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Volume 5.1  
Summer 2021



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a journal curating literary arts

Volume 5.1

Summer 2021

# *indicia*

a journal curating literary arts

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Summer 2021

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# editors' introduction

*indicia*: in-DISHy-yuh

*n. pl.* (1) differentiating marks, characters, or signs, or (2) a biannual literary arts magazine — featuring poetry, flash and short prose, and art — that says “out with the old guard, in with the noobs.”

For each issue of *indicia*, we seek poems, art, and short prose that hunker down at the fringes of the experimental and the accessible, with a special emphasis on developing their own sense of play. What we generally receive fills out the vast spectrum of these qualities, and the ones that make the biggest impression on us as vibrant, necessary, and/or bizarre are presented within these pages.

If there's one thing you should keep in mind while reading this issue, it's to keep some snacks handy. These works drip with the juice of transmutation, seizing the moment's spirit of nostalgia, loss, hunger, exploration, and acceptance of the fact that omelets require a few broken eggs. So pull up a chair, fluff your napkin, and stuff your voracious face.

*AJ Urquidi & Marcus Clayton*

Executive Editors



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• i o i a  
i ai i

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I'm not there, scaling the memories  
of my own country word  
by jagged word

— Wendy Xu, "Reading the Canon"



# How Mạ Makes Rice

*Jason Yore*

Take at least three scoops from wherever it has been hidden and listen to the grains scatter in your vessel.

Slide the bag or box back before you move onto the next step.

If you're able, let ice cold water flow into this basin. Even if your fingers are numb, continue to mix well until the water turns to milk.

Drain and rinse again. I've been told to repeat this until everything is clear or at least less murky.

Once you're satisfied with the conditions, plunge your index finger straight down like an anchor until you've reached the bottom.

Take your middle finger and curl it back into a backwards P, the one you kept making well into first grade, measuring the line where rice meets water.

Bring your index finger back up and touch the soft, white bedding, middle finger still curled into its shape — a sign you'd learned to make before signs ever mattered, before affiliations ever mattered.

Now ask yourself, does the water touch the belly of this intersection? If it doesn't, add more until it does. If it does, you're ready.

You may find that all this is only tradition and starting means starting after you've made the necessary considerations. Start making rice before you start making anything else, she said, because you'll forget it and it's the most important aspect of any meal.

The last part is just finding the right balance between boiling and steaming. In between rage and rest.

This is hard to teach and harder to learn, so you make rice every day for every meal until it makes you proud, until it's the centerpiece of all you've created.

# *yure* pirate glove

*J. D. Nelson*

that frog sound is the wall of the right egg  
the key of the denver tooth rug

this could be the tree of the fresh brain  
that bread is the structure to glow

we are the science to win that love  
a clock of the wheelbarrow and the earth chews

the slug of the shrimp  
we can be the *sluck*

the oreo time packet in the land of the seven  
where the cranked apple knows us





# When Leela Talkies Went Silent

*Murali Kamma*

“Best movie to capture the Emergency: *Jaws*. Scary!”

“Not sure. How about *The Poseidon Adventure* or *The Towering Inferno*?”

“Don’t know about the Emergency. Best movie of the 1970s: *Star Wars*.”

“Why not *Sholay*?”

“Wrong group for *Sholay*! *The Godfather* is the best movie of the 1970s. Period. Please don’t ask if it’s 1 or 2.”

This text exchange among members of a WhatsApp group called Leela Land wasn’t untypical, and even the youngest members, now in their forties, knew that the Emergency, lasting close to two years in the mid-1970s, referred to a period of draconian rule when civil liberties were suspended in the nation and any opposition to the party in power was crushed ruthlessly, with many citizens ending up in prison.

Leela Land — formed before *La La Land* was released, as some were quick to point out — saw a sharp rise in texting following an announcement that the historic Leela Talkies, already shuttered and in disrepair, would be demolished. The news, spreading like a jungle fire, brought fans of Leela online to commiserate and figure out a way to save the theatre. But it soon became clear that any agitation would be foolish, given how they seemed to be living through a second Emergency under an increasingly autocratic government. While it was okay to talk about the intolerant ways of earlier regimes, anybody questioning the current government could be called anti-national and face

harassment. The right-wing party's minions were known to lurk on social media, ready to pounce and troll any "unpatriotic" critics no matter how mild the criticism.

So, abandoning their protests, which would have been fruitless anyway, the WhatsApp members began to share fond memories of movies they'd seen at the theatre.

Leela Landers were, for the most part, the more educated subset of the moviegoers who had patronized the theatre over the years. Nevertheless, few of them were art cinema enthusiasts, for art house favourites never came to Leela, even though it had been the only theatre in town to show foreign cinema. What drew these fans was solid entertainment — films like *Enter the Dragon*, *Dirty Harry*, *The Exorcist* — and glimpses of a world that had little to do with their everyday lives. Yes, it was escapism, but it wasn't anything like what they found at the town's numerous other theatres showing domestic films. Local cinema held no surprises — it was comfort food. But Leela provided something different, and when a new foreign movie opened there, the excitement among fans was palpable, with tickets for the first few days selling out like the hot pakoras of their favourite food cart vendor near the theatre.

Watching a movie at Leela was a treat, as if they were enjoying a restaurant meal that was exotically different from the home-cooked food they ate every day. "Foreign" here meant English-language movies without subtitles. Many educated fans had no trouble with the speech, but for the others, because of the accent or because they hadn't learned English formally, the conversation would have been hard to follow. That hardly diminished their pleasure.

The '70s and '80s were Leela's golden age. While the theatre was older, its popularity grew dramatically after it began screening only foreign movies, for which the owners gained exclusive rights in their town. For two solid decades, Leela reigned as a mecca for lovers of English-language movies. Enclosed in a gated area at one end of Cinema Road, the soaring building — awash in a vibrant mix of indigo, yellow, pink, and orange — looked like a cathedral. And in a sense, Leela

Talkies was a house of worship. It had no doubt seen better days, and the intricately carved ceiling couldn't hide the discomfort of lumpy, squeaky red seats. Cigarettes, though forbidden, were sneaked in, and careless smokers left burns and holes. Greasy food was another problem, sometimes leaving stains that couldn't be easily removed. None of this bothered the audience, who found the theatre's faded grandness comforting — and once the lights dimmed, they were magically transported to another world.

But by the early '90s, even before the malls and multiplexes came along, Leela Talkies had lost its mojo. Seemingly overnight, it seemed, television antennae and satellite dishes sprouted like weeds and wild mushrooms all over town, turning its residents into hermits once daylight leaked out of the sky. The most serious blow came in the form of video rental stores. People could now watch all sorts of movies in the comfort of their homes — and they did.

Leela continued to screen foreign films, and there were half-hearted attempts at renovation, but only die-hard fans still showed up regularly — although even they didn't linger before or after a show. The food carts near the theatre saw a rapid decline in their business.

In the '80s, on the other hand, a crowd would gather near the theatre well before showtime — to eat, gossip, drink, argue. Often, movie buffs would eagerly head straight to Leela from their offices in work clothes and mingle with younger folks, many of whom were still in college, and retirees who had lots of time to shoot the breeze. Like age disparities, class distinctions and socioeconomic circumstances didn't matter, with the great equalizer being their fondness for Leela. It was a club that didn't discriminate, and a ticket was the only requirement for admission. They chatted as equals, without any awkwardness, because the only topic for discussion was cinema — or more accurately, English-language cinema.

Hierarchies were irrelevant, as was fluency in English. They barely mentioned what they did for a living and they all spoke in the local language. In the lobby during intermission, as food

vendors did a brisk business, an office peon or a shop assistant would talk easily to a bank executive, a doctor, or a college lecturer. Even the presence of a high-ranking official from the local government didn't intimidate moviegoers.

While old-timers liked to reminisce about Leela's early days, the younger crowd focused on current movies — although “current” was a relative term back then, because the movies they watched at Leela were a few years old. That wasn't a problem, but what bothered the fans — sometimes passionately — was the censor's scissors. A favourite game, while they waited to enter the theatre, was to guess which racy or controversial bits had been cut from the last movie at Leela. Or they would talk about the performances they liked or disliked.

\* \* \*

“Wasn't there a tense period in the mid-80s as well?” a fan asked on WhatsApp.

“Indeed. The PM was assassinated, leading to a horrific massacre by rampaging hordes. We were somewhat insulated from the troubles here on the coast. Still, Leela was a refuge for fans during stressful times.”

“But not in the '90s.”

“Ah, that's because Leela was no longer the same. The decline had begun ... people had other refuges. Satellite TV, video stores, the internet. They stayed home, mostly.”

“What were some award winners that came to Leela in the '80s?” somebody texted, bringing the discussion back to cinema.

“*Chariots of Fire, Gandhi, Tootsie, The Last Emperor, Rain Man, etc.*”

“What about *Back to the Future* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*?”

“Those movies were popular here, but they didn’t win Oscars.”

“True. It’s good to know Leela’s range was broad.”

“Of course. Fairly broad, I’d say. We had Sunday morning double features that drew an enthusiastic crowd. Usually, the second film would be lighter fare.”

As the 1980s ended, bringing a sudden increase in TV ownership, there was a noticeable drop in Leela’s weekday audience. And by the early 1990s, when satellite television and video players gave viewers wide options, even weekend audiences began to shrink, reducing the theatre’s revenue. Although Leela Talkies no longer held a monopoly on foreign films, it continued attracting a smaller but die-hard crowd that stoically endured, week after week, deteriorating conditions at the theatre, where the owners didn’t seem to have enough money and interest to repair the air-conditioning system, replace a temperamental projector, or even fix the broken seats. The lobby, with its frayed carpet and musty smell, looked empty and uninviting, and since snacks were no longer available inside, filmgoers stepped out during intermission. The conversations were less animated, and devout fans mournfully wondered how long Leela would last. The web, arriving like a cyclone with its flood of information from the outside world, delivered another blow. But the theatre managed to stay in business — until, just before the century and millennium ended, the doors closed abruptly. It was the end of an era.

Leela Landers were familiar with the movies released in the ’90s. Their favourites ranged from blockbusters — *Jurassic Park, Titanic, Independence Day*, and so on — to films that were especially popular with the Sunday morning crowd. Those included *Schindler’s List, The Shawshank Redemption,*

*Forrest Gump*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *The Sixth Sense*. Even *Life Is Beautiful*, which wasn't in English, made a splash.

Leela Talkies was sold in the twenty-first century, but any hope for its revival was short-lived. Looking to turn things around, the new owners abandoned foreign films, which weren't cheap to import, and focused on domestic cinema. Leela no longer had a special role, and to the chagrin of fans, it became indistinguishable from the other theatres in town. When this strategy didn't work — not surprisingly, given the intense competition — the owners resorted to another, more dubious strategy, sending shock waves through the Leela community. They began screening, discreetly at first, adult movies late at night. It didn't take long for the word to spread, causing outrage and bringing a stern response from local officials.

No other old movie theatre still standing had the stature of Leela, even if its forlorn state evoked sorrow more than nostalgia. Responding to the clamour of movie buffs, the government decided to buy it. But the timing was off because of a contentious election that brought a populist right-wing government to power. Even at the local level, newly elected officials became nervous and unsympathetic to preservationist causes. And the nationalist government, seeing the already closed Leela as “a purveyor of foreign and pornographic films,” decided to tear it down.

Like a solitary prisoner condemned to death, the locked and lightless Leela Talkies, looking pitiful, awaited the final act of destruction.

And then came a last-minute reprieve, surprising just about everybody. In a terse statement, the government called off the demolition and said that a committee would be formed immediately to explore its fate. What led to this astonishing decision? Nobody knew, but that didn't stop people from offering their views. The most bizarre explanation, shared almost like a joke to entertain friends and relatives, was also the most popular one.

In cafes, workplaces, and homes, it was said that Leela Talkies — desolate and off limits during the day — came alive at night, albeit discreetly, for a select group of patrons. Only invited fans were allowed in to watch a movie, late at night on certain occasions. It wasn't clear how they got chosen or who the choosers were, because nobody passing the theatre at such an ungodly hour would have an inkling about the goings-on.

So why then was this rumour floating around? Because it was the age of disinformation and conspiracy theories, a few noted with knowing smiles, and it wasn't hard to spread all kinds of nonsense. People believed what they wanted to believe, and two plus two didn't equal four. Maybe these patrons weren't real, they added, clearly tickled; maybe they were ghosts.

Ghosts! There was scoffing and much chatter about confusing reel life with real life. When the movies *Ghost* and *Ghostbusters* were mentioned, nobody could remember watching them at Leela. Inevitably, there were folks who didn't find this talk ludicrous — and they even claimed, with a straight face, that if one passed by Leela Talkies at three in the morning, it wouldn't be unusual to see a faint glow emanating from the theatre.

It was also said that, following the “death sentence” on Leela, a fan managed to sneak into the theatre and scatter the ticket stubs he'd saved over the years. On seeing them, the new officials inspecting the theatre found the nocturnal shows believable.

But could they be so gullible?

Why not? It could have spooked them, people said in hushed tones. The officials, known to be superstitious and insecure, were perfectly capable of believing such rubbish. Maybe they thought the theatre was jinxed. Acting in haste could backfire.

Whatever the reason for the government's change of heart, resignation turned to relief for Leela Landers, at least for the time being. They went back to discussing movies. On one occasion, a WhatsApp member who was now living abroad with his daughter said that many of the films he'd seen at Leela in the '60s were available on a popular streaming platform. It led to a flurry of excitement.

“Can you name some of those movies?” somebody texted.

“Early James Bond — the best. Hitchcock. But also, movies like *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* and *Bullitt*.”

“What about the wonderful movies inspired by World War Two?”

“Not to mention *The Sound of Music* and *My Fair Lady*.”

“Of course. You can also include Spaghetti Western films and grand period dramas like *Spartacus* and *Cleopatra*.”

And so, as these lively exchanges continued on WhatsApp, it seemed as if the days of Leela Talkies had never really ended.

A flat-bottomed boat with two men, upright  
as the statues they would like to be:  
an old man at the bow, a boy at the rudder.

*Margarita Serafimova*



# Dead Johnny

*Prachi Valechha*





# Thermometer Rises in Charcoaled Ch(*iors*)arity

*Heath Brougher*

Heat(*hermometer*)er sis(*sy*)ter s(*cissorkick*)trong

diptych(**9**) diphtheria

everyone's at home

- to out(*run*)wit the monst(*rosities*)ers of Covidian breeze ,,
- Wambles awaken, begin to stuff t(*ow*)oes and brains into *anglets* ,,
- (!!!!)

just as the Dysania to commod(*d*)ities,, san(*d*)ity's Griffiage ,,

we noticed even the girl from the moon

was suffering

- bouts of ex(*temilly manifested*)haustion ,,
- s(*w*)ore throated words ,,
- headspace headached ,,
- respiratorities d(*epressed*)istressed,,

*roughly as healthy as the filth of the rampant*

————<>————)(**eather**————>——>————

Fripperies slip

Chiffons of how

we got into logotype logleaden treestumps ,,

a Petroleum Tree will die to(*o*)m(*any*)orrow

a**MiD** these 2Os so(*wn*) rougely roarless ,,

- **UN**ripe ,,
- **UN**ruly

((**ZIP ZAP A ZOOT BAZOOKA**))

sounds(*ilently*)cape  
among this rough de(*ad*)cade.....  
thus f(*oregone conclusion*)ar————> so,  
where's that th(*endoftheworld*)ermometer?;

# Fringe Glitter

*Connor Fisher*

start with an anecdote about composition  
the rule of thirds as another architecture

discrete endings ping off one another  
the girl opens an envelope marked

“photographed topography pulled in increments  
through a bird’s eye,” dust on its surface

where oiled feathers stick out like nouns but  
don’t touch the scripted emblems around them

stuffed in dress shoes’ miserable geometry  
next door to a pile of empty luggage

she made a sentence with fringe glitter  
another glassless pane to peer out from

fires were disappearing from the village  
a chanted voiceover made the needle flux

# Resistance in a Chrysalis

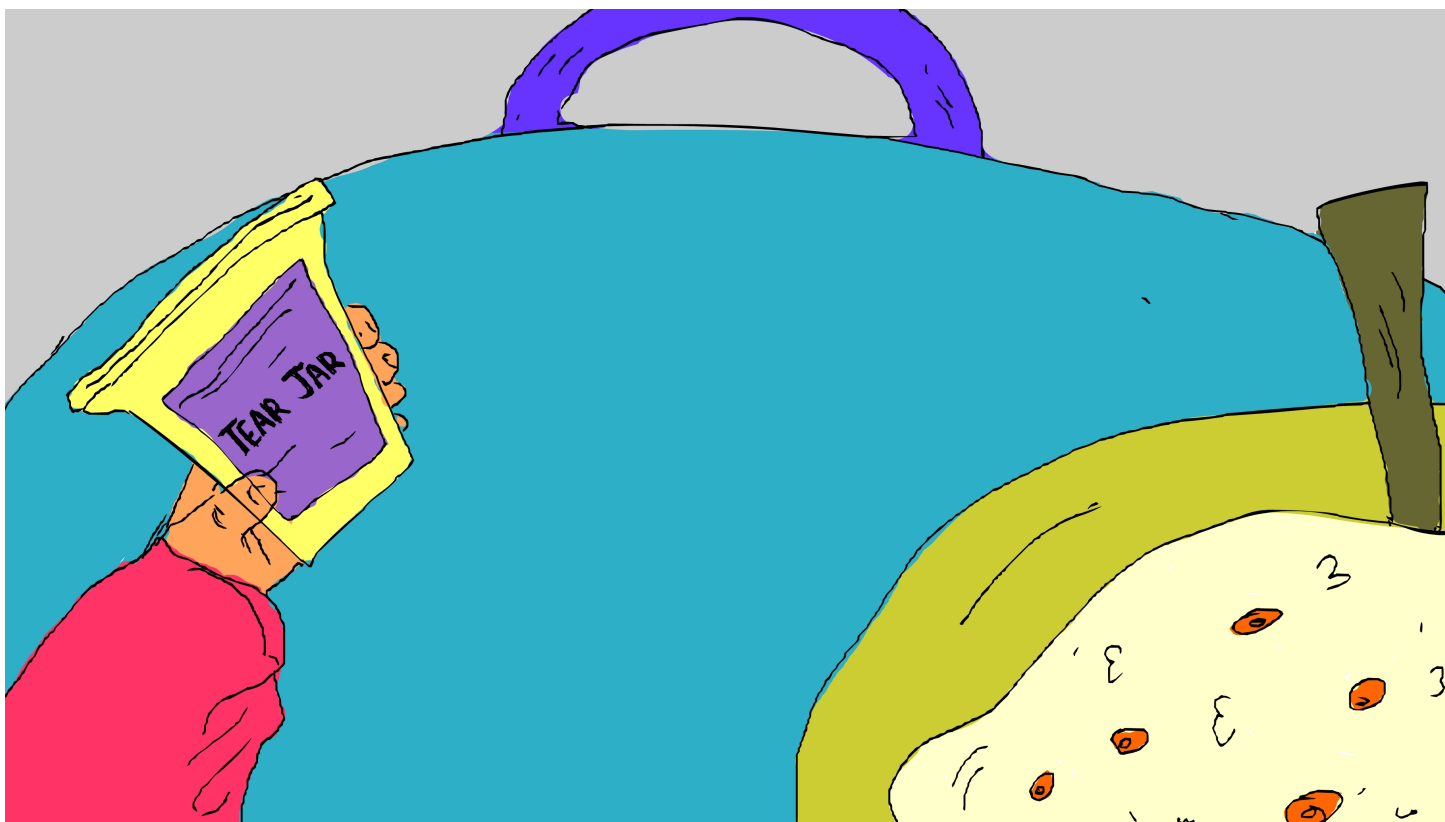
*Amy Poague*

Your imaginal cells ask what weather  
you are under. The progenitors of eyes

anticipate gazing up —  
yet there was never weather above.

That disinterest from the sky:  
*What I just did felt like smiling*

*Felt like trying so hard without a face*



## Loveapple

*Prachi Valechha*



# Attempted Life

*Salvatore Difalco*

I tried pure psychic automatism to get through the mornings. I intended to express verbally the real functioning of my mind. Did I believe in the superior reality of my thus far neglected associations? Did I believe that dreams were fundamental? Did I espouse an undirected play of thought? I never thought about it in those terms. I was not concerned with the hierarchies contained within my persona and my consciousness. I grew tired of inventing little people to reenact my mental Civil Wars. And yet this was the art — *opera di pupi* by any metric. During the dark hours I reverted to primitivism, stripping naked, wrestling myself on the floor, and jumping rope. Reason controlled none of my behaviours. I stopped eating and sometimes I would just whirl and whirl like a dervish until I began to hallucinate. Was it a good thing or a bad thing? I will not enforce a binary on this question. What is clear, what is perhaps painfully clear, is that prolonged periods of solitude lead to all manner of strangeness. Not a stretch to suggest that many have gone quietly mad during this time, or not so quietly. The other day all hell broke loose in the street below. I stepped out on my balcony and saw an unmasked woman with a burst of white hair wrestling with another woman who was masked. The masked woman was perhaps ten or twenty years her junior, but she was losing the tussle. The unmasked woman, white hair on end, grabbed the other woman's scarf and whipped her around like a crash test dummy. This stopped traffic. Cars and trucks began to blow their horns. I heard men and women shouting. Finally a trucker jumped down from his five-ton and tried to intervene. He wasn't wearing a mask, but this seemed insignificant. He stepped between the women, but the unmasked woman continued whipping around the other one with great energy and shouting obscenities that made me blush. Even from my eighth-floor perch I could see how

bloodshot and screwy her eyes were. Finally several other people intervened and separated the women. Then a masked man began to scold the truck driver for not wearing a mask, even wagging his finger at him. Was I surprised when the trucker decked him with a right hook? I was not. I think the mayhem continued for a time. I could hear yelling and honking and such from my study, and then the sirens. After I wrote the word *sirens*, I went to bed and patted my empty stomach.

# Parent Child Interaction Therapy

*Cameron Morse*

*Thank you for being  
a good listener*

the puppet tells  
my son therapist

Britney's hand  
up its bum

on the iPhone  
before she goes

dark wanting  
to watch unnoticed

to examine  
our interactions

whispering  
through  
me

the wire  
I'm wearing

I'm not supposed  
to be aware

of wearing  
the words to say



# Deworm

*Prachi Valechha*





# Molten Indolence

*Jill Pearlman*

i

God, fabulous Levantine  
lounging over chaos in a carmine silk robe,  
idle creator dreaming with head in his palm —

they say he's orderly, separating everything  
but what creator really has that going on —

in the ongoing,  
chaos is always swirling.

ii

I, myself, my desk  
where the facts forget themselves

on the screen where we scroll  
as of old — turn, turn Torah, everything is in it

and sheaves and sheets of notepaper beside my computer  
scrawls of black ink

bits and pieces of voices  
dispersed by winds gathered by new winds

full of all-and nothing  
promiscuity:

Dispersal of the self. One reason to travel.  
*Mole Negro. Taco Barbacoa. 6:30.*

*From my flesh I see the Divine,  
Job verse 19*

*Amtrak. Electric bill.*

iii

The badger, under a bed of leaves  
collages old obsessions. They lie dormant,  
suck up elements  
of overlapping sisterness  
of endless difference slighter than we think

to faithfully resurface to gleam  
to stitch themselves in light rain this way and that  
like spider threads unattached  
to dormers or corners of the room

a meal's vocabulary forming itself —  
fleshy artichoke hearts part of the  
endless combinations in the query of each day.

New sentences stir like leaves and bits,  
for the listening ear, keen  
unrushed

and sounds muse in profusion  
making songs from seven notes

# Another Way to Go

*Chris Page*

I got there late, almost sundown. The sky was the sky, full of color. Wind moved the brown grass the way it does. The pillbox that James leased from the city looked much like it had in 1943, being rushed to completion by the Department of Defense. Its lone eyelet, now boarded up, of course, squinted over the cliffs, scanning for an enemy that never appeared. The generator we put in grunted and squealed but was definitely broken. The pump quivered limply, its gasket split, leaking fumes. Fumes.

I bit down like I was a character in a story, set my jaw. I disarmed the padlock and placed my open palm on the iron door. It wasn't cold.

\* \* \*

James was great at talking. He could read people's pinch points like a chakra map. It was like he knew the story everyone told themselves, especially widows and widowers. Our younger clients, the ones with one-in-a-million medical conditions or barely survivable injuries, they were never totally sold. They didn't really believe it. Death wasn't real to them. But the old ones? Suddenly it was all true. Something would happen, and there was no seeing past it. They thought it was real.

I knew he was playing us all, to some extent, but I got played anyway. He read my pinch points in less than five minutes.

“We don’t know for certain, man. I don’t know, sixty, sixty-five percent? The process — the way this thing is going to work is that we have to try. Getting it started is the proof that it *will* work, someday. I don’t know if it will work now — or ten years from now. If not us, you know? That’s the true part. The details might be muddier, but that’s always true. In the meantime, what we’re selling is hope.”

So I signed up because he wasn’t lying — not in the strictest sense. And he gave me enough money. I knew it was half-way rotten. Meg knew too, I think, but she couldn’t toss out the money, either. They were a package: me, the money, the scam. Until the money started to run out, everything seemed like it might work.

The first bodies had their own units. The paperwork was never totally consistent, but we had the lawyer’s okay on all of it. She kept all the points lined up to the regulations, when there were any. James had it set up basically as a morgue. Most of the rules were the same. The first site would have passed inspection, too. It was legit. But he couldn’t actually afford it. He hired me for the first move, and then I started taking on various roles in the outfit. I filed for my cemetery broker’s license, learned the difference between aluminum 2024 and aluminum 5052, and handled payroll, back when we had employees.

After the first site fell through, we moved everyone to a portable truck unit — the six 8 ft x 5 ft pods were unplugged and stored dry, and the bodies were put in MERC bags and cooled without pressure. This violated the contracts, but James promised us all that it was only until we found a new warehouse. The truck was the main site for 6 months. It’s a miracle we kept the MERC’s running the whole time. It only takes a few hours over 32 Fahrenheit to spoil it all. I was the one who found the pillbox. They didn’t know the product we were selling, but everything else was legal, as far as I know. I emptied my old 401K early to put in the generator and keep it running.

\* \* \*

I pressed on the unlocked door and stepped into the dark. It was cooler in there than I expected but not as cold as it should have been. The first thing I smelled was dust — the bits of concrete and sand that littered the abandoned floor. I could see the last remaining pod, with all its hoses and wires intact, glimmer in a shaft of light from the doorway. Its own lights, green and blue toggles, were dead. There were seven people in there. I stepped forward, again letting myself feel hope and validation — the temperature hadn't dropped inside the unit, the seal was secure. I could tell Meg it would be alright.

The next thing I smelled was different. I lurched forward and braced myself up on the pod with a free hand. The other was over my mouth. The metal under my hand was warm.

Inspired by the story of Bob Nelson as retold in *This American Life* Episode 354: “Mistakes Were Made”

# Handling Pills

*Cameron Morse*

Who ever heard of  
cancer catching

a secondhand cancer

caught from linens  
the toilet seat lid

\*

Use a rubber during  
“sexy time”

Touch sparingly  
the spit up  
basin

\*

Bathroom mirror

as if choice  
steers us  
clear

of time and opportunity  
I marry myself

each morning by  
no choice of  
your own

\*

Snowplows swoop  
down Lynn up  
Liberty skipping  
our street completely

disconnected as it is  
from the main  
arteries

high volume  
traffic

loud noise

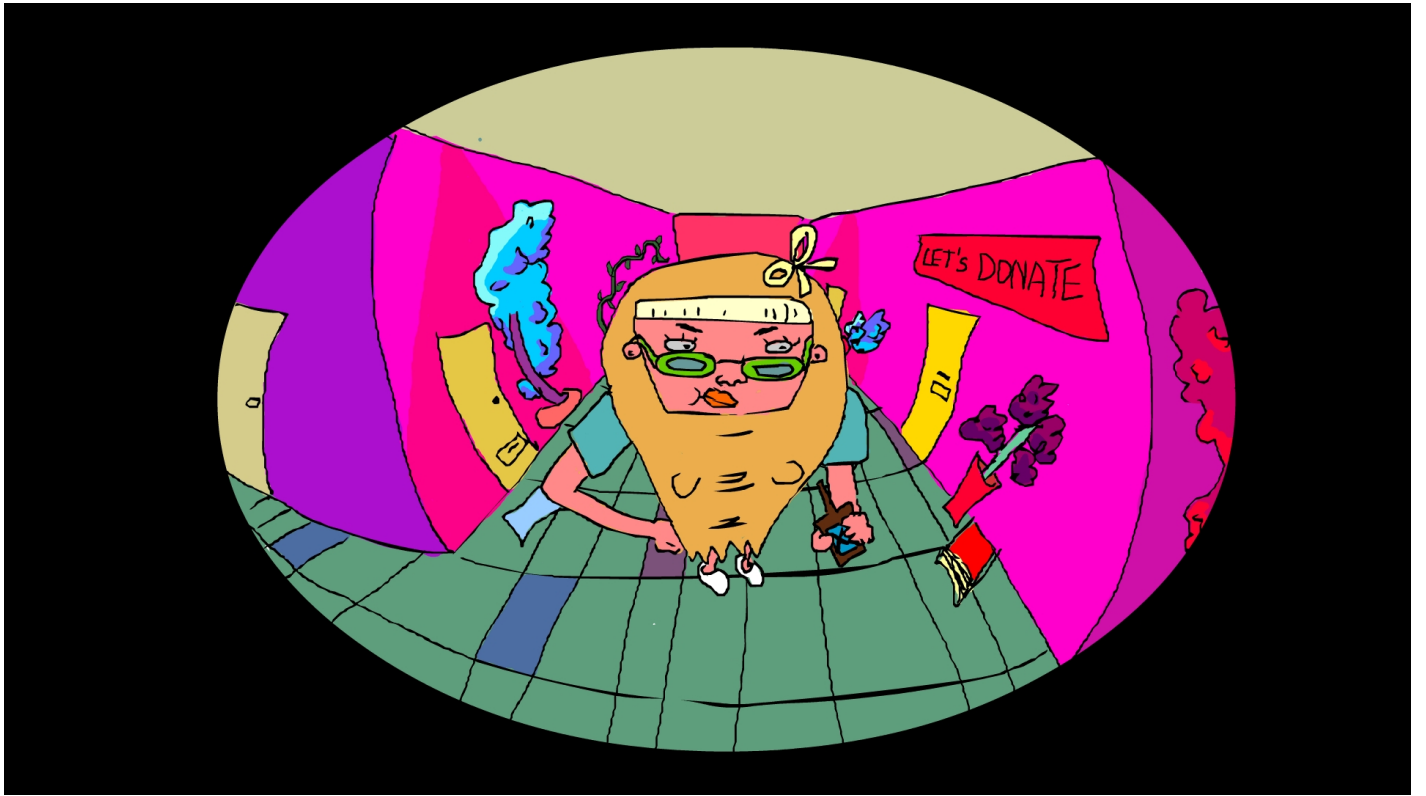
\*

Roughening nights  
a cascade of wet  
beddings

an array of laundry baskets

I curse myself  
for checking the diaper  
with my finger

checking the furnace  
with my finger



## Bad Finger

*Prachi Valechha*



# fry egg tantrum

*Rachel Sandle*

i get  
angry that you try  
to help while i  
am frying an  
egg not  
because i don't  
want to be  
saved (i  
do) but  
because a broken  
yolk is irrevocable.  
you don't

get it! everything  
is ruined. i can't  
eat this and

no one can (you are  
be my not my)

witness.

# the minor chicken on the road with the prole

*J. D. Nelson*

the tree safe is a patty  
this glow is the checker of the salt

the trouble of the night is a mark of the cloud  
the same winter face and the doom fridge

the bright wood of the merry corn  
to win a turkey dollar

be the green dream  
sing to win a tree

the hand is the mirror of the polite day  
the water is a clay burger

the hammer of the glow  
*thwunk tunk* that bellow

that taco is the gum of the rose  
to win with the help of an area code

the meat nearer the eye  
that slam is the caulk of the hair

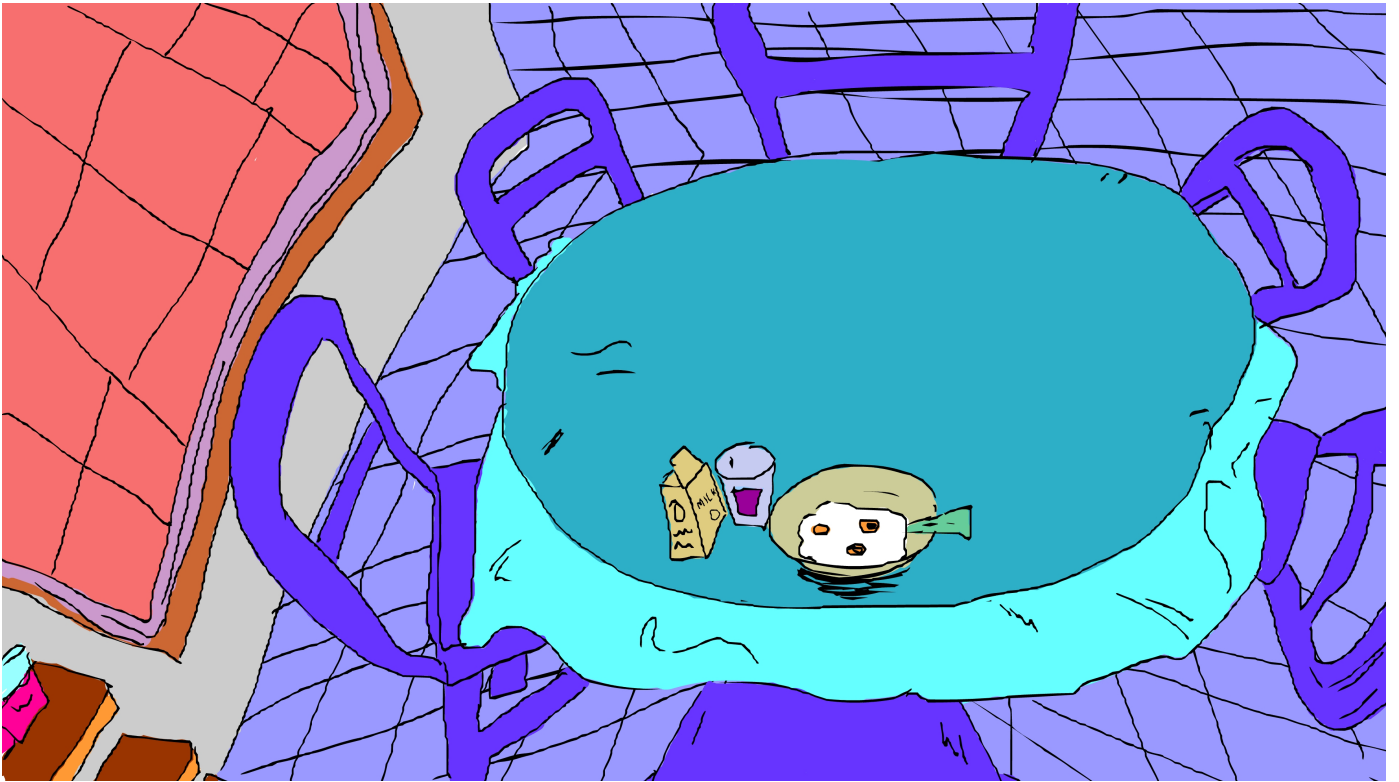
I have regalia.  
World space surrounds me.

*Margarita Serafimova*



# Loveapple

*Prachi Valechha*





# Joe's Car

*Tim Fitts*

Joe's car took a beating. From the second story window of her South Philadelphia rowhome, the woman tossed down her alarm clock, her shoes, her microwave oven, a box of money, a toaster, blender, and a comforter that floated so slowly after the other items that it seemed to be traveling in slow motion. Watching the comforter gave you a sense of vertigo.

All of the items pelted Joe's car. The lights from the police cars lined up on Oregon Avenue flashed all the way down Juniper, intermittently illuminating the woman, her hair down past her naked breasts and hours of screaming had shredded her voice from her voice. The items lay all about Joe's car, his windshield spider-webbed and the roof partially caved in.

I knew it was Joe's car, because every time she tossed her belongings down, the crowd went, "Oh! Joe's car!" I don't know if there was ever a point in the evening when the woman had the crowd's sympathy, but if she had, their sympathies had now clearly shifted to Joe and his automobile, a Yugo.

The crowd shouted for her to jump already. They shouted for the cops to tase her, to shoot her and be done with it. The woman forced her hands upon the window sill and gave a look down one side of the street, then the other. She disappeared, returned with a spray of lighter fluid, a box of tampons, and flung down kitchen knives one by one. "Oh!" they shouted. "Joe's *car!*"

# I wonder if you

*Monica Kim*

I don't remember the first time I met you or even the last time I saw you but I remember glimpses of moments we shared: sitting on the hood of your mom's silver Prius; watching you bound down the stairs of your duplex, skipping the last step; running with our arms behind our backs, imagining we were characters in *Naruto*; kneeling in front of you, behind the dumpster, feigning to plant a kiss on your cheek to deceive the boy who'd been hitting on me the week before.

I wonder if you remember the same things; I wonder if you even remember me at all. I wonder if you're living with your mom, if you're still in the same town, if you went to the state school most people go to, if you have someone you love, if you're happy, and in the back of my mind, if you're sitting in a jail cell or in a prison or had a deadly encounter with police like so many young men who look like you.

But maybe I'm wrong and you're sitting in an office, the same office whose security guard watches your back a for a little longer than you'd like; maybe the encounter with the police wasn't deadly but something meant to fuck with you, the policeman stopping your car just to see the look on your face as you fumbled for your license and code-switched when you replied to his *hey boy what do you have in your car?*

I don't know if any of this has happened and I have no way of knowing; I don't remember your last name, only your first, *Rashaun*, so if I tried to find you on Facebook to answer my questions I'd only meet a million dead ends. I don't know if you wonder about me, the girl who no longer identifies as a girl; I don't know if you wonder about the person whose hoodie you lent when it started raining and we were drenched head to toe on our walk home from school; I don't know if the person you're wondering about is not me but actually my cousin, who you've mistaken for me, like every other person who's mistaken us two because of our black hair and crescent eyes.

I don't remember the first time I started wondering about what trajectory, what universe your life had taken. I wonder if it even matters. But maybe I wonder about you because I wonder what version of myself I would be if I hadn't moved away from you. I don't know if it matters in the end; in the end what memories of you will I keep stored in the crystallized amber of my mind, and what will distort, disintegrate?

And you — what do you remember, what do you wonder?

# Nowhere/Elsewhere

## *A Walking Mirage*

*Chi Kyu Lee*

First Circle We leave the rainbow where no one dares to come  
up to the surface There is no officiality in the womb where the TV lights  
men's glasses with ice cubes long gone No one is watching  
the soccer match It's on to hide the odor of our shame We are playing  
hide-and-seek, praying no one will seek us

Second Circle Gentrified mansaf We can do better elsewhere If this is our comfort  
we might as well drop our faces into the mansaf and pretend we are better

Third Circle Darkness is another womb  
for those who seek a -pologistics to be Two  
men are always searched We (or to be more precise—Our presence)  
wake (wakes) up a guard from his slumber Embassy  
guards don't lose their sight of us two men, afraid still  
the walled womb might be punctured

Inside of the guard post is too bright My face  
is a de -escalator My partner -in-crime  
uses my keffiyeh to dry his forehead and palms

Fourth Circle We are still walking We stretch our time  
knowing too well it will hurt later We believe  
in prophets but they must be wearing  
sunglasses tonight

Fifth Circle We are the same  
in the womb Past lovers make  
one different I am a gold  
star He is not a  
single anything for he loves *The*  
*Dispossessed* We met after  
the children in us started to lock  
their bathroom doors after  
they looked up the definition for "love" in the dictionary  
and could not  
tear it out

### Sixth

Circle (Home to the two  
towers perhaps

never to be completed)

He

me across carries  
the threshold

half is My  
fault -y  
No arch



taunting me?  
funny”

I say “It’s not

but He would not

give

me

a hint

and I cannot

find Him

Eighth

Circle

We ate

a l l

of our

energy  
bars

at

the top

Telling

our

selves

“If the sky  
will

s

we

will climb

two

more

mount

- يَنْ\*“

*of Amman*

\*The accusative ending for the dual form in Arabic, المثنى





# contributors

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**Tim Fitts** is the author of two short story collections, *Hypothermia* (MadHat Press, 2017) and *Go Home and Cry for Yourself* (Xavier Review Press, 2017). His short stories have appeared in journals such as *Granta*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *CutBank*, *Shenandoah*, *The Baltimore Review*, and *Boulevard*, among many others.

**Murali Kamma's** *Not Native: Short Stories of Immigrant Life in an In-Between World* (Wising Up Press) won an Independent Publisher Book Award for multicultural fiction. His fiction has appeared in *The Apple Valley Review*, *Havik*, and *Cooweescoowee*, among other journals, and is forthcoming in *Rosebud* and *Evening Street Review*. He's a contributor to *New York Journal of Books*, and his work has also been published in Wising Up Press anthologies and *The Best Asian Short Stories 2020*. ([www.MuraliKamma.com](http://www.MuraliKamma.com))

**Monica Kim** is a social justice advocate and writer. Born in Seoul, South Korea, she has lived in New Jersey for most of her life and graduated from The University of Michigan with a BA in Honors English. She won the inaugural Jane Kenyon Chapbook Prize Award for her series of multiverse poems and her writing has been published in *The Mantle*, *Okay Donkey*, *Thimble Magazine*, *Stirring*, and the *Michigan Quarterly Review* Online.

**Chi Kyu Lee** (he/him) is a poet. He was born and raised in Seoul, Korea, but grew up in many places (perhaps too many). After graduating from Cornell University, he is pursuing an MFA degree in creative writing at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Website: [www.chikyulee.com](http://www.chikyulee.com)

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**J. D. Nelson** (b. 1971) experiments with words in his subterranean laboratory. His poetry has appeared in many small press publications, worldwide, since 2002. His first full-length collection, entitled *In Ghostly Onehead*, is slated for a 2021 release by mOnocle-Lash Anti-Press. His work has recently appeared in *E ratio*, *Otoliths*, *BlazeVOX*, and *Word For/Word*. Visit [www.MadVerse.com](http://www.MadVerse.com) for more information and links to his published work. Nelson lives in Colorado.

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*A Surgery of a Star*: [www.staringproblempress.com/shop/a-surgery-of-a-star-by-margarita-serafimova](http://www.staringproblempress.com/shop/a-surgery-of-a-star-by-margarita-serafimova)  
*En-tâm (The Forest)*: <https://poetrychapbooks.omeka.net/items/show/76>

Tony Quagliano Award:

<https://hihumanities.org/na-mana-wai/tony-quagliano-international-poetry-award>

**Prachi Valechha** (pronouns: she/her) is a freelance cartoonist and animator from India. She loves to make Toons and Toons for Tunes. She loves to play with colors and is excited for the day when people will want to live in her cartoon world. Art makes her feel powerful, like anything is possible and she is the God of her little universe.

**Jason Yore** is an ESL teacher and high school diploma instructor in Southern California. Some of his pieces have been included in publications such as *RipRap*, *Carnival Literary Magazine*, and *Bank-Heavy Press*. As a teacher, he was afforded the opportunity to live in Thailand and Turkey, where he befriended many inspiring raconteurs and rebels. He calls Little Saigon, Orange County, California, his home, where he lives with his two cats and fiancée.

