

issue two

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Rinnan Lit.



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Letter from the team

We're very excited to bring the second issue of rinnan to all of you. Rinnan has evolved from a passion project to a team of people who love literature and the intricacies of language.

This issue is full of work that works so well with each other, giving it a very interesting glow, almost.

Once again, we are forever indebted to our contributors for their writing and to everyone who reads our issues for their time and attention.

Erin (our volunteer editor) says:

This is my first issue as volunteer editor, and it was a pleasure reading and editing each piece I was entrusted with. We had a lot of wonderful writing, and I am proud to be a part of this team. Poetry is dear to my heart, having been part of the literary scene for over two decades, and it is this love that brought me to Rinnan. I am looking forward to reading future pieces, so please keep sending them.

Wristband

Arthur DeHart

My eyes crawled from my face in prophetic allusion,
A watch is just a slap band in prophetic allusion,
The Tarot cards told me to get fucked,
So I gave them to the neighborhood teens,
Until they learned their lessons.
Water in a glass,
Is an ocean somewhere,
And I think I just,
Fell in

The Sensibility the Scroll, Curse, Man Burned

Andrew Buckner

I.

It was a handmade scroll written in blood
Found beneath the bodies, stones, mud

Left by the first war:
The time when man first tore,

Rendered a line of separation
Between fellow humans, self, and nation.

Amid bomb blasts and cannon fire
A feeling of hatred, disillusionment, desire

Crawled across the heart
Of the scrawny, young man
Who first read this brief work of art;

A dire
Specter of dread

Retired

Feelings to the man's head

As the curse spread

Voices of souls long past

Pushed him through woods; dark, vast

Telling him that mankind

Will forever be blind

Eternally repeating the events

Spied here; an immortal precedent.

II.

As the years pressed on

Seasons changed, nights became dawn

The scroll would be bid upon

In Italian gallas; concern undrawn.

The rich receivers of its contents

Quickly became violent;

Was disguised as a man of gray

Who asked twenty-five cents to pay
For the scroll, curse, modern folklore

To the average, unassuming man
Who would knowingly pour
Gasoline over the text and with fire stray

Bodies from book;
Meat from hook.

Thus, the world and the woods became one;
The scroll became earth, sun

Wars eternally thundered their vehement song
And misery, suffering, disease were prolonged.

Bits of the scroll found their ways into the walls
Of every home, ensuring all

Future generations never learned
Of the sensibility the scroll, curse, man burned.

Rain Violence

Kushal Poddar

The shrapnel of rain struck
against the tarpaulin of a makeshift shop
pierce my state of being.

All day, a day that may feel like
the whole life, I shall try
to operate and extract the splinters
of monsoon from my spirit.

A few may stay inside
near the source of warmth
and set me in a bursting mood.

Care(ful) for the Mind

Nida Mubaraki

Your entire existence is defined by powers beyond your control, and you cannot eradicate what your blood bore you. You are the product of two, a love letter of perhaps eternal love or a mishap of a situation. You cannot control what they do to you at six or sixteen & you cannot change the hereditary hell you are in
(Hold on, now, and be still; it will all happen before you know it).
The disease of empathy is riddled in me. An apparatus buried within the soul, conceived at conception—you. & the omnipresent waterpool is overflowing with my past and the time before me;
a recipe for this woman. A woman of pigtails & Russian ballet teachers & arrhythmias & big (narrow) blue (espresso) eyes that shine (glare). They glow like the waterpool. Contain your insides, contain yourself. What you have been given and what has been made for you is only so safe for so long
(The needle pricks your skin, and it is not an antidote, but it keeps you breathing).

Waiting for a father who went away with the precipitation

John Chinaka Onyeche

And these days are now becoming more of a ritual.

The remembrance of a father who went away without a soothing word for his family. Whence, after we returned and whips out the flotsam, from this sturdy desk where we had once leaned our backs, and talked, just like a father and his son. In the trendiness of the twilight, book after book and after the days' toiling. A heavy sound on the metal steps that announces the returning feet of a father. These memories of you are now glued more within the family's heart, as we stood waving our hands to the harmattan breeze, thinking that it would bring you back home since you left home in the time of ceaseless precipitation. If this is not you coming with the season, where else should we look out for you?

The holy order

John Chinaka Onyeche

Locked and keyed unto God
Inside the dome, they gathered
Men and God commune as friends
Through rituals as ageless
The order is to preserve God's will
Men dine with dirty hearts and hands
Together with the holy amongst them
But secrecy must be held for eternity
In the traditions- as of the ancient
Holy is the one chosen by the men
Where race and fraternity bridges
An ancient gap lay unbridgeable
Until the order is questioned

What is God and the order?
What is God with colours?
What is God with fraternity?

Men made their God in their likeness
Mounting it above the others
Even unto the death of another
God wills it, the death of another
How holy is this sea we see
If it is not rituals upon rituals
Men created the order to be Gods

We all sing

John Chinaka Onyeche

I am just a boy, one who sits
On the edge of the world,
lending my voice to the grief
of my homeland and which
never gets out of the roof
Since my homeland is built
in ruins and in the blood of
her own offspring to date –

Nigeria

Every voice of freedom is
muffled by bullets or court
Where our just course is
Perverted and diverted for
Gain where no life lives for-
ever, as all men die and the
earth remains for who knows

The Blue Sky Awaits The Black.

Abdulrauf Yusuf Olanrewaju

I actually didn't miss you
but the slow walking hours of the night;
-when the black sky feels its own blackness
as eyes, too, borrow from them
the gloom look that'll make them
rest in peace on the sofa
till the becoming blue sky begins its revolution-
missed how you always rescue
my struggling eyelids, with
a lovey-dovey conversation
from the oppression of the eyes
& the battle between declination and resurrection
through the boundary between the last tock
and the first tick of the first tock.

I'm patiently waiting for you
like the sky awaits the blue
colour to hug it again,
after the invading black must have left.

Life Souveneir

Adeyemo Sarah

In my home, night prayers water the seed of fellowship with the creator.

And every dawn, my grandmother summons us to prayer.

From infant, my grandmother had taught me how to count the rosary

with the mumblings that coated my tender tongue.

Now a boy, bred in morning chants of grandmother,
who whispers in her dream the fragments of her night prayer.

This night, grandmother's voice is fainting;
she shivers as the rosary quivers in her hands.
Strands of hair under her mantilla are what I see.

Today's prayer is the souvenir of life to heaven.
After the prayer, my grandmother tenders her tongue
into the shape of silence.

Chateau Tivoli

Christian Garduno

You remind me of a future me
and all my old notebooks
Wonderland found Alice
she was my sister a long time ago
that was when I was drinking in blue moons
with a wedge of orange
thinking of a title for you in the morning
I lay paper roses at the bottom of your feet
that was the summer you sent me jasmine seeds
and a bucket to grow them in
you were like Cleopatra in her chambers
wafting through the night
I'm in a hurry, but you can't rush the future
it uncoils as it will
it's unfolding still
you can't photocopy the soul
you remind me of who I used to be
when I was fearless
when I was free
and your eyes were bluer than the moon

Murphy's Windmill

Christian Garduno

I heard about you before I met you
your fingerprints were all over this town
the stars were compressing us together
your perfume is like tear gas in the morning

The space between us is maddening
I must be falling from grace
your daydreams keep me up at night
I feel like touching pictures of your face

I fell for you the very moment I met you
and everybody knew it in this town
the definition of gravity
I just keep falling down

The space between us is growing quite mad
I keep falling from grace
you destroy me so quietly
while I'm fascinated with you face to face

Star of the Sea

Christian Garduno

Me and my memories—
racing toward obscurity
one of us makes up lies & the other makes up chords
we wind up in the same song

I don't have any more dreams coming true
you're leaving & packing up most of my stuff
you're a one-way ticket
going just like the rain

You left behind your pillowcase
I'll use it to catch my dreams just in case
she says from experience—
every boy has his price & it's usually a sigh

And if you will
I will

Sometimes our hearts have too many moving parts
& when I woke up this morning in the afternoon
not my house, but it felt like my room
not my house, but it felt like my room

My muse is slightly faster than she used to be
her laugh louder now—
because now I see you the way the stars look at you
& that's something you just don't give away

The Winter Lady of SoMa

Christian Garduno

Were we born to burn each other
We are condemned to love one another
you can carve your name on my headstone
I wiped your tears, and they became my blood
we took the pills and only half-died
and there's really no point in starting over tonight

We broke bread when we only had crumbs
we were born to bury each other
I got half a mind to tell you what I'm thinking tonight
the stars go blind
and they half-lied
I'm over the moon if you really wanna go there

O'Shaughnessy Seawall

Christian Garduno

Kohl around your olive eyes
the night went stark raving mad
you were singing Many Rivers to Cross
it was pure devastation baby
you went full-tilt Cherokee
and the band played Caledonia
you had on your Pixies shirt and your sights set on me

The kohl smeared around your eyes
like a night on the Continent
the wolves are at the door
and they don't like to eat one at a time
it happened just before we met
we hadn't happened yet
I was always holding out hope

Words etched

Aldas K Ruminis

Words etched on yellow,
marked over with red
as your blue pen follows
sketched notes on divided lines.
Mistakes, corrections
and thoughts adorn
the scribbled page
consumed inside your mind,
expressed through heart
that gripped the pen
inside your sleeve and moved the thoughts inside your head.
Poetry and fiction —
the creative writing —
they call your thoughts and feelings poured onto the page.
Edited and changed,
improved. Your emotions
escaped and became
public, to be revised.

Tears Rot Away

Aldas K Ruminis

Tears rot away
when blood no longer flows
and the corpse once alive
rattles in the wooden grave.
Death parts us all
from the breast of life,
throws us under our fates
bleeding, sweating, whimpering, fighting, clawing and scratching
towards the light
but the end is the end.
When the priest blesses
your legacy and name
and your family huddles
and throws the dirt
to seal you in your wooden cage, your eyes shut with earth
to seal the door to the living world and sobs and cries
are your final marks in the dying world.

Bed of ice

Aldas K Ruminis

Upon the bed of ice I struck my life, the coldness keeping it intact.
Emptiness and silence
inhabit the halls of my life,
the castle molded out of bricks
stolen from the neighbors' yards.

I built the tower of ice where I reside, melting you out of my life.
Frozen in the past
the words traced in steam within
the walls I walk; I wipe them off.
The coldness kept me warm
when the pillars of the world left me all alone.

I have to try

Aldas K Ruminis

In the land of hooded knights, I have to try.
With feathered ink to establish power and by
striking words to defeat the iron-clad fighters.
Stone-guarded towers shall crack under the bones
they buried, the lust they shared and
the land they claimed, all veiled in the name of greatness.
But now the steel, in the hands of these mounted iron beasts, shall
be too heavy to bear... against the truths of men.
And with each readied blow, they'll see themselves
in those bright dying eyes.
That fire within that vision tamed, with the blood they claimed,
shall never ease their pain. As they wash the blood off the shining
white,
the echoes of the blinding red and black shall reveal their faulty,
corrupt pasts. And even upon my death, when that of my blood runs
dry, the streets will flow blessed free and they'll sing my name.
For here lived he, who trembled not,
and with bright truth fought all that wicked-iron wrought.

Mystic Poet

an angel oak
under its wide limbs
a thin glow of dawn
*upon a peaceful
settlement*

down sun down
someone in the room
puts on the lantern
*the smell
of kerosene*

love letter
in a sealed
envelope —
all those broken pencils
and eraser

Green, quite a-

Irina Tall Novikova

Green, quite a bit breaks through in the dark, damp earth ...

A man with dark eyes and blond hair entered, breathing through his mouth, sat down, shortness of breath grabbed him by the throat, held him, long oh and lingeringly digging his claws ...

The bus drove around the car, slowed down, and opened several doors, as in a children's box...

Boys rolled out beady, young and similar to schoolchildren ... They talk about babies, and talk about chips and cola, about what they eat only at the age of growing up ...

The old man closed his breathless mouth, his face drooped, his features drooped and limp. The bright slits of the eyes caught the light, looking around intensely in the misted glass with dark spots of the leopard, the branches cut into the sky with thin sharp pins...

Four numbers, dark, almost black, and someone sings softly, blinks sadness and freezes like a statue...

And those others, like little fireflies in a cage, want to escape, leave the world, forget about themselves and those who they used to be...

Dark headphones stretch like snakes to the ears, absorb external sounds, giving the possibility of a small concert, staying in a different environment... The heart almost does not beat, almost...

Broken paper tickets crackle and a man with the smell of tobacco, gray colorless, sits on the seat, his hands are thin and sharp, one of the whitish nails is damaged and swollen, he continuously looks into space trying to see something ..

And the dragon, ancient, black, invisible, swims past the glass, touching it with its paw, leaving a long transparent trail...

The whitish and cloudy rushes in more and more and you lost something in the distance, but the memory hid everything from you with a sieve so that ...

The book is buzzing in your ear telling the story of the past, once a great country ruled by a single person. heat, but the snow was strewn from the beginning of April... Where is your spring?

The man clenched his sore hands, in his hands is a white bag with a half-wiped red heart on a thin grid of wires, the engine is noisy, the windows are shaking, the inside of the bus is seething, digesting fuel ...

In that dining room where there is little space and nothing...

She ate long and drawn out, chewing through every cartilage, banging on the gray artificial table with the white tip of the mug like a knight, without her faithful horse. She had a silver clasp in her nose, as a dedication and a reminder, as something that should neither be lost nor found. .. and you, looking at her yellow lemon apron that is covered in puffs, don't you remember your youth? Your former and lost happiness? They gave you a different life and you forgot yourself, but someday you will remember everything and understand what a lucky person is ... She got up, opened the door, put her spear, moved and fastened the container and went out without even leaving a scent of perfume ...

- "I hoped .. and they were afraid to even go out with me ...", she smiled with blue eyelashes and unfolded the package, transparent and light, which fell to the floor and, without fully unfastening, entered the mouth of the black trash can ...

- "And I'm from Ukraine .." - and the eyes laugh, bright lakes, a strange voice and dialect ... The one who loses himself and others, everyone ...

Cleaning lady in green with a white face of death, without a single drop of blood... Like a blank white sheet.

-Utopia writer.

Refugee Status

Narimaan Shafi

Government Directive 465 from the Department for Displaced Persons: Local authorities to absorb refugees into the community swiftly.

Displaced people are fleeing biblical famines that are plaguing the entire planet. My assignment is to document them on entry. Everyone is asking why we are welcoming hungry people across our borders. The official line: We are a first world nation and as such have planned ahead. We have stores and will ration to get through this current crisis.

As I work I notice refugee numbers declining slightly. A few are reported deaths, the majority, disappearances. Starting as a trickle, cascading into a steady stream, the disappearances alarm me so much that I am compelled to work through my allotted lunchtime to investigate.

My lunch is a small, rationed, synthetic, protein burger with no salad. Eating the rainbow is something not many can afford. As I chew I bite into something unfamiliar. I extract it from my mouth immediately; a whole fingernail complete with heavily chipped, red nail polish. I vomit. My body convulses and the table shakes. A sheet of paper falls from the shelf above onto my plate. 'Government Directive 465:

Local authorities to absorb refugees into the community swiftly.' The word absorb pulsates before me, trying to jump off the page. I vomit again as the reality of what we have become hits me.

The Tale of the Stolen Hoodie

Christine LaChance

There will always be terrible injustices in the world, and there is no stopping this horrid fact. This crime was personal. I've been called crazy. I've been called stupid. I've been called brave. People will sometimes ask me why I've taken up trail running as a hobby, of all things. Those who knew me best gave the impression of relief at the possibility I had taken on something more reasonable compared to my past endeavors. I often give the excuse of getting to be outside, fitness, good for the heart, nature's lovely, blah blah blah. The truth, the real truth, is something much more personal, my secret life in The Hive.

It was a dark and stormy morning, the standard weather for the area, deep in the forests of the Pacific Northwest. Okay, so it wasn't deep in the forest. In fact, it was on the well-known, quite famous mossy trails about twenty minutes from the hotel where I stayed the night before. Give me a break. I go where The Hive tells me to. I can't deny the relief I felt when I learned the location of my stakeout. I've got this weird fear of my appendix exploding if I should ever find myself in an area without phone reception. Don't judge.

Anyway, I found I enjoyed hiking out there. The clouds and rain tend to keep people off the trails more often than not. As a matter of fact, it is categorized as a rainforest. Sunny days are a rare thing out there, and I enjoy the quiet and solitude I can get, but never be too far from help should something go wrong, like my appendix exploding. I know it hasn't happened yet, but that just means it still could. Hiking was the cover for what I was really doing out there. To others, I was simply a tourist. It was the perfect excuse for someone like me to be out there for hours on end. You know about Bigfoot. I really shouldn't have to explain. There have been some reports coming out of the very forest in which I was hiking, concerning items going missing. The stories all had something similar - a large-statured, unidentified trail runner. To us, it meant only one thing, Bigfoot was up to no good. It made perfect sense. This was his territory, and we made sure he went unchallenged. The war between cryptids would spell annihilation for any humans caught within a ten-mile radius, easily. No one should have to endure such a tragedy. As a Cryptid Vigilante, it is my job, our job, to make sure people, good people, like you, are safe from the vile deeds these fiends might commit. Have you noticed alien abductions have gone down these past few years? Nessie hasn't surfaced in broad daylight lately? Mothman hasn't been flying over populated areas and frightening sky gazers and such? You're welcome.

Bigfoot developing a habit of thievery was not something we could overlook.

Sure, it starts out so innocently. One time, he's just swiping a bag of food from some sleeping campers because foraging during the season hasn't been the greatest.

The next minute, he's committing grand theft auto and joyriding through the busy streets of Seattle, rampaging through coffee bars if his order wasn't quite right. Who knows what sort of damage a cryptid could commit then? We weren't certain, but we were highly suspicious it was him. So, there I was, waiting for a trail runner to come by. I needed a look. I needed a photo, something to determine Bigfoot's presence here. Off I went to the mossy forest, ready to capture evidence of Bigfoot in the popular area.

I nestled under the tarp I set up earlier that morning. The camo design and color blended in beautifully with the cascading moss from the tree boughs. I was perfectly concealed as I waited, laying flat on the soft, moss-cushioned ground, facing out to the trail. He wouldn't even notice me there, ready to snap a photo while he dashed by. Raindrops fell delicately upon the tarp, and I kept myself busy by trying to find some sort of pattern, rhythm to their dripping and dropping. Summer had come by the time of my visit, and the forest was heating up. Adding the rain to the heat made for a very humid hiding place under that tarp. The Hive grants its members hoodies to wear while we are out and about in public. They aren't anything particularly unique, but they are used for other members of The Hive to identify and recognize one another.

If you know, you know. I won't even tell you what they look like because, well, you're not a member, are you? No, really, are you? With the building humidity, I crawled out from beneath the cover of the tarp and removed my hoodie, trying to make myself more comfortable for what was turning out to be a long morning. I stood in the gentle rain for a bit, letting it bring me some coolness.

During this time, I heard a deep *thump-thump-thump* from a faraway distance. I hung my hoodie on a low branch of a mossy tree, my attention turned towards the mysterious noise. This was definitely not rain, and the rhythmic patterns suggested it was an animal in motion. *Thump-thump-thump*. Whatever it was, it was getting louder. It was getting closer. Quickly, I retreated back under the cover of my tarp and readied my camera. *Thump-Thump-Thump*. There was no mistaking it now. Even with the softness of the moss on the ground, the sound was unmistakable. Something large, heavy, was running along the trail. Bigfoot. It had to be him. I waited, ready to take my shot. The thumping stopped right next to my tarp. The only way I could see who or what awaited out there was to take myself out from the camouflage. I had to do it. What I saw, I will never forget. Tall. Solid, lean muscles rippling through the dark brown hair growing down his body like the moss growing down the trees. Feet, the length of a hoagie, and the width of a medium pizza, bare. It was him. Bigfoot stood before me. I was in awe. I had, of course, believed in him.

I had never seen him outside of a blurry photograph before. Now, he stood before me in all the clarity my human eyes could provide.

In my moments of quiet admiration and shock upon seeing the living legend, I had failed on two accounts. The first was my failure to be the first person to ever get a clear photo of the cryptid. For this, I will always curse myself. The second, the one which had set me on my current course, was not noticing what had caught his attention enough to make him stop. My hoodie rested on the branch of the adjacent tree. When I had finally gathered my wits, I processed what was happening. Bigfoot was trying to rob me. “Hey!” I shouted.

Bigfoot whipped his head in my direction, locked his dark eyes, the size of dinner plates, with mine, let out a startled growl and thundered off down the trail, my hoodie in his gargantuan, hairy hand. As fast as I could, I rose up from my stomach and crawled my way onto the trail. Camera in hand, I thrust it up in Bigfoot’s general position while he rushed down the path and into the cover of the trees. I snapped as many photos as I could. Every single one of them, a blurry mess. Every. Last. One. “Damn you!” I cursed to the trees, Bigfoot no longer in my sight. There was no way I could catch him now. “You’ve not seen the last of me, thief!”

Now, I know what all of you must be thinking. Surely, it isn't that big of a deal. It's just a hoodie, easily replaced. You would be correct. I could easily acquire another, but you miss the point. You might not believe this, but he knows who we are. I think that's why he not only stopped to look at my hoodie, but also part of the reason why he took it. That hoodie is mine. My name is crocheted in gold into the fibers of that fabric. He races through the forest under my name, my identity. My hoodie is wrapped around his oversized, hairy, bulky body as he runs along the trails of the Pacific Northwest, committing petty crimes of theft, or worse. He mocks me. He mocks my fellow cryptid vigilanties. His crimes are expanding. He must be stopped.

Should anyone find that thief while he's out on one of his runs, let him know I'm coming for him. I've been training for two years to finally be able to compete with his speed and strength. Not only that, I'm getting my appendix removed next month. There will be no explosion and no need to call for a rescue as a result. That hoodie is mine. I will catch him and take back what was stolen from me. If nothing else, he could reimburse me the forty dollars it cost. Come on!

Heaven Can Wait

Robert James Cross

When loneliness came crashing down around the lush one-bedroom apartment of one Theodore Trampoli, he was unfazed. The glitter and novelty of E! Entertainment Television had given his life the meaning that he craved outside the house without his actually having to leave the property to experience “life” in the first place. Add to that his love of shitty food like Little Caesars pizzas and Funyuns covered in spicy mayonnaise. He would wake up in the middle of the day, usually 3:00 or 4:00 pm, and take a Tums antacid to ease the indigestion that his diet gave him before taking a quick shower that consisted of putting a tiny amount of hand soap on his genitals and armpits. Then he would either spend his days off masturbating to amateur videos of Thai hookers - with and without cocks - being impregnated by naval officers from the United States or playing violent video games while gorging himself on cholesterol-laden delights. If he had work though, then the few hours before his shift as a stocker at Walmart would be spent watching reruns of Keeping Up with the Kardashians with the occasional masturbatory session aimed at the voluptuous Los Angeles family of skanks.

He lived by himself, and for his own good because he often got into psychological altercations with anyone he lived with, including his mother and father when he was younger. They kicked him out onto the street, and he ended up couch-surfing at the home of some acquaintances he met in high school that enjoyed his company if only for the fact that he amused them or made them feel better about themselves because they weren't him. This would bring on a cavalcade of insecurities for a normal human being, but Ted wasn't a normal human being, and if someone told him that he was ugly or a piece of shit, he'd nod in agreement. He knew that human beings only lived through this one life before either transitioning into some cosmic

Neverland or being reincarnated as a tortoise or just turning off like a fucking television. This perspective drew him to just not giving a shit about anything outside of his own selfish wants.

Ted clocked in at Walmart a little before 10:00 p.m. and walked towards the aisles he would be working on. Since the Walmart he worked in was open twenty-four seven, he expected people to ask him where certain things were in the store.

"Excuse me, sir," a voice behind him called.

He turned to see a cute high school girl and two puka shell necklace-wearing dweebs on either side of her. That was the thing about California. You had to learn to deal with every fashion faux pas in the book because the recycling of every era went through California first and some could not keep up; media capital of the world and all.

“Yeah. What’s up?” Ted asked.

“Where’s the toilet paper aisle?”

“It’s over near the cleaning supplies, which is down this aisle and past the cereals.” “Cool, man. Thanks,” one of the puka shell assholes said.

“No problem.”

They scurried off and Ted wondered why the hell three high school students needed so much toilet paper as he passed them at the checkout with a shopping cartful. It was probably some weird new science project for school or something.

He suddenly had a memory float back into his brain of junior year. This girl named Megan Clegg had given Ted her phone number and wanted to go out on a date with him. He called her and arranged a movie date where they went out for Italian food before going to see the newest schlock romantic comedy that Hollywood had to offer. She enjoyed the movie well enough, but Ted couldn’t be bothered because the whole time he kept staring at another girl who was sitting three rows down. Megan caught onto it during the midpoint of the film where the two characters have a disagreement and it looks to the audience like they will never get over it; again, schlock. So Ted finally clued in on Megan’s catching on around the point where a new love interest comes into the picture and causes the main character to change his tune before losing the girl. But since Ted didn’t give a flying fuck, he continued fantasizing about the girl three rows down.

When the movie was over, they waited outside for Megan's parents to come pick her up. Ted lived two blocks away and would walk.

"You like the movie?" Ted asked.

"It was alright. The RV scene was funny."

"Ha, yeah." He couldn't remember what she was talking about.

"Did you like it?" she asked.

"It's the same movie that they release around this time every year. Boy meets girl, boy screws up, girl threatens to leave, boy begs for girl's forgiveness, girl thinks begging is romantic, so she takes him back. Rinse and repeat."

"Hmmm." She looked uncomfortable.

"So, uh, you wanna make out?"

"No. I just want to wait for my parents."

"Alright. Fuck off then," Ted said before he began to walk away.

"Why couldn't you just be nice? You were nice when you asked me out."

"Because I thought you'd be an interesting person to talk to or at least go see a movie with, but you aren't. I think you're a bit of a prude too."

"Why? Because I won't make out with you?" she asked.

"No. Because you kept silently judging me for checking out that girl in the theater." "We were on a date! I'm supposed to be your main focus, not some girl in the theater!" "Yeah well, like or not, sweetheart, you were just some girl in the theater too."

Megan's parents' green SUV rolled up just as Megan shot Ted a look of complete disgust and anger. He waved to Megan's father and smiled before turning to walk back home. He could hear a murmur of Megan complaining to her father, but he didn't pay attention. She would complain. They all would complain. He saw it with his mother and father. He saw it in popular media. He saw it in classic literature. They make jokes out of the fact complaining became normalcy, and then wonder why the divorce rate is so high and why men commit suicide at a higher rate than women. Men rarely complain, and when they do it is to people behind closed doors. They never made a show of it - not for any reason of masculinity, but because it isn't right to get frustrated over things you can't control. Women never get this because they are raised to be taken care of, so they never got a taste of control until adulthood, and they complain.

Back at Walmart, the neon sign outside was collecting moths for the spiders that lived in the undercarriage of the roof and Ted was stocking Pop-Tarts that were flavored like soft drinks and holiday recipes. He kept a shopping list in his head of all the different things that he stocked that he would end up coming back and buying on payday. Walmart employees didn't get a

discount on groceries until the holidays, and since Christmas was coming up, Ted was ready to buy many nonperishable food items that caught his eye. Pop-Tarts were one and, of course, Funyuns were another along with all the trimmings of random condiments

He had tallied up the ratio of condiments to the amount of fast food he bought, and it came out to ten bottles of ketchup to every one Burger King Angry Whopper. It was a better addiction than heroin, but it was just as deadly and made him just as lethargic.

His shift was halfway over, and he was allowed to leave the building for lunch at 1:00 a.m. so he drove over to a Mexican food joint down the street named Rolberto's that touted itself as the only Rolberto's in the country, which Ted knew was bullshit. He had a friend whose parents owned a few of these taco places, and they all had different names, but served the same food with the added "only [insert random Mexican male name here]'s in the country". The beautiful lie of advertising slowly rusted away before him after that. Sure, there were some places that were obviously different, but then when you looked into food distribution, it got even murkier. When you realized that there were only three or four companies that distributed food to restaurants around the country, then you begin to realize that people who were picky about what they ate were just ill-informed.

Ted ordered an Adobada burrito with no pico de gallo. Then he added cheese making sure the only healthy thing in the burrito were the tiny chunks of tomato inside the guacamole. As he sat in his car and ate it with the windows rolled down and the air conditioning on full blast, he imagined himself still driving through the night air without a top on his car

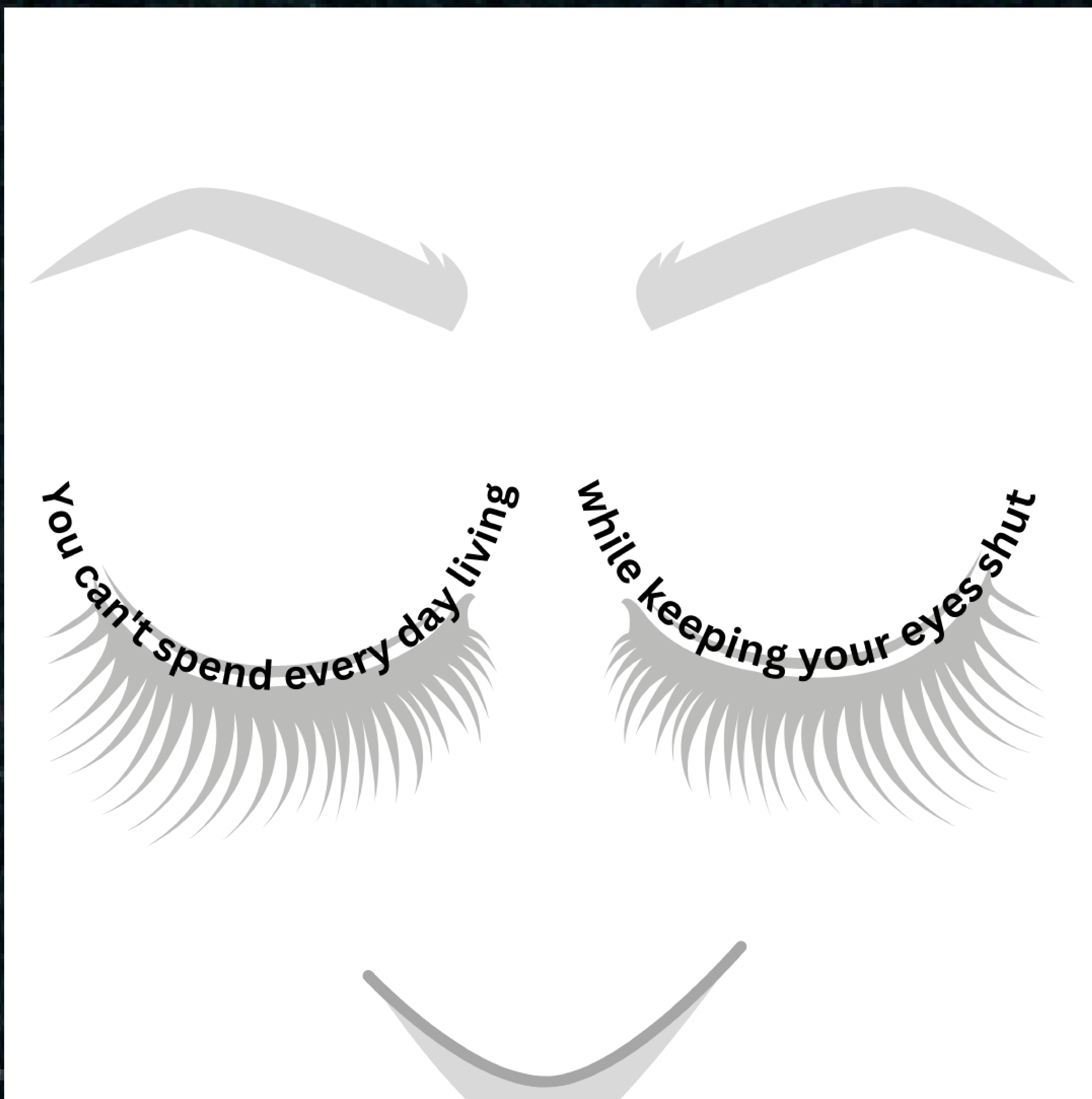
. It was a small thrill he got before having to punch back into the clock and deal with monotonous barcode after monotonous barcode. This also gave him a slight hard on that he would need to get rid of before reentering the store or he would probably lose his job, and as lovely as not working at Walmart would be, he needed the money.

A few hours later and his shift was over. He went back out to the parking lot and used a squeegee to wipe the morning dew off the windshield of his car, got in, turned the key, rolled down the windows, turned up the AC, started listening to the AM radio jockeys push the newest fad in politics, and drove off into the sunrise. He passed through the industrial part of town before heading through the hedge-rich suburbs where the big boys of capitalism lived. He saw sprinklers coming on and old ladies walking dogs as they shit all over the city streets that cost so much to live on. Then he came up to a house that had been covered in toilet paper the night prior and an Indian man outside in a robe with his head in his hands.

Better him than me, Ted thought. If that's what being successful looks like, fuck that.

Everyday Living

Tinamarie Cox



Author Bios

Arthur DeHart

Arthur DeHart is a professional rule breaker. He has many poetry collections and novellas out. He has also been published in many places including your local bathroom stall. He is EIC of Naked Cat Lit Mag and owner of Deep Wood Productions. He currently resides in or near St. Louis.

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Andrew Buckner is a multi award-winning screenwriter and filmmaker.

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John Chinaka Onyeche

John Chinaka Onyeche is an author, poet, and teacher of History and African History. He is the author of *Echoes Across The Atlantic*, *A Night Tale At The Threshold Of Howl*, *We Returned To Kiss The Cross*, *The Broken Fort*, *A Good Day For Tomorrow's Coming*, *Stateless*, *25 Atonements*, *The Gathering Of Reeds*, to be published in March 2024 by Ethel Zine Press and a chapbook *Chapters Of Broken Tales*. He is a Best of Net Nominee. A husband, father and poet from Nigeria. John composes his work from the city of Port Harcourt Rivers State, Nigeria. He is currently a student of History and Diplomatic Studies at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt Rivers State. When John is not writing, he loves reading.

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Christian Garduno's work can be read in over 100 literary magazines. He is the recipient of the 2019 national Willie Morris Award for Southern Poetry, a Finalist in the 2020-2021 Tennessee Williams & New Orleans Writing Contest, and a Finalist in the 2021 Julia Darling Memorial Poetry Prize. He lives and writes along the South Texas coast with his wonderful wife Nahemie and young son Dylan. 45

Aldas K Ruminis

Aldas is a writer from Dublin, Ireland. He has spent the last few years dreaming of a successful and prolific career as a writer; so he earned a Masters in Creative Writing. His work has been published in Cabinet of Heed, Idle Ink and elsewhere. More at: www.aldaskruminis.com

Mystic Poet

Christina Chin is a painter and haiku poet from Malaysia. She is a four-time recipient of top 100 in the mDAC Summit Contests, exhibited at the Palo Alto Art Center, California. 1st prize winner of the 34th Annual Cherry Blossom Sakura Festival 2020 Haiku Contest. 1st prize winner in the 8th Setouchi Matsuyama 2019 Photohaiku Contest. She has been published in numerous journals, multilingual journals, and anthologies, including Japan's prestigious monthly Haikukai Magazine.

Uchechukwu Onyedikam is a Nigerian creative artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. His poems have appeared in Amsterdam Quarterly, Brittle Paper, Poetic Africa, Hood Communists and in print anthologies. Christina Chin and he have co-published Pouring Light on the Hills (2022).

Tinamarie Cox

Tinamarie Cox lives in Arizona (USA) with her husband and two children. Her work has appeared and is forthcoming in several publications. She is also the author of a poetry chapbook, *Self-Destruction in Small Doses* (Bottlecap Press). You can find more of her work at tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com. And follow her on Twitter @tinamarie_cox

Irina Tall Novikova

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

Narimaan Shafi

Narimaan Shafi is a writer based in the North of England. Formerly a Science teacher and content writer she's now just a writer. Her particular passion is flash fiction, both reading and writing it. She often wonders if the ever-growing pile of flash fiction anthologies in the room will turn sentient and say something. She wrote the content for National Geographic's online Forces of Nature which was nominated for a Webby Award in 2022.

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