

---

*SUMMER 2023*

---



*ISSUE 50*

# COLOPHON

- 3 an editorial *Julia Kaczmarek & Laiana Farias*  
4 poetry *Mykyta Ryzhykh* • \*\*\*  
5 photography *Laiana Farias* • perceptions  
6 short story *Dan Ziebarth* • I Love You. I'm Sorry. I'm Hungry.  
9 photography *Julia Kaczmarek* • coastline  
10 poetry *Rizwan Akhtar* • Vacancy  
11 poetry *Rizwan Akhtar* • Evolution  
12 short story *S.F Wright* • Orange Juice  
13 photography *Laiana Farias* • morning  
14 poetry *James Croal Jackson* • Years Later I Crave Loneliness  
15 poetry *James Croal Jackson* • When People Say You Grow More Conservative With Age  
16 poetry *Mervyn Seivwright* • Ghosting My Childhood Coast  
18 poetry *Mervyn Seivwright* • Grasping Light  
19 photography *Julia Kaczmarek* • mirroring childhood  
20 short story *Bob Carlton* • Code Name COMET's Final Op  
21 poetry *Ali Ashhar* • Rearview  
22 photography *Laiana Farias* • through  
23 essay *N.H. Van Der Haar* • Study of AI Generated Art No.8  
26 poetry *Sarah Luisa Kuhlewind* • Roadtrips  
27 poetry *Sarah Luisa Kuhlewind* • Sunset, Sunrise  
28 short story *Vanessa Houlan* • The Path of Rhododendron  
31 photography *Julia Kaczmarek* • dawn  
32 flash fiction winner *Marcelo Medone* • Guide to Walking through the Woods in Winter  
33 photography *Julia Kaczmarek* • summer wind  
34 review *Alex Carrigan* • review: you stupid slut by nat raum

---

## EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

*Julia Kaczmarek*  
*Laiana Farias*

## EDITORIAL BOARD

*Arthur Mulder*  
*Lea Vandervorst*  
*Merel Langeveld*  
*Anouk Roest*

## FINAL EDITORS

*Lhya Munive*  
*Amy Larsen*

## GRAPHIC DESIGNER

*Julia Kaczmarek*

want to contribute? send submissions to:  
[writersblock@gmail.com](mailto:writersblock@gmail.com)

find us on:  
[Instagram @writersblockmag](#)

want more? check our website  
[writersblockmagazine.com](http://writersblockmagazine.com)

# *an editorial*

---

*“Standing there on the embankment, staring into the current, I realized that—in spite of all the risks involved—a thing in motion will always be better than a thing at rest; that change will always be a nobler thing than permanence; that that which is static will degenerate and decay, turn to ash, while that which is in motion is able to last for all eternity.”*  
*Olga Tokarczuk*

Despite never filtering our submissions into a restrictive theme, somehow our selections always align themselves within a broader topic. In its euphoric chaos, our summer edition brings several contemporary pieces which contemplate the symbiotic experiences of the temporality of life and human relations. Although this issue collects many stories about memories, it does so through a diversity of forms: family, the rise of AI, different perspectives of looking at mundane objects, recalling moments from your childhood that leave permanent imprints in your life, and idiosyncratic ways of expression. Through the ever-changing process of creating art, we invite you to read perplexing pieces that evokes thought-provoking rhetorical questions about looking for answers, chasing ideals and ambiguities of life whilst simultaneously being entirely open for deeper interpretation. Lastly, we are proud to share the winning piece of the 2023 flash fiction competition, so engaging that it makes you feel transported into its pleasantly unsettling story.

We are indebted for the magazine’s constant encouragement for creativity for both our writers and board members. We are indebtedly thankful for all parties that contributed to Issue 50th, and we hope Writer’s Block continues to inspire artists to produce their eccentric art.

*Laiana & Julia*

*by Mykyta Ryzhykh*

\*\*\*

My cat is purring  
I conjure with my eyes closed and the war ends outside the window

The cat smiles and knows that wizards do not exist

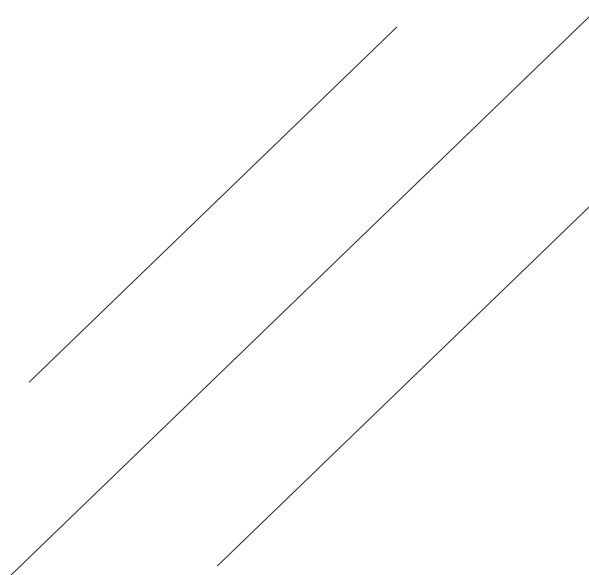
\*\*\*

spring breath of petals  
cat playing god with mouse  
by the grace of god

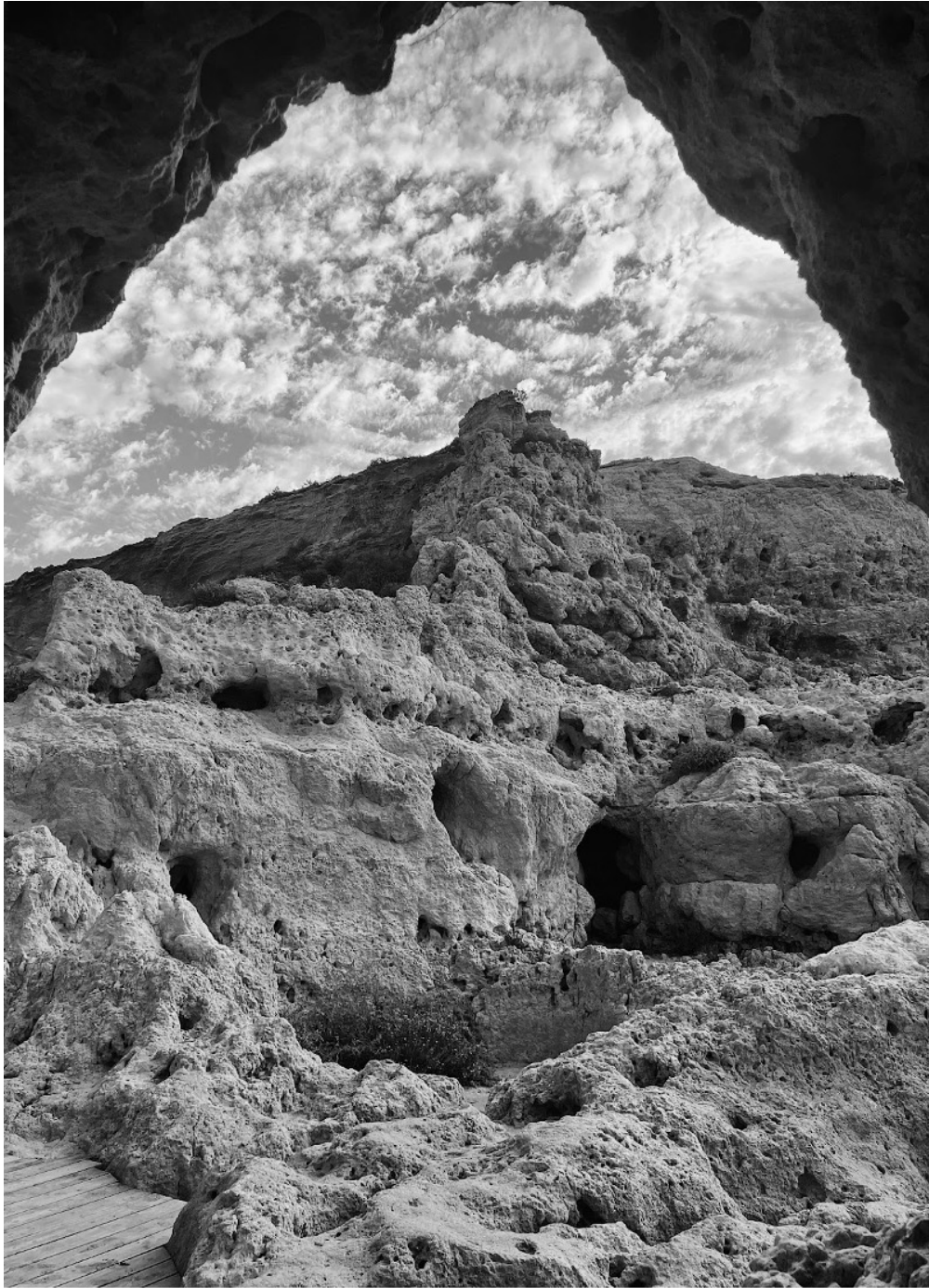
\*\*\*

We soared into the sky in the form of steam  
Will we be able to return to earth?

The white cat of my younger sister is afraid and hides under a canopy  
Every time it rains from the sky







---

perceptions  
*by Laiana Farias*

# *I Love You. I'm Sorry. I'm Hungry.*

---

Dan Ziebarth

"Oh, Charlie look, should we stop in here for lunch?" Jen pointed towards a small store front to her left as she asked the question. Charlie turned to face the building, scanning over the place to quickly size it up.

"Yeah sure, some of the dishes on the special board sound pretty good."

"Perfect," Jen exclaimed, as Charlie stepped to open the door for her. Jen entered the small café with a smile as Charlie followed, the two friends shuffling into the cozy building and out of the crisp autumn day.

The café had exposed brick walls and a smattering of small tables, most lining the wall and a few scattered across the middle of the room, leaving narrow paths for customers and waiters to walk through.

The place was relatively quiet for lunch hour, and both Jen and Charlie looked around, at first expecting a host to escort them to a table.

"Why don't we sit over there by the window. It's nice and bright," Jen said, pointing over to one of the tables tucked into a little nook between the door and the wall by the front of the café.

"Sounds good to me," Charlie replied as he began to walk over to the table quickly. He was hungry, and hoped that they wouldn't have to wait too long for someone to take their order.

As the two sat down, a young waitress soon came along and handed the couple two menus.

"Anything to drink?"

"I'm still deciding," Jen replied.

"Same here. Maybe just another minute," Charlie added, even though he could have ordered immediately.

"Of course, no trouble." The waitress gave the two a smile and walked back towards the kitchen.

"Ooh, they have apple cider. That actually sounds perfect for today," Jen swooned with excitement.

"I was thinking the same thing. I'll probably get that with whatever else I order," Charlie said, looking up from his menu with a smile.

"Great minds think alike," Jen answered back, looking up with a smile of her own.

"I love you, Jen," Charlie said before looking down at his menu.

"You what?" Jen shot back in surprise, her eyes widening.

"Oh, I just said I love you," Charlie replied, still looking down at his menu.

"You love me?"

"Yeah. I'm sorry."

"You're sorry about what?! Sorry that you love me? Sorry that you brought it up?"

"I don't really know, but I can tell by your tone that I'm sorry."

"What? No... no I'm not saying you should be sorry."

"Oh, okay." Charlie smiled again and looked down at his menu again, scanning the array of options.

"Charlie?" Jen's face was still displaying her state of shock.

"Yeah?"

"What's going on?"

"I love you. I'm sorry. I'm hungry." Charlie looked back down at his menu.

"Charlie, we've been friends for 25 years." Jen tried to sound calm as she spoke again, but she struggled not to yell the words out.

"Yeah, I actually think it's 26 now."

"26 years then, we've known each other for 26 years and now you're telling me this?!"

"I guess so," Charlie replied with a slight shrug.

Jen sat frozen, a puzzled look continuing to paint her face.

"You think I should get the bacon cheeseburger? It doesn't really seem like a burger place. More of a kale salad crowd from the looks of it," Charlie said gesturing with his left hand towards the rest of the room before looking down at his menu again.

"Don't you want to talk about this?" Jen finally asked.

"Maybe. I could also order French toast. That would be good too, and it has been a while since I've had French toast. I like when they put those little scoops of butter on top at restaurants too. It might be too late for that, though. French toast is more of a breakfast meal. You think they're still serving breakfast?"

"I didn't mean talk about the food, Charlie."

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Charlie, you just told me that you loved me."

"Yeah?"

"Charlie, we've been friends for 26 years. You've never once told me that you had any interest in dating me whatsoever. Now we're sitting here for lunch, and you tell me that you love me."

"Yeah."

"But... but," Jen sputtered, struggling to put together the myriad words flying around in her head to form a coherent sentence. "How long have you wanted to say this? Did you know you were going to say this today? Have you spent the last 26 years wanting to date me, being in love with me, and never told me this until now?"

Charlie paused for a moment, taking in the barrage of questions before smiling and chuckling a bit. "Ya know, I don't really know." He laughed a bit longer. Jen didn't respond, staring at Charlie in disbelief. After another second, Charlie spoke again, breaking the silence. "You know what you're going to order yet?"

"You don't know?! How don't you know?!"

"Well, yeah I'm not 100% percent sure yet, but it's either going to be the bacon cheeseburger or the french toast."

"No... no no no. Not the food, Charlie. I'm talking about how you don't know the answer to any of these questions. How can you not know how long you've been in love with me? How do you not know if you were going to say that you loved me today or not?"

"Oh, yeah. I'm sorry. I don't really know."

"Charlie, you shouldn't be sorry. This is just a big deal."

"Okay, yeah. Sorry."

"No, just..." Jen was once again at a loss for words.

"I can't believe the waitress isn't back yet," Charlie said, looking up from his menu again. "I'm really excited for that apple cider. That sounds great right now. It's probably not a big deal though because I still don't know what I'm going to order. I just can't make up my mind."

"I'm sure the apple cider will be great too, Charlie. It's just... don't you want to talk about this? We can talk about this."

"Yeah, actually that might be really helpful," Charlie replied with a nod as he set down his menu now.

"Great!" Jen looked at Charlie with a soft smile.

"So, do you think I should go with the bacon cheeseburger or the french toast? I can't decide. Honestly, whatever you say I should get, I'll order. They both sound good."

Jen exhaled, dropped her head down, breathed in and lifted it back up. "Just order the bacon cheeseburger."

"Yeah, you're right. I'm gonna get that. They're probably not serving breakfast anymore anyway."



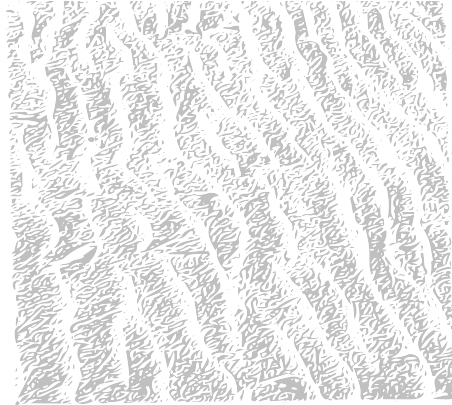


coastline  
*by Julia Kaczmarek*

# Vacancy

*Rizwan Akhtar*

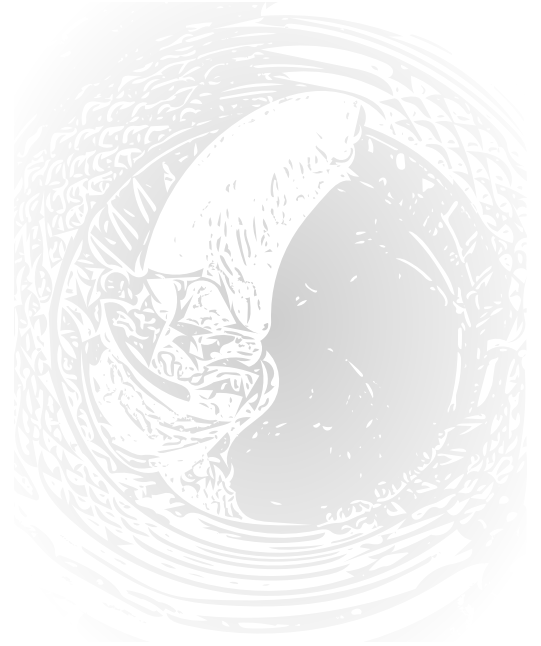
eyes almost fossilized in sockets  
holds me guilty as the wind clubs  
the tree outside, what else but an  
explanation that distance kills the  
desire to touch and make us nude  
without a mirror, we are turned into  
reflections continue like a 9 to 5 job  
a toaster sticking out burnt edges  
the dead engine refuses to vivify  
out of use, each thing settles with  
vacancy and enjoys the random  
rerun of the owner, the driveway  
with dry leaves, a bird pot without  
water and the empty wire swings  
washings tucked in a cupboard  
evenings on their risk of spending  
landscape a strip of wasted thought  
the second kiss is always trapped  
between doubt and natural groping  
couldn't it be more decent to say  
that I do not miss you anymore.



# Evolution

*by Rizwan Akhtar*

when you are alone in a room  
where an air-conditioner whirs  
it's not poetry but the sheer  
silence which cripples the body  
and suppose you take an exit  
find mountains behind you  
sleeping for ages like ancient  
humped creatures; a society of  
dark pools of torrential rains  
alluvial rivers plot amphibian  
games a display of hairy faces  
not any place for words but  
impossibility of raising a voice  
the green grief of grovelers  
capable don't spill their palms  
while hands grow slowly  
that erected vertebrate bends  
bulging between legs, skin  
carves a touch, just loneliness.



## Orange Juice

*short story by S.F Wright*

I'd drink at least two 1.75 bottles of vodka a week. I'd mix it with Gatorade, tonic water, soda. Usually, I'd wait until evening, but there reached a point where I'd start mixing drinks in the morning.

I taught continuing education classes a few times a week at a community college; otherwise, I survived on money left over from student loans. I'd often show up to class drunk but functioning. I'm fairly sure my students didn't suspect anything.

Some mornings, I'd look out the window at a pink, light blue sky with violet clouds, not sure if it was a sunset or a sunrise. When I'd realize it was the latter, I'd hope I didn't have work; upon remembering that I didn't, I'd celebrate with a screwdriver. The orange juice gave me some scintilla of false hope—this touch of healthiness. I must've been around 31 or 34. But during those moments, it could be nice, because things seemed possible: before everything turned into what it would become—not just the neighborhood, safe now in its veil of pure morning, but me, too—I waited.

---





morning  
by Laiana Farias

# Years Later I Crave Loneliness

*by James Croal Jackson*

you follow into every room I have  
ever known the way a horse

finds redemption in the movement  
of hooves tired of staring

at the same metallic sky hammer  
pounding lowest cloud a kettle

in some makeshift brewery a fermentation  
process brooding sour the wind the creaks

subtle days my shoes tied together  
for small steps without stumbling





# *When People Say You Grow More Conservative With Age*

*by James Croal Jackson*

When I think about it, I already lost my train  
of thought. What a metaphor! With the desert smoke  
into the sunset, et cetera. I think my pockets  
would have been lined with gold in the olden days  
then I'd grow old and resent it. What gives  
me the right – the right – the right  
to become my true oppressor?



# Ghosting My Childhood Coast

*by Mervyn Seivwright*

Mornings reveal a location's nakedness,  
turning on the light from darkness,

from roaches scattering, from its silence  
awakened, this beach before it is clothed

with faces, the commotion of vehicles,  
a populated promenade popping

with screams, whistles, tromping feet;  
churros, fries, stroopwafels, fries,

fried kibbeling, broiled seabass,  
grilled gambas, fries fondled

with mayonnaise, whisked-blown scents  
overwhelming my senses. The sun

slowly hovers from the grey-blue dunes  
into this mid-October sky, a breezy chill,

listening to the seagulls, their calls,  
threads of sharp harp strings, murmuring

against the tidal wave orchestra, constant  
strummed sounds transitioning tone

from high and low tide land-shag. The sun  
reflects from the east bringing a luminous

reddish-amber tint to the cumulonimbus clouds  
playing games with the stratus clouds below.

Scheveningen gusts and sounds remind me  
of Felixstowe, a stretch across the North Sea,





as a boy with my mum, she loved it there,  
slurping down the slimy whelks and

other shellfish from small cups. The miss her,  
painting the recollections from cold-day walks

with her still warm my spirit as the duffle coat  
I wore back then. The clouds here are tennis balls,

the coasts whisking winds between my home  
and here. This beach place has more sand,

layers sculptured by the tides leaving  
surprises under shells instead of stones.

In the morning light, paws and bare feet  
are overlapping in the sand, skating

along while seagulls, blackbirds,  
and men with metal detectors search

beneath the sand for what the sea shares,  
as our society, always seeking. While I sit

with a sandy bottom, preoccupied  
with memories, pondering, no one wonders

if I belong here, except the unflinching  
seagulls shifting near my shoes, but I am safe

*by Mervyn Seivwright*

# Grasping Light

The cherry blossom trees  
of Hirosaki Castle are distant  
from my days collecting  
pink snowflake petals in a spring  
saunter, rendering my moments  
in winter, the bare trees  
in the intensive care room  
I dawdle in, the tastes I yearn  
for, absent in the I V, absent  
in the liquid broth, absent  
on the clinical beige walls  
and slot windows screening

shifting nights and days.  
The cherry blossoms trees  
not yet bloomed bring  
ocular captivation unlike  
the dogwood trees, their name  
not providing the suckling  
sensory experience to my spirit,  
as the cherry blossoms trees,  
a marker for life, a beginning,  
seeking to embrace a fortnight  
in a year's cycle, our time  
measured by milestones,

mishaps, junctures as our time  
existing, working, surviving  
for family, even supplanting  
our lives with children to grow  
hopes, dreams, opportunities  
lost, gained in our seeds,

creating longer winters amid  
cherry blossom moments, brought  
in prism perky peaks  
we pinpoint in each year,  
not blurred out by the fog  
of monotony, or teetering

as the trees scarecrow into the land.





mirroring childhood  
*by Julia Kaczmarek*

# *Code Name COMET's Final Op*

*by Bob Carlton*

The sun dropping below the city skyline was a beautiful sight, no doubt, but it was an evil wind that Yuri felt blowing that summer's eve. The call from the embassy had been from some evasive low-level bureaucrat. Something about this mission was amiss, and Yuri was not reassured when he saw the pilot approaching.

--Sign this, the pilot said, thrusting his clipboard at Yuri. The man could not get out of there fast enough. Scanning the paperwork, Yuri caught the flight log's anomaly: the plane had sat, loaded and ready, for two weeks in Ashkhabad.

The hangar was deserted. It was up to Yuri to unload the diplomatic pouch and, per his instructions, "dispose of it in an appropriate manner with utmost discretion." The smell of death emanating from the shipping container was overwhelming. This, for thirty years' loyal service. And now, no Cold War, no relieving ideology, nothing left to keep the shame away.







# Rearview

*by Ali Ashhar*

Dad takes us on a long drive  
as we reunite after two years.  
We come across my old school  
dad starts reminiscing first day of my school  
and exclaims, he used to be a brat;  
Mamma replies, this institution is a palette  
of memories which turned him into a sincere boy.  
Two miles away, there's an exhibition going on  
where I recall going every year after being done with my exams;  
we chatter about how my parents used to promise me  
that they will bring me here and get my favorite toy  
only if I could pass my exam with flying colours.  
We move forward in a similar way to life,  
we dine at my favourite restaurant,  
mamma asks dad to order chicken curry  
as it will bring taste to our conversation;  
for it used to my favourite dish  
and how eagerly mamma used to cook it for me  
on different occasions.  
We finish the scrumptious dinner  
and go for a walk,  
we look at the sky and introspect:  
time elapses fast  
like the disappearing sun under the horizon  
my childhood disappeared somewhere  
under the responsibilities of adulthood.



through  
*by Laiana Farias*

---

# Study of AI generated art No. 8

*N.H. Van Der Haar*



Lawrence G. Quinn  
Born 1988 in Melbourne.

Lawrence Gordon Quinn was an Australian artist best known for illustrations for popular young adult books. Born a child prodigy to the wealthy Quinn mining family, Quinn was privately educated in Europe. Upon returning to Australia and as a teenager he won several art competitions and even became a celebrated political cartoonist despite his youth.

At 19, Quinn attended the Melbourne Institute of Cultural Studies (MICS). Accelerated by access to family money, he quickly developed a reputation for virtuosic work but an aristocratic attitude. This behaviour was worsened by his family who as a graduation present gifted Quinn a large private studio and gallery in Melbourne.

“I mean we all tried at one point to be friends with Quinn. He would offer the opportunity to work in his studio and then charge rent. Hard to be mates with your landlord” - Leslie Verney, artists and fellow student at MICS.

Rather than devoted himself to conventional painting, Quinn chose to become an illustrator in the literary world. Almost immediately his illustrations garnered popular attention from readers, helping elevate the readership of the books.

This began in 2008 with *Silent Court of the Outlaws*. Reviewers critiqued the work was ‘witless and derivative’. Instead it was the illustrations that received great acclaim. Quinn made no friends among the industry by suggesting that readers who enjoyed the cover could remove it and frame it if they liked.

Regardless of this, in 2010 he again did the illustrations for *The Whiskered Eye* (2010). In this circumstance, Quinn asked for edits to the narrative of the work because it ‘clashed’ with his artistic vision. Editors agreed and made changes without consulting the author which shocked many in the industry again. Quickly, Lawrence Quinn was becoming known as the bad boy of illustration and became a celebrity across Australia.

“Quinn behaved like a shark in a puddle” - Linda Thayer, Author of *The Whiskered Eye Series*



*Turtles all the way down* (2012) was Quinn’s first illustration for a book for adults and earned him equal measure praise and scorn. It also elevated his career into a new level of fame.

“Publishers included a dust jacket that could easily be hung on the wall to prevent another ‘Silent Court of the Outlaws fiasco’ ... I did everything possible to satisfy him and somehow he still almost jeopardised my entire book” - Dr. Sophie Hood, Author of *Turtles all the way down*.

“The book aside, Lawrence Quinn has once again created an illustration worthy of a gallery wall. I sincerely wish we had more genuine artists like him showing the younger generation how truly

high they can aspire. 5 stars” - Cecilia Pontoise, in her 2013 Literary Review of *Turtles all the way down*.

Quinn replicated his early success but earned himself notoriety after confessing on live television he had not bothered to read the book before finishing his illustration. Later, he was quoted as saying that he would have asked for changes to be made to the work so it was less ‘cinematic’. The media lapped this scandal up and only added to his reputation.

In 2013, he illustrated the latest in the *Torchbearer Series* and while still very popular, some critics suggested that Quinn’s style was becoming repetitive. Slowly, the illustrator’s bombastic and snarky personality was tarnishing his success.

“I understand Caravaggio being snobbish but Quinn wasn’t even forty and thought he was Rothko reborn” - Rosalyn Koufax, Author of *Torchbearer*.

Beginning in 2014 and against advice, Quinn attempted to write and illustrate his own self described masterpiece: *The Bridgelizard*. Assistant writers and editors he hired indicated behind close doors that Quinn was not a good writer and his illustrations were becoming less sophisticated. Unperturbed by this, for the next half-a-decade Quinn worked on *The Bridgelizard* in isolation, refusing media appearances and illustration work. Devoted fans on Quinn's stalked him and several were cautioned were trespass on his properties and studio. A majority of his fans and supporters moved on, many critics suggesting that the illustrator would never finished his work because he had 'lost his golden touch'. Many of his rivals and enemies in the publishing industry blacklisted him from further work because of his previous bad attitude and personality. While some small online communities sharing and celebrating Quinn's work still exist, for the majority of Australian the name Lawrence Quinn is an unknown.

In January 2023, representatives for Lawrence Quinn released the above illustration for *The Bridgelizard*, which had been finished in 2017. Half-a-dozen high profile artists working in Melbourne confessed to assisting Quinn with this work and the creation of another 70 paintings and drawings. The representatives confirmed this and indicated that *The Bridgelizard* would include roughly 100 illustrations.

In February 2023, Lawrence Quinn posted to a fan website: "BL is finished. Receiving my final edit process. Publish date is for November 10th. Regards, Lawrence Claudius Robert Quinn".



*poetry by Sarah Luisa  
Kuhlewind*

## *Roadtrips*

Driving in my car  
The little champagne metallic  
In between the Northern nowheres  
Listening to teenie love songs  
Kissing on the narrow side walks

Dreaming of our car  
A convertible pink one  
In between rough cliffs and surfs  
Writing stories, our ping pongs  
Holding hands the whole way long

Diving in the sea  
Beneath apricot colored skies  
In between the night and day  
‘Making our dreams come true’  
I start the car and say



# Sunset, Sunrise

Looking at you  
Chestnut honey brown  
Sunset  
Already lost in eyes  
Making time slow down

Laying next to you  
In crisp white sheets  
Night sky  
The world asleep  
Just us, endless repeats

Thinking of you  
Looking out the windows  
Sunrise  
It's all butterflies  
And pink flamingos

# The Path of Rhododendron

*Vanessa Houlan*

All that which is written here is recent. Our words are recent.

My boyfriend and I went through hell to be together. We tried not to three times, in different ways and for different reasons. Failing fast and effectively. I have never known a man to be so persistent, patient, hopeful.

There had been ample opportunity for either of us to 'get out' – I even left him. A fear response. A mismanaged reaction. I hinted at reunion and he dived in, slowly preparing, and then a crash into the water.

What did we have against us?

Nothing much; death, mental illness, new employment, unemployment, rising living costs, family troubles, pressure, pressure, pressure.

I was reticent to live with him. I wanted a Plan B. He seemed hurt. I said I was stressed. He fretted about whether I liked "our plan". His idea, our plan.

"No pressure," I always said, "we have a lot on."

"Our stress heightens the feeling of vulnerability. We need to treat ourselves after you move in," he always replied.

Support, long kisses, playful sex. Gripping my hand tight as we cross roads. "Can I take off your make up?", "Come to the toilet with me?", "Have you eaten?", "I can't wait to see you. When are you coming here?"

We are so far from perfect. We are so far from where we could be.

We found a path lined with purple rhododendron. I placed a bud in my hair and he sighed. He sent the photos to his mother.

"We can't measure love.", "Do you think I'm stupid?"

"No, I don't. You are just naïve for your age. That isn't stupid."

"You're right. I'm sorry."

Over the past few months, I grew attached to the magnolia tree in the garden. High, we chased each other around it in the dark. Helicopters and stars above. The previous summer he had found the weed in good quality packaging on the pavement. It has lasted us into May. We have lasted into May.

I felt myself grow in forward-looking strength. He had a paralysing fear of failure.

"Do you think I'm stupid?"

"No, I don't. By the way, have you ever lied to me?"

"Lying to you would put me in the hospital."

I fear myself at times. I seek the help I need. He likes to help me. Men like feeling needed. I like to help him. Women – vice versa.



In the shower, he put his face between my butt-cheeks. I yelped,  
 “What on earth - ?” Everyone knows we shower together.  
 He would rub his cheek against my eczema-ravaged hands. Kissed them always.

I give him an out for everything.  
 Are we softest to those our psyche considers weak?

“Could you please remove the emojis from your ex-boyfriend’s name?”  
 “Shit – I forgot. Sorry. And, could you tell me if your ex-girlfriend messages you?”  
 We held hands.  
 He likes to read my work aloud.  
 We are so far from perfect.

On the night we had herring, was he okay then? So mundane I cannot remember. I scan seeking changes. I found none, now I retroactively scan, and I cannot remember.

We were living together before we lived together. Then, my whole life in his house for one week. I cut the keys on the Friday.  
 “Shall we get a kitten when we have our own place?” or something to that effect.  
 Why did I feel the need to hug him so hard after work?  
 “We can’t measure love.”  
 He sent the photos to his mother.  
 “Ути, моя хорошая.”  
 What did we have against us?  
 “We can manage this.”

A panic attack in early May. The meds zombified him.  
 Is it all a colossal fake? Is it all a conspiratorial misdirect?

Moments before, he smiled and removed the nail paint from my toenails.

We are so far from perfect.  
 I try to measure love because it scares me.  
 I make a Plan B.

We fall asleep holding one another.  
 I want to walk back down the path of rhododendron. I gave him an out for everything. If he wants. He does not have to.  
 “I want.”

Back to the Friday. He tells his sister stories of when we met. Everyone already knows them. He smiles at me across the room.  
 He has said things that do not make sense.  
 “Do you think I’m stupid?”  
 “No, darling. I’ll keep reassuring you. Have you done anything with another girl?”  
 “No. I’ll keep reassuring you.”

We need a lot of reassurance. We never shout or scream. Sometimes voices clip, but they soften like our expressions do. We are far from perfect as we fall asleep holding one another.

"If you were ill in hospital, I'd stay there all night with you.", "If you got really sick and went to the toilet all over yourself, I would wash you in the bathroom and bring you back clean to the bed."

Did it start with me, or his fear of what I may do? I give him outs for everything.  
He dips me, kisses me, grins.  
He wants to try it on the sofa, against the counter, in the garden.  
"You're my best friend." It is a "I Love You".  
Under outside pressure and far from perfect.

A note explaining the hope he had. You only hope for what you do not have. What do you hope for now? I tore up the note.  
"Are you scared now? Now that I'm angry?"  
"Maybe you're too beautiful?"  
All of those times when my face was perfect. We were far from perfect. Then my face, a stain of perfection on self-loathing.

Here is your toothbrush. Here is your drawer. Here are your towels.  
I pack my toothbrush, empty my drawer, bag my towels.

Just Friends do not kiss. Just Friends do not fuck.

Those times when we tried not to be together; "How long as just friends?", "I want to be with you again."

He wanted all of it.

Then, sometimes, She's going to leave you. She doesn't even know it yet. She's going to realise you're stupid, and leave you.

Then me, sometimes, He doesn't love you. You can't trust him.

He said: Too beautiful, too temperamental, too clever, too good.

He said: Моя хорошая.

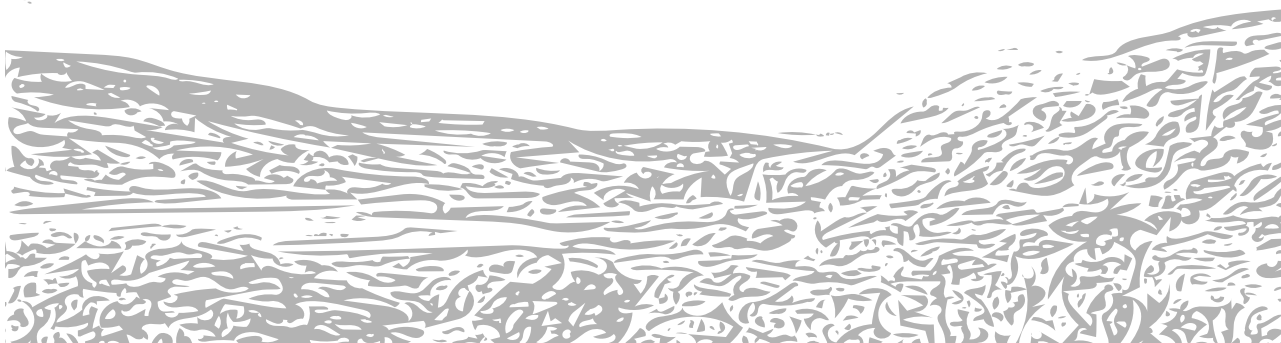
He redacted all his reasons, and cannot find that which sent me here. They say he does not know what he has done, but I do.

I am too familiar with what comes after a death. I have seen a few now, this is like one.

You repeat the story and you scan it.

On that Saturday night, something split, unattached, acted and gained control. I wait for the original. Where is my version?

I see him walk towards Loss along the path lined with purple rhododendron. I send the photos after him to my mother.





dawn

*by Julia Kaczmarek*

*Flash Fiction winner*

## *Guide to Walking through the Woods in Winter*

*Marcelo Medone*

In the first place, you must ask yourself about the real need to embark on this eventful expedition. If you really want to take a risk, you should know that there are three rules for walking through the woods.

As a first rule, I recommend you go during the daytime. The night usually brings unpleasant surprises. Likewise, you must avoid the hours of dawn and dusk, which are preferred by the inhabitants of darkness to ambush the unwary; if possible, choose a clear day. Do not go with fog, rain or thunderstorm, because dark forests usually come alive under those atmospheric conditions. Don't give advantages to your enemies.

As a second rule, get appropriate clothing for your adventure: pants and warm shirt, half-cane leather boots, a camouflaged jacket that allows you freedom of movement and a Stetson hat to prevent the sun from blinding you before penetrating deep into the forest. In addition, you must provide yourself with basic weapons: a pistol with enough ammunition to dispatch four or five outlaws, a metal cross to scare away vampires, a sharp spear to impale zombies and a spray with phosphorescent paint to discover invisible ghosts that can get in your way, because dark forests are always plagued by ghosts and supernatural beings.

It also doesn't hurt to carry a compass to orient yourself in case you lose sight of the sun and don't know where the north is. Otherwise, you could end up walking around in circles. As optional equipment, you can include a mini camera that you will attach to your military jacket, so you can show your adventure to your friends when you return to your dull and boring life in the city.

Finally, if you hear terrifying shrieks, laments from beyond the grave, and anguished cries for help, ignore them and keep your eyes on. It is known that more than one adventurer has fallen into these traps when he was about to finish his tour.

Please take great care of yourself: unforeseen events can arise every second. Never trust the apparent calm of a peaceful forest. Nature can be deceptive. Unfortunately, despite all these warnings, the last volunteers who have received my advice have not returned.

I'll be waiting for you with a hot coffee and some brownies.



summer wind  
*by Julia Kaczmarek*

# Review: *you stupid slut* by nat raum

*Alex Carrigan*

It's quite easy to look back on one's youth and feel a mixture of regretful longing and secondhand embarrassment. Realizing how you spent these formative years and what you can take away from them may help lead to a more stable and fulfilling adulthood, but it can also be an exploration of trauma and regret. How one chooses to use the knowledge gained from this reflection can vary, and for this author, it's a chance to experiment with how one can recollect.

In nat raum's *you stupid slut* (Dream Boy Book Club, 2022), they use an examination of their late teens and early 20's in Baltimore, Maryland, to create a hybrid memoir. The collection combines various forms of poetry alongside photography and mixed media created from various scraps and items. This produces a work that feels like what happens when you clear out a drawer you tend to dump whatever was in your pockets into, and how rifling through it reveals what you chose to hold onto the moment you placed it in.

Throughout raum's work, the reader is never allowed to feel settled into their story. The pieces in the collection are not told sequentially and often drift in and out of time, usually focusing on raum's state of mind in a particular moment that may not feel greatly important to some but left an impact on them. Even how raum chooses to present these anecdotes varies in format. Some of the textual pieces are presented in different poetic forms, such as verse poetry or prose poetry, while others take more hybrid formats. There are several poems in the collection in which raum creates poetry in the form of Wikipedia articles or material safety data sheets.

These poetic styles help compartmentalize the memories and provide structure for raum to examine these moments. For example, each of the material safety data sheets in the collection refer to a different a form of liquor as the material in question, such as Fireball whiskey or Sutter House White Zinfandel, to examine memories and emotions. In the poem "stop signs," when providing the physical description for Fireball, raum writes, "when you were four or five, you were obsessed with stop signs and the number nineteen, convinced you'd have it together enough by your last teenage year that you'd have seen as many different stop signs in that time." While the reader may not understand the connection between Fireball and stop signs, their writing implies that the memory somehow emerged through the imbibing of this liquor, giving an idea of how they connect senses to memory.

Mixed media is also used to provide poetic verses in other pieces. These are generally presented as full spreads in which raum uses text overlaid collages of their own photography and other found objects. The piece "ouroboros or secrets to tell strangers" present lines like "i wish there were a way for me to explain to everyone i know that i'm incredibly socially anxious right now and that it's really hard for me to interact with people outside of a very specific and very small circle of close friends." These lines are positioned next to scans of

Baltimore transit tickets and a café punch card, items that can cause general anxiety for city folk. “i’m worried i’m becoming so exhausted that i’m losing all of my fight and passion...” they write later in the section.

However, while raum’s collection looks to examine the disillusionment of early adulthood, it’s also used to examine some more difficult subjects. As noted, many of the pieces in this section involve substance usage, and are explored in pieces like “red sangria,” where raum writes about working in a restaurant the night of the 2016 election, showing the anxiety that emerged as the election results slowly crept in. Other pieces explore sensitive subjects like sexual assault, something that is often explored in the collage spreads, as if the author is trying to organize their thoughts to process the matter by fishing for a post-it congratulating them for “saving Hyrule” alongside modified Pokémon cards depicting STDs. While it can read as dredging up negativity for the sake of creating art, you stupid slut feels more like an attempt to catalog and move past these moments. In “at the bewitching hour,” raum writes: “let it be known: i am not grateful / for tragedy. i hold no love / for the years that have worn me / thin as lived-in cotton, down to my / memory who chose to keep only / silence.”

The complexity and care that raum uses to form you stupid slut creates a memoir that is a colorful and confrontational examination of one artist’s foray into adulthood. While one may view these years as experiments and regrets, by focusing on how they can be used to create new art, raum’s memoir elevates these experiences into a rumination of what is held and what is let go. It asks the reader to consider what parts of our life go into the junk drawer and what parts are transformed into something new, and what was used to help move that process along.



*Thank you for reading and supporting  
Writer's Block Magazine*



interested in helping Writer's Block?  
*we accept donations  
check our website*



interested in contributing  
to our magazine?  
*send submissions to:  
writerssblock@gmail.com*

