

MOONFLAKE  
press.



*treasured*



ISSUE #11



*Dear readers*

This issue is dedicated to all the treasures, however little or large, that keep our hearts beating in tumultuous times, sad times, hard times and even in joyful times.

We hope you enjoy reading these personal, beautiful pieces as much as we did.

Take care of each other, as you'll read here, our treasures aren't always ours forever.



*The team at*

**Moonflake Press**



women who dream

We don't really have a name for it in my family.  
I just know my aunt has it, I do too and my mother  
told me all about how grandma could see  
in the very same way.

We don't hide it either.  
You would just wake up one morning, and tell your big sister,  
“*she's coming*”—months before her daughter is born.

222 full moons will pass and one night,  
your niece will begin to dream of the life rising  
inside of you too. This deep sense of knowing carries  
abundant futures so impatient to be revealed.

A precious inheritance passed down  
from mothers—guardians of nightblooming fortunes.

Yes, even grandma's eldest daughter—  
the one we survived and rather not call “*auntie*”.

Family affairs twist and turn my soul blue sometimes,  
yet the truth remains unyielding: my bloodline  
is trailing comets of women who dream.

Bettina Guigui



*Bettina's treasure...*



### **Cubone and The Quilt**

My biggest fear can be seen in Pokémon - Cubone, specifically - a small being that sacrifices happiness in exchange for its mother's skull. Or in movies like Step Mom - Susan Sarandon weaving that quilt, unable to pull her children back from the cliff edge of loss.

If I leave this place before you're grown, do not wear my skull. Wrap this inheritance of worth around you. Know that you are strong enough to carry your own heart. You are brave enough to welcome in love. You are fierce enough to fight through grief and find the joy beyond it.

**Charly Chow**

Charly's treasure...

LOVA SAURURURS



## Sun Tea Waiting

In the blue morning, we padded down the walk to offer a Mason jar full of water and dried leaves so the sun might exert her change. Concrete cool against our soles, I whispered about sun tea like magic.

Like so much at your age, patience is a practice. Time moves in a dance you cannot predict. When will the tea finish brewing? What if you look away and miss it? You dashed between the window, my side, and back again. Sunlight dappled the carpet where your wooden cars lay in wait.

I walked you to the pond, and we watched herons through the chain link. They balanced on twig legs, unblinking. You picked up a rock and a stick and cried when we couldn't bring them home. As I carried your hiccuping baby body, you pointed to a stray cat dashing into a drainpipe. We waved goodbye and discussed its possible destination. We were going home too.

After lunch, you begged for a cup of the lemon-yellow liquid.

"Not yet," I said.

"Why?" You tilted your head back, eyes wide.

"Let it rest."

While I washed jammy dishes, you circled our experiment in a fairy frolic of mismatched socks. You painted smudges all across the glass and infused our concoction with spiraling stories.

"Is it ready?"

Now, I turn the vessel, teabag tags clacking, so you can evaluate its progress. Golden light sparkles through the hazy jar. The sun dips, and we gather what was promised: a warm day spent together, your little, growing hand, and tea brewed by distant fire.

C. M. Wright

## Hold On

My baby, a baby no longer. Now a high school sophomore, morose because that's how all the kids are nowadays. Your daily uniform, an oversized sweatshirt and black leggings. A messy curtain of blue lavender ombré hair obscures your face, hides your sweet doe eyes. Sometimes I worry you don't want to be seen. When I come home at the end of the day, you're holed up in your room, screens stealing your attention. When you were little, you used to leap down the stairs, taking them two at a time, to greet me with a huge hug after work. My key jingling in the lock, I'd hear your excitement and yell from the other side of the door, *hold on, baby, hold on.*

Unprompted, you used to tell me about your day. Now our daily conversations are reduced to a single syllable exchange. *How was school? Fine. How are you doing? Good. Do you have homework? No. What do you want to do this weekend? Dunno.*

When I'm hungry to connect, I surprise you with dinner at a fancy Korean restaurant. Our place. We eat family style, which forces us to negotiate. Our menu-driven conversation on brisket versus Wagyu is longer than any exchange we've had this week. As we grill the meat at the table, you disclose how much you dislike chemistry. How you were paired with the worst boy in class for the lab. How you struggled with the assigned experiment. How you needed to document observations to get full credit. How you forced the reaction by pouring the copper solution directly onto the aluminum foil when the teacher had her back turned. I'm a bit shocked; you've always been a "follow the rules" kind of kid. You share that you didn't want to fail, so you thought, *what would Mom do? She'd find a way to make it work.* And you made it work.

As dinner progresses, we greedily fight for the last coveted fish cake in the banchan. Our chopsticks battling across the table and you start laughing. And suddenly you're bubblegum pink and dimples and nose scrunched, six again and we are together at the park. Echoes of your joyful giggles when I pushed you on that swing, afraid you'd fall off. You were fearless demanding that I push you harder and higher. I'd have to remind you, *hold on, baby, hold on.*

We order dessert. Something neither of us can pronounce. It's a Korean pancake filled with Nutella and topped with crunchy corn flakes floating in a bath of melting ice cream. Over soupy spoonfuls, you casually mention that the boy in chemistry has floppy hair. With a shy smile, you intimate that he's cute but dumb. Maybe he isn't the worst boy in class. Maybe you'll help him study for finals. I want to ask you if you like him, but the bill arrives before I have a chance to spoil the moment with ridiculous questions. It's getting late and we ride home quietly humming along with our blended Spotify playlist, our stomachs full. I lock this moment deep in my heart. I'm traveling for work and I know it might be some time before our next special dinner.

*I'll hold on, baby, I'll hold on.*

Johannah Simon



*Johannah's treasure...*



## The Same Circus

The sun was waking as Jock walked to the bus stop, a sleepy breeze tousling his hair in gentle encouragement. Jock's tummy was full of flutter-flops, but he could be brave, because today he was going to find his baby sister Poppy. Because family sticks together—that's what Nan always said. Nan was his only grown-up, not a proper Mum, but she loved him like a mama-bear.

Jock was lucky. Lucky, because Nan might be old, but when the child protection workers did their yearly welfare checks, she'd say *not you lot again and let's get this over with* and *maybe my son didn't stick around to raise this little boy, but I'm not going anywhere*. And even though Jock didn't quite understand, he knew Nan's cheeks were lined with tiny roads leading to someplace safe.

They'd never managed to put him in a foster home, not like Poppy, who was taken from the hospital just five hours after she was born. That was last year, when Jock was four, but he still remembered Nan taking him to see Mum and Poppy. *Here to do a baby-lift*, the curly-haired social worker had said to a nurse wearing pink lollipop socks. They'd hovered near Mum's hospital room, whispering about *drug program* and *court orders*. Even though Jock didn't quite understand, he knew it meant Poppy was gone for always. Poppy didn't have a dad either, but they had the same Mum (who was now in rehab, wherever that was), so it was up to Jock to rescue his baby sister.

Another thing Nan liked to say was *not my circus, not my monkeys*, and even though Jock didn't quite understand, he knew she meant he should stay away from trouble if it wasn't already stuck to him. Still, Jock was sure he could fix things, and this trouble was stuck to him, wasn't it, if Poppy was gone? All he knew was that her foster-family lived in a white house far, far away. Nan had pointed it out when they'd gone on a bus ride, Jock's face squished to the smudged window as the bus trundled by.

The plan had come together in the dream-puddled moments between bedtime and sleeping. Jock knew he had to catch the bus again, if he wanted to find Poppy and bring her home. Maybe Mum would never come back, but he just couldn't forget Poppy, tied together as they were by invisible ribbons that frayed as the weeks and months passed.

And so, Jock found himself at the bus stop with a shoulder-bag, a muesli bar and his favourite dinosaur-feet slippers. Backyard roses laced their scent through the morning air, and he remembered pressing his nose into Poppy's velveteen head that one time, how it had felt like rose petals. His cheeks became wet, which puzzled him, as it wasn't a sad memory, not really. And even though Jock didn't quite understand, he knew it meant Poppy was supposed to be with him, as sure as a pinkie promise.

Jock hummed softly to pass the time, a lilting lullaby Nan liked to sing. He was going to be a big brother, which meant soothing songs and careful cuddles and gentle games. Jock was gentle. And he was a good boy, Nan was always saying so. He was sure he'd be a good brother, too, once he found Poppy and told her foster-family he was there to collect her. *She's my monkey*, he would explain—surely, anyone could see they belonged in the same circus? As he waited, sun spilled across the empty bus stop, bright, like Nan's fried eggs with golden hearts, and Jock's chest swelled, brimful with something he could barely hold in his two small hands.

**Karen Baumgart**

## Grandmother's China

"And this is my grandmother's china," Julie said, throwing open the elegantly carved doors of the cabinet. She and her husband were downsizing, trading their large home and park-like garden for a cozy condominium. "I've kept it all these years."

I peered into the crowded shelves. There were stacks of plates, a dozen of each - dinner plates, salad plates, butter plates, dessert plates, plus soup bowls, serving bowls and platters.

"That's a lot," I remarked. "Do you use it much?"

"Twice," she laughed. "My first Christmas as a young bride and then the following Thanksgiving. It felt worth the effort seeing the smile on my grandmother's face and my mother's nod of approval, but they are both gone and the dishes are never used."

Much like our past experiences, important and relevant things outlive their usefulness and fade away to obscurity, only occasionally popping into our minds. We'll remember them fleetingly with a smile or grimace, while hanging on to the tangible items.

My sister and I shared our grandparent's china of twenty-four place settings, twelve to each of us - white porcelain edged with gold surrounding an embossed gold circle that felt like braille when passing a finger over it. Then more gold holding a ring of deep rich cobalt blue.

For big family holiday celebrations, we were able to combine our dishes to set an elegant table no matter how many attending. We didn't live near each other, so the china had to be wrapped and gently loaded into the trunk of a car to be unloaded at its destination, usually my sister's home in the Santa Cruz mountains. After dinner it was a laborious task to hand wash every piece and separate what was to be returned to be stored until the next event.

With young families it was special having these elegant and extravagant meals of many dishes. A steamed pudding flambé was a dessert hit with the little ones, with ooohs and aaahs and wonder on their faces. But being stuck in traditions, wonderful when started, become old and tiresome as the years pass.

As we continued viewing Julie's inventory, she sighed. "The children don't want any of this. Don't even ask, they say. What should I do with it? It's been in my family for three generations. I can't just get rid of it."

Why not? Why does disposing of these possessions feel like a betrayal, as if mothers and grandmothers are watching us, disapproving of our reckless abandonment of their treasures. They must have acquired these new at some point in their lives. Why do we get stuck in time when life changes with each generation?

The Loma Prieta earthquake liberated my family in 1989 when almost every piece of my sister's share shattered. We no longer had settings for extended gatherings, and I eventually passed my share to my son and daughter-in-law when newlywed. They soon tired of its care and moved on to dishes they had chosen, much more suitable to their taste. I wasn't offended. We were not living in 19th century England.

The memories live on, however. My sister gave me boxes of various sized pieces and shards of china and other dishes for pique assiette mosaics, a post-earthquake art form revival on the central coast. I loved making picture frames, pots, platters, tabletops, hunting for different colors and designs from tile shops full of broken inventory, The options were endless.

Recreating, enjoying and moving on. Shouldn't life be like this?

Dad, I finally broke the fourth wall  
and crawled out of the horror film  
your death left me behind in.  
I still hear your voice in the static,  
each time the soundtrack stalls.  
I keep catching glimpses of shrapnel  
glistening against my mangled skin,  
and I can still feel broken pieces  
of you writhing through my veins.  
Dad, I'm no longer watching  
the world turn from behind a screen.  
Is this really what it feels like to live?

I thought I was just an actor in  
the saddest movie I've ever seen,

why do the credits say this movie  
was inspired by you and me?

Are you watching my life play out  
through blood-stained glass?

Dad, I'll always remember you  
through a rose-colored lens.

Can't you see my hands reaching  
through the broken display?



## Breaking the Fourth Wall



Why won't you let me pull you out?  
Why won't you pull me back in?

I want to become static; I miss being  
pixels painted on a screen.

Dad, I've lost my sea legs of incarnation  
and I don't trust my bones anymore.

I'm scared to change the channel—  
it's only been a month since I broke free.

Dad, I'm torn between betraying  
you and betraying myself but

I know you'd only want me to live.  
Dad, is there a cinema in the sky—

a place to catch the latest release?  
Promise you'll watch my newest film,

it's about the day I escaped from  
the saddest movie you've ever seen.

### **You Look Just Like Your Father**

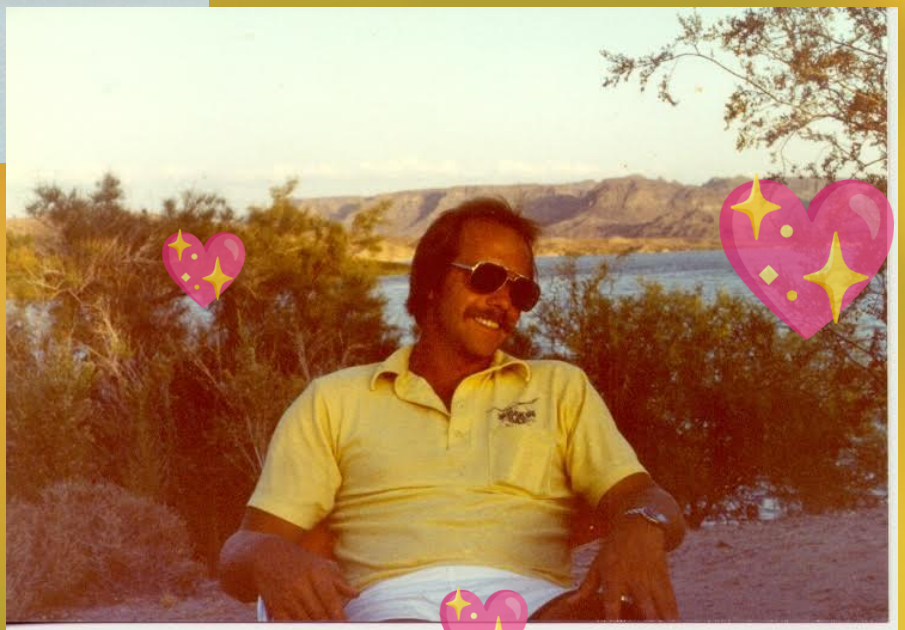
I never loved having your fine head of hair  
or lanky physique,  
same pesky upper lip that curls when I smile  
and freckles in the summertime.

As a girl, I would roll my eyes every time  
people reminded me of our likeness  
but as a woman, I would give anything  
to hear someone say  
you look just like your father  
one more time.

**Hannah Dilday**



*Hannah's treasure...*



## cherry

Cocaine came wrapped inside small paper envelopes, each one folded like origami.

After we graduated in 2017, Fraser and I hung out a few times a week. Restless and unemployed, we ordered coke and listened to music all night. He admitted he kept waiting for big things to happen, and when they didn't, he became increasingly depressed. A sticky grey cloud followed him everywhere, but after a line or two, he became the warmest sun.

His eyes were pale, like sunlit snow, and he had a dark sense of humour that challenged mine. Stories from his childhood sweetened the sour drip of the drugs in my throat—broken arms from climbing trees and stolen Milky Ways from the corner shop. I imagined us as kids, drawing on the pavement with chalk and feeling sad when the rain washed our scribbles away.

Sometimes, one of us would risk sitting a hand on the other's knee. Fraser habitually sucked cherry sweets, making me think about his mouth. Now and then, he confessed that the girls he dated were disappointing, which was enough to satisfy me.

*February 2018*

Fraser's mum texted me at 4:44am to tell me he'd tried to take his life. I had her number in case he did something stupid.

*He'll be fine, but it was touch-and-go.*

That day, I learned she'd saved mine for the same reason.

I hung up, ran to the bathroom, leaned over, and puked into the sink.

*November 2017*

Fraser rested his head on my shoulder as we sank into my saggy green sofa. He smoked half a cigarette, leaving the rest smouldering in my ceramic sun ashtray. Our playlist ended with *Us* by Regina Spektor.

In the silence, he turned, searching my face.

"I'm always safe with you, right?"

Pale limp smoke rose from the ashtray.

"Of course. Always," I said, lifting my pinky. "Promise."

March 2018

The first time I saw him after his attempt was at a bar in town. He insisted I pick the place. Least I can do, he said.

When I arrived, Fraser was rolling Amber Leaf at our table. The White Stripes crackled from the speakers, and pachouli incense filled the room. We hugged, and he wouldn't let go until he was holding me. I gripped back, rubbing his bones to check he was real.

We sat opposite each other, his smile still beautiful. I'd ricocheted back and forth about my responsibility for weeks. *I could have stopped him, no, I couldn't, maybe someone could, maybe no one could. Why?*

I hated myself.

"Still smoking?" I asked.

"My only vice left."

A bartender wearing a flannel shirt wandered over, rattling his keys against his belt.

"Can I get some drinks started for you guys today?"

"What's on tap?" Fraser said, plain, as if nothing had happened a month ago.

Flannel Shirt rattled off beers. I stared ahead.

"And for you?"

They both watched me, waiting.

"Um...sorry. A Last Word, please."

"Coming right up."

Fraser cleared his throat and pushed his half-rolled cigarette to the edge of our table.

"You're the last person I thought about. You know, before I did it."

There was no glass to hold.

Being in public couldn't stop me. I dropped my head and wept like I'd done in my bedroom for the past month. My eyeliner filled my eyes with black ink.

"Fuck," he whispered, reaching for my hand. Fraser's warm palm had almost become ashes. He didn't let go, even as Flannel Shirt set down our drinks.

"Thanks, mate."

I managed a half nod, showing my face, blotched like fat under torn flesh. Our drinks sweated on the table

as my cheeks dried. I nudged Fraser's glass toward him.

"You don't want your pretentious beer?"

"Waiting for you to start your pretentious cocktail."

The condensation from my drink melted the paper coaster, tearing it apart as I lifted it. I dipped my pinky into the glass, prodded the cherry, and licked the residue off.

"Tastes good. Drink your stupid beer."

The White Stripes faded into Arctic Monkeys, and the pachouli incense lingered. Fraser flicked his lighter on and off until he clipped his thumb and flinched. He finally broke the silence.

"I want us to be proper friends. Not just when we're out of it, you know?"

A group of men bellowed behind us, smacking their hands against the table.

"We are proper friends."

"I treated you like someone to self-destruct with. You kept me sane."

The ghastly sobs knocked at my heart again.

"Clearly, I didn't."

Flannel Shirt must have clocked out because *Frozen* by Madonna started playing. Fraser traced a line over his sweaty glass. The cherry in my drink hid in the dim bar, tender and sweet.

He gulped his next sip.

"Let's get coffee tomorrow. We'll be us again."

I slid my fingers into my drink and pulled out the cherry.

"Whatever that is."

"Yeah," he said, "Whatever that is."

Cherry juice dripped between my fingers like honey. Across the table, my best friend was alive. I bit the fruit, and sweet juice filled my mouth.

**Larisa Scott**


## Been Loved

- as a boy  
against a rumpus  
room mural of Michael Jordan  
at 3/4 scale. Forged myself  
tense and scheming  
in T9, unmuscled hands.
- as a girl  
melted on carpet,  
or stretched meshy  
across the club,  
or, whatever, worshipped.  
Delivering solid stomping cunt.  
I have been  
that eyeliner.
- as a creature  
(as you do).  
Not some secret  
third thing but the  
inevitable fourth  
through five billionth.  
Explosion of deer.  
All around you I do  
a verb like slink  
but better.


Jenna Jaco



**Google Is Wrong**



I have all  
the storage  
in the world.



**Jenna Jaco**



**April 5<sup>th</sup>, Ripples of Summer**

The vulnerable scent of summer  
is wandering in my tiny world.  
Without any knives of winter,  
without any thorns of spring,  
only me and the scent  
is hugging each other.

My blue half shirt  
is about to be a symbol of freedom.

My nails dyed in dark navy  
is about to be waves for struggling for  
the future that words can save many people  
who believe that they are always alone.

**Yuu Ikeda**

### A Softness

Curled up in wool blankets and flannel sheets  
on a too soft mattress, too high in the air  
Just high enough to push the window open  
The wind is from the back tonight  
cooling the room until it is too cold  
I burrow deeper in my perfect nest

Until the oldest cat complains  
by touching a cold wet nose to my ear  
I concede, I close the window  
lifting an edge of one blanket, inviting  
The cat declines, instead climbing on top of me  
adding his purr to the perfect warmth

*inspired by a line from R.M. Rilke's Threshold of Spring, "A softness, as if from  
everywhere"*

Penny Nolte

*Penny's treasure...*



**Lastly**

Bury me high on that hill  
by the octopus tree  
with the worn grass slope  
I taught you to ride down  
and I'll outstare the sun to assure  
all pain,  
even final felt pain,  
is not searing  
or worth the wax to write home  
when my joy runs through you,  
always and always,  
like gritted gasps of gravity.

**Ian Johnson**

**Sunbeam**

When I saw you  
I tried not to want you  
I refused to write anything down  
Now, I lie beneath you  
In drought-toughened grass  
And drink in the light  
One by one, my fingers  
Lose contact  
With the Earth.

**Jasmina Kuenzli**

## Katie & George

This is a house where you use the back door as the front door. You enter into the kitchen with its carefully chosen eggshell-colored walls, where you find Uncle George is probably cooking wings. You walk to the pantry, which is a child's haven, complete with a candy jar, every sweet cereal, and every tasty chip bag imaginable. You turn around and see the kitchen table. It's white, one of Grandpa Earl's handyman projects. That's where you would play games like Cranium Whoonu and Disney Parks Monopoly for hours with Aunt Katie and your sister. The kitchen always smelled like fresh donuts on a Sunday morning with a glass of chocolate milk courtesy of Uncle George. One Christmas, he would give you a gallon of whole milk because he found out your parents bought skim at home. It was basically water. A glass of milk always tasted best in this house with whatever cookies were in the pantry at the time.

Next is the living room. This is the first open concept house you remember. The kitchen and living room are one big room. The only things that define which is which are the white tile in the kitchen and the nineties fuzzy carpet in the living room. The living room had green leather couches that were cozy. There was a full couch in the center of the room, a love seat against the wall, and a single seat with its back facing the kitchen table. You would get on your knees a lot and turn around in the chair to talk to whoever is in the kitchen. In the living room, you would listen to your aunt sing her same karaoke song, "Power of Love" by Celine Dion, about three dozen times in your lifetime with the karaoke machine that plugged into the television. On that green couch, you would find out Michael Jackson died and watch the coverage with your aunt all afternoon and evening. You would develop a love of pop culture because of your aunt. Y'all watched *E! News* together and talked about celebrities with each other. You would turn around to see two bookcases full of every movie imaginable. You liked *Grease* the most and watched it often. On any given Saturday in the fall, Uncle George would cook and teach you how football was played. That became helpful in high school when you were explaining the game to your friends. He raised you to be a Texas Longhorn fan even though you ended up going to the University of Houston for school.

Aunt Katie would take you to the midnight premieres of all the new *Twilight* movies. Uncle George would take you to see *Harry Potter*, so you were fully covered with what's popular. Going to the movies would be a frequent thing when you were at your aunt and uncle's house. You and your aunt saw *Alvin and the Chipmunks* and *Hairspray* about two dozen times combined while they were still playing in the theaters.

Back at the house, Aunt Katie would work in her office, which was off the house's foyer. You didn't understand what working in "benefits" meant until you were around sixteen, but you always knew when open enrollment was growing up and that your aunt was about to be really busy. You were happy because she still always made time for you. When you're nineteen and in college, you would get your first speeding ticket coming to her house to print out an essay for your class. She was the only one you knew who had a printer you could use for free.

Up those stairs was the balcony where Uncle George kept his PlayStation portable; one day, it eventually fell off the balcony to the foyer below. To the right is the upstairs living room. You would play *Order Up!* on the Wii for hours until Aunt Katie would tell you it's finally time for bed.

One year, your aunt would decide to decorate the upstairs living room for Christmas and get an artificial white Christmas tree with candy colored lights. It was different from any other Christmas tree you had seen, so it was your favorite.

Off the living room was the master bedroom. You and your aunt would get ready together in her big bathroom. One night, when you were house-sitting, you would read the entirety of the novel *The Notebook* while sitting in the big comfy king bed with their dogs, Minnie and Donald.

Down the hall is your sister's room, where she kept our most re-watched DVDs and VHSs, like the two-VHS set of the *Titanic*. In your room, which was across from hers, you kept spare clothes for random sleepovers and random trinkets from all the Disney World vacations y'all went on. There was a big box television in the corner of that room. There was your uncle's old PlayStation 2 plugged into it so you could teach yourself how to play *Madden '08*. That queen-sized bed in your room would get your first boyfriend in middle school over text. You still can't remember his name anymore because he broke up with you a week later over text, saying it was a joke. Your little middle school heart was broken, but your aunt held you as you cried because middle school boys were mean.

You would take many vacations from that house. Every trip was "the last trip" you're going on, but then the Disney website would pop up in your aunt's email, and suddenly you had a five-day trip booked with park hoppers staying at Port Orleans Riverside over spring break. One year, a trip actually wasn't going to happen, so you made a PowerPoint presentation as to why the family had to go to Disney and even planned the trip and budget. Y'all went that year, too. Road trips to Florida started from that house at 3 A.M. sharp. Aunt Katie would drive to eighties pop music that your twelve-year-old self would announce to the car, "it sounds like it's recorded in a tin can," and "can we please turn it off?" You were not allowed in the front seat often as a child on these road trips because the one time you were actually up there, you answered your cellphone as your uncle needed your help getting on the Florida Turnpike. You were promptly put back in the backseat. After you made it to Disney on a road trip for the first time, instead of flying, you were so excited you called your Grandma Tessie on speaker phone to exclaim, "We're in Disney World!" Your aunt and uncle raised you to love Disney and to dream. You would tell yourself from a young age that your dream was to work at Disney. A dream that you would accomplish.

It wasn't about the house. It was about the people who lived in it. My bonus parents. Aunt Katie and Uncle George gave me memories that would last me a lifetime. They moved out of that house a few years ago, but we still go on vacations. We still talk often. I visit them as much as I can since they actually moved closer to where I live now. Uncle George is still cooking and watching Longhorn football. Aunt Katie is still the person to whom I tell my secrets to and who holds me when a boy breaks my heart. It's about the people who helped shape me as a person. Who taught me right from wrong and held me when I got hurt. Our love that we share is infinite.

**Brooke Choppin**



# Brooke's treasure...



## You Already Are

Ira learned early that love does not announce itself. It leaves evidence.

A spoon still warm in a sink. A curtain moving after the window is shut. A voice repeating itself in rooms no one is speaking in anymore.

As a child, she believed treasure meant excavation—something hidden beneath the world's surface, waiting for permission to be found. She once dug behind her building until her fingernails filled with soil and her knees went numb. She found a cracked glass bead and a worm that moved like hesitation. She kept both.

At thirteen, she stopped believing in discovery and started believing in repetition.

Her friend Aisha used to sit with her on the rooftop after school, splitting mangoes with salt and chilli, arguing about whether the seed or the flesh mattered more.

“The seed,” Aisha insisted, always certain.

“You only say that because you don't want it to end,” Ira said once.

Aisha smiled. “Nothing ends if you hold it properly.”

Ira remembered that sentence longer than she remembered Aisha's face.

Her mother, meanwhile, spoke in domestic weather. She folded clothes like she was aligning time itself. She would press her palm against fabric and say, “It remembers you better than you remember it.” Ira thought it was just another of her mother's quiet inventions.

Until later, when the wardrobe still carried her mother's smell long after the body was gone. Camphor. Jasmine oil. Something like the idea of being held without asking.

That was when Ira began keeping things. Not objects. Not souvenirs. Evidence.

A bus ticket from a day that no longer had a destination. A dried leaf pressed between pages of a book she never finished. A voicemail she could not delete where her mother simply said, “Eat something warm today.”

Warmth became her definition of survival. Years passed without insisting on themselves.

One winter morning, Ira returned to the apartment building she had once called home. The paint had peeled further, like skin giving up its argument with time. The mango tree behind it had grown uneven, leaning as if listening to something only it could hear. She stood there longer than she meant to.

Then she saw the boy.

He was crouched near the soil, digging with a spoon too small for seriousness. His face was streaked with earth, as if the ground had already claimed familiarity with him.

“What are you looking for?” she asked.

He looked up without surprise, as though she had always been part of the scene.

“Treasure,” he said simply.

“What kind?”

“The kind that proves something was here before I forgot it.”

The answer landed in her too easily, like it had been waiting.

She knelt beside him. They dug without urgency. Soil softened under shared repetition. The world narrowed to the rhythm of searching without expectation.

Eventually, the boy stopped. He held something small between his fingers: a rusted key.

“It doesn’t open anything,” he said, disappointed.

Ira took it gently. It was warm, as though it had only just been placed there.

“Not everything is meant to open,” she said.

“Then why is it a key?” he asked, offended by the universe’s lack of clarity.

Ira studied him. The seriousness of children always looked like devotion from the outside. From the inside, it felt like something about to be rewritten.

“Sometimes,” she said, “it’s just proof that something was held carefully.”

The boy seemed to accept this, though not fully. He slipped the key into his pocket like a compromise.

Before she could stand, he asked, “Do you think I’ll find real treasure?”

Ira paused. The question did not feel like it belonged to him alone. She looked at the building. At the mango tree.

At the cracked lines in the ground where things had been buried and forgotten and returned in different forms.

“I think you already are,” she said.

The boy frowned, as if that answer was too large to carry properly. But he did not reject it.

That was the strange thing about children, Ira thought. They accepted what adults only survived.

She walked home slowly. The air felt heavier than it should have been, like it remembered her.

Inside the apartment, everything was as it had always been. Or as it had decided to remain.

The kettle sat in its place. The wardrobe stood closed, holding its quiet inventory. The walls carried their usual density of absence pretending to be structure.

Ira placed her palm against the glass of the window. For a moment, she thought she heard her mother moving in another room. Not footsteps exactly—more like the idea of footsteps deciding whether to become real.

Her phone lit up on the table.

A voicemail, old, still unplayed.

Her mother’s voice filled the room again: “Eat something warm today.”

Ira listened without moving. Then again. And again.

Warmth, she realized, was not comfort. It was persistence. It was the way things refused to disappear properly.

She turned toward the wardrobe. Opened it.

The smell was immediate—camphor, jasmine, and something that did not belong to any single person anymore. She pressed her face into the fabric and closed her eyes.

For a long time, there was only breathing.

When she finally stepped back, she noticed something she had not before. On the inside of the wardrobe door, carved faintly into the wood, were small initials she did not remember writing.

And below them, a line in uneven handwriting:

don’t forget to come back for me

Ira stood very still.

Somewhere outside, a child laughed—sharp, familiar, almost identical to her own.

She turned toward the sound instinctively, as if it had called her name before language existed. But there was no one there. Only the soil. Only the key in a pocket she was no longer certain she had placed there. Only the steady, unreasonable warmth of things refusing to end properly.

And Ira, standing in the middle of a life that felt less like memory now, and more like something still waiting to be returned to its owner.

**Kumar Sen**

### **Craftsmanship**

She sat beside me  
at the craft table,  
and swung her little legs  
her flower socks  
embroidered-soft  
until I cut the thread  
like a cord, red and pulsing  
the cross-stitch end  
of fraying twine;  
a blanket stitch,  
I tucked her in  
the quietude of nighttime;  
she cradled sweetly  
in my quilted arms  
and I pressed my head to hers,  
wove my body  
on the natal loom  
and prayed in whisper to the Earth

**Holly Taylor**

## Carried To You

Every spring, mother sends pictures of blossoms  
gathering like old friends at a garden tea party,  
their heads thrown back  
in dizzy laughter.

And I, in turn, reply with abashed offerings:  
flowers vining along strangers' walls,  
unfamiliar blossoms on random streets,  
sprouting in soil so dry  
I can almost taste it

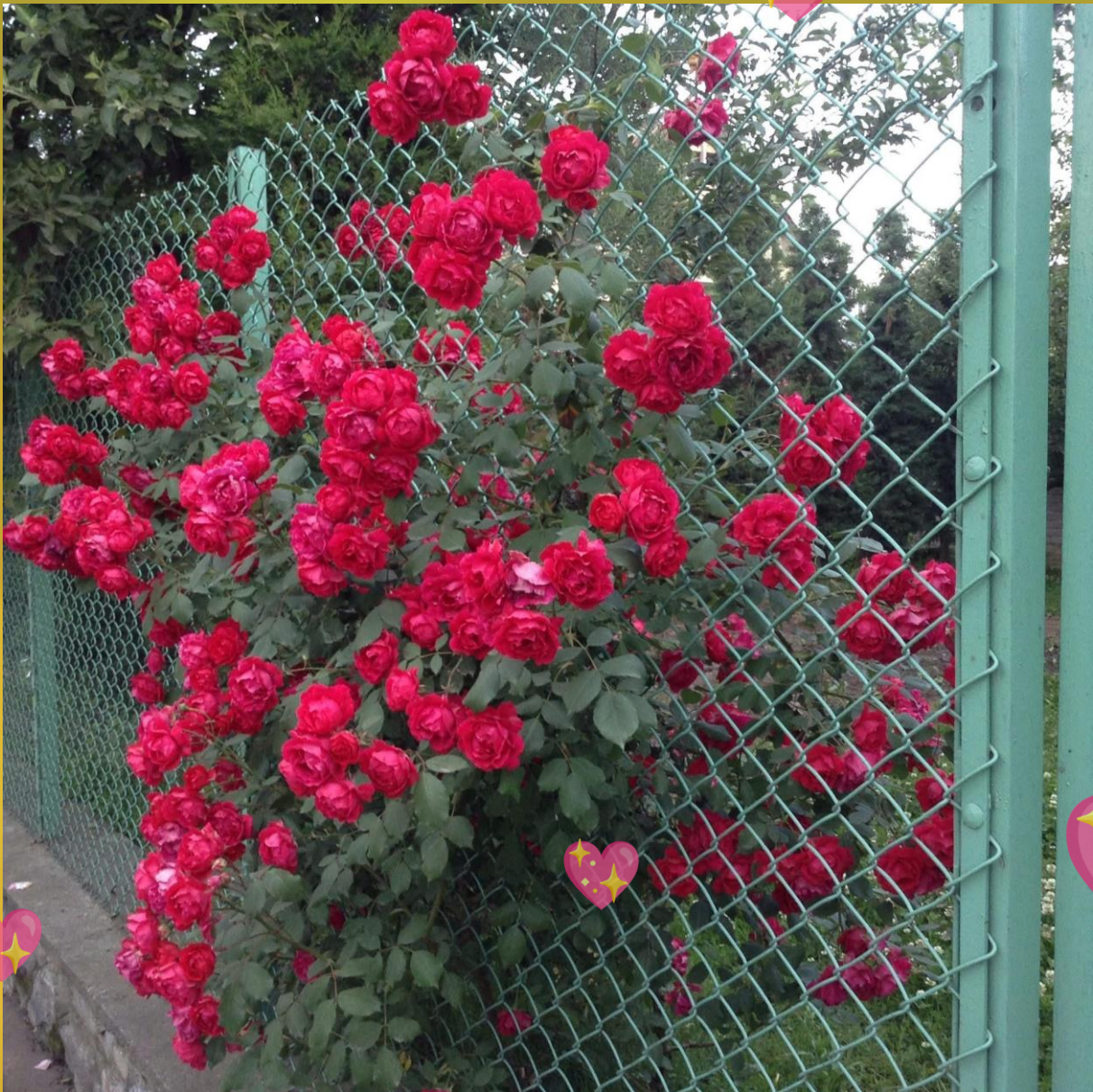
Her voice rides the radio waves  
arriving faster than my heart  
could muster language,  
invoking  
the Mongolian örtöö across the striding steppes,  
the old stone roads of Rome,  
as she pines:  
*the garlic bulbs are done curing;*  
*I only wish someone*  
*could carry them to you.*

Her voice grows weak  
remembering the old days  
the long waits  
between tedious trunk calls  
and my grandfather's letters,  
long before swapping cities meant  
never coming back.  
*It was so different back then,*  
she says, apricating under the afternoon sun—  
and behind her, in the garden shed,  
hang implicated  
in the mid summer harvest —  
garlic bundled together,  
as her children once were  
back in the proverbial Malgudi Days.

*\*Malgudi Days, a collection of short stories by R. K. Narayan and a popular 1986 Indian television series based on those stories.*



*Saba's treasure...*



## Expectations

You think your life is going to turn out some way.

Not that I knew exactly what our future would look like... Would we buy a house? Would we have kids? Or would I just convince you to adopt 100 dogs instead?

I don't think I had a preference. I was happy to spend my life with you. However that looked.

The only thing I knew for certain is that we'd be together. The moment you asked me to marry you, time stopped. By far, the easiest question I've ever had to answer.

There was no doubt in my mind that we would be together until the end.

I just never accounted for the end. And how soon it would be.

August 5, 2023, I was supposed to marry my soulmate.

Ten days before that, he was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. And 30 days after that, Joe was dead.

Time stopped then too. And I don't know if it ever started up again...

There was no way to differentiate one moment from another. They were all the same.

And more and more it seems like time can't exist when something incomprehensible takes place. Good or bad.

You think your life is going to turn out some way... And it does. Somehow. Good and bad.

I've spent years trying to make sense of something that doesn't make sense and never will. And that can really take a toll because you just go round and round. But, isn't that what we're doing anyway?

We're just spinning in circles around the sun until we're right back where we were...

History repeating itself... because you see... the August before that, Joe found his brother dead in his apartment.

And the year before that, his uncle died in a terrible car accident. And the year before that, my godmother died of cancer. And the year before that, my dad dropped dead.

I don't want to brag, but what I'm trying to say is... I know a lot of dead people.

"Have you learned anything from all of this?"

Yeah, I've learned that I can make people very uncomfortable by turning any condolence they may offer into something that leaves them speechless.

"God doesn't give you more than you can handle."

Seems like he gives some people more cancer than they can handle.

But the truth is, I can make people uncomfortable even without a smartass remark. I can make them uneasy by simply sharing my reality with them.

People recoil at the mention of death. Contemplate my own mortality? No, thank you.

They just want to leave a nice neat platitude on your doorstep. A little something for you to open on your own so they don't have to see your reaction.

"You're so strong."

I can't tell you how I've come to abhor this phrase. How am I strong? Feels like I'm just existing in a situation I didn't ask for and have no control over. And if I face planted onto the floor and sobbed, would I be weak? Telling me I'm strong removes my agency to show my feelings. It tells me you aren't comfortable seeing me be vulnerable.

But, here's the thing. If I have learned anything from this experience, it is that my strength is my vulnerability. It is my willingness to expose my soul in the wake of tragedy. To open myself up

so others can walk around inside and touch my experience, take what serves them, and leave what doesn't.

And in doing so, a little bit of Joe gets stuck to the bottom of their shoe and they walk out with him, traipsing his story and his life along with them...

You think your life is going to turn out some way... and sometimes, it doesn't.

So, I spent the months after Joe's death wanting to be dead too. Not wanting to kill myself. Just wanting to not be alive.

Sadness is so heavy, but simple. Joy is now full and complex. I think that is why it is "easier" to be sad. It is so straightforward. Joy is more intricate.

Can you ascend into joy as easily as you can succumb to sorrow?

I do not know the answer to this.

Perhaps it is as easy as loving.

And why we fall into love... we don't climb there.

Still, we say, "we've fallen out of love." And I think that is wrong. You have to struggle out of love. Disembroil yourself from it. And so it is with sadness, we must untangle ourselves from its grip.

But these anguished tentacles, wrapped around our limbs, feel like an embrace. A mistaken hug. A misinterpreted sign of affection.

To extricate yourself from the sadness feels as though you are also detaching from the love.

It is not so. To let go of the sorrow only unearths space for more love.

My life has certainly changed shape since I lost Joe, but my love has only grown. It doesn't entangle me like the sorrow. It wraps me up like a cloud. It lets light in.

I can still feel Joe's hand in mine as I sat with him, for hours, knowing he was going to die.

You think your life is going to turn out some way...

*Not this way... This is not my life... This is not our story...*

There was a distinct shift the moment he was out of his body. He was no longer laying in front of me as I held him, he was standing behind me, embracing me.

In the gap between then and now, it has all bled into one... we are beyond that space and time. And we are holding each other.

I have said sorry many times. Not for what I have said or done. But for the circumstances that are. Beyond my control. Out of my power.

We wanted to do this together for a lifetime. And we did, but it was only his.

The space of my life goes on... and I'm no longer wishing for it not to.

I used to ask, "What will I do without you?" Now, I only ask, "What will I do?" Because I know I'm never without you.

You think your life is going to turn out some way.

And it will.

**Alison Thalhammer**



*Alison's treasure...*



*Bios...*

## BETTINA GUIGUI

*women who dream*



Bettina Guigui is a writer, community builder and cultural programmer of West African descent, born in Europe. She is drawn to themes linked to the intimate, kinship and cultural heritage. Her work has been published in the digital anthology "Poems That Are Medicine: The Art of Caring Through Poetry".

## CHARLY CHOW

*Cubone and The Quilt*

@whatcharlywrote - on insta, TikTok and twitter

Charly is a neurodivergent poet and creative non-fiction writer from Coventry, UK. She likes to write about love, identity and belonging. Her work appears in Trash Cat Literary, Epistemic Lit, and Micromance, and is forthcoming in La Rotonde Review and The Haikuist.

## C.M WRIGHT

*Sun Tea Waiting*

Instagram -- [@cmw\\_author](#) |

Author Website -

- <https://www.cynthiamwright.net/writing>

C. M. Wright writes about connection and the wilds.

Her work has appeared in GossamerWight, eucatastrophe, and Camp Hiawatha. She lives in the Southeastern US with her partner, two wiggly dogs, and an ample supply of yarn.

## JOHANNAH SIMON

*Hold On*

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Johannah Simon is a mom, corporate learning strategist, adjunct professor, and professional dreamer. A Midwestern GenX multi-genre writer, her tiny pieces have appeared in Troublemaker Firestarter, Anti-Heroine Chic, BULL, Dodo Eraser, Underbelly Press and Electric Pink. Find her work at [www.thewritingtype.com](http://www.thewritingtype.com).



## KAREN BAUMGART

*The Same Circus*

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Karen Baumgart lives in Australia and adores beautiful quotes, pink things, cats, and chai lattes. She loves it when people geek out on a random thing that makes their heart sing. Karen used to be an English teacher and is quite certain that writing is the best therapy.

### SUE SESNON SALT

*My Grandmother's China*

Sue Sesnon Salt is a fourth generation Californian and now retired. Her nonfiction credits include the Brevity Blog, Blood and Bourbon and Pure Slush. Her fiction appears in Pacific Review. Her poems are featured in the "Women in a Golden State" anthology, online at the Wave and The Modern Artist.

### HANNAH DILDAY

*Breaking the Fourth Wall // You Look Just Like Your Father*

Hannah Dilday is an emerging American writer residing in the Netherlands since 2020. Prior to relocating abroad, Hannah earned her BS in Philosophy from The University of Oregon. Hannah's poetry has appeared in *Maudlin House*, *Divinations Magazine*, and *ONE ART*, among others.

### LARISA SCOTT

*cherry*

Instagram: larascottxx



Larisa Scott is a writer based in Edinburgh, Scotland. She has studied Creative Writing at the University of Edinburgh. Her work has appeared in "Journal De Folie". She is an Aquarius.

### JENNA JACO

*Been Loved // Google Is Wrong*  
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Jenna Jaco (they/she) is a genderfluid poet and technical writer from Texas. You can find their poems in Ballast, Fifth Wheel Press, Underblong, and elsewhere. Their debut full-length collection, Mall Water, was released in 2024 with Kith Books.

### YUU IKEDA

*April 5<sup>th</sup>, Ripples of Summer*  
Twitter and Instagram :  
@yuunnnn77

Yuu Ikeda (she/they) is a Japan based poet and writer. She loves mystery novels, western art, sugary coffee, and japanese animation "呪術廻戦 (Jujutsu Kaisen)" and "ブルーロック (Blue Lock)".

Her favorite novelists are Agatha Christie, Conan Doyle, J.D. Robb, Jeffery Deaver, Nele Neuhaus, Peter Swanson.

She writes poetry on her website.

<https://poetryandcoffeedays.wordpress.com/>

She is the author of these poetry collections ;

*"The Palette of Words"*,

*"Seasons Echoing Around Me"*,

*"Phantasmal Flowers in The Eden Where Only I Know"*,

*"Her Favorite Broken Glass"*,

and more.

**PENNY NOLTE**

*A Softness*



Penny Nolte creates gentle narratives of family and place. After a decades-long pause from storytelling, her new work appears in *Moonflake Press*, *Auroras & Blossoms*, *Green Silk Journal*, *Macramé Literary Journal*, and others. Originally from upstate New York, with a fortifying decade in Colorado, Penny now calls Vermont home.

**IAN JOHNSON**

*Lastly*

Bluesky - @youcanandyouwill

X - @10kandalatte

Ian Johnson is a writer from North East England. His words appear in such publications as *Trash Cat Lit*, *Bull*, *Underbelly*, *3:AM*, and *Scaffold*. He is a BotN nominee.

**JASMINA KUENZLI**

*Sunbeam*

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Jasmina Kuenzli (she/her/hers) writes poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction, and has been published both online and in print, most recently with *Haunted Words Press*, *The Hooghly Review*, and *LEON Literary Magazine*. Find her work on Twitter @jasmina62442 and on Instagram @jasminawritespoetry.

**BROOKE CHOPPIN**

*Katie & George*

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Brooke Choppin is a twenty-eight-year-old creative from Houston, Texas. She writes mostly creative non-fiction and about the autistic experience through her eyes. She is currently the Editor-In-Chief of

**The Hot Mess Press**

literary magazine.



**KUMAR SEN**

*You Already Are*

Kumar Sen is a writer from Kolkata, India. His work has appeared in *Reading into Culture*, *New World Writing Quarterly*, *Flare Magazine*, and elsewhere. Trained as a mathematician, he writes in Bengali and English, exploring sensory detail and the subtly absurd. He is also a musician, composer and bibliophile.

**HOLLY TAYLOR**

*Craftmanship*

Twitter - @holtaylorpoetry

Holly Taylor is a poet based in England. Find her work elsewhere in Thimble Literary Magazine and Mugwort Magazine.

**SABA ZAHOOR**

*Carried To You*

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Saba Zahoor is an engineer, born in Indian-Occupied Kashmir. She is a self-styled peasant poet who views poetry as a portal to alternate realities.



**ALISON THALHAMMER**

*Expectations*

@alisonthalhammer

Transplanted from Chicago, Alison Thalhammer is an LA-based writer, actor, and storyteller. Constantly walking a fine line between nostalgically sentimental and whimsically droll, she has surrendered herself to the muses. When not sitting at her desk, Alison enjoys weightlifting to correct her posture and loving on her two tiny pups.

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