

MOONFLAKE
press.

LUSH

ISSUE #2



Dear Reader,

Sometimes a day is full of grays; storms, concrete, tiles and empty notebooks. If we're not careful, our lives might remain grayscale. This is why we asked for lushness for this issue of Moonflake -- to summon color and life, to plant it and let it grow beyond us into a world we can immerse ourselves in.

The incredible writers in this issue offer rich emotional landscapes, vibrant memories, and longing tinged with sweetness. These pieces create a jungle filled with all kinds of words for you to consume. Love alongside regret. Desire with uncertainty. In order to be truly lush, we have to embrace every feeling, setting, and image that makes up our world. We have to taste every emotion.

These days, I find myself searching for forests. I've never found a better place to become truly lost. In writing, we can mimic the feeling of stumbling across a deer path, and following it to its end. Over a cliff, or into a secret haven. In writing, the path might lead us back into ourselves.

I hope you get lost in these beautiful words,

Marcella Haddad

Managing Editor

And all of the team at Moonflake Press;

Cyrine Sinti - Editor In Chief

Nandita - Fiction Editor

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conversation about mangoes

The words tumble out of our mouths,
we crumble them into a ball, throw it
up in the air and watch

it fall, rebound and roll, roll, roll.

The words come apart on the floor,
explode into flakes of orange, little
tin-foils, a bleeding of pigments

into the wood, a murder of colours.

The words form a pool, a tidal, landslide
of red anemones which we breathe in –
we never knew we could

inhale, exhale, the flavour of mangoes.

The words grab us, grasp us, hold on,
undo all our buttons and comb our hair
backwards – we are

separate, touching, melted into the green.

Lorelei Bacht

a verdant voice in the night

*Behold the way our fine feathered friend
His virtue doth parade
Thou knowest not, my dim-witted friend
The picture thou hast made...*

No one had ever sung to me that way. Not alone in the dark on my twin bed, anyway.

The song begins in a deliberately small voice, I remember: a young woman, alone and tentative, observing her boyfriend heading her way. He is not feral. Not the kind of bad boy that young women seem to want, but self-effacing. He is not looking for attention, but shy, almost timid as he crosses the street, she unnoticed for now. He doesn't play on the high school football team, but on the debate team instead.

But more than physicality, he radiates virtue.... ahh, that's why she loves him.

In the dark, in my imagination, that boy is me.

The cheap cassette-player whirls, and she sings to me, her message so personal that the spongy headset I wear cannot obscure the nuance in her voice. The rest of the house is quiet, my younger brother in the other twin bed, turns in his sleep.

In 1968, in suburban Houston, I am 16, and Barbra Streisand has just released her ninth studio album. The album is lush and lavishly orchestrated, her career in such ascendancy that she commands the best arrangers, and the best musicians too. A voice so full throated and verdant, that when she dials it back, makes it small, my ears lean forward, wanting every note, because it's me she softly serenades. In the first stanza of the song, a single, diminutive violin is her only accompanist.

You sense that soon (the song is less than three minutes in length), her vocal cords will soar.... the orchestra will lift itself and bloom. From its tentative prelude, Streisand will drench the arranger Ray Ellis' score with emotion, heart stopping for an adolescent alone in the dark.

*You're my funny valentine
Sweet comic valentine
You make me smile with my heart
Your looks are laughable, un-photographable
Yet, you're my favorite work of art.*

Houston's downtown department store, Foley's on Main Street, has a big record selection.

On the eighth floor, above the racks of vinyl recordings, a shrewd merchandiser has covered the entire wall with Simply Streisand album covers. The singer, an implausible beauty at age 25, is photographed on a wooden stool, her arms and legs crossed, dressed in a short-sleeved pastel sweater, looking over her shoulder at the camera. The album contains ten standards from pop music's golden age, composed by legends like Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II.

Meanwhile, in another part of the record department, The Beatles peddle an experimental kind of romance on their new album, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. I am drawn to both records, but not equally. No, my lonely heart seeks an old-fashioned kind of solace.

The lyricist, Lorenz Hart, wrote the words in 1937, partnering with composer Richard Rogers on the film score for the musical Babes in Arms. Even today, decades after that

Depression-era film's debut, My Funny Valentine is a staple for jazz singers and instrumentalists. In my nocturnal daydream, the history isn't important. Instead, the sung story takes center stage.

As I hang on to the lyrics in the second stanza, the song's spare arrangement becomes lavish. Harp and violin rise together, the voice making it clear that I am the singer's blithe sweetheart. Unbelievable, I think: me as her favorite work of art? Yes, me! I say, gathering momentary confidence. I pretend that only a worldly, older woman can fathom who I am inside. Tousled and slightly dopey, maybe, but she isn't asking me to change a thing.

*Is your figure less than Greek?
Is your mouth a little weak?
When you open it to speak, are you smart?
But don't change a hair for me
Not if you care for me*

Now the orchestra swells, each musician leaning forward I'm sure, every piano key rippling, the voice slightly breathless as she underlines the you and your. Straightaway, in crescendo, the base drum joins in, booming, then lowering its volume to make room for the last two lines:

*Stay, little valentine, stay!
Each day is Valentine's Day.*

I know from nothing about romance, except that I want it, just like this. So, in the dark, I ask myself: how do I capture love like this? How do I hold it close? How do I make it stay?

The cassette is rewound, not for the first time tonight. And I listen again, my newfound confidence ebbing, retreating into the insecurities of that 16-year-old boy. Can I believe the sensuous muse on the tape's reprise?

I cannot say when with certainty, so I whisper: if I find this lover, can I make her smile at me with her heart?

John Mark Jennings

губа не дура
the lip is no fool

Good taste will surely be the death of me:
my wandering tongue that seeks small pleasures. Know
my lip is not a fool: though blind it sees
the clever, composed quirk your cupid's bow
compounds with mirth and mischief; wants to suck
the smirk right off your swollen lips and sew
them shut with kisses—tied with ribbon, luck,
artistic ink, a flair for drama, blood,
and sealing wax. My lustful mouth is struck
with wanting you. A strange desire floods
my tongue—much wiser than my mind can be—
more sure of what is right and most beloved.

Danielle Roberts

a desired name

At age eight or nine, she found one of those baby naming books at the local library. Sprawled on cheap carpet, she flipped pages on an exciting hunt to unlock the origins of her unique name. She wasn't prepared for the startling entry that sounded more like a celebrity gossip article:

“Desiree” is French, derived from “desired.”

...

Famous Desirees include one of Napoleon's many loves, Desiree Clary, and Lucille Desiree Ball.

...

“Overtly sexual... lusty... sounds like a stripper's name.”

But what hit the building blocks of her soul was the author's carefree comment at the end. With the sexual connotations of the name,

“why would anyone name their daughter this?”

She scanned the entry over and over, believing she must have read it wrong. She was a strong reader, but maybe this was too grown-up for her understanding. But there was no rectifying the verdict: she was inappropriate for existing. It was wrong to have her name.

And this was in elementary school, where you're encouraged to label every personal belonging with your name.

Now she wanted to hide and push away any attention.

Her name gifter was originally going to name her Priscilla. Her mom changed her mind after a walk in Queens while pregnant. She saw a sketchbook abandoned on a bench, picked it up, and flipped through the pages. The drawings were beautiful with just “Desirée” — an accent mark over the second of the three e's — signed in the corner.

Her mom is the only person who still accessorizes her name with that acute mark. The daughter never cared for it. It made her name drip of erotica. Even though her mom sent heartfelt Birthday, Mother's Day, and Christmas cards full of esteem and how the daughter has navigated womanhood so well, her accessorized name was the only thing that stood out.

Like platform heels at the grocery store.

Ruby red lipstick in church.

An overpriced ripped mini skirt to practice bending over, unlike a lady.

Yeah, that was her daughter.

Thanks, Mom.

In eighth grade, a girl got pregnant and mysteriously disappeared, leaving our hero to growl many times that school year, "It's not me!"

Because the pregnant girl's name was, well, you know.

As she reluctantly grew into legality, men would comment on how beautiful the name "Desiree" was. Never guys her age. Older men. With stifled chuckles, lingering eyes, and physical builds that pressed into her comfort. Like there was a cheat code of crassness that would unlock her name's seductive potential.

Those were the times the name book from the library would haunt her.

How could a mere girl carry a heavy name like that?

After she was drugged and raped in college, she was desperate to regain control. She went to the counseling center and signed up for a therapy group. After her first session, a frat guy with a cocaine problem asked to take her home. He talked about himself on the ride. He asked if the two of them could see each other again.

Was he not paying attention to her introduction about getting raped at a frat house?!

She said it was a bad idea, got out of his jeep, and walked to her dorm.

She felt like an idiot for taking the ride home. A Desiree would take the ride, though.

She wondered if she would have rebuffed him, if he was better looking. A Desiree would wonder that, and she knew the answer.

She never went back to group. She coped by dissecting her worth and throwing it like confetti.

She became a slut and highly intoxicated. Guys became dispensable.

It was inevitable, after all. Honestly, it felt kind of nice.

But when campus was quiet on holiday weekends, she wandered and relished in no one calling out to her.

She loved not hearing her name.

She constantly thought about reinventing herself and became obsessed with name change notices in the newspaper.

Then someone interesting would walk by and she would become distracted by the image of how the sex would feel.

Sometimes she would hit play on the fantasy to see how far she could take it.

And sometimes she'd hit play on Coldplay's Parachutes album to see how many tracks she could go before craving attention again.

july meadow

In a hidden meadow,
daffodils tolled in the lush season,
drinking the honeyed sunshine,
and chattering in
this time-old language of flowers;
Now cornflower and grasses
grow in rushing pathways, hushing an
ancient medicinal garden plotted with
tinctures of field marigold,
a breath of white gifted from Mother Elder,
a cloak of blue-tinged Rose of Mary,
and hemlock poisons,
once made by fingers knotted with revenge.
All watched over by the Day's Eye -
small and unassuming; the perfect Medieval spy,
passing messages on twists of hair-fine roots
from the past to the present,
The poppies let you forget or remember
that Victorian love letter of wild roses
of pleasure and pain,
punctuated with bees and blue tits,
and those little beetles who prefer
to go about their work unnamed.
Such a spot of beauty – this heart-shaped mole,
above the lip
on a cliff, the sea cresting below,
air tinged with fragile salt.
A young couple found this place of pasts;
hands bound by flutterings,
they lay down amongst the flowers, just those two,
they looked up at the white puffs of dragons
and romance and other fancies -
He loves me, he loves me not,
but of course he did love her
lying there,
naked innocence surrounded by foxgloves
in the heat of Elizabethan sea holly -
But then the others came,
licking their lips
framing themselves as modern
Klimt, Ophelia, Monet;
Each lay back, crushing their body shape into the land,
Leaving their mark, like a dog
for the recognition of strangers -
the meadow is made dry and flat,
pulled petals spat in angry paint splatters,
It is fenced-off to be developed
into something grey and useful.

Amy B. Moreno

summer aisles of the northeast

A hotel card
pressed against some ephemeral trinkets
of which I'll only have some pictures to remember by,
stain my back pocket -
their scent lost somewhere between the folds of where the mind rarely wanders.

A nonchalant wind
cherishes with me the nostalgia it'll leave behind
after it dishevels my hair and rushes on
to disappear into the film of the Polaroid that tries to capture its divinity
in fractures.

The roving clouds
stranded between stern, rocky cliffs
seem adventurous today, not quite as shy
as usual - not as intangible either
for I fancy, that perhaps a wisp curls out to greet me, and I almost feel it
meet my fingers.

A green abyss
yawns wide in a contagious dreamy haze
which surrounds everything that can be seen with the eye -
and then some more;
it settles into my heart too, and ironically, this unconscious souvenir, of all others,
is the only one that lingers.

If I cannot
steal a piece of these in a jar to take home and adore, and serve
as a reminder of all the beauty that remains, and will
with or without me,
then at least stretch these mornings
and evenings
stretch this moment
like the rocks, the thin mist and the clouds, the pines, firs, cedars and
their scents stretch on and on and beyond.
Stretch this moment
make it a poem, and
let me lay here, at least then,
till I can call it a home.

Riyosha

The artichoke-green wide leaves of the bromeliads stretched out toward the sun, eagerly seeking its warmth through the high bank of windows. The plants' central spikes, Christmas-red, brought pops of bright color to the foliage. Beyond them, Hong Kong's hills rose in undulating waves, the thick green trees ruffled by distant breezes. The apartment provided the absolutely perfect view of the stunning landscape.

She reached forward to the mahogany coffee table, lifting up her Riedel flute. The bottle of Dom Perignon sat alongside it, nearly empty.

The nearly-inaudible hum of the air filtering system was the only sound in the five-room apartment. Wong was still at work, and she had never once heard any noise from their neighbors. The building's soundproofing was exquisite.

She ran a hand over the rose jacquard fabric of the couch. Wong had chosen it, of course, just as he had chosen everything in their apartment. The teak shelving across the room, with its asymmetrical design, showcased his favorite treasures. The top shelf featured an antique cracked-wood crocodile mask from Kenya. Lower down was the Qianlong Chinese vase with its pale yellow and cerulean design of jumping fish. A cocobolo box of aloeswood incense sticks was only opened on special occasions – his birthday, his parents' birthdays, and the Chinese New Year.

And there, directly at the center, was a three-foot-high rhodium sculpture of a gorilla, hunkered down with knuckles clenched as if about to charge. His eyes were glittering diamonds. She knew the sculpture cost more than the entire building she was in. Wong never pointed it out to guests, when he had business associates over. He never had to. Every CEO in Hong Kong knew its story. Every CEO had heard the rumors.

She finished the Champagne in her flute and poured the rest of the bottle.

An ebony-headed tern floated just beyond her balcony, so close, and yet so impossibly distant. The balcony doors were locked shut. Wong had never said it, but she knew he didn't trust her. It was the same reason the front door was locked. If the skyscraper caught fire, she imagined she'd immolate in this very room, scented by fragrant aloeswood, the crocodile mask and cocobolo box and everything else turning to ash. Everything except that rhodium beast. It would survive. It would always survive.

saltwater cherry

mango gold and dripping peach
strawberry without the seeds
bathed in syrup. the sea
is the only place on earth
because without the sun
to light the gentle waves
on fire
would it be earth at all?
the fragrances of minerals
soak your hair and i hope
the water smells of you in return
in case i ever disappear into
it and never come back, because
i don't think i'm good enough
at swimming to
bring souvenirs.
strike a match to the
pineapple and melon,
to the pomegranate that
bleeds down our hands
so we can
eat the sky,
and plant our apricot pits
in a coral funeral parlor.
words could not mean
less but i can't help
thinking beautiful did not
exist until just now.
a big bang whose conception
is invisible but to us.
if i could look away
for just one moment
and dry my sticky mouth
i would see in a thesaurus
how ocean leads me to deep and
deep to bottomless
cavernous
unfathomable
and i would wonder
how anyone said anything
before now
when all these words
only just
began to
mean.

aral



our contributors;

Conversation About Mangoes ~ Lorelei Bacht

Lorelei Bacht Lorelei Bacht (she/they) lives and writes somewhere in the monsoon forest. Her recent writing has appeared and/or is forthcoming in Feral, Anti-Heroic Chic, Abridged, Odd Magazine, PROEM, SWWIM, Strukturriss, The Inflectionist Review, Hecate, and others.

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A Verdant Voice In The Night ~ John Mark Jennings

John Mark Jennings is a writer and landscape photographer based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. His essays explore the way the past casts long shadows over one's identity. He often blends photography and memoir to create hybrid writing forms. Insta; @JohnMarkJennings www.johnmarkjennings.com



The Lip Is No Fool ~ Danielle Roberts

Danielle Roberts is a queer poet from California. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Blood & Bourbon, Cæsura, Green Ink, Jabberwock Review, Molecule, The Poeming Pigeon, and the Poetry Brothel Anthology. Find more of her at sonnetscribbler.com. Insta; @sonnetscribbler



A Desired Name ~ Desiree McCullough

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Tropic of Cancer ~ Sean Wang


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Saltwater Cherry ~ aral

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Thank You to all of our contributors
for their wonderful pieces!



Thank you for exploring the lush jungle of this issue with us. We hope you've gathered words, sights, sounds, and feelings that you can transport back into your life -- and in return, we hope they continue to transport you.

Read on!

Marcella Haddad

and the rest of the team at

Moonflake Press



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