

# THE UNEXPECTED



MISTY  
MINT MAGAZINE  
VOL.1



Volume 1



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*Misty Mint Magazine* is published by Hugo House, which is located on the traditional territory of Lushootseed-speaking Coast Salish peoples, including the Duwamish, Suquamish, Tulalip, Muckleshoot, and other Coast Salish Nations who are still here today.

Through editors, contributors, and readers, *Misty Mint Magazine* also exists in lands beyond the peoples and communities listed here. To learn more about the land you live on, please visit [native-land.ca/](http://native-land.ca/).

This acknowledgment is intended to be a step, not an end. We are grateful for the stories, language, and poems created by the Coast Salish and all the First Peoples of this land and acknowledge the ongoing racism and disparities that they experience. Though we have not and will not always get it right, we commit to uplifting Indigenous youth voices as well as creating space and opportunities for Indigenous youth writers on their creative journeys.

## Letter from the Editorial Team

Dear Readers,

An encounter in the woods at night. Tall sauntering turtles.  
Sidewalk cracks. Grief.

*The Unexpected.*

This is what greets you as you open this magazine. We are all so familiar with the unexpected, we're thread through it, cinched and brought together at every wayside.

We looked for submissions that grabbed our attention and held onto it till the end, submissions that ultimately subverted our expectations. It was our pleasure to receive such a multitude of submissions, some which fit the theme and some which didn't but were still gems. Thank you to all who made this issue possible.

And who could forget about you, the reader? Thank you for giving the unexpected the recognition it deserves. We hope you treasure these stories and poems and value each writer's work as a priceless gift. Before jumping in, check out the table of contents and the page edges for content warnings.

We are honored to welcome you to this first issue of *Misty Mint Magazine*, "the Unexpected." We'll promise you here—you won't see it coming.

Sincerely,

The Editors of

*Misty Mint Magazine*: Vol. 1

Linus Elkins    Josie  
Allison Kw    Erika Lee    Anthony  
Sophie Hammond    Olivia

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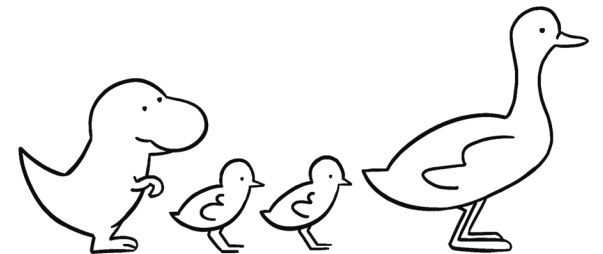
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## Clouds

Viv Tynes

The sky is white  
White with clouds  
Their faces watch us  
wondering  
at our stupidity

They cry with us  
They shine with us  
They flee when humankind dares  
to hope

We have forgotten that they watch us  
We call them clouds  
They call us fools.

## the unexpected pt. 2- what comes next?

Erika Lee

*-a five-act story of grief told by the deceased-*

act 1- the window

It feels like the sun is mocking the girl through the window.

The light that once seemed so warm and gentle now looks like a shard of cruel glass seeking to illuminate all flaws in this world.

The girl pulls the blinds closed.

They sound like a screech of claws raking against the walls of her heart.

The cold sunlight is like a wave of forgotten sadness that wraps around the house like a snake, seeking to seep like blood (life) into the walls.

She turns away, jamming fingers up her ears as if being silent could solve everything.

Newsflash: it doesn't.

act 2- the dog and the cake

The dog bounds with endless enthusiasm over the viridian green fields.

It moves through time and space with a purpose, but the girl can't tell what it is.

A soft, rosy glow lights up the edges of her vision like the sun setting over a still glass ocean.

It cracks.

(nothing lasts forever, didn't they tell you that?)

Glass falls like knives and stabs the mud in the ground, sinking like the weight of the world had been placed upon them.

The sun's burning stare captures the land in chains, till the vibrant

grass fades into empty husks and the landscape is painted in shades of ruby red.

The dog glitches through time—one moment: whole, the next: decaying, the next: a skeleton, the next: dust.

The objective of its purpose remains, a pink frosted cake, sitting cheerily on the now sunbaked ground.

It was sore to the eyes, a sickly-sweet imperfection. It smiled a saccharine smile at the girl in its plastic, chilling way.

She smashed it.

It was thrown back in a shower of sparks and fire.

The girl looked at her hands. They were covered in frosting.

Under the setting sun, it almost looked like blood.

act 3- hyacinth purple

The girl sits in her rickety rocking chair and closes her eyes.

The chair creaks back and forth, with a hissing sound like old wood creaking on a ship lashed by winds.

Something settles into her soul like ice, a heavy ice that freezes the limbs and makes the body heavy with weight.

The chair goes back and forth.

Back and forth.

Back and forth like the golden scale weighing life with a feather.

act 4-

Space. There are so many stars in space, in the universe. They are like the jewels that glitter under the harsh light of truth and the sparkles that mirror the sea.

The girl is awed and humbled at the same time, looking up from her bed.

She wants to keep looking at the white stars, each as bright as the sun itself.

(because the sun is a star, and we are all made out of stardust)

But her eyes are tired.

Her eyes are tired, and the stars twinkle and flash.

The girl stares up at them, bloodshot eyes held open by glue and

stubbornness.

They are nailed back as if they've been fastened by the chains of waking.

The girl will not let them fall.

Slowly, the stars twinkle and flash.

They fade, and then—

And then they are gone.

All that remains is the inky darkness of nothing.

Like floating in the endless murky depths of the secret part of the ocean,

Like turning into a weightless, formless being that doesn't even exist.

An empty bottle of glass left on the shore where the waves crash over and over and over again like a record player stuck on repeat, winding through the same measure over and over and over again. It's like suddenly time stuttered and she's stuck here, between one frame and the next.

There is no feeling but coldness.

She doesn't exist.

act 5- retrograde

Meaning: a backwards motion.

(*astrology*: but it's only an illusion)

The girl stands in front of the window that stretches high like a colossal wall forever into the sky.

The glass feels as cold as her soul.

She reaches a blue hand and—

Pulls open the blinds made of bones and dust.

The sun's weak light filters in, the wandering of the slow movement of a concerto.

It hangs in the air like a sigh.

The girl looks out at the hushed world with nostalgia, thick and strong like the bonds of spiderwebs that tie strangers' lives together.

The scene makes for an old photograph.

The blinds are crooked and warped as if they've been doused with the water of time.

The bones of the dog hang like a broken chandelier from the sky.

A crown of purple hyacinths is woven into the girl's hair, a halo.

And there's a star in front of her, beaming with the sharpest of cruelties—

Truth.

The girl is laid down into her coffin.

And that is that.

(it is set on fire and she shines brighter than the sun and the stars and all of the galaxies combined)



## The Gravedigger

Rose Rocket Davis

It needs to rain soon. The ground is too dry, the grass the same brown as the dirt below it as she walks across, brittle and crunching under her feet like bones.

But the bones are much farther down than that, under five feet, ten inches of dirt exactly, no more, no less. She has the tape measure on her belt to prove it.

The sun shines with vehemence, insisting on remaining well into September, so that the leaves redden and fall in the unnatural heat. What does it matter to her, if the sun persists in shining, save that it draws sweat from her skin and makes her job all the more difficult? What does it matter to the gravedigger if the world burns save that she'll have to bury it?

She marked out the plot yesterday, after her boss, frowning, told her to disregard the family's request and dig it anyway.

"They'll appreciate it later," he said.

The parched ground gives way easily, her neck shaded by the ancient tree growing overhead, from long before this was a graveyard. Her shovel bites the earth solidly, without prejudice. She's several inches into the dirt by the time she hears the voice.

"I like it here," says the little girl.

"I know," says the gravedigger, otherwise ignoring her.

The little girl coughs into the silence as she watches the gravedigger work. When the hole reaches a foot deep, she sits down on the edge and dangles her short legs into the pit.

"Don't you get tired?" she asks.

"Not after how long I've been doing this. Where are your parents?"

"Talking to the man at the gate. They want you to stop."

"I know."

The hole deepens underneath her shoes, stained brown with dirt. The branches of the tree wave in the air, playing in a soft song. The girl coughs again.

"You're not dead yet, you know," points out the gravedigger, twisting her head over her shoulder to raise an eyebrow at the little girl.

She frowns, her small face pinching. "Of course I am."

"Technically," the gravedigger corrects, "you're not."

The girl shrugs, looking at the sun through the tree, rays of light shifting onto her face like the last embrace of an old friend.

"Will they be okay? My parents?"

At three feet, the gravedigger stabs her shovel into the ground, folds her hands over the top, and stares at the girl.

"No," she says honestly. "No, they won't be. They'll be alone and sad, and they'll hurt like they've never hurt before."

Silence again. The girl rubs her throat and watches the gravedigger dig, the methodical motion of her shovel the axis around which waves are pulled to shore, life is pulled to death.

Years of it have made the gravedigger fast, and dirt piles around the edge of the hole as she sinks further into it. The girl has to peer over the sides to keep her gaze on the shovel. The gravedigger stops, takes her tape measure out, and unspools it. Four feet, three inches.

"You should go back."

"Why?" asks the girl sincerely. "They won't see me."

"They might."

"They can't."

Another few inches. The sun lowers in the sky, still cloudless. If it doesn't rain, her parents will bury her in crumbling earth as sick as their sadness.

“Hey.” Her boss’s frame blocks the light from their faces. “They’ve gone home.”

“Did they give up?”

“No. I told them we were closed.”

“Should I stop?”

“We always need more holes.” He turns away and starts down the hill, hands in his pockets. The little girl watches him go, smiling as he fades away.

“I like him,” she says. “He’s trying to help.”

“Why are you still here?” The Gravedigger doesn’t pause, but her arms feel suddenly weary, the sweat clustering on her skin in a thin sheen of uncomfortable moisture now noticeable.

“Why are you still imagining me?” challenges the girl.

The gravedigger sighs. She throws her shovel out of the hole and takes out the tape measure again. As she leans down, she says, “Because human beings are not supposed to be alone.”

“Are you alone?”

Five feet ten exactly. She’s good.

“Right now, I am. And it’s a good idea for people who are alone to put together some construct of somebody else so they don’t have to be. That’s why we make up ghosts.”

The gravedigger leverages herself up onto the side of the pit to sit next to the little girl. There is such comfort in the quiet.

“What do you see?” asks the gravedigger.

The girl peers down into her grave, at the way the faintest traces of sunshine filter into it to cast shadows into stark relief. Lights flicker in the darkness, tiny glittering things. Stars, perhaps, or deep-sea fish, the kaleidoscopic fractal of the universe, so far away and the only thing the road leads to. Always inevitable, in whatever direction you go, the lights in the dark.

“Hope,” she says at last.

The gravedigger shrugs. “Sure, why not. Pain is temporary,

kid. Early grief is useless, and what you’re looking at is just a hole in the ground. Your parents will be fine.”

Nothing. She looks over, but there’s no one there, just the empty silence.

The gravedigger stares over the hills, into the tree. She clips the tape measure back to her belt, grabs her shovel, and hoists herself the rest of the way out.

She is good at her job, and part of a gravedigger’s job is to climb out of the pit.

Maybe it will rain tomorrow.

## Windblown

Viv Tynes

in the rain,  
 small things hunker down —  
 fluffs of pollen wearing sweaters;  
 a million lions believing in art and culture  
     recoil in grasses;  
 and tall turtles saunter off the beaches  
     into a house on a brick;  
     sunning in forests and in silence  
 in the years where everyone had  
 a luckier umbrella

and a period.

## The Diver

T.G. Sparks

Jack Clayborn was greeted in the morning by a knock on his door. “Ferryman Jack Clayborn, you have a message from the executive.” A cold voice said. The old man sat up with a grunt. He quickly got dressed. His clothes were his most prized possessions, some of his favorite things he had managed to get from the haul. Usually, anything of value was gone when it reached him, taken by the upper levels. He pushed open the slab of jagged wood attached with a paracord that operated as his door. The letter was thumbtacked to the double-stacked cubicle wall that made up the walls of his room. A letter of any form was strange to get. Paper was a precious commodity, reserved for the people on the top level of the office building turned civilization. He opened it quickly.

*Ferryman Jack Clayborn. This is a notice from the executive. You have been reassigned diver partners. As of today, your partner is Diver Bailey Quin. He will meet you at your boat. Have a long life and remember, the future is now and the past is irrelevant.*

*- Executive Austin Andrews*

Jack snorted. *The past isn't irrelevant, especially if you are showing relics of it off at your fancy parties*, he thought as he made his way down to the boat disperse. Forty boats were lined up near openings in the glass walls of the fourth floor of the office building. The first three floors of the building were completely flooded and unusable now. The boats were not any normal boats. They were made of scraps of wood and anything that could float and hold weight. Over the forty years when boats were needed, the people who lived in the tower had gotten quite

good at making them. He pushed past other Divers and Ferrymen to get to his boat. It was his crown jewel, one of the few actual boats he had managed to recover. It was a motorboat that was an obnoxious shade of bright yellow with white accents. One of the kinds that people used to take out on lakes. Back when lakes still existed and the entire world wasn't a lake.

"Oh! You must be Jack! Sorry I'm a bit late, I had to grab my stuff," a high-pitched voice called. Jack turned around, seeing a kid running over to him.

*Oh. He must be Bailey. Just my luck, he's a kid,* Jack thought. He didn't have anything against kids, but they didn't know anything but the crap the government was feeding them. He grunted at the teen. "Alright, let's go." Even with all the destruction the flooding had caused, Jack couldn't deny the fact floating through the flooded city was an awe-inspiring scene. Not a lot of the buildings remained standing, and those that did were inhabited by other groups of survivors. Holes had been made so boats could get through. Weirdly, the water was clear. You could see straight down to the bottom, where the roads were still visible. Bailey took all of it in awe. He was a small boy, smaller than Jack was at that age but not unnaturally small for a Diver. There was never a lot of food and Divers were on the bottom floor and therefore last priority. He was white and had a massive amount of freckles that covered his arms and face. Short brown hair framed his face, and he wore tight-fitting leggings and a tank top. Both had holes and patches.

"Ooh! This is so cool!" He exclaimed, smiling as he looked down at the houses below them. They had left the main city and were headed for the suburbs. There were no more survival towers out here; all the houses were completely flooded.

Jack scoffed. "It's not cool. People used to live here," he said. "People died here."

Bailey turned to him, eyes gaining a serious look. "I know that. I think it's cool that I can see all of this. The government tries to tell us the

past is nothing we need to know about, but I still want to. If they're not going to tell me, I'll just try to piece things together from what I find for the haul."

The old man raised an eyebrow. "I'm sure you're aware, kid, but talking about the before is illegal."

"I know it's illegal. It's been drilled into my head every morning since I was born. But I still want to know," he retorted, clenching his fist.

The air between the two of them was tense after that. Neither said a word. Bailey sat at the front of the boat while Jack drove them to their destination. It was nice, Jack admitted, to hear someone talk about the past. He missed those times. But as much as he wanted to share his knowledge, he didn't want the kid to get in trouble. It was less about him. He was an old man of 65 who probably wouldn't live very much longer. But Bailey still had a life, as dull and dark as it was. They arrived at what was once a middle-class neighborhood but was now just the remains of houses. *This looks familiar,* Jack thought, a feeling of déjà vu washing over him. He shook it off. *I've probably brought a diver here before.*

"So," Bailey started, "this is where I'll be diving?"

Jack nodded. "Yes."

"Ok!" He jumped off the boat. Jack just hummed, knowing he'd be back up in a minute.

Below the water, Bailey was in complete awe. Being in the boat was one thing, but actually being in the water was a new experience. Floating in the middle of the street, he could see water-damaged houses, rusting cars, and sunken trees. He picked a house. A small one floor house with what used to be blue accents. On the front lawn, a tree still stood tall, with a wooden swing that floated upward. He swam into what once must have been a bedroom, grabbing items he didn't really know the uses for and stuffing them into a bag. When he was done, he swam back up to Jack's boat.

"Good," Jack grumbled. "You're back." Bailey smiled and then excitedly sat down next to the bag.

Jack watched in confusion as he opened it and started taking out its contents. “What are you doing?”

“I’m trying to figure out what these are. I’m curious, you know?”

Bailey responded.

Jack sighed. “Look kid, I’ll tell you what they are. But you can’t tell anyone, got it?”

Bailey lit up like a Christmas light. “You actually know? And would tell me?”

The old man grumbled, looking away to try and hide his smile. “Of course I know! I was about your age when the towers were created. I can still remember these things. And yeah, I’ll tell you. It’s better than watching you get things wrong for the ride back.”

He reached in the bag, and his eyes lit up. Jack was surprised to see the grossest stuffed bear he had ever seen. It was soaking wet, partially covered in mold, and was missing an eye. Nothing that couldn’t be fixed by the makers, but it was still gross now. Nevertheless, Bailey was practically squealing when he picked it up. “Look! It’s adorable! What’s it called?”

“It’s a teddy bear.” Bailey looked confused. “Oh. Right.” Jack continued. “They’re animals that used to live in the woods.” Bailey nodded and set the teddy bear in his lap. *It’s gross, Jack thought, but it’s probably one of the only toys he’s ever had.*

They continued like that while Jack slowly drove the boat back in. Bailey would hold up an object and Jack would explain what it was. As they were playing, Jack seemed to notice something. These items were familiar. It was only when Bailey pulled out a picture frame that Jack realized why.

“Woah! What’s this? Looks like a drawing.” He asked.

Jack reached a hand out. “Here, let me see.” Bailey handed it over, and Jack looked at the photo. He froze. The photo itself was simple, a family photo of a middle-aged couple and their two kids. To anyone else, they would just be random people. But not to Jack. He knew those

people. After all, he was one of them. He stopped the boat.

Bailey turned and looked at him. “Hey Jack, you good?” He saw Jack’s expression. “Jack?”

“It’s me…” he whispered, so low he could barely be heard.

Bailey heard though. He jumped up and moved so he was looking over his shoulder. “Really?”

Jack nodded. He pointed at the teenage boy. “That’s me and my family,” he said, still in shock. “I haven’t seen them in so long.”

Bailey nodded. “What happened to them?”

Jack sighed. “They didn’t make it into the towers. The flooding happened quickly. I only survived because I was on the roof at the time. My family wasn’t so lucky.” Tears threaten to spill. “I’ve never told anyone this.”

Surprisingly, Bailey pulled him into a hug. “You never let yourself grieve. You weren’t allowed to. I’m sorry.”

Jack smiled and pulled out of the hug. “It’s not your fault kiddo. Besides, it’s been 50 years. That’s a long time to hold onto something.” He turned back on the boat and started driving. “Let’s head back. C’mon.”

## A Gift

Tenzing Sherpa

Every Christmas, my extended family used to play a game. Sure, we did presents and ate a variety of dishes, from Nepali curry to Vietnamese spring rolls, but this game was when I'd say everyone would come together. Sleeping uncles rose from their naps, my aunts would put down the green tiles used for mahjong, my cousins of all ages and I would pause our video games to join. My Nepali dad and cousins and my Laos aunties would even join. Something that always caught my eyes, though, were my grandparents who would silently come to watch as well, even though they didn't completely understand. This game was a familiar language, one that transcended ethnicities and generations.

The game isn't a complicated one. A box would be wrapped almost 20 times with materials like duct tape multiple layers of plastic wrap, in the middle of a circle that was made up of the family. The box would be handed around along with a pair of dice. Each person once they rolled the dices with doubles, would hastily try to get past the many layers, whether they would rip, scratch, bite, stomp. Time ran out when the next person in the circle would roll doubles, and the cycle would continue until the box would open. There would be a prize in the very last box, even though it was usually pretty unspectacular. A 20-dollar gift card for Starbucks, a few packs of candy. It didn't matter, those small moments reminded us of how grateful we were to have each other. As time went on, our family slowly grew apart. Responsibilities would pull different family members away from our yearly gatherings, and with them went our box games as well. Before we knew it, my grandpa was diagnosed with lung cancer.

A few months after Christmas of 2020, my grandfather had passed away from his disease. He had been battling cancer for a year and a half, but it wasn't until the last few months of his life that our

family decided to put him into hospice. Being the only person capable to, I took up the role of helping my grandma Popo care and assist him with daily activities as he lost strength. I let homework and school pile on with missing assignments, and left being with friends to help him bathe and change positions from the wheelchair to the bed. With his sickness, however, came a gift.

Our family started coming together. My uncles and aunts would skip work to come over and spend time together with my grandpa. My cousins would come with them, as we spent his final months surrounding him and reminding us of how important these times were to each other. A mahjong table was present, as well as a big smile stretched onto not only his face, but us around him as well. We ate together, reminisced together, laughed and cried together. In those moments, I learned what was important to me. With different types of pressure closing in on me, with grades dropping, the fear of missing out socially with friends, the pandemic, and the expectations the people around me had, I focused on helping my grandpa. I will have time for the things I missed but my time with my grandpa cannot come back.

This Christmas approaches, one with an empty chair and an extra plate in the cupboard. But with it comes a reminder of the best way to spend the holidays, and what was really important to me. With every member of the family in the house, presents under the tree, a wide spread of food on the table, and a box game to end the night.

## Grief

Cory Gennari-Pratt

Grief hits at the strangest moments.  
Like a shadow you didn't know was there  
until it swallows you.  
Like a speeding car  
you just didn't see.

It hurts.  
Like you never thought it could.  
It stabs you as if you didn't know pain.  
As if this were your first wound.  
As if you hadn't felt things 100x worse.

It hurts with certainty.  
The simple truth of paths you can never take.  
Of words you never got to say.  
A smiling face you will never see again.  
A joy you can no longer hold in your hand.

It hurts.  
Like a hammer to the heart.  
Because you know you won't heal.  
You've lost a piece of your heart you can never retrieve.  
A thing you didn't know you needed until it was gone.

It hurts.  
Like the ghosts you can see on the edge of your vision.  
Like the things you used to do.  
What you can never have back.

It hurts.  
When you thought you had moved on.  
When you thought you had cried so much  
you couldn't cry no more.

## The Shadow of Her Ending

Lily Fredericks

Lyra stood between worlds.

All around her were decisions to make that once made could not be undone. She took a step, hesitant and afraid, from the world she knew and toward the unknown. Ahead remained an ominous darkness, a fate foreign to her. A fate she hadn't chosen.

She disappeared further into fate's covetous hands, its fingers closing around her, interlocking, inescapable. And there she was, confined within its cage; the door between her past and present closed with a shrill, agonizing shriek.

She told herself it wasn't too late. She could go back right now if she decided. Her family would take her in the safety of their arms. She could go home and be in a comfy bed. She could forget the unforgettable.

But she remembered the look in her mother's eyes. Fear. It was true, utter fear. And even if she or her little brother, Luke, still loved her in their hearts, fear lay there as well. A monster in hiding, waiting to attack.

So she took a step.

And another.

And another.

The forest opened like a mouth and swallowed her in its depths, branches like gnarled limbs blocked the way she'd come. Lyra knew she had made her choice.

"Take me!" she yelled to the darkness daringly.

Her voice, though strong and steady, had the slight hysteric edge of someone who'd given up hope. Someone on the brink of insanity, about to cross a line they couldn't come back from. Lyra

hated these lines. They were invisible to the eye, and no matter which path she took she was bound to cross one. And one was all it took to be a disgrace.

She tried to focus on positive thoughts. At least she was free. At least there was no one left to tell her what to do. She could leave. She could go freely beyond the village she'd always been confined to. Like a bird in the swift flowing wind. Like the wind itself.

Except...she knew she couldn't. The darkness was here, all around her. So vile, so absolute. She would have welcomed the village, praised it, if it meant she didn't have to be here. But she had been banished to the darkness. The very same darkness her father had been banished to all those years ago.

She tried to summon memories of him to her mind, but with each passing day he became all the more faceless. He was even more faceless than the darkness around her. Tendrils of black beckoning like fingers. Wind like whispers trilling down her neck. *Lyra*, they said. *Lyra*.

She wondered how her father felt in his final moments. Was he willing to die? Was he paralyzed in terror? Did he fight till the very end?

Lyra looked to the sky, hoping to see the moon to restore at least something familiar and safe in her memory. But it was covered, dimming by the second, the black tendrils suffocating it and snuffing out the light from within. She looked across the bleak sky: black ink spilling in all directions. Not a single star was in sight. Not a single spark of hope.

"Take me," she whispered, "Please just take me. Make this all *end*."

"Is that what you wisssshhh?"

The voice was quiet, like the fall of a single feather. And yet it seemed everything around her seemed to hiss these same words, filled with a deep, gut-wrenching animosity. Imperceptibly, Lyra's



pace began to quicken.

It was as if the sky was the lid to a box, and the forest around her, walls closing in. Somehow she knew even without knowing him, that this was exactly how her father had felt: yearning for an escape. For an end.

But she realized she didn't want everything to end. That would mean that the lives of her mother and Luke would end, and with them all their love. The children of the village, all the memories of magic that could not be erased, *would not be erased*, would end. She knew this was what the darkness wanted. What it craved. It fed off of the sullen and the fearful, planting its seeds of doubt within each. And now they had bloomed into a viscous nothingness. They had bloomed within *her*.

Lyra began to weep, mourning the loss of time, of life, of existence itself. The tears brought no comfort to her as they rolled down her cheeks. Just a reminder of her failure, of everything she'd done wrong. It began to rain, the drops seeming to wash the world away. The careening trees melted beneath the onslaught. The world around her dissolved into the thick black atmosphere: perennial, opaque.

As the rain intermixed with her tears, she wished it too would wash her away: that she could simply fade into nothing. How nice it would feel to not have the burden of life. Every thought weighed down on her, an impossible weight, and she staggered helplessly beneath it.

But much to her dismay she remained.

The earth beneath her feet felt surreal, as if it wasn't entirely there. With great distress, she watched with her very eyes as it dimmed into nonexistence. All around her, the rain fell, erasing everything in its path. Everything...but her.

She wondered if it would just be her existence forever in this abyss, left to contemplate all her faults as she drifted through

the never-ending river of time. For a moment she closed her eyes, wishing she could *forget* the past had ever happened, and give in to the appeasing, soothing current of the present. And perhaps she could've...if the darkness wasn't still with her.

When she opened her eyes, a mirror stood before her. It shone with an ominous luminescence, a surreal sheen. She turned away, unwilling to face it, afraid of what she might see.

"Loooooooook" the darkness crowed, its tendrils of black climbing up her throat. They tightened in a vise grip, jerking her head violently to the mirror and prying her eyes open.

She stared into her reflection with a newly attained comprehension of who she was. Of *what* she was. She gazed into a pool of never-ending black, so dark and depthless it swallowed her gaze. It was the darkness. It was her. She screamed but no sound came out. An immeasurable stillness hung suspended in the air, taking with it, her voice.

But as Lyra looked back into the mirror, she knew that what she had initially believed was not true. She delved into it, past the viscous darkness, past the moans and groans and shrieks within it. She looked past it and saw a girl: *herself*.

The darkness swirled around her mirthlessly, as it began to hum a tune:

*The shadow followed her, the girl she used to be  
It would miss her: her smile, her laugh  
It sighed thinking of all the times it trailed behind: faded, forgotten  
For the girl was the story, the shadow the teller  
But really it's the teller who makes the story  
Tells it the way they want it to be*

In the mirror that had really become a window, Lyra watched herself

as she stood between worlds. Between the now and the then.  
Between the forest and home.

*And so now you must understand  
After all the fears that you've faced  
The one that scares you the most is you  
Your life, your story  
Its lines finally erased*

Lyra watched herself turn around and head home. To the luxury of love, the safety and comfort of family. And they accepted her, taking her in with both arms. Engulfing her with the warmth she longed for.

And now she was there. She could smell the scent of bread baking in the oven, the fluffy dough rising. She could taste the fresh air wafting in, the soft breeze circulating the room. She saw her mother and Luke, their eyes raw and red as they enveloped her between them: the two people she loved most.

But it wasn't really *her*.

Lyra watched as the girl turned around, sparing her an expressionless gaze. And within it she saw the darkness: its ambivalence towards life and death, its utter vacancy. She waved her arms at her family, desperately vying with the darkness for their attention. But they didn't hear her, or see her, or sense her. For her story was no longer her own. It was the shadow's. The piece of darkness within her had replaced her, and no one would ever know.

It plastered her face across its own: smiled with her lips, laughed her same trilling laugh.

How could anyone not perceive its falseness? The blatant insincerity. Through it all Lyra trailed behind as someone else lived her life.

Forever a spectator of its lies,  
An observer of its blasphemy,  
The shadow of her ending.

# Bob's Mysterious Book

Etienne Tran

## Chapter 1: Wildness

On the first day of summer, Bob neither wanted summer camps, food from ancestors, or video games. He only wanted to read books 24/7. After his mom showed him the introduction to books at school, he could not stop reading them. He loved to read so much. He read books while authoring stories, swimming, taking showers, printing papers, sailing out, and playing with friends.

“You must spend time with other hobbies!” his brother said.

“This is too much reading,” his friends exclaimed angrily. All the people he knew did not approve of his hobbies during summer.

“You did not do your chores just because you wanted to read *The Hobbit*? Ridiculous!” His mom shouted.

Despite all the yelling, Bob never stopped reading. He loved to read biographies the most, which his mom respected a bit since she was a history teacher, but she still was angry.

## Chapter 2: Set Sail!

On a bright sunny day, in the middle of a deserted blue sea, was an island called Finn's Springs. Finn's Springs was the last time the dinosaurs were found. The island left many trees, plants, animals, rocks, sand, and volcanoes. One time at school, Bob read a nonfiction book about Finn's Springs. His whole family was interested, so they wanted to sail out there someday, which was today.

On July 13th, Bob asked if he could sail out to the sea to Finn's Springs. Of course, his dad would always accept it if it were about sailing.

Bob's mom and dad prepared the sailboat. Dad had many skills about building, while mom was good at making designs. When the sailboat was finished, they would set sail on the bright open sea with the ol' bright sun shining on them.

“I think Bob will read books again even when setting sail,” his mom quietly mumbled.

## Chapter 3: A Quick Time Skip

*6 years later...*

“I'm hungry,” Bob's brother mumbled.

His mom responded back, “We already have multiple raw moldy crabs.”

The sky was as dark as Vantablack. It seemed like this part of the sea was unclaimed. The sail was dilapidated, so they were riding on a rock with no control. The boat itself was already damaged, and they had rotten food. Bob never stopped reading even after 6 years.

“How can you act so calm in this situation?” his mom said.

As they were dreading for a miracle of hope to happen, the sun appeared. It shone brightly into the lost sea, and fueled back the family's soul, including Bob. In the far distance, there was an island. It was filled with colors.

“There it is! After 6 years, we have finally found it,” his dad shouted excitedly.

However,

## Chapter 4: A Sticky Situation

The island exploded right in front of their eyes. It was like a nuclear bomb. The sun slowly got eaten by the dark sky, and the wandering boat launched into the sky. “AAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” Dad yelled.

Yelling would not stop it. The boat only went further up. The boat got taken apart as seconds passed. It seems that their hope was lost, and their souls were taken back to the sky. However, Bob started to say words from his book out loud.

“Calm down, go back to your flower and turn back to normal.” As soon as he said those words, the boat stopped.

“Hey, what happened?” Dad asked. There was nothing but air passing by. It was quiet for a moment, until...

## Chapter 5: Fall Into Expressions

The boat started to drop.

“We’re falling!” His dad panicked.

It was just them falling. Seaweed, wood, and other sharp debris were falling from the sky. Not only it was them falling, but there were more people falling to their demise on their boats.

“Help us!” The people said.

Bob’s mom threw a large, tattered rope from the seat. “Tie it!” his mom shouted. Once the rope reached one boat, the people tied it on a hook.

“I got it!” A person exclaimed.

Two boats were tied together now. This pattern kept repeating. Three boats were tied together.

“I’m tying it!” Another person said. 4 boats were tied together, then another, and another. All the boats were tied together now. 3 seconds

from impact.

Suddenly, rocks were falling from the sky above them.

“Duck!” his dad shouted.

The rocks heavily damaged their boat, but it could still hang on. “My boat won’t fall apart until it feels like it!”

1 second from impact. The boat was falling too fast.

In the last millisecond, Bob’s boat started to fall apart.

“Oh no!” Bob’s brother said. Everyone looked at the dark, quiet sky, hoping the heavens would have mercy. \*EXPLOSION NOISE\*

§

The boats finally reached impact. Fiery smoke covered the sky. Seaweed, oak, blood, and sharp rock filled the cold, polluted ocean. Lots of people had broken bones, vast amounts of blood loss, and some even died. Most of them had to go to the hospital. There was no sign of light, or the island. Was anyone alive?

Bob’s mom slowly opened her eyes. She saw dead bodies, polluted water, and blood. As injured as she was, she could still sit up, but not for long.

There was Bob, sitting on a tattered bench on the sailboat and reading.

“W-What are you doing Bob?” his mom nervously asked.

“I’m using magic,” he replied.

The dad and his brother slowly went up as well. The two of them were fine as wine.

Mom said, “How? This should be impossible!”

Bob and his brother and dad stood up like nothing happened. A helicopter arrived at the scene, also.

“Are you okay?” The people at the helicopter said. They dropped a ladder for them to climb. The family members finally got the miracle they wanted, and they climbed up the ladder. But Bob only just flew up

the ladder instead of climbing it...

“WHAT!!!!” His family shouted. Other helicopters helped other injured people too.

After noticing Bob’s way of going up, they went up with their eyes closed. They were speechless to death. They did not worry about that though. They were glad they were safe. When his mom, brother, and dad went in the helicopter, a lesson appeared in their head. As the bright yellow sun shone on them, they knew that they cannot judge a book by its cover.

Bob sat on a chair and started reading again.

## **Journeys**

Ruby Eagan-Heffernan

When you come to a fork in a path  
In the great Unexpected Life Woods  
You might ponder a path for hours, days, years.  
Or you might charge toward a path that will surely lead you to greatness,  
Only to get caught on a branch and thrown into the trees,  
Forced to forge a new path, and unexpected path, through life.

And just when you think you know what to expect,  
think twice,  
and expect the unexpected.  
I assure you it will happen.  
Except when it doesn’t.

## Inside

Rose Rocket Davis

I worked on the moldings until my fingers bled and tiny spots of crimson painted the wood. I made dragons of cedar and sculpted their wings from pine, carved snails from the banister of the largest staircase that transformed into something else entirely by the time you reached the top. I coaxed smiles from birch and made trees that had stood for generations look like gossamer in their death.

The sprite has my best smile and tiny fingertips, small and sharp enough to cut yourself on, which I did, because I was being careless and you were distracting with your own smile, with the way furs brush your shoulders and satin scrapes your feet. The things I made imitations of with my unflinching wood, brought to life. I didn't even need to look at you to make them. Your smile is carved into my eyelids.

I bandaged my fingers, but only later, once I'd finished the day's work. I wanted it to be completed as fast as possible, because you'd promised us a party when we were done. You said we'd get to dance like you did every day, below the chandeliers my neighbour was hanging, on the marble my brother was laying, and next to the wonderland I was carving with two fingers outstretched, but tiny bits of blood were landing on it anyway.

When we were done that day, the same day our work was complete and perfect at last, we went home. We slept, and we dreamed again of shine and shimmer, of what would be the only chance in our lives to touch the stars as we twirled our loved ones to rich music played on real strings. In my dream, I danced with you. You wore velvet, and I was made of wood, and as long as I held your hand I could move. You complimented my moldings, and I said something that must've been good because you invited me to stay.

At the next day's sunset, we walked up the hill to our house, and we stood in front of the great gate it had taken twenty of us to hoist into position, and we called out. Out you came, in velvet, with the noise of celebration spilling like light from the crack in the doors behind you. You came up to us and you smiled (oh, your smile), and asked us what we wanted.

"We've come for the party," my neighbour said.

"This party?" you asked.

"The party we were promised."

"There's no party for you here." You laughed, perhaps at our smudged faces, at our hands you'd make us wash clean every day before we touched the house we'd built, at our best effort of looking like you.

"We made this house," said my brother. "It's ours."

"It's not," you said, choking the words out because you were still laughing in your velvet with your gold and your smile, "and you're never getting inside."

We left soon after, as of course you know. What were we supposed to do? I think somebody pounded on the gates for hours, but most of us walked all the way back down the hill, tripping because there weren't any stars to see by. Your smile is carved into my eyelids, burning them, my lungs, my heart. I see it when I close my eyes, somehow different than the way it used to look. You don't understand, though. You're wrong. My moldings know, and they smile at you from their walls. The not-snails mock you from their staircase. The ceilings are all laughing in their own creaking ways. The sprite cackles at you, my blood on her wings, my blood all over our house, on dragonback and gossamer.

You see? We are already inside.

## The Cabin in the Woods

Nadia Bollinger

I can hear screaming in the distance.

Not that of a human, but of the freezing wind. It howls through the trees and screeches through my thin cloak, racing along my back and running its icy fingers through my hair. My breath comes out in little white puffs, mixing with the thick fog, preventing me from seeing more than two feet in front of me.

I am lost.

I was supposed to arrive at my sister's house tonight, but as I carefully reread Analise's directions on a folded piece of paper, I become more and more confused. An owl hoots in the distance, accompanied by the howl of a coyote, and I look up to see a full moon.

Night has fallen.

If I do not find shelter soon the cold will get me; that is, if an animal or a madman doesn't first. I pull my cloak tighter around my frail frame, although it does little to warm me. I raise my blue fingers to my mouth and blow. Reaching into my satchel, I feel only the paper with directions. I have no more warm clothes to put on, no candle to light my way, and no food left. I have been walking in this forest for hours, yet I feel as though I have been going in circles.

Her house was supposed to be in the forest, she had said.

I was ill and missed her wedding that took place a month ago, and I have never met her husband. Truly the only thing I know about him, through whispered conversations between family members, is that he is a gravedigger who is missing the fifth finger on his left hand. I know I should have brought a gift for the newlyweds, but I was in such a rush to come meet my sister and her groom. I haven't

seen her in ages, and as the cold fog seeps into my brain, the only thing that I can think is that I am desperately looking forward to catching up.

If I live long enough to reach her, that is.

The wind is growing louder and louder and I am growing colder and colder. The fog swirls around my cloak, wrapping me in its frigid tentacles. I stumble towards a tree, teeth chattering, eyelids fluttering, body freezing. I slump against its rough bark, and it scratches my skin as I slide towards the lumpy ground. I am about to close my eyes, let the cold overtake me, lose all hope of seeing my sister.

But then I see a light.

It is faint, but it glows brightly in the dark and burns through the fog. I crawl forwards, dragging my frozen body across the muddy trail, blood gathering on my scratched palms. As I move closer, I see the outline of a small cabin, and I have never been more relieved in my entire life. The source of the light was a lantern that had been hung above a porch, and in the wind it sways back and forth, back and forth. Without a thought for my unseemly appearance, without a thought for the sticks gathered in my hair, the tears in my dress, the dirt smeared on my face, the cuts on my palms, I stumble up the stairs and bang on the door.

At first, I think no one will answer.

But then slowly, like the creaking of a coffin lid, the door opens an inch and a pale man peers out. When he sees my trembling, timid appearance, he opens it wider, having presumably decided that I am of no threat to him.

"How can I help you?" he asks, his voice smooth. He is dressed all in black, and his hair is shiny and smooth and raven colored.

"My sister," I rasp, my voice hoarse. "Are you married to my sister?"

"No," he replies, staring down at me curiously. "I was recently

widowed.” His eyes are like an ocean, and I can feel myself drowning in them, gasping and clawing for air.

“I’m searching for my sister,” I hiss, leaning against the wall. “I cannot find her. I’ve lost my way.” His eyebrows raise almost imperceptibly. “I’m freezing,” I continue. “I don’t know where to go and I am near death.” I have lost almost all my pride and am nearly ready to beg him to toss me a spare candle.

“What is your name?” he asks, looking me up and down. There is something in his eyes, something odd.

“Marie,” I respond, my throat dry from the cold.

“Well, Marie,” he says, smiling kindly, “you’re welcome to wait out the night here, until this awful wind passes.” It is a kinder offer than I could have hoped for, although I know it is dangerous to spend the night with a strange man that one does not know. But I glance back at the dark forest, with all its strange noises, freezing wind, and insane laughter. So I turn around and nod.

“Thank you, sir, your kindness is much appreciated.” He grins a crooked grin and nods, opening the door all the way as I stumble inside, throwing down my bag. The warmth floods my senses, melting the ice from my eyelashes and bringing the color back to my face. I collapse into the armchair by the hearth, reaching forward and warming my hands by the blazing fire. There is an odd scent that emanates from it, underneath the flaming sparks and crackling wood, but I cannot place it in my mind.

As the feeling returns to my body, I glance around his home. It is sparsely furnished, with only the armchair facing the fire, and two seats on each side of a small table, which serves as a reminder of his late wife. In a room I can see farther down a hallway is what I can only assume is his bedroom, and right next to the living room is his kitchen, a teapot screaming on the stove. I look behind me to see that the door has been shut, but there is no trace of the man. I look to the side and see that he has stealthily materialized in the kitchen

and is pouring the tea into two mugs. He hands one to me, sipping from the other.

“I suppose you’re hungry,” he says, almost to himself.

“Yes, very,” I say, hoping I’m not imposing too much by anticipating a bite to eat. He nods, then returns to the kitchen, bustling around, grabbing plates and knives and grabbing a dish from the oven. As he prepares the food, I glance out the one small window that looks out behind the cabin. And through the fog, I make out a line of gravestones. I turn back around from the window, looking over at the man. I suppose he is a gravedigger too, just like my sister’s husband. I wonder if they know each other.

The man grasps two plates, handing one to me and holding the other himself. He walks over and sits on one side of the table and holds out his right hand, motioning for me to sit in the chair across from him. I stand from the chair next to the hearth and make my way over, falling down across from him.

I stare down at the dish, trying to place it in my mind. It appears to be some sort of meat, but I can’t tell what kind, although the scent is intoxicating. I carefully cut off a small piece, placing it into my mouth. Flavor explodes across my tongue, delicious and warm and fatty, and I think to myself that I have never tasted anything better. It has the perfect texture and is cooked to perfection, the juices squishing out from the meat and swirling in my mouth. I swallow, the meat sliding down my throat and into my stomach, and a sudden starvation takes over me. I devour the rest of the meat in a hungered frenzy, while the man across from me takes small, civil bites.

Once my plate is nearly clean, with only a small pile of meat left, I look up at him.

“This is delicious,” I tell the man, whose sharp mouth breaks into a wide smile, revealing his sharp, gleaming teeth. “What is it? Where do you get it?”

“I’m not willing to disclose my secret ingredient,” he says with



a wink. "But I will tell you that I get it from nearby."

"It's so good," I say again, for it is truly some of the best food that I've tasted. "And thank you so much for letting me stay here."

"Of course," he says warmly. "I'm always happy to open my doors to those who need it."

"Is this something you do often?" I ask, surprised at his genuine kindness.

"Twice before. A few years ago, but I can still remember them clearly. Charlotte Daniels and Isabella Smith." I feel my eyebrows furrow when I hear the names.

"Those names are oddly familiar," I say to him, tilting my head. "Are they famous?"

"Not that I'm aware," he says, looking back down at his food.

"It's strange," I continue, trying to think back to whispered gossip I heard in my town, "for it's as if they are perhaps famous for the same thing."

"You must be mistaken," the man states calmly, scraping the last bite of meat off his plate. His eyes meet mine, and I stare into their blue depths, when, all of sudden, I remember talking to Analise. About two or three months ago she was telling me about two girls, Charlotte Daniels and Isabella Smith.

"No, now I remember," I cry. "They were traveling in these woods when they went missing and were never heard from again!"

"That's awful," he says with a frown. "They seemed fine when they entered my house. Perhaps a madman got them."

"Perhaps," I say, for how could this kindly man be a murderer?

As I am tucking my legs up to my chest and settling further into my chair, I notice something rather odd. This man, before he knew I was coming, had made just enough food for two people. But perhaps he was just planning on saving some of the leftovers for his supper tomorrow. I look back down at my plate, and the small pile of warm, fleshy meat that remains.

"You know," I say, looking back over at the man, "I should save the rest of this food and take it to my sister tomorrow, she will most likely greatly appreciate it."

"No, eat it up if you're hungry. I'm sure Analise will be fine without it." I stop in my tracks, eyes widening, breath quickening. I raise my head slowly from my food to look at him, wind howling against the sides of the cabin as if it wants to blow us away.

"How do you know my sister's name?" I whisper, looking this man up and down. He shrugs, leaning back in his chair.

"You mentioned it earlier," he says, trying to force me to recall an event that I have no memory of.

"No, no I didn't," I reply, starting to grow frightened. The man grins his crooked grin, leaning forward and reaching out his left hand to grab his plate off of the table, which is when I see it. He is missing his fifth finger on his left hand. He follows my line of sight to his hand, and his grin grows wider.

"Sir," I say, trying to keep my voice from shaking, "what did you say your name was?"

"Why, so silly of me! I can't believe I forgot basic introductions. My name, my dear, is Jacob Lewis." And with that his mouth opens into an even wider grin, the icy depths of his eyes swimming with a repressed humor. Then he turns on his heel, gathering his plate, and briskly walks back to the kitchen.

As his back is turned, I jump up in a panic, rushing to the door. I wrap my fingers around the knob, trying to pry it open.

But the door doesn't budge.

I wiggle the knob harder, praying with all my might that the door will creak open. I can hear him walking around in the kitchen, and I shove as hard as I can. But the door is locked and does not move.

"Marie," I hear his voice behind me, slimy and thick, "why would you try to go back into the cold? Come finish your food, my

dear.” I turn around and he is standing there, watching me with his dark, cold eyes. I slink back to my seat, leaning back down onto the cushions, which don’t seem so comfortable anymore. Which is when I make a realization. It is not wood that the fire crackles on in the hearth, but human bones. Shaking, I pick up my plate and look back down at the meat.

And there, under the small pile of meat that remains, is a finger.

And shoved onto it, right next to the knuckle, a glimmering wedding ring.

I jump backwards, the plate flying off my lap, and I run. Through the back door and out into the graveyard and the fog and the corpses. I can’t see more than half a foot in front of me, it’s so dark out. I crumble to the ground, praying that the man—my sister’s husband—can’t see me. I hear the door open again, and I lean against a headstone, trying to keep my breath silent. There is a snap from nearby, like the crunch of bones.

“Oh Marie,” a voice sings out from the hidden depths of the darkness, “come out, my darling.” I can feel him coming closer and closer to me, and I lean away from the grave, attempting to silently scurry backwards. But all of a sudden, a flash of lighting illuminates the sky, and I can clearly see the headstone that I was leaning against.

*Analise Jones, beloved daughter, sister, and wife.*

I scream, scream at the top of my lungs and let the cold air rush in my mouth, and then I stumble back and turn around and hit a wall. But it isn’t a wall. It’s Jacob Lewis, grinning his awful grin.

I scream again, and the wind screams with me.

## Seasoned

Adrija Jana

This morning I ate two chappatis

Just two, because I didn’t like the chutney tarkari a lot

In the afternoon, I ate rice, paneer and yoghurt mixed with my mom’s sweat that went into making it in India’s summer heat

In the evening I ate half an egg roll

And well, half the anxiousness my mom was feeling anticipating a fight with her husband

And at night I ate two chappatis and paneer (Well I love paneer)

And a splitting headache that seems absorbed in my bone marrow from all the shouting

Tomorrow I want to eat a huge bowl of alfredo

(Or maybe next week, if I can put together enough funds)

And hopefully have it seasoned with a little bit of relief and peace to be enjoyed under the moonlight.

# Once upon a time there was a wall

Viv Tynes

In the quiet  
misty morning  
when the moon has  
cease their singing

gone to bed  
when the sparrows  
and the sky is

clear and red ...

Are you awake?  
Mother, mother  
can you hear me?  
Just a HAT!  
dead  
a dream

breeze  
in my face  
suns  
in my eyes

Just a dream  
I lost  
My eyes in the land  
of the quiet

and monsters are  
here

a dream of  
gods  
they'll be here soon,  
like rabbits

they flock to sunderings and reach the sun

Like lovers do

A thousand shattered moons

THE RAVINGS  
of a madwoman

cats and dogs  
snakes  
and rats

Oh, no  
no

Oh, no  
no  
no

Little things crawling over me  
Dreams and

temporarities  
(bursting  
through  
the seams)

Believe,  
Believe!

On ragged wings  
these shattered things!  
stolen rings!

we sling —

we spring  
and scream  
and scream  
and scream

In the quiet  
misty morning  
and the sky is

I would like to make myself again, I will make myself again  
I would like to make myself again. I will

and then we're free

make myself  
again.

Ladybugs in love  
Ghosts and memories

I swat at spiders  
Ants in my skin

and broken kings!

we sing!

SHOT!  
into the atmosphere

and scream  
and scream

when the sparrows  
cease their singing  
clear and red

## In Sidewalk Cracks

Anushka Garg

What have you found in sidewalk cracks?  
 Crumbs of some sweets,  
 Maybe some squishy moss or grass?  
 A little garden in the street!

Maybe you've seen some tiny ants,  
 Crawling in a row,  
 Taking those crumbs of sweets,  
 Back to their anthill home.

Have you ever found a small toy,  
 Battered by the weather?  
 I really like it when I find  
 A big bird feather.

Sometimes, there are lucky surprises,  
 A shiny penny, perhaps?  
 Or a bright red ladybug  
 That flies onto your lap.

If you think, "Nothing resides here,"  
 Then do some looking around.  
 You'll find, beneath our feet,  
 There's a whole world to be found!

## Third and Finally

Rowan Wasserman

If you'd driven down the road that night, the sight would have shocked you. Really it would shock anyone. Yes, shocking was easily the main word for this experience.

If you were driving down the road that night you would have seen several things.

#1: the gate of the big house hanging open

#2: a dark red trail, barely visible on the dark  
 concrete road

#3: a dark and shaking shape shambling down  
 the road, right on the yellow line.

Maybe you're new to the area and you don't know about the big house. It's fairly obvious that it's owned by some rich people who love to waste money. It's massive and covered in the obvious signs of wealth. Three stories, perfectly trimmed hedges, huge beautiful windows. The lights are always on in the big house.

It's the kind of house you wonder why someone would want. Sure it's massive and nice looking, but it's in the middle of nowhere next to a loud highway. There're very few neighbors and everyone there loves to avoid each other.

Every house on that peninsula is surrounded by a tall fence. Privacy, security, everyone has their reason. The big house has an eight-foot wrought iron fence with pointed fence posts. It connects to a huge gate that arches into a rounded top. There's a thick chain and padlock that keeps the gate closed. You never see that gate open. Even when the homeowners are coming and going, somehow the gate is never open.

That's why #1 is so scary.

The trail of blood, because it is blood, of course it is, is immediately terrifying. Maybe you would assume it was from a car accident, or maybe just some roadkill. That would make sense on this highway, wouldn't it?

But it's not roadkill and it's not an accident from earlier. The trail leads through the open gate to the front door of the big house. The trail ends at the yellow line where #3 is.

#3 is silhouetted against the flickering light of the single lamppost on the highway. The shape is human, shaking, struggling against whatever it's carrying. Dragging.

Held down by the weight of its luggage, the closer you get, the louder its breath grows.

You grow closer to it and the shape is illuminated by your headlights.

The source of the blood is quite obvious now.

The person on the yellow line, slowly moving towards you, eyes to the ground, is dripping with blood.

So is the body they drag behind them.

As your headlights land on them their downcast eyes raise and meet yours. Those bloodshot blue eyes would meet yours. The body drops as the figure takes a single step closer to you.

## Reedbeds

Viv Tynes

At dawn, I watched the reed beds  
grow, the marshwater shimmer copper  
and gold. You watched me back, pale stranger,  
long-necked and feathered, ghostly in the mist.  
I thought then: *What a pity*. And your graceful  
bones sank into the shrinking pocket of swamp.

I closed my eyes and breathed  
smokey air.

At noon, I watched the ferns  
unfurl, the glut of blackberries  
glimmer in the light. Their juice  
sparked thick and sour on my tongue, and I fell  
back into thicket and thorn, fingers threaded  
through scorned earth fit only for that lush invader.  
I struggled and unknotted the briars, searching  
for thimbleberries. The sword ferns sighed.

I closed my eyes and breathed  
smokey air.

At dusk, I watched synthetic waves  
wash onto shore, the bones and bottlecaps  
intermingling in the golden light.  
I sank softly into the sea,  
holding my breath and chewing on plastic.  
I thought then: *What a pity*.

I closed my eyes and breathed  
smokey air.

## Tallest Boy

C. L. Ayres

I slogged down the sidewalk as rain fell like thick mist: a hearty chill that had settled over the ground and over everything. My backpack felt heavy and my clothes stuck to my skin. I had forgotten that I, in fact, did not own an umbrella.

I felt him walking behind me. Someone that I could not identify, but I knew that he wore all black. My eyes moved to look, and I found him walking now at my side. I noted that his shoulders were dry and without rain as we slowed to an eventual pause in front of a fat pink rose bush. Where I had always been the shortest in my class, he must have been the tallest.

“What is it?” He asked me. Not only were his clothes black, but his hair was dyed dark, too. And it was his umbrella that had befallen the area about my head as I noted that the nails on his fingers around the foam handle were colored like tar. My own hair was white blonde.

“You’re following me,” I said, but I meant it as a question. I knew him from a distance, always walking in the bike lane across the street. He was older, two, perhaps three years.

“And I thought you were following me,” he laughed. “You look lonely, always, and you looked wet, today. I thought I’d help you out with both of those things.”

“You don’t have to,” I looked to the ground. “What is your name?”

“Nero,” he responded. Something flicked ON in my mind.

I turned to continue up the hill and the rubber heel of Nero’s black boot crunched like Velcro as he turned with me. So we would walk to my house together, I supposed, letting go of my backpack straps and then holding onto them again. We reached my driveway,

and where I thought he would stop there, he continued until I was fumbling for my keys. Then the door was open, and I was half inside, wondering if I should thank him as I looked into his poisonous eyes.

“How old are you?” I asked. He was taller still, standing a step shorter than the doorway.

“Fifteen, sixteen this winter.” Nero cocked his head and I knew his question.

I returned, “thirteen.”

§

Summer, and I am stuck thinking between lectures from Mother and my therapist, between white sheets and sunlight and grass. And him, Nero as I laugh and we talk and he teaches me things that I thought I’d never learn. Mother is sad, but I think it is her own fault. She was careless with Dad, then she was careless with me. Asking me to be good was like screaming at dusty divorce papers, asking for her marriage back. Sometimes, I cannot stand to look at her.

Autumn and winter. What I feel when I see him, Nero, my Mr. Tall Boy. “Love.” It is a hideous word until you realize that it is the only word to describe that feeling. The fluttering that I get in my hands as he walks towards me in the halls on his phone and I wonder, “*Will he look up?*”. He always looks up to wave, a brilliant coy smile on his lips. “Love” is a noun and a verb and mostly, it is Nero. He is the subject of my journals; there are pages filled with his name written over until waves fill the spaces between lines. He helped me, he talked to me. He helps only me and he talks to only me because I am his only friend. He is my only friend. When I think that he’s mine and I am his, I cannot help it. Do I “love” him? Yes, I “love” him. I love him.

§

Springs passed, and Nero drew away from me. With him went my happiness and without him came my depression. They called it seasonal because it happened to be the winter when he made his new friends and I felt desolate when I watched him talk to other people. When I walked past him, he did not look.

No, he did look. I caught him glance, I know I did. He had to have glanced because those green eyes and his crooked smile were my lithium and my carbamazepine. “*Give me drugs,*” I told my therapist and I asked my doctor, but they smiled and shook their heads as if I was joking. It was alright at first because Mother was depressed too—I treated myself until she ran out and then she found out and my therapist said that she was very disappointed in me.

It was killing me. I’d lost Nero and I’d lost his attention. I felt that if I spoke to him he’d be annoyed or apathetic. In class, I could not focus. I stared evidently forward with his face in my mind, galaxies away until the teacher had called my name three times and I had to admit that I did not know her question, nor what her entire lecture had been about.

“Hey,” I whispered once as I watched him from across the street. “Nero, it’s me. Don’t you wish I was next to you? Because I could be. I think of you, and I can’t remember you because remembrance is the past and you are my present. Don’t you miss me looking up at you?”

Fear should have filled my heart at what I had become, but I feared Nero’s absence more. I did not want to end up like Mother, sitting sadly in her office, a matchless wedding band still around her left ring finger. Nero. My distance, my Tallest Boy.

§

Years passed and Nero graduated high school and I, a couple years after. I followed him to the city when he moved and, through a hole carved into the wall, I wished silently that he’d sleep with his venom

eyes open. His hair is ash brown, but I need him still because I've spent too many nights contemplating the fractured mirror in the bathroom. And when he leaves my mind, I wander and I sometimes find myself on the roof, looking down at the streets below.

One night, I followed Nero to a bar and there was a young man reading poetry on the stage and I thought that Nero liked it. His face went still, and I know that look because he once looked at me in such a way. So I emailed the bar and asked if I could perform something I had written and they emailed back, "*Yes, we'd love to welcome you onto our stage!*"

Two weeks and I would stand up there. I would invite Nero and I would look down at him and he would look up at me like that, and I would speak to him. As I scratch words into my journal, I wonder if he'd known that young man. I wonder if that was the same young man I saw sometimes, through the hole in the wall at night.

In my writing, I have not left my room in days, and it hurts to unbend my legs to slowly stand up from my bed, the place I have sat in for the past forty-eight hours. There is an impression left in the mattress from where I sat and there are notebooks strewn about the sheets. Yesterday, I left something: a piece of white printer paper with the date of my reading, taped to his door. And I had sat with my ear against my closed door until I heard Nero's footsteps outside. He'd paused. He must have seen it. I walk to the east wall slowly and the floor does not creak. I press my fingers against the paint, bending to look through the hole.

My eyes settle on his mattress, stripped. "*You still love me, don't you?*"

§

He's not here. He did not come home, and when I looked through the hole, I found that his mattress was gone. I went into the hallway

and discovered his doormat missing, the key that hid underneath it as well. I used the copy I'd made to unlock the door and stepped inside. His scent hit me but nothing else—it was as it had been shown through the wall. Nero and his things were nowhere to be seen.

I wanted to despair. I wanted to smash my vanity mirror open or run up those seven flights of stairs to the roof. For love, because I loved him and he was gone. Too encapsulated by my writing, I'd forgotten to watch. He'd escaped. Left.

I should despair. But as I lowered and my fingers curled against the floor, they reminded me of something I had forgotten. The key. Nero had left that key underneath his doormat, the same hiding spot as at his parent's home, the home of our younger years. Without speaking to me, Nero had sent it: *a hint*. A hint that he wanted me though I was too shy to speak to him. He'd left it there for my copying and I'd copied it. So even if he'd moved away and I'd missed his move, he would not go without telling me such.

The reading. He would be at my show. I stood up.

§

I introduced myself to the swirling lady at the bar counter and I sat and waited until they called my name. I stood, walking on swaying legs to the stage as my heart seized. It was far too crowded on the floor, and I must have been mistaken because I did not see Nero in the throng.

I took the three cement steps up and I am on the stage, unsure why I am so out of breath. I stop at the mic, my right hand gliding to the metallic handle. I hold a gold-embossed black notebook in my left hand and I brush my hair aside, squinting against the lights. Nero. I look left, right. Left again, but he is not there. No, it must be my vision, *why is my vision so spotty?* I hold my notebook up and flip to the bookmarked page but my brow feels hot and I have to look



again.

I *want*...I cannot read the words and I cannot think of the word's face. My eyes become rifles as I shoot looks across the crowd, less than cunning as I already know what I will not find. He's never run away from me. Never.

My notebook hand lowers until it drops and the sound has everyone looking at me, really looking. I swallow as I think I see Mother in the crowd. I wonder if Nero ever existed, if even I ever existed at all. Black curls at my vision and *can I really not remember Nero's face?* Eyes black, or eyes green? It is the last time I will think of him, or see him. The last time I will see anyone. Or think of anyone. Or love anyone, ever again.

The mic stand wobbles uncertainly before me.

## Our Ephemeral Hands

Erika Lee

Suddenly, unexpectedly, I fell in love  
 I fell in love with the world  
 And the stars that shine like gold  
 And the waters that set the globe on fire  
 And the moss that covered buildings like creepers  
 And the red sun that blessed the land with cozy-cold warmth  
 And the dust of what was left  
 I fell in love.  
 Perhaps we were never meant to be  
 Perhaps we were supposed to be an explosion of neon colors  
 Of ideas that sparkled like diamonds  
 Of excitement that fueled the endless march of the living  
 Of fire that burnt paper-thin reality to expose something new  
 Perhaps we were supposed to be like a comet hitting the Earth  
 Passing between one frame and the next  
 And then gone.  
 Perhaps we were our own doom  
 Our own undoing like the unraveled seams of old thread  
 Picked apart by ignorant hands wearing crowns of golden greed  
 An ill-advised, fast-paced sonata of shredded paper  
 Perhaps we *changed* our fate.  
 And the sun sets on what remains  
 Over the green ocean of soft vines  
 Like the veins of the Earth  
 And the sun burns red with life  
 Breathing color into the gray ground  
 And the dust of the homes

And the dust of the cars  
And the dust of the roads  
And the dust of the skeletons  
And perhaps, one day  
One day  
The Sun will die, and the world along with it  
And the story will end, not with an explosion but with a sigh like a whisper  
of silence.

(But perhaps, perhaps, before then, *change*—  
Something magical like the tears of the morning  
Something wonderful like the sunset between fingers  
Something magnificent like the sprouting of wings of shades of green  
Perhaps something unexpected like *love*.)

And love,  
Love for our evanescent lives.

## ***MEET OUR CONTRIBUTORS***

*in order of appearance*

**Viv Tynes** (they/she) is a 9th grade queer poet, fiction writer, artist, and dancer. They are inspired by the natural world and the inscrutable workings of their subconscious. In 2022, Viv received a Silver Key award for poetry in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and was the first-place winner of her age group in the 2018 Write Out Of This World short story contest. Additionally, Viv's book reviews have appeared on the shelves of Third Place Books, a local bookstore. Viv loves connecting with others through creativity and laughter, and they hope that readers will find their own connections through Viv's work.

**Erika Lee** is an aspiring writer in her teens. She likes to read, swim, draw, and play her violin in her free time. She enjoys writing because she believes that language and words can be vividly beautiful and powerful. She hopes to be able to reach someone else's heart other than her own through her work.

**Rose Rocket Davis** is currently a high school junior living in Seattle, Washington. She writes short, imaginative fiction she hopes to one day turn into writing novels and would like to live in a library. She wants to inspire other queer teenagers to put their work into the world.

**T.G. Sparks** is a queer teen fantasy author. He uses writing as a way to explore complex thoughts and feelings but also to create fun new worlds. "Life is uncontrollable and we are at the mercy of whatever gods may exist, but when you write, you are the only god. And you answer to no one." More of his work can be found on TikTok @bluesky42\_.

**Tenzing Sherpa** is a writer from Renton, Washington. He enjoys making observations about everything around him and taking notes.

**Cory Gennari-Pratt** is a disabled queer writer born and raised in Seattle. They fell in love with writing when they were ten and have been writing ever since. They partake in a variety of arts, including dance, theatre, visual art, as well as writing, and are very passionate about the political power of art. They hope that you can find some piece of yourself within their works.

**Lily Fredericks** enjoys all forms of art and writing, particularly comic-making, which to her is “the best of both worlds.” Her *Billy the Bean* comics are published in her school’s newspaper, the Highland Piper, for all to read. Lily loves to find ways to get involved in the community through being a member of the youth-led organization YASC and participating in different writing and arts programs, including the Seattle Times Ed Lab and teen newsroom TeenTix. When she grows up she aspires to become an elementary school teacher so she can encourage children to explore their creative multi-faceted identities in a supportive learning environment.

**Etienne Tran** is a student who has written and published several books at elementary school and at other writing camps. He is from Seattle, Washington and has written books for 5-6 years with other 5-6th graders. He likes to swim, play piano, speak French, play video games, and write.

**Ruby Eagan-Heffernan** is a budding poet who loves the outdoors, math, her dogs, and understanding the world through words. She writes with the Frog Hollow School, where she wanders a tree farm and gets to know herself and others by writing and reading poetry.

**Nadia Bollinger** is from Washington state and has been writing stories ever since she could hold a pencil. She loves writing short horror stories, although she writes in many different genres. In her free time, she enjoys dance, music, and horseback riding.

**Adrija Jana** is a passionately creative writer based in India. She mostly creates poetry pieces based on her personal experiences as well as social issues she is passionate about. Her work mostly revolves around protest against period poverty, marital rape and advocating for freedom of choice, apart from emotional self-lived experiences. She is inspired by writers such as Margaret Mitchell and Nayyirah Waheed, as well as the minutiae of everyday life. Apart from being a writer, Adrija is also a spoken word artist, theatrecian, filmmaker and creative researcher, and all her work is woven together by common themes. She believes that creative pieces that let the innate imperfection shine through truly touch hearts.

**Anushka Garg** is a fifth grader who likes to write in school and as a hobby. She especially likes to write poetry, and won a local contest a few months ago! When she’s not writing, Anushka can be found playing with her sister, hiking, or reading a book.

## ***MEET OUR EDITORIAL TEAM***

**Rowan Wasserman** is an eighteen-year-old high school senior with a great passion for writing. Their favorite form of literature to create is long stanza based poetry, and short stories. They cross a wide topic of genres with their writing and like to try out new styles, formats, and tones with their work. Outside of writing their hobbies include gaming, cooking, and playing with their dog. Rowan's writing can be found in *Tattoo Magazine* along with their photography and art.

**C. L. Ayres** is an Asian-American novelist, short-story writer, and artist from Bellevue, Washington. The psychology and interaction of people are both subjects of great interest to her. Surreal stories that live on the edge of dreamlike worlds and reality make up the hundreds of thousands of words she has written, and those which she will write in the future. Ayres is a two-time winner of the MoPop Write-Out-Of-This-World contest, and has dreams of further sharing her unique ideas and work with other writers.

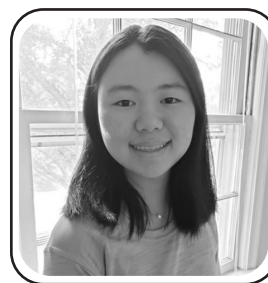
*Misty Mint Magazine* wouldn't be possible without the dedication and hard work of the Misty Mint editorial team! All Misty Mint editors are also writers and members, past and present, of the Young Writers Cohort program at Hugo House.

### **Anthony Wang**



**Anthony** is a current high school sophomore that is invested and loves to participate in various writing projects or anything to do with literature. In his spare time, he will often pull out a book to read, although he finds that lately the work of high school has meant that he has gotten to do that less and less. Aside from writing short stories and reading, Anthony also enjoys taking long walks in nature, listening to rock/indie music, playing the flute, and napping. He is very excited to be part of the first edition of *Misty Mint Magazine* and can't wait to see what the future of this publication could be!

### **Allison Xu**



**Allison Xu** is a young writer from Maryland. Her short stories and poems have been published in *Blue Marble Review*, *Paper Lanterns*, *Unbroken*, *The Daphne Review*, *The Weight Journal*, and elsewhere. When she's not writing, she enjoys reading, swimming, baking, and playing with her beagle.

## Daisy Lerner



**Daisy Lerner** (she/they) is a writer, pianist, poet, editor, and lover of brioche bread. She collects gargoyles, special editions of J.R.R Tolkien books, Generation 3.5 My Little Pony figures, and soft drink pull tabs. Their favorite genres to read are classics, fantasy, memoir, and fiction, and aim to read 50

books in 2023 (wish them luck!) Their favorite book is *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg. Daisy is a music lover before all else, she listens to every kind of music there is. Her favorites include Pixies, Scott Walker, Kero Kero Bonito, The Rah Band, Mitski, Childish Gambino, Giuliano Sorgini, and Claude Debussy. She's very excited to share an amazing magazine with everyone and hopes you enjoy it!

## Erika Lee



**Erika Lee** is an avid reader and writer in her teens. She enjoys many genres, from sci-fi to high fantasy. However, her current favorite is magical realism (even though she hasn't read many books in the genre yet). Her current favorite word is 'effervescent', which she imagines as a bright lime green

color. In her spare time, she likes to draw, play her violin, and swim. She is delighted to be able to work with such fantastic people on this magazine and applauds all submitting writers for their wonderful and stunning work.

## Jade Fraser



**Jade** is eighteen years old and a super senior in high school. She has been a passionate reader and writer all her life, and ultimately hopes to be a freelance writer aside from a service dog trainer and breeder. She enjoys reading many genres, including fantasy, sci-fi, and humorous autobiographies. She is a

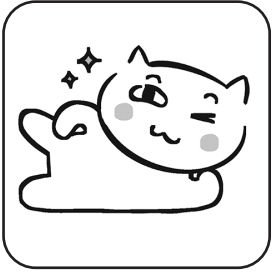
versatile writer; she'll write anything from horror or sci-fi short stories to informational essays. Her passions include disability justice—especially as a service dog handler—and inclusivity in the dance world as an invisibly disabled dancer. She was an ambassador for an inclusive dance brand for that reason, which included the duty of writing articles for their blog! Aside from language arts, her hobbies include collecting plushies, musical theater, and glassblowing. As a two-time member of Hugo House's Young Writer's Prose Cohort, she's grateful for the opportunity to be involved with *Misty Mint Magazine*!

## Josie Frazier



**Josie** is a writer and current member of the Young Writers Prose cohort at Hugo House. She was a member of the first *Misty Mint Magazine* editorial cohort. This cohort collaboratively crafted the mission statement, created the submission process, named the magazine, decided on its theme, and put it out into the world.

## Linus Elkins



**Linus Elkins** is a 17-year-old poetry and prose writer from Seattle, Washington who thrives through the practice of creating and sharing art. They strive to push boundaries and open discussion with their work, and they plan to continue pursuing writing after high school in hopes of becoming a published author in their adulthood.

## Olivia Zhang



**Olivia** is a writer and 2021–2022 member of the Young Writers Prose cohort at Hugo House. She was a member of the first *Misty Mint Magazine* editorial cohort. This cohort collaboratively crafted the mission statement, created the submission process, named the magazine, decided on its theme, and put it out into the world.

## Sophia Kawamura



**Sophia Kawamura** is a student from Washington who dabbles in writing poetry and prose. She spends her time procrastinating on calculus, hugging her dog, and reading (sometimes) good books.

## ABOUT MISTY MINT MAGAZINE

*Misty Mint Magazine* is a fresh new literary journal run primarily by students from the Hugo House Young Writers Cohort (with some support from the Hugo House Youth Programs team!) and was founded with inspiring youth voices in mind.

As passionate young writers ourselves, we recognize the importance of providing a safe space for youth to express themselves, regardless of their experience, background, ethnicity, and/or identity. Through our words, we share unique perspectives in a world that needs to hear them.

We also acknowledge the weight of our histories and the power of our identities. By showcasing our incredible works of prose, poetry, and everything in between, we aim to amplify the voices of all writers who have been historically marginalized or silenced in the publishing world. So, to the young writers who have felt unheard in the past, this is your time to shine! Whether your pieces are pristine or still a bit rough around the edges, whether they're hopeful or despondent, whether they speak truth to our lived realities or envision worlds outside of our own, we encourage you to share your work with us!

As you look through the pages of *Misty Mint Magazine*, you'll see the many pasts, presents, and futures of these diverse young writers. By the time you turn over the last leaf of this journal, we hope you'll come away feeling empowered in this ever-changing world.

To learn more about *Misty Mint Magazine*, visit [hugohouse.org/misty-mint/](https://hugohouse.org/misty-mint/).

## ***ABOUT HUGO HOUSE***

Hugo House is a nonprofit organization that strives to open the literary world to everyone who loves books or has the drive to write.

Hugo House's mission is to give people a place to read, hear, and make their own words better.

Founded in 1997, Hugo House has served the literary community of Seattle and beyond for over twenty-five years. Through writing classes spanning an array of genres for both adults and youth, and literary events featuring Pulitzer Prize winners, poets laureate, local voices, and new talents, The House dedicates itself to programming that serves and enriches our community.

Hugo House firmly believes youth voices are worth amplifying. The House offers opportunities for all youth interested in writing to craft their voices through various programs, including writing circles, open performances, yearlong writing cohorts, creative summer camps, and more. Learn more about Hugo House's youth programs at **[hugohouse.org/youth-programs](https://hugohouse.org/youth-programs)**

As a nonprofit organization, Hugo House relies on donations from supporters to sustain and grow crucial literary arts programs. Consider making a donation to support programs like Misty Mint Magazine at **[hugohouse.org/donate](https://hugohouse.org/donate)**

Learn more about all of Hugo House's offerings at **[hugohouse.org](https://hugohouse.org)**