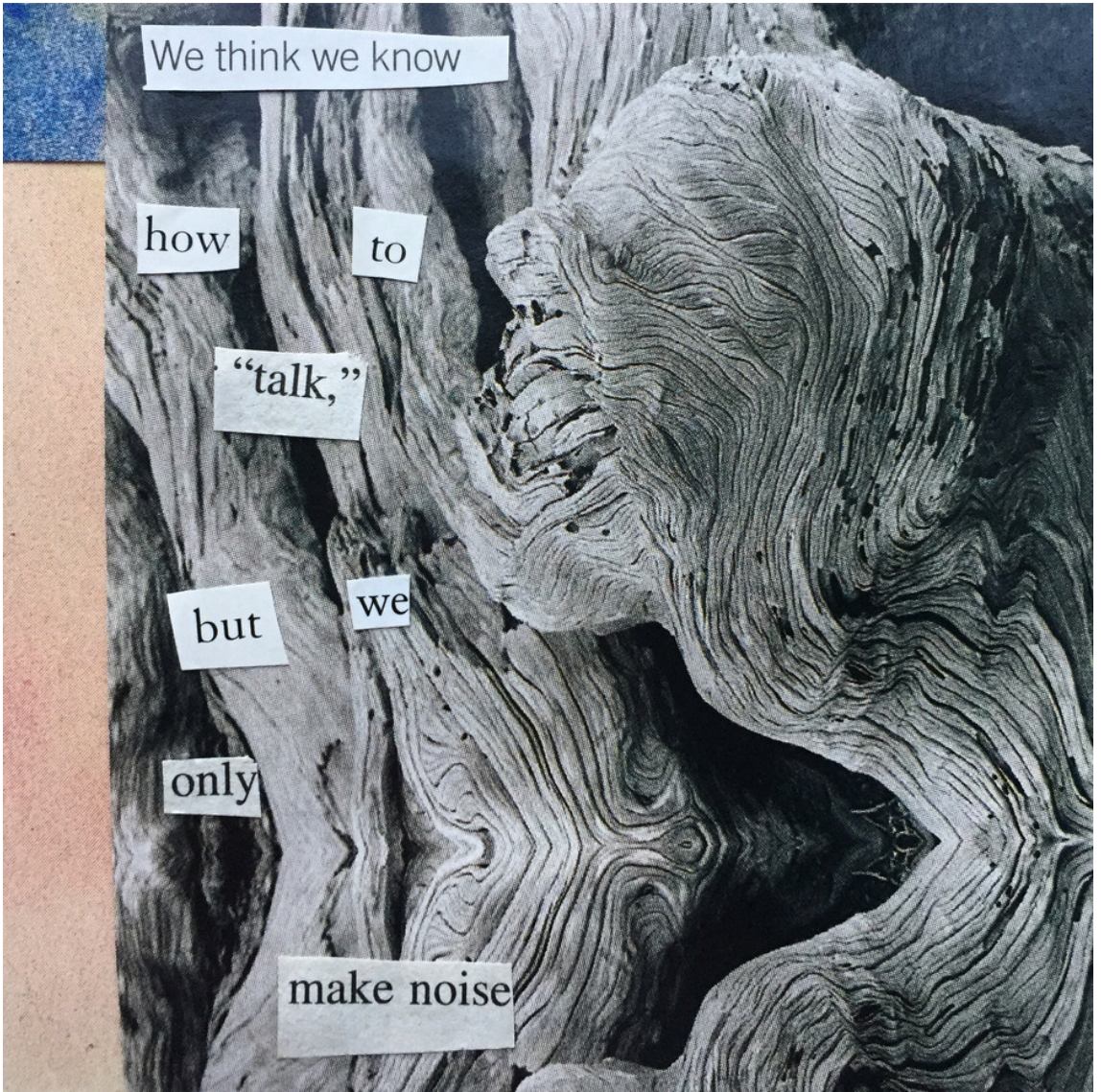
6.17.17

No haiku for you
Its smoky surface no fit
for your reflection

6.22.17

My twelve-year summer
Central California
Pollen-filled gold fields
A sneeze-filled delirium
Love's phenomenology





"language barrier"

Giovina
Phildelphia, PA

I Can't Write Like You

(After reading a poem by Franny Choi, because Danez Smith told me to)

But they tell me I should
and sometimes I want to.
My lips don't fit well around the words.
I don't see the world in color or landscapes.
I am alone here with the dead.
Sometimes I dance, sometimes I put the pen
to my lips, take a puff and exhale ghosts.

*Janaya Martin
Minneapolis, MN*

Early morning Sundays.
Strawberries, café con leche,
one tightly rolled up

blunt, and one kiss planted,
simultaneously wetting
two pairs of plump

chapped lips.
Natural, calm, and elevated
love at its finest.

*CDMA
Lawrence, MA*

on to greater things

when we were tiny
we could stumble
and only fall
a few inches

we have grown
capable
of throwing ourselves
from greater heights

*Shanika Powell
New York, NY*

I gazed at the sunset
watching lovers pass
holding hands
I focus more internally on the sunset

blinking back tears
basking in the last rays
listening to the ocean
sitting
wishing you were here

Essence of Love #53

*Mardochere Morisset
New York*

Cette bite foutre mon cœur

I love(d) you so much
I love(d) fucking you
fucking you,
so much

I remember when we first started exploring each other-
when you were a freak,
the things you'd do
were so nasty and hot
and then you just stopped.

And then you just stopped
touching me in the way you used to,
I tried to get hot
but the more that I tried
the more I put you off.

Then you shut off.
It was a difficult time,
but I thought our love was starting its prime,
not rotting from a dying vine.

Do things revive?
How resilient is the will to survive?
Or is love just a passing thing to make us feel alive?
Conditioned into submission to Oxycontin, I need another dose of
how I love(d) you,
and how after I still wanted your love (dick).

But as time passed, I forgot,
Then I thought
I better not ever fuck you, even if I want to;
time opened my eyes

I now realize
that it's unwise to do,
the love(d) won't be
as good as it used to.

Louisa Lamb
Alexandria, VA

By the Light of Chromis

AJ Smith
Houston, TX

I'd made it to Rho—The tiny failure in orbit.

"A most mediocre rock," I remarked to my shadow—my most familiar companion at that point...aside from the kind galaxies that avoided the temptation to destroy the course of my spacecraft or my thousand years of frozen solitude. Their unspoken generosity cradled the huntress in me all the way to my destination.

This planet of pink sand and milk white ponds appeared to be a beautiful place, made lovelier by the scatterings of yellow moss hugging the base of the jagged quartz mountains in the distance. I sat for a long while in my landed spacecraft, ogling my surroundings through the glass hood. I resolved to tuck any admiration for Rho's beauty away, quickly. It was a useless thought.

The orange star, Chromis—as vibrantly pigmented as my orange skin—provided plenty light for me. I decided to climb out. Finally, I made my first steps onto the terrain. The air was heavy and murky with a still fog—much like my dreary thoughts.

My plan for Rho was simple. I'd get vengeance for the murder of Grandfather Hygourd. Poor Grandfather...

He may've been from Earth, but he was the most loving, caring adoptive guardian I'd ever had...and he was the most amazing captain, carrying out another mission many eons ago, to claim this very planet. I remember being confused about how he'd even met his shipmates...the beings that were vile enough to kill their captain. So scathingly evil.

This planet...His planet...was supposed to be named Hygourd 1. The deviants saw to it that he'd never succeed.

I cracked the rigid knuckles of all fourteen of my digits, hiking farther into the direction of the orange light, my seven-foot stature cut through the fog in feverish anger. I tried with deep breaths to release the thoughts of him suffering at the hands of the greedy deviants he had trusted. I had to remain on these grounds until my vengeance touched whomever or whatever on Rho.

I released a vibration from inside my core. It helped me to perceive what lied on Rho's surface as well as what lied beneath—

I stopped abruptly in my tracks. I detected something...

...something small...round...shy of a single millimeter thick.

I bounded 192 more steps down this Chromis-lit path to a tiny jagged quartz rock. I detected a coin inside, mysteriously suspended within the rock...probably hardened and degraded under the sweltering heat of Chromis.

My fingertips hardened and I found myself intently chipping away at it. If a coin was a part of the perpetrators' riches—if it had any semblance of importance, I'd waste no time in finding other ones, claiming what should've rightly been in Grandfather's hands. Suddenly, I drew in a sharp breath. I ceased chipping. Sometimes I carried the burden of error in my echolocation, but...my margin of error was broader than I'd ever imagined. The spikes along the spine of my back stood at attention. I felt a disturbance of upright beings.

I hissed loudly in natural defense, and let my fingertips grow longer and harder while whipping myself around to face whomever it was.

Ten shadowy figures stood in silence. They were no more than two feet away from me. My heart drummed loudly. These things...

They were like onyx...but humanoid.

Their forms weren't even receiving the light of Chromis, and...

They had no faces.

That was not the way in which my hunt should've advanced...I needed to look the perpetrators in the eye in such a way as to make them cower in fear...but there were no eyes to glare into. I felt as though all of my control had been transferred to them in some unspeakable way.

Before I realized it, my legs sprang into motion and my body was rapidly cutting through the fog like a sword. I was retreating to my ship...in cowardice. I sprinted and punched random pieces of quartz that jutted out closely enough to me in such a way as to shoot shards at them. I hadn't even looked to see whether the shards hit them or not...or if these beings were following me.

"What are they?"

I tapped the command board hidden inside the center of my broad chest to open the hood of my ship. I leaped inside with such a forceful thud. As I tried to control my rapidly heaving chest, I sealed myself inside with another tap.

My eyes widened at the stream of black slithering its way toward my ship...and it morphed back into those 10 beings— inches away from my glass hood.

I quivered relentlessly...

I was ashamed to be so scared. I wheezed and wished my only companion wasn't inanimate...I wanted it to protect me.

I began to feel an intense drowsiness wash over me. Every joint in my body started to harden like concrete. I was unable to discern why I felt as if I was going into frozen solitude again. I couldn't even think—I...I imagined breaking through the glass of my ship and using my fingertips for slaughter, but...I didn't make a move. Why hadn't I?

A dark hand, with the longest and boniest of fingers broke through the glass and gripped my wrist so quickly. I felt a crunch.

I gasped, mouth agape...I tried to wail. Nothing came out. Tears filled my line of vision. I tried to screech, but...I couldn't. This encounter had morphed into a brand new evil.

I saw the other nine voraciously beating at the glass hood. The hood looked due to shatter at any moment.

"Don't..." I struggled to cry out. My jaw locked.

I couldn't understand what was happening.

I cried for Grandfather Hygourd.

My body grew numb so rapidly, and—

I loved getting immersed in the psyche of our captives. They always seem to have the most colorful thoughts and remembrances. She was so deliciously scared. She traveled here to avenge her weak grandfather...This being—whatever she was—had such enviable gumption.

I have memories scattered across this city
Like pieces of broken beach glass
swept up upon the sand
They cut me when I walk pass
Somewhere I used to be
Someone I used to be.

Chelsey Minor
Astorville, Ontario
Canada

*She's like this,
raven-black hair and darkness in the eyes.
Melancholy swear down her lips,
a help request or a war declaration,
powerful and delicate
spurs of Savannah's cactus
protection in the bleakness of escaped enemies
Rare occurrence: As a black pearl,
Abyss' daughter
Her smile, unveiled, precious*

Mitch Di Martino
Turin, Italy

Doctor

Scary Honest
Amazing Comforting Teaching
An Apple A Day Keeps The Doctor
Away
Helper

Pomme HJ
Compton, CA

*We danced on clouds
moving to the rhythm of the wind
without the fear of falling
we flew with birds
and raced around the sun
we surfed on airplanes
never fearing the height
we hopped over rooftops
testing gravity as we laughed
carefree in our adventures,
we didn't need wings
all we needed was each other*

KaiCeleste
Michigan

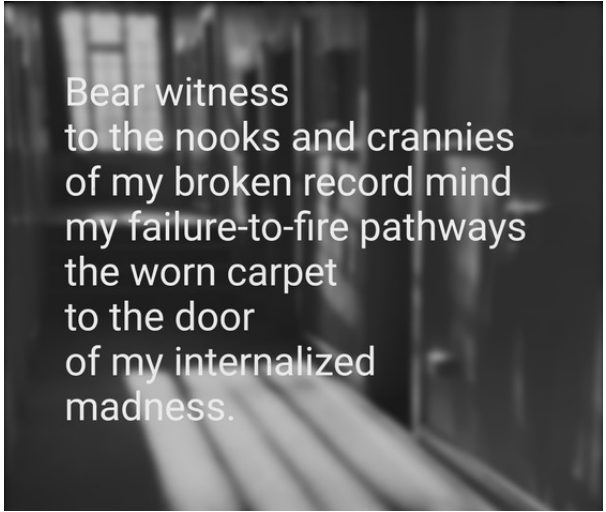


My every thought is of you.

*My heart, a stone
within my chest*

*My tears,
a pointless gesture.*

*M.J. Wenman
New Zealand*



Bear witness
to the nooks and crannies
of my broken record mind
my failure-to-fire pathways
the worn carpet
to the door
of my internalized
madness.

Love Limerick

I feel so intoxicated,
But you can alleviate it.
My love for you is growing.
Are you willing to start blowing?
It'd be much appreciated.

I'll take a knee for you,
Gazing at your eyes sky blue.
I hope you enjoy my pleasure,
it's a standard that no one can measure.
Our chemistry is finally getting brewed.

Our love for one another has many roots.
Let's cut to the chase and start knocking boots!

*Makeem White
Pittsburg, PA*

Vibe with me, let's exchange energy.
Let's explore each other's universe, and talk about what we see.
You've been reading me, just as I've been reading you.
Let's put the books down and reveal our truths.
The stars are aligned and I'm trying to do the same with you.

*Alicia Evon
Detroit, MI*



Toothpicks

I thought
you would
stop
at my heart

but here you are

picking your teeth
with my bones

Losing Hand

I am weary
of playing this hand;
why don't we just
call a spade a
spade
so that we may
bury
our love
with it.

Moonless Denial

Screw sunsets;
I want to ride off
into a moonless night
so that I will not see
when you betray me

Documentary

no silver screen
am I
though you project
your past
upon my skin
as though
the parting
of my
curtains
reveals an ending
you know too well

*Darla J Quinn
Traverse City, Michigan*

Rainforest Mind

I have an unquenchable thirst for
The unknown, the wild, the beautiful and the wicked.
The vicious and dark.
The hollow and torn and bruised and beaten.
The poets, the saints, the musicians and the love lorn.
The stars and the beyond.
The romantics and the freed men.
The renaissance of people and life in 383 different colors.
For books and fantasy and fiction and rhyme.
For faith and courage.
The truthful and the idealists.
But most of all,
For you.

(Title inspired by Paula Prober's Rainforest Mind Theory')

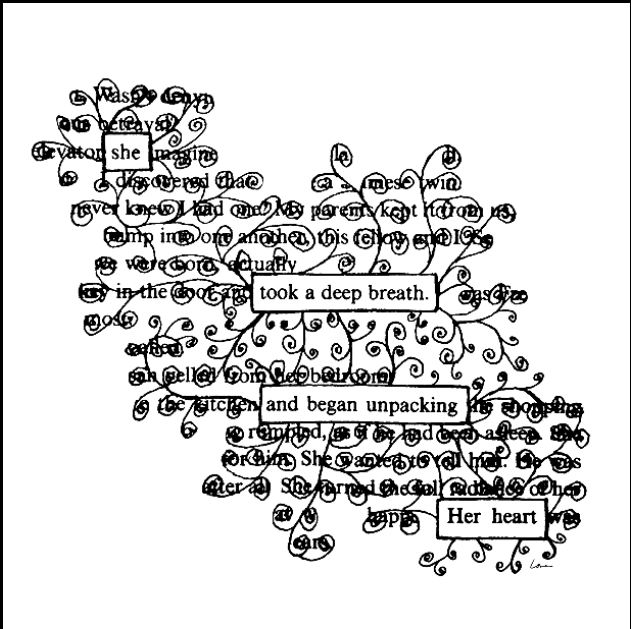
*Anusha Ramji
Bangalore, India*

Take me back to last night.
Where you tasted of smoke and apple flavored candy.
Where the air was thick, but the clearest I've ever breathed.

Take me back to last night.
Where your sleepy smile was my happiness,
And your hair was a beautiful mess.

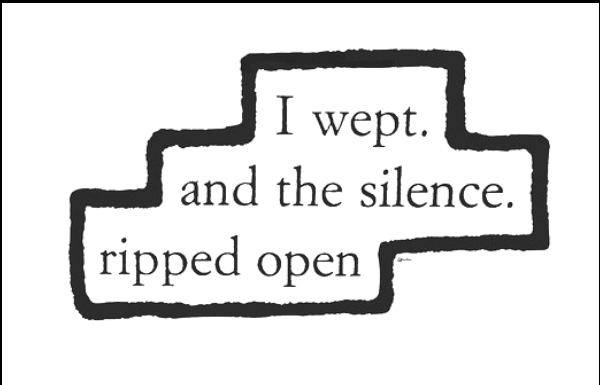
Mary Patterson
Ontario, Canada

Take me back to last night,
Where your hands were all over me, and I finally felt loved.
The smoke in my lungs and your lips on my skin
Are all I need to keep me sane.



"breathe"

...



Colette Love Hilliard
St. Louis, MO

"silence"

decisions, decisions
clear and poorly made

turned a peaceful protest
into a deadly raid

*Zuri McWhorter
Detroit, MI*



her mama used to wake her with
café para niñas—
coffee for little girls.

cinnamon, sugar, coffee, and cream.

now her mornings can't start without
first sipping down
something at café vita
(the place
down the street
where they know her name
and what she drinks):

still an americano—hot. two espresso shots.
four circles of honey, and hemp milk to the top.

and sometimes, by noon,
she's up to 3 or more—

34 years old, and still a mama's girl.

jump
roll
in

cut
snip
trim

she had to meet up w her mama 'round 10

i had
breakfast
with a friend

coffee for little girls **sunday, 9am (until we meet again)**

*James Albert
Portland, OR*

I could not help falling
When I saw his green eyes
And his lob of black hair
Dark as a raven

A football game
Falcons vs Stallions
What do you know
We sat in the same stand

Though all my friends warned me
I disregarded their remarks
Not caring whether or not
He broke my fragile heart

He asked me whether it was taken
The seat beside me
I played it cool
Quickly replied yes

I figured he was worth it
Prepared for the worst casualty
I held my breath
And went in blind

Scrambling in my mind
To encounter a truth to my lie
My friend Zach walked up
Serendipitously

But nothing could have braced me
For the impending crash
The way my soul would shatter
Each time that he passed

Pleased with myself
For being so slick
Disappointed that my companion
Still was not him

We ignored one another
For the first year or so
Me thinking there was no way
And he probably did not know

He looked over and smiled
Like, "you got me this time"
And I waved as if
I had no idea

That I even existed
Or held a place on the earth
While I figured he would not
Care either way

In any case
I guess my fate was sealed
Never felt electric
Until he was near

Until one morning I rushed
To Algebra, AP
And slammed into him
Quite accidentally

Next Monday was another
Just like the rest
And I hoped we would
Bump into each other again

He picked up each paper
But then rushed off
Once we were that close
Every bet was lost

Next thing that you know
Organic Biology
Who sat next to me
It was him, of course

So high school goes
The rollercoaster ride
That it tends to be
One second you're crying
Then falling asleep

"You're that girl from the game
With the taken seat"
I tried not to blush
"Yes, I'm guilty, it's me"

"That was pretty cold"
I rolled my eyes and laughed
"Sorry, the seat was taken"
I think he was taken aback

It was worth it
When his hands were on me
And I knew that soon
They would touch me again

But really all I wanted
Was to bask in his undying glory
To forever live in the glow of his warmth
Find the nook between his chest and arm
And stay there until the end of time

Maxwell Cole
Flame to my fire
Even if it only
Lasted senior year

Of course, I didn't say that
Of course, I never would
So I glanced instead, to the side
"Did you hear Mr. Adams?"
He said page 265"

Changed the subject
"Describe the process of karyokinesis"
Suddenly my face was in his hands
I don't know if I could even
Call it a kiss

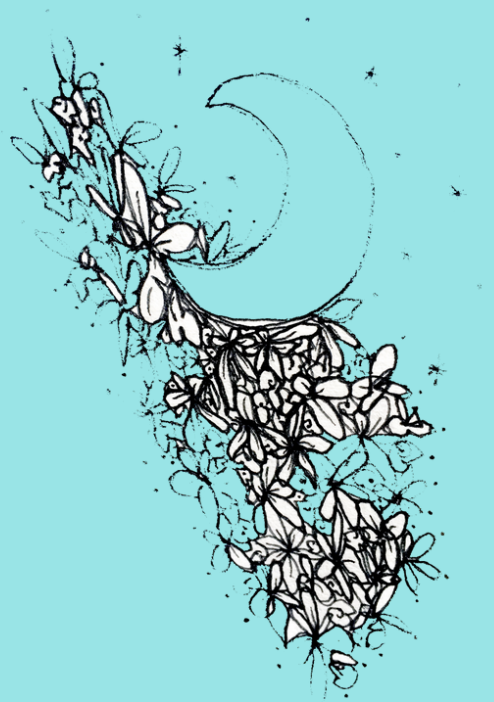
His mouth was on mine
My lips were confused
I liked playing the game
But now I didn't know what to do

And then Mr. Adams was yelling
"Ladies and gentleman,
unacceptable behavior in my room!"

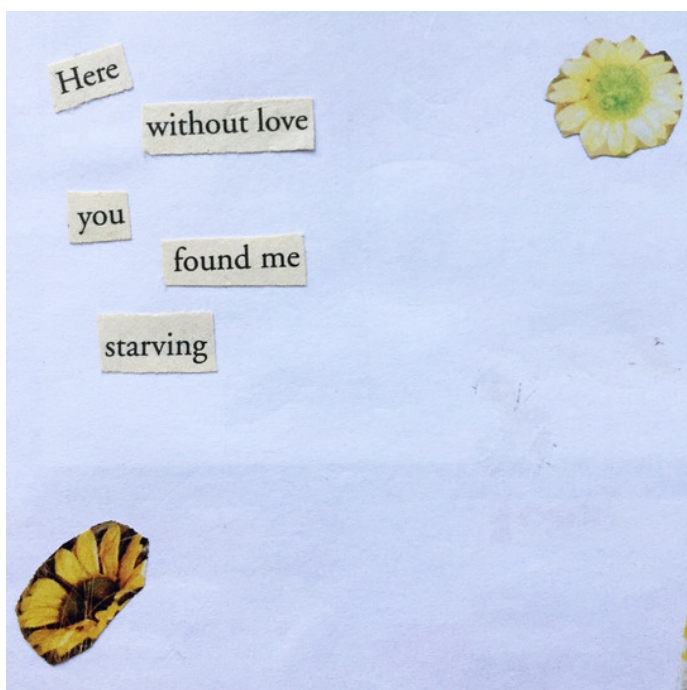
Not that we cared
It was the first moment
That I felt blessed by the sun

It didn't matter that
I had to wait in the office
For my mom
And then, when she got there
Explain the whole thing

As if she could ever
Begin to understand
Or wrap her head around
My adoration, obsession



Natasha Yee
Phoenix, AZ



"senses III"



"senses I"

Bougie and the Beast

she breathed softly into his ear
pleasure swelling in her throat
her lips sucking his

he wanted more

a marvelous trickle of pleasure
caught in her throat
fevered and blistered to a moan

he wanted more

she licked his lips; he bit back
her cry broke and faded
as her body began to quake

still he wanted more

their eyes met in the candle-licked darkness
and in this sweet flash of heat
he grunted

and she knew what more he wanted

her

screaming
squirming
burning
shivering
naked

he wanted

her

raw
her heart and soul, devoured

her

permission to take
#cruel&complete possession

as this reality settled
a chill tiptoed along her spine
she held her breath
and whispered
I beg your pardon

*R.K Johnson
Washington, D.C.*

Storms

While everyone wished for
the winds to slow and the rains
to cease, she prayed
for thunder, lightning, and destruction.
For the storm was her life and
she couldn't live without the sting
of the hail on her skin.

*Eliza Jay
Minneapolis, MN*



Some say I can't hear through the
haze,
but the weed helps to
cut through those deafening days
of malaise and craze that comes
with being alone and afraid

Momentary lapses in judgement,
The guttural lack of a loved one,
Someone to hug and snug on

But art will keep the heat on
No need for a lead on
Freedom reins and runs through even
severed veins until I'm falling asleep
on the phone again
and in the throws of another
windstorm

This is one to last
And when it doesn't...

*Pale Illusions
Vancouver Island, BC
Canada*

*My love is like a parasite, leeching outward, and looking for a new host. This
rageful monster takes no survivors, so I beg my lovers, "do not engage, it will
only enrage." Despite my knowledge of this angry parasitic love, I continue
to douse it in gas, fuel this monster, and watch as the flames lick at the grass.
In my path a wake of destruction. Not even my hope can save the ones I
love, not from this parasitic love.*

...

*Pick at my skin and tell me about how I only continue to sin.
Shame me and speak of how only religion could tame my sinful heart.
I mean you are holier than thou, so lead me by example.
Let me just see how dark your deepest sins might be.
In the end you may become my friend.*

*Sabrina Moore
Ashland, KY*





I wish there were 2 of me
So I could shoot myself.

*God
New Jersey, USA*

The Point

Mark Rylance proclaims, "one day
The last folio will go up in flames".

And his point?
Is his point
There's no point?
He has a point,
We have no chance,

The universe will burn us up

Like ants we will ignite, and so
No point of another folio.

Yet here we are. But not for long,
A blaze, a flare, a flash and gone.
We cling to existence with our mind
Defined by spirit, flair and wit
And conscious reason to treasure it.

And yet you choose to numb your brain,
To stupefy your senses dull,
To duck inside your skull and skulk,
I have to say I find it odd.
You might as well believe in God.

*Christopher Colles
Canary Islands*

Kali Ma

by Taylor Yeomans

Santa Cruz, California

Evoked upon the dark moon. As scorpions crawl at my feet. Naked on honey suckle sweetness, I can finally see your beauty. Audacity rebelling against acculturation. Sexuality dripping like nectar, roaring with lively bliss; you were born to scorch archetypes--appearing from the abyss.

A cry of shame rings out from my rib cage. Fear for the darkness of my potential. You slash away guilt. My throat burns with truth.

Poisons rise into my gut. Palms fall open, asking "what?"

The hardened pelvis releases. The hips pinch then quake. A flood of emotions, I'd blindly stored away--now surges awake. The brain like a theatre, flashing the journey thus far. "Strike the match," you call from beyond.

I open my legs like butterfly wings. A flame rests in my left palm. It glows green, as I offer it love. "Dear flame, guide me to let go of what is no longer." Imagining the self-hatred, I see it hiding within. I stir it from frozen spaces; pulling it out through the palm of my hand. The flame vibrates wildly bright. I seek shame next. Every exhale drives it out from deeper heart tissues. My spine lets air between each vertebra. No longer do I feel my issues.

As the doubt drains, the orb pulses brighter. My ears feel unclogged, like doubt is a ball of wax. Without doubt the fear drains free. The heart screeches in pain. "What did you mean?" I see them crowding around me, shouting "Get the fuck out! Fall in line! Learn to behave!" But this time I feel no need to belong. The draining fear leaves a void. Anger rises, ready to be raw. "I honor you anger, no longer will I shun you from my sight." I place the wild orb on the ground. It's flames begin to dance, rippling with might.

"Toss it all in." Whispers my heart, the voice of a lost friend. Tears begin to fall. I see labels like worn out cloaks, heavy and unbefitting. Burdens I no longer wish to carry.

I drag them free from under the surface. Peeling them away like dead skins. Slut, bitch, evil, sinner, unworthy, waste of life--I toss them into the fire. They burn, crackle, and pop. I see times of petrification. Visions disintegrate, fragmented by light and dissolving. Pain turns to ashes, the mind is silent. Wholeness feels like a cloud. Weightless I am able to float down into the heart.

Soft and tender like the womb; the beat melts away understanding, releasing a river of golden light. Tempering the fire, and saturating the orb. A presence of peace is drawn forth. Nothing holds meaning over soul. The golden light alchemizes the fire, revealing a crystal at its core. Placed in my left palm, it's energies are absorbed.

Love penetrates the depth of my heart. Pours into the void. Instead of filling, the void expands with potential. Hope pours through the palm. Winding through the body, flickering it on. I belong here. The pain serves a purpose. My shattering feels soft. The crystal glows abundantly with compassion. I feel connected to ants, to trees, to moon, to you, to me. To all we don't know.

Never alone at home within. Sitting to witness the dance of atoms. Where did they all come from? Perhaps the banana slug formed from the same star's dust as I? If energy is neither created nor destroyed, than might this not be our first time? With past and future tumbling infinitely in either direction. Only here, can we be now.

Maybe we've lived lifetimes upon other planets, in other galaxies, in other universes, in far out distant space. Perhaps nothing I've been holding onto will follow beyond. So why carry it here?

Awoken with curiosity. The pressure has been relieved. The dead rests in peaceful ashes. In remnants of rising smoke I see the shadow of a phoenix. I close my palm around the crystal.

Experiencing gratitude and wisdom within the paradox of the unknown. I am one small witness, but I feel magically mighty full.

The poetry
You have
Kissed
Off my
Lips
Speaks for
Itself

- when I've realized
there are more sad
poems than anything else

Waiting
For the
Hurt
That's bound to
Come

Harder,
Faster,
Than your
Tongue

- worries that eat me alive

alyssa apolloni
Detroit, MI



through the kitchen
window
bouncing down the
hallway
into the living room
off plain white walls
bright afternoon
warmth streams
broken over, over, over
cars on the overpass
and destined for
elsewhere

denis bernicky
Montreal, Quebec
Canada

by the time
you remember
just what it is
you've left behind,
you're going too fast,
and you've gone too far,
and it isn't practical to turn back,
and besides,
new could be better

the
wind buffeted
trees will move
but give no ground
the grass does the same -
this is somehow less remarkable

at night
the church's facade
is lit by floodlights
the roof and steeple
no less present
for fading in the darkness

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forbothbreadandambition.tumblr.com

Pale Illusions, illustration

"The juste milieu,
the happy medium,
between reality and art."

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