

TIDAL LIGHT



TIDAL LIGHT

ISSUE XIII

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Cosmic Daffodil Journal: TIDAL LIGHT

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“Where there is light, there is hope.”
— Louis Pasteur

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Kellan Jansen lives with his dog in Oregon. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *BRUISER*, *Bending Genres*, and *Expat Press*. Find him @MarryMeMachine on X.

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David Woodward aka un-known lives just south of Montreal with his wife and son. Some of his most recent work can be found in the *engine(idling)* (poem nominated for Best of the Net), *North Dakota Quarterly*, and *Sunday Mornings at the River ("f**k the patriarchy" series)*.

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A carpenter, Ted Jean writes, paints, plays tennis with Amy Lee. His work appears in *32 Poems*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *PANK*, *DIAGRAM*, *North American Review*, *Blue Earth Review*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, dozens of other publications.

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Sam is a design and construction professional from Italy, living in Boston, MA. He turned to poetry later in his journey, seeking refuge from the chaos of daily life. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *West Trade Review*, *Sontag Mag*, *Underscore Magazine*, *Berlin Review*, among other literary journals.

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Lin Laguna (she/her) is a Filipino American writer based in Florida. Fueled by matcha, she spins speculative tales of wayward women. When not worldbuilding, she enjoys capturing poignant moments through microfiction and poetry. Connect with her @linlagunawrites.

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Katy Z. Allen is an emerging poet and retired rabbi who founded and led an outdoor congregation and a Jewish climate organization. Her poetry has appeared in online publications and her poetic book, *A Tree of Life: A Story in Word, Image, and Text* was published by *Strong Voices Publishing*.

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Isabel Fontes was born in Lisbon and lives in London. She has been writing for as long as she can remember, with work published across Portugal, Brazil, Spain, and the UK. She co-created *Jazz'n'Poesia*, hosted literary sessions in libraries, and developed cultural TV programmes.

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Cody Gohl is a Brooklyn-based poet exploring queerness, family, intimacy, and the odd, radiant moments that shape a life. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Yīn Literary*, *Eunoia Review*, and *Blood + Honey*. He is currently completing his debut poetry collection, January 2034.

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Anne Eyries has poetry published in various journals, including *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Consilience*, *Dust*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Humana Obscura*, *Ivo Review*, and *London Grip*. She lives in France.

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Saroj Senapati is a writer based in Bengaluru, India, with a background in mechanical engineering. He explores resilience, metamorphosis, and the intersections of technical and lyrical thought through poetry and fiction. His current projects include a novella, *Harvest the Momentum*, and a growing portfolio of creative and digital works.

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Kathy Bruce is a visual artist based in Argyll & Bute Scotland. Her work explores archetypal female and mythological forms within the context of poetry, literature and the natural environment.

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Anne Ramallo's poetry and short fiction has been published in journals including *Sky Island*, *Tension Literary* and *Uncharted*. She placed third in the Pen Parentis 2026 Fellowship for parent writers. Anne co-founded the micro press *Poets in the Pines*, whose first anthology, *Made From Midnight: a requiem*, released in 2025.

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Cameron Colan (he/him) is a multidisciplinary artist who believes wonder is a form of wisdom. His work explores this through stillness, presence, and gratitude for all the ways we grow in rhythm with our world.

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Joely Ramo was born and raised in South Florida. She is guided by her practice of Kabbalah and Buddhism. Joely received her Bachelors in Fine Art with a minor in Printmaking and Critical theory from Maryland Institute College of Art.

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David A. Lee is a physician, philosopher, and poet whose work explores the intersections of medicine, memory, and the natural world. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Eunoia Review*, *Unbroken Journal*, *The New Verse News*, and *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*.

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Sharisa Aidukaitis is a writer and college educator in upstate New York. Dozens of her poems have appeared in print and online journals, including *Trampoline*, *Moss Piglet*, *The Quarter(ly)*, *Metphrastics*, *Ivo Review*, and others.

SPECIAL THANKS

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Whalebone Cathedral

I left you lying on your back in waves of dark emerald grass, watching it curl around you in the wind like honey missing your mouth, wrapping instead around the fire ant patrolling our linoleum floors.

I heard the cracking like candy as they chiseled the mummy free, lifted it through our kitchen like pallbearers with nowhere to go. You were like that when I came back—gelatinous and haloed in the rug that held you, ambered under frost. I let you into my veins then, and we burned to a mist above ourselves, floating through pine needles until time became a river again and pulled us apart.

In Dungeness, I built you a treehouse from the washed-up ivory of whales. Their ribs curved like driftwood prayers, pale, hollow, and endless. I thought of how we'd mimic accents after Vlad left, how the vial I bought from him hums like you when I hold it to my ear. I pricked my finger on a white spire, watched the blood bead and dry into the shape of a wing or hand.

The whales come more often now, so I stack their bones until I can see above the fog and treeline, all the way to Seattle, which you said we'd never leave. I lie on the roof, naked against the calcium light, until the coyotes gather below.

When they begin to howl, I pull the bone ladder up and see their eyes glitter in the brush, waiting. The moon is so bright I can't look, so I keep building through the night.

I stretch bear pelts across the roof to keep the rain out. I hang elk horns from the balcony to keep you safe. When the house is ready, I carry you up—the rug is so heavy but the bones hold—and I spread you out on the floor,

Whalebone Cathedral

careful not to touch your face.

The air around you thickens, sweetens, remembers. From the upper window, I can see the Sound. A freighter passes, black hull slicing the horizon.

Somewhere beyond that, Vlad is still selling, still apologizing before he takes my money. The city hisses with rain and neon when I meet him, and when I try to explain what I've built, he laughs. I let him.

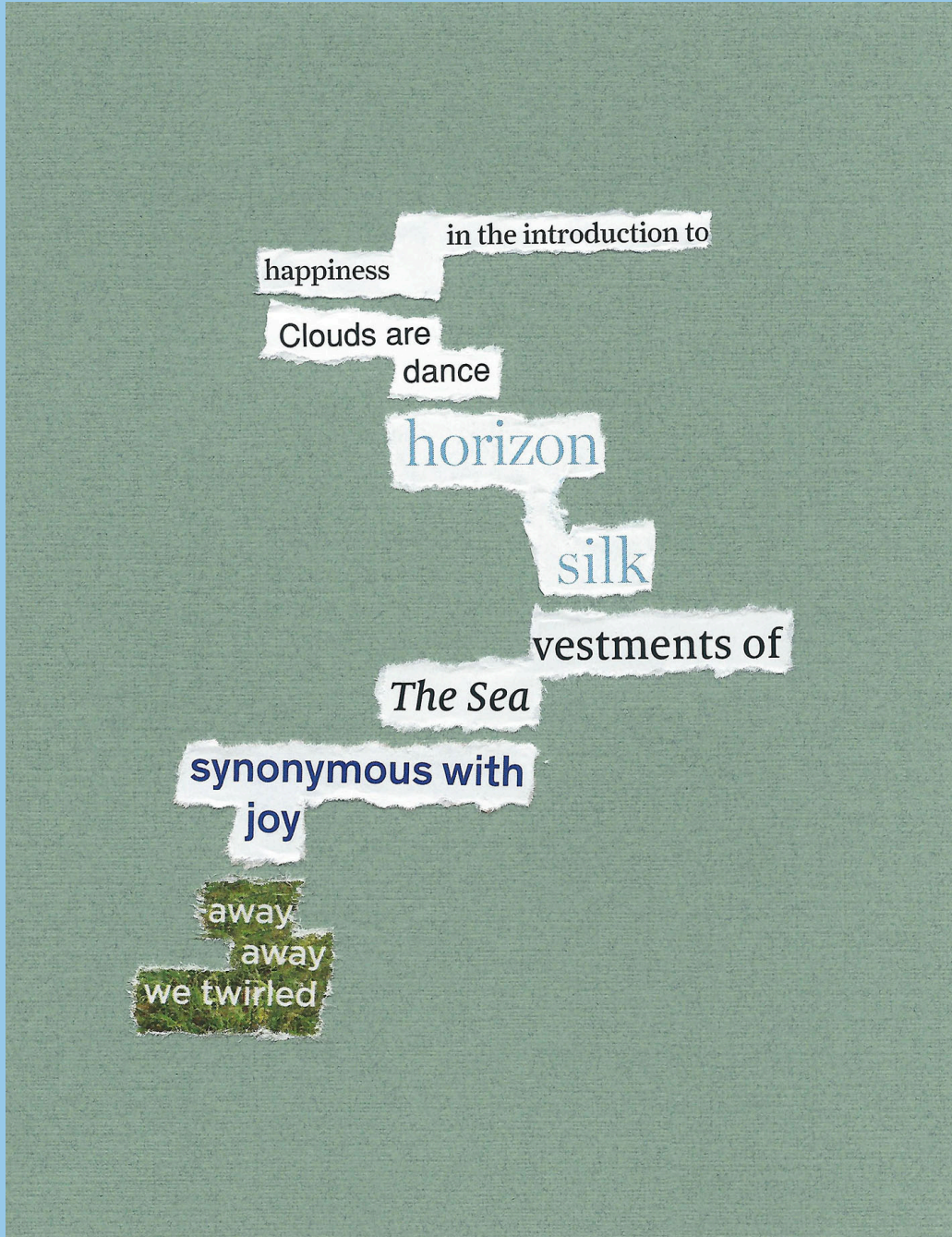
When I fall, it happens slowly—two stories through the white ribs, the smell of salt and ocean rot, the taste of your name breaking in my mouth. I land in the mud beside the carcasses and watch the mist rise as I hear the old cracking again, faint, like glass or memory.

You and I once hid in tunnels as the ocean came in, certain we could outwait the pulling water. You saw the tide turning before I did, but we stayed anyway. The currents we hid from only washed us into others.

I climb back up, slower now. The coyotes watch from below, patient and silver under the moon. I pour the sticky amber from Vlad's vial over you and wait. For a moment, you shine in the twilight. Then everything hardens: the blood, the ivory, the liquid, the breath in my throat. I fall again.

The grass meets me, honeyed and soft. Ants patrol the outline of my hand. Above me, the treehouse gleams in the dark, a white cathedral holding what's left of you.

in the introduction



Blue's Garden

I met you in the garden. What can you not provide? What can you not create? You are the ultimate creative force, in here.

I followed you from plant to plant, flower to flower, vegetable to fruit, food to food. You are my food. You have always sustained me.

I thought I had lost you. But there you were. Down on my knees, soiled and happy, you stood right before me. We are so focused here, are we not? This close to life, how can we not be, you seem to say to me. You are the best teacher of death. I never could imagine eternity, until I met you.

We met in the fall, as I recall. The garden was respiring its last breath. Brown was the dominant colour. Splashes of yellow and orange and red were sprinkled here and there. But they were desiccated tones, weak and tired, the edges outlined with that crispy brown that would soon engulf the little life that remained. I remember you so well in the garden. How you stood out amongst the dying. I can still feel that wool, blue sweater against my cheek when I hugged you for the last time. I had just shaved and the rough fabric bit into my face and neck. It felt awful. How I miss that feel. I was never good at describing colours. Sure, sure, I know the basics. But I was always awful with the subtleties, wasn't I? You called me colour blind. I just couldn't tell the difference between indigo, cerulean, navy, turquoise, midnight, royal, aqua, aquamarine, cyan . . . cyan? How the heck was I supposed to know cyan. I still have no idea what shade it is. Maybe I don't care. Maybe I never did. Blue was just blue to me. I still don't know all the names, but blue, any blue will do for me. Perhaps if I could blend them all together; what would it create then? I bet it would be the deepest, the richest, the most intense . . . ah, that's too obvious, isn't it? Perhaps certain subtleties are missed on me.

Blue's Garden

Or, perhaps, I just don't have the word for them. Inside, somewhere deep within, I have names for every shade of blue that I have ever come across. These names are feelings, feelings that always bring me closer to you.

Lapis Lazuli. That was the colour of your sweater. You told me it was also a metamorphic rock. It was supposed to open the mind of the one who possessed it. It could give enlightenment. Self-confidence and peace and harmony and compassion and morality, you listed all the possibilities. But you didn't really believe that a beautiful blue stone could do all that, did you? But you did think that it could improve your mood, didn't you? And I would have to agree. You were the happiest person I had ever met. But you didn't need to possess a stone for that. You were the precious stone. Or is it a mineral? Can a stone be both mineral and stone? I wished I would have asked you that while I had the chance. There are a lot of things I wished I would have done, differently. I clung to you, didn't I? I couldn't help myself. You were a magnet. Are magnets stones? I'm certain they're not minerals. Actually, I'm not even certain of that. You would have said to me, in your kind way, you know things from the inside. Not many people do; everyone is so concerned with naming, identifying, clarifying . . . impressing. You told me once that you thought I had a gift. Me! You said I had a clarity that others didn't. I thought I was just indifferent. You said, no, that's not true. You saw something in me that I couldn't see. Is that love? Or is it just perception. Or was it just a lie? No, I don't believe that. Why would you lie? My paranoia is creeping up again, isn't it, my love. You always knew how to help me see more clearly. How did you do it? I think it was in your blue nature. It is the happiest, the most joyful, the most compassionate, the most peaceful . . . Perhaps blue needs to attach itself to the right person. Only then can blue come alive. The potential lies within, I can hear you saying. I can hear you so

Blue's Garden

clearly right now, on my knees, filthy in the earth, my hands attached to the soil, the humous touch uniting life to life, our fates linked forever together. I am never alone in the garden. I am enriched with decomposition. I am desire. I am the harvest. I am holy.

I am with you. Blue.

Requiem after Drowning

This, I thought, meant afterlife:
 salt crusting my mouth, lips
 two delphinium petals tinged

with blue. Clothing cut
 in jagged strips. A field un-
 folding in an ambulance.

Everything spun slower there;
 even the fluttering of medics
 dulled as if dipped in honey

& littered with debris.
 Before all this, I braided
 my hair with sweetgrass

to bind body to land,
 though water claimed
 me instead. I offered

my lungs as fair trade, tattooed
 the contract above my starboard
 breast where I didn't keep space

for valves or uncertainty.
 I asked the doctors to let
 me stay. It was quiet there.

Until the red punch
 of a defibrillator
 shocked me back

into rhythm, & that's
 when the singing began.
 Not the diluted melody

of whales thousands of miles
 away. Not the rush of pressing
 ear to shell. No, this was the song

of near-death & its gospel.
 This was the song clawed from
 the throat of the waterlogged.

LOVER

*In the night something calls to you. By morning you won't remember the sound of its voice. Whether it was singing. Whether it was real or something hungry for another feeding. No one tells me you're dead. Those who knew are busy. Troubling themselves with innocent nerves. Rewiring hourly to keep them from electrocuting the entire system. In hollow light I unfurl. Discharge ~~my body~~ from waiting but it waits & I can't tell it how to stop. Jaws clench & release around my neck & shoulders. Parts of a sum that aches in the undetermined tempo of ~~gone~~. If I could what would I tell you now? *Our last moon dropped out of the sky to deliver me new darkness. This fumbling bitch burned the edges of your toast. The floor still greasy from pairs of bare feet dancing reminds me I can't remember the last time someplace felt like ~~home~~.* Tomorrow or maybe next week I slip the cracked dish on the coffee table into a sandwich bag. Hop a bus or hitch to the farthest edge of the Rahway River & scatter ~~what's left~~ of your Marlboros. If only the river could tell me how the evermore of you tastes on its cooling tongue. Instead of waiting I walk ~~home~~ in the silence of departed warblers & lick fire-coral from my bottom lip until it rusts.*

A House with No Mirrors

At La Jolla Shores, beneath the glassy surface of the sea, a guitar fish swims peacefully. His gray body shaped by a triangular head and a lengthy tail. A gliding electric guitar. I try to keep up in my snorkel mask, but he is soon gone. Seconds later, a small stingray appears—a fleshy, flat silver diamond. I gawk at her mysterious beauty, but she pays no mind.

My friend, OhShinnah, and I are here drinking the last rays of summer, chasing leopard sharks. We catch sight of one wearing ashen fins. He slips through the blue and scurries from view. In this underwater house with no mirrors. Hidden from reflections of the circus on land. Here, I forget our planet is in peril. Here, I forget about my ongoing battle with insomnia. Here, I forget the damage I've done to my back from spending long hours at my writing desk, at the piano.

Next week we're back at it, OhShinnah and me. This time, we hit up La Jolla Cove. Sea lions bark and sun their bellies. The smell is strong. Pungent and fishy. Baby sea lions frolic in the turquoise tides. I snorkel on, breathing through a tube that likes to let the ocean in. Liquid salt soaks my tongue as I veer deep into this house with no mirrors. No concept of self. No rearview vision to show me what I've left behind. Fatigue flees from my frame. My muscles surrender to the surrounding parade. Orange garibaldi swim all around me. Sailing after them, I fancy myself a mermaid, floating over sea grass, long and green. Its hair-like strands sway to the current's silent whispers. In this heaven of a home, where marine life sings its song. Where I am held by waters that remind me of a distant cocoon.

OhShinnah catches my attention, her sand-toned hand points to a giant rock—where a lobster strolls, dressed in a hazel shell. I wonder if it's heavy,

A House with No Mirrors

feeling empathy because at this moment, nothing weighs on me. Everything moves in a flow I seem to recognize. A common language of divine connection with all of existence. This calm also resides inside me, clear as a raindrop. If only I could remember to tap into it and dive into the depths of my serenity. Sheltered from the injustices of the world. From anxiety. Warmed by the waters, reminiscent of a house I once visited before mirrors existed, before I exited the womb, when the voice of comfort taught me its tune.

poor kids from out Anderson Creek

“some natural tears they dropped, but wiped
them soon; the world was all before them ...”

as he tramped among the fields beyond the fences
poaching pheasants to feed the family, he first
saw her, wandering beside the rough cover of
hazelnut and nettle, crying, and raising his hand
to hail her, set aside his shotgun, and sat with her
in the shade of the only oak, where they talked a little
but mostly looked, and lightly touched their hands,
till her eyes were dry and the sun got low, when
they agreed that this would be their spot,
and after that hour were wedded one forever

advice for your big day

You will itch. At 5am when you wake up, tangled in your sheets doused with your own sweat, you will itch. This will not be the last time you itch for many weeks. You will itch in the car on the way to the hospital, but this is more of a nervous tick. Also, you will be nervous. It's not the same type of nervous you felt before going to the hospital, thinking about what the hospital might be like, how you will fare in the hospital. It's similar to the nightmares you had about dying on the operating table, or waking up to find that your surgeon cut off your leg by mistake.

This nervous will not go away with the paperwork. You will get the bill before they even start. This is not the last bill. Keep that in mind. That part's very important.

Prepare to answer questions. You will get many. Don't forget to tell them that you're allergic to Penicillin, your Mom will keep telling you over and over and over again. But also prepare to answer the fun questions. Yes, you are excited for today. Yes, you have been waiting a long time. Ten months since the date was set. Then three years before that.

You will cry, just a little, when they stick you with all the tubes in the pre-op room. You will make friends with the resident who's about to graduate med school. When you cry in front of her, she will tell you that she is so excited for you, that so many of her friends have done what you're doing, and that they are so much happier for it. She will show you more kindness than your parents in the waiting room downstairs. Later, you will try to remember her name, think it Sarah or Sasha, something with an S. You won't remember.

When you're wheeled into the operating room, your surgeon will put a mask over your face and say to breathe normally. He will tell you this is just oxygen. He's lying. You will wake up in the operating room behind a curtain.

advice for your big day

You will learn what people mean when they say loopy off anesthesia. You will learn that the most anticipated procedure of your life took all of an hour and nine minutes. You will go home by lunch.

You will be given many pills, but you will take none of them. Well, not the painkillers, at least. You will take the antibiotics, of course. Set an alarm for 8pm, 8am, 2pm, and, worst, 2am. You must take those every six hours, on the dot. Put the loose pill right by your bedside, so you don't have to grab for it. Dust it off, swig some water, get it down. One week of this.

You will miss showering. Unlike anything you've ever missed before, you will miss showering. You will bemoan peeling yourself away from every chair, feeling the stick underneath your armpits. Your hair will be a mess. Do not bother with dry shampoo. You do not know how to use it. Learn to wash your hair kneeled beneath the bathtub spigot like in prayer. Learn to bathe with baby wipes. Learn to wipe the orange iodine from your skin, remember its original color. Learn how and where to use cologne. Learn all these things quickly. Two weeks of this.

You will want to do everything you could do before. You will want to reach the switch on your lamp. You will want to reach for a mug on an eye level shelf. You will want to cook and not get tired. Don't be a hero. You will be able to do none of these things for a very long time. But you will also be alone for three weeks, and thus have no choice.

Buy groceries, but take each item into the house one at a time. You will not be able to lift the bag. You will want the cilantro on the high shelf in the grocery store. Ask for help reaching it. Do not feel too bad when you get embarrassed and don't ask for help reaching it.

You will start to hate your apartment. Do not go on walks around your building in the middle of swampy July. You will do it anyway because you

advice for your big day

are afraid of blood clots. Do not be afraid of blood clots.

The walking will mean more sweat, and the sweat will mean more itch. You will want to claw off your skin, chew it between your teeth, and spit it out. The itch will be worse than the pain. You will see the doctor three weeks after your surgery. You will claw at your chest but you will not mention the itch. When you take off the compression vest, the itch will go away within the hour.

You will start to feel the itch less and less as time goes on. You will start to forget what the itch was like in the first place. Sometimes you will scratch absently at your chest to try to remember. Someday, you will not remember.

A Stone's Throw



Between the Breakers

I was not born of the sea,
but salt still rises when I speak.
The land forgets me—
brickwork, broken clocks,
everything ticking in a language that isn't mine.

I come here to remember.
Or to disappear.
This edge where rust outlives love,
where the wind gives truer names
than anything written in blood.

I walk the wreck-line barefoot,
between ruin and retreat,
wondering if the tide knows me better
than I ever tried to know myself.

Some days I think I'm driftwood—
useful only when burning,
beautiful only when broken.
I've carried anchors I never chose.
Worked jobs that bent my spine
into shapes that didn't belong to me.
Loved people who left
sand in my bed, silence in my chest.

Now my pockets are worn thin with questions.
I want answers—
but the sea has never promised
anything it won't take back.

Migraine

Inside this ivory dome is an ocean
full of long, flowing tendrils of kelp,

beached whales
that have lost their echolocation —

the suspension in my head
drawing the saltwater up and out

of the skull, as electric shocks
circumnavigate the brain's hull.

I hold this pain like a spoon of algae
on the tongue, sparkles of light

dissolving behind the eyes.
I think of floating on my back

in the Aegean Sea, weightless, just as
my mind locates the discreet silver spike

growing roots into the ocean floor.

Life Raft

I am his woman.

Though I am breathless, rubbery, and bloated, he tucks me under his arms, and we float out to sea.

The blue expanse is blinding. My slick skin is a severe shade of orange; it stretches taut over my frame and stings with the effort. We bob across gentle waves and watch the shore shrink behind us in silence, knots of briny fear lodged in our throats. I aim for the horizon while he cracks jokes and sings a tune, and as the afternoon sears us from overhead I almost forget the mouthfuls of saltwater, or the wet weight of his clothes, or the leathery backs of creatures skimming the surface and sidling up to me.

Nights are the hardest. We are fatigued from the days' blistering sun, tendrils of seaweed clinging to us like ribbon. I keep watch while he tosses and turns, and I can hear his lips press together like a pair of dry leaves to form words against my swollen, bone-wet body. When the inevitable storm hits, he wakes and howls into the wind, telling me to hang on, as though his grip left me any other choice. I bounce across the waves and retch sea water, but the sound of violent sickness ripping through me is lost in the storm. Something rips my body from below—hot flash of bloodless pain, salt flooding the open wound—but he doesn't hear me scream, either.

Morning again, and the sun is abrasive, and I am weary, watching his lashes flutter over his burned cheeks while he sleeps. He'll hate that I took some damage overnight, probably blame himself for it, press his forehead so firmly to me that it sticks like a thigh to a leather seat. The first thing he does when he wakes is search for the damage. Pale, slimy flakes of skin peel away from me. His smooth fingers shake while he stops the wound with a clamp. He asks if it hurt, and I tell him I'm made to withstand the elements. His laugh cracks across the still waters. It almost makes me believe.

Life Raft

The horizon beckons. He smells like the sea and eats from a can, humming around greedy bites, while I shift under his movement. I long for the sensation of tasting, of eating, of when my flesh only bloated after flavors burst on my tongue. He eats, and the waves slap against my body pumped with air, straining against ropes and a clamp and a man much heavier than myself. An albatross slices through the cerulean plain above us, and I daydream about flying, too.

We live like this for days, weeks, months, a year. He whispers promises to me at dusk: I'll never leave. We're in this together. You're as beautiful as the sunset, and even more beautiful than tomorrow's. Pinks and oranges give way to the colors of fresh bruises, which collapse into thunder and rain. I notice the violent droplets have a way of glittering in the moonlight after a particularly bad storm; I focus on their descent down my faded coloring to distract myself from his desperate sobs. And the creatures, their claws and teeth and fins slice like paper cuts through my material, but he stops patching me up in the mornings once I stop feeling the pain.

I left him to the whims of the sea one night. It wouldn't have been my first time watching a man's body float away—sometimes they didn't even protest, like this one. He bobbed along the waves, staring at the night sky and allowing tortured groans to sound across the nothingness between us. At this point, I knew my way home. I knew another girl made of rubber would pick him up eventually. Maybe they would float forever, him whispering promises against her tattered surface while she puckers, smilingly, beneath the white light of day. Maybe she is designed to withstand the elements, her skin so resilient it practically repels the clawing. The thought makes me laugh.

I wash up on shore one quiet night. The tide tries to pull me back in before I

Life Raft

manage to stand on tender feet. Water rolls from my weathered body in a downpour. I stumble for a moment, clawing at the sand and shells and translucent crabs scuttling across the beach. Then, I break into a wobbling run, heading inland.

Between Lands

Typhoon-tossed, she squints for
elusive shores. East spells

soy-sweet ease, while West lures
with wine-heady promise—yet harbor

after harbor, no welcome
from weary townsfolk; fear condemns

the flagless ship, the patchwork
pilgrim. Listless, lawless,

she sails on. Ocean Mother whispers
secrets upon starless waves;

dolphins whistle wisecracks,
arching from sea to sky;

high above, a bridled tern
sails salt-thick wind over

endless Pacific. A brown
feather alights on the bow.

did you know

that this world is our tapestry?
somewhere in the boroughs that first needle
begins to thread, flitting through loops
and gaussian hoops, fitting like an immigrant in alleyways and bends;
that string soars past the ocean—pink like a cheek
until it finds yours, squeezing through your pores
rilling deep under your chest. i stitch your heart closer—
the pinks fold beneath the blues,
tubes molding like hands holding
till our hearts weave like constellations
and the lights shine twice as bright tonight

did you know
that you're easy to love?
like an artist strokes a canvas
your paper bones are made for painting;
in the Philippines, the Talaandig paint the auburn soil,
so all the love that seeps beneath
will find a home under the flesh.
and you must try my mother's turon—
jackfruit, plantain, sugar sprinkled on a spring roll—
you'll know heaven on your tongue
and finally know how you taste on mine.
and baby, you could do anything you want to;
you could be a model, a singer, a writer—
or you could learn to love yourself
and see your skin the way i do;
dip your toes into the ocean
and fortune's there, i promise you—

did you know

you've got gold between your teeth and you don't even know it
you steal away my dancing mind and you don't even know it

Finding the truth at the edge of time



flying mobula

scientists watch the display
with notepads blurred by spray

spectators to this strange inscrutable semaphore
as dozens of rays throw the flags of their bodies

into the freedom of blue air

breaching entirely the sea knits itself
beneath them their salt-scorched gills

are like exposed ribs their white bellies
swell with sunlight

this is baptism

they swirl and sink between waves,
then emerge their flapping is a festival

a bunting of mirrors flopping with the sheer joy
of their own synchronicity

the scientists scribble theories

of rituals of showmanship of an instinctive itch
but this frolicking mob is uninterested in boats

they believe in nothing but leaping

in the ecstasy of flight

Changed

Something changed
that day among the trees and works of art,
as words of poetry

 fluttered by,
 connecting,
 interconnecting,
 weaving together

 trees
 water
words
 breeze
 meadows
 people
leaves
 rocks
 sculpture
 sunlight
 trees.

Something changed that day,
 inside me.

The trees entered into me,
 I entered into the trees.
I am their sister,
 I am their cousin.

 We are kin.

Our experience,
 our souls,
 our vision and our fate,
 our persistence,
our very beings,
 our heartaches, our pain
and our love
 are One.

Whale Fall

Jonah dreams he will someday be swallowed by a whale. A blue whale. A two-hundred ton mountain that breathes, that floats and dives beneath the surface, that roams the ocean knowing it is the largest of things. He will swim, watch his final sunset, and the water will begin to vibrate. Of course, any fish in the surrounding area will flee, knowing the jaws that await them below the surface, but not Jonah. He will watch the fiery colors of the sun on the horizon and be happy to leave it behind.

The whale's mouth will pull him in and the fish that cannot swim fast enough will join him. They'll panic, they hadn't meant to surrender to nature's inevitable end, but the old man among them will be calm. He'll glide along the pale pink tongue, the curved arches decorating the roof of the whale's mouth, the powerful jaw as it closes and blocks out the sun's fading light. He will marvel at the ridges of the beast's throat, become lodged in those firm folds for a moment, and feel the shivering life surrounding him. The slosh and gargle of the belly below him will incite a single second of fear—what awaits him down below? How quickly will the acid bath do its job? But, he will hear the whale's heartbeat, a rhythm louder than his fears. He alone, of all the sentient beings on Planet Earth, will rest in the sound. That heart will beat two billion times in the whale's life. Jonah's heart will also beat two billion times, a rhythm that has sustained itself for seventy-six years, the average lifespan, and need not beat beyond that number. The shrew that burrows in the garden behind Jonah's house will also feel its heart beat two billion times in its three years of scavenging the depths. Its heart beats like gunfire as it carves tunnels around the toys Jonah's children buried in elementary school, around the roots of the hydrangeas his wife planted in '98, around the water pipes that keep sprouting leaks. The shrew's clock surges forward, a life that cannot stretch beyond the quickest blink of an eye. The whale's clock is sure in its unhurried movement. Does their size, large or small, give them dominion over man's ticking clocks?

Whale Fall

Jonah may never know the answer, but he knows that he will be happy to go in the act of pursuing his deepest dream, a dream first formed at Children’s Church, when Miss Bannet told Jonah he could play his namesake in the summer play. He sat in that paper-mache monstrosity, surrounded by handpainted fish—his fellow prisoners—and was told to act scared. Miss Bannet wanted him to show how afraid the Bible’s Jonah must have been when he was swallowed, but the five year old standing before her couldn’t stop smiling. He spent the next seventy years drawing whales on old receipts and notebook margins. He has researched their migratory patterns and anatomy. He isn’t suicidal—it’s important that people know this. He was told he needed to explain his fascinations to a doctor after his children found his plans drafted in the notebook he keeps open on his desk. They think he isn’t coping well with his new status as a widower. It is a term he’s never liked, “widower” sounds as if he is making widows for work. They took pictures of his research on which island in the South Pacific would be best for his final journey and the interview he saved from a free-diver website: “I could hear the sounds at 10 feet, 20 feet, but it was like a whisper until I was down there at 50 feet below. I couldn’t see the whales, but I could hear their song from miles away. I just had to go deeper to hear it. You know, I cried?” Jonah will hear the heartbeat and the song. He will go deeper in his final moments to hear it.

He has lived a long life, and he may continue to live a long life. But he knows that he will die in the belly of the beast when the time is right. He knows it will not be pleasant, to be digested, but he’s read about the whale fall phenomenon, and to be eaten by a whale means that he will be a part of something so much bigger. The gases in the whale’s body will bring it to the surface and some part of Jonah will see the sunlight again. Then they will descend again, falling falling falling, until they meet the ocean floor. They will feed life there for a decade. They will become an ecosystem. They will become a home. They will become.

Aurora Raindrop



Where the Fog Settles

This morning, the sea was a breath held in stillness – the air thick with fog, rolling in slow, silver tendrils across the shore. I walked my usual path, half-lost in thought, when I saw her again. A fleeting silhouette at first, drawn from the mist like memory rising unbidden.

She walks the same stretch of coast she always has, at the same hour, as though time itself were anchored to her ritual. Her coat, pale and a little threadbare now, moved gently with the wind. On her shoulder hung that familiar canvas tote, edges softened from years of use. But it was her gaze that stopped me – distant, unwavering, fixed on something not quite visible to the rest of us. As if she were watching a world no longer present, but still vivid to her alone.

There was a time, years ago now, when she never walked alone. A dog, large and golden, used to trot beside her, tail high and swaying, mouth parted in what could only be described as joy. He was a creature of sunlight, even when the sky offered only grey. And she, in turn, carried something light within her – not exuberance, but serenity—the kind of quiet calm that made people soften without realising.

Strangers would lift their eyes as she passed, touched not by curiosity, but by the inexplicable warmth of her presence.

She spoke to the dog often, not in high tones or empty chatter, but with the cadence of someone speaking to an old friend. Her words were few, but he listened as though each one carried weight. Their conversation was constant, even in silence – a shared language composed of glances, gentle pauses, and the long, companionable stillness that only true understanding allows.

Mornings felt gentler when you crossed paths with them. As if, for a moment, the world forgot its sharpness.

And then, one winter, something changed.

The dog grew slower. His stride no longer matched hers, his steps uncertain, his breath more laboured than light. I remember the day clearly – not

Where the Fog Settles

because she cried, but because she didn't. The sky was pale, the air brittle. She walked alone that morning, and from the open window of her cottage, I heard music drift into the street.

Joni Mitchell.

"I wish I had a river I could skate away on..."

It played low, as though meant for no one, and still it filled the space between houses. I stood still and watched as she leaned against the doorway, arms folded around herself, her eyes closed. It wasn't the song that undid me — it was the quiet.

The way she let the silence fall between each line, like she was listening not just to music, but to everything that was no longer there.

Since then, that song has stayed with me. Not as melody, but as memory. A sound stitched into fog. Whenever it plays — in a café, or through someone's headphones on the train — I don't hear it. I feel it. A cold river winding through a warm place. Her grief had a soundtrack. And somehow, so did mine.

Now, she walks alone.

The leash is gone, though she still holds her hand as if it remembers its shape. Her pace is slower. Not weak, just quieter — like someone walking beside absence. And still, she stops at the same places: by the tide pools where the water gathers in mirrors, by the flat rock where they once rested. Her head tilts slightly, as if listening. As if she might still hear his paws padding across the sand, or the rustle of fur as he settled beside her.

She didn't notice me. Or perhaps she did — it's hard to say. She has a way of looking at people that makes you feel as though she sees more than your face. Deep and patient, her eyes carry something steady, something still kind, though touched now with sorrow. It's not a gaze that asks anything; rather, it offers a quiet presence. A small grace in a world that so often rushes past.

Where the Fog Settles

From her tote, she withdrew a tissue, worn at the corners, folded with care. And then, the red notebook. The same one she's carried for years. Its spine is cracked, and its cover bears the marks of long use — a patch of ink here, the edge of a pressed flower there. I know that notebook. She once sat on the sea wall and let it fall open beside her. I caught a glimpse: pages filled with quotes in looping cursive, fragments of thought, small sketches — one of a dog curled in sleep, chin resting on a sandaled foot.

I wonder if she writes to him now.

Perhaps she composes quiet letters no one else will read. Lines filled with small happenings — the shift of the tide, the call of gulls overhead, the feel of salt air in her lungs. Maybe she writes to remember. Or maybe to keep forgetting at bay.

The sea, ever constant in its change, keeps their memory. I can still hear the echo of his bark some days, carried on the wind. And sometimes, when the fog thickens just so, I swear I hear the opening bars of "River" in the air — not from any speaker, but from the space between things. The part of the world we rarely look at directly.

This morning, she stood there again, her frame still, eyes on the horizon as though expecting something to rise from it. Not a ship. Not a person. Something more elusive — a presence, a return, a breath of what once was. The fog curled around her like a veil, obscuring, revealing, folding her into its hush. And then, with one last glance, she turned and walked on, her footsteps soft against the sand.

She didn't disappear.

She simply moved forward —
not out of grief, but memory;
not searching, but carrying.

And behind her, the melody remained, a river she no longer had to escape,
only walk beside.

I will forget so many things

but let me keep the first time
I saw the sun set
along the East River
as I rode the J
into Manhattan.

It was payday,
and I was meeting Jessie
for drinks at Eastern Bloc,
\$200 richer than I'd been
before I slept.

It was from a piece I'd written
about luxury spas in Chiang Mai,
cobbled together in my crowded
Bushwick apartment.

If only they knew
their travel expert
was a 25-year old
with four roommates
and no savings account.

But I didn't need Thailand—
I had this silver line
from Halsey to Delancey
that could deliver me
into whatever red-soaked night
I wanted.

So I sailed across the river
just as the sun was falling
against the glass-covered buildings
of the Lower East Side.

I will forget so many things

The whole world erupted
in the juiciest orange light,
the rays refracting
off the buildings' sides,
tumbling into the water
in bolts of tangerine and pink.

The whole thing
like the most spectacular
watercolor I'd ever seen—
even the little ferry boats
glowed like fireflies
in the luminescent waves.

And then the train,
my god the train,
like a beam of light itself
shooting right into the sun,
engulfing all of us
in a beating
amber buzz.

I was alive—
and I knew it.

I knew exactly who I was.

I took it in and wept.

I wept

and wept

and
wept.

A girl must ride on her own melting

*Tabular bergs: vertical sides, flat tops; can drift for years before melting.
Older bergs: crevassed by brash ice, carved by katabatic winds.*

You think running away's the answer;
on a night bus, hurting

in the quiet company of uneven snores,
darkness punctuated by neon signs,

biting your nails, chewing on questions
you should've asked.

*Air bubbles: freed by melting ice; work their way out in vertical stripes.
Striations: show how an iceberg has leaned from its original position.*

Everyone gets off at the breakfast stop
but you don't get back on. It hits you –

with the violence of the cold that time
your skates broke through the ice

and I lay down to haul you out – that it's not
all my fault. When I answer the phone

tears fall
while you wait for the first bus home.

*Author's note: The title of my poem "A girl must ride on her own melting" is inspired
by Robert Frost's quote "Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its
own melting."*

What is this?

“What is this?” my teacher asked, his words quiet against the cold wind blowing in from the sea.

I looked out at the glassy water, the surface a mix of soft winter hues. I could simply describe what I saw, but I knew there was no simple answer to his question.

The Seon monks had taken me in the year before, and it was easily the thousandth time one of them had asked me that question. Were the other monks asking each other the same thing at that very moment?

I could see our monastery where it perched high above the coast on a rocky cliff. Smoke from its cookfires spread out over the sea, the plumes making strange shapes where the wind disturbed them.

“I don’t know,” I said, hedging my bets. Seongsenim seemed to prefer such vagaries. Not that the monks were ever *angry*. In the beginning, I’d always been terrified they would turn me out, back to being an orphan on the streets. But regardless of how I answered, the rice arrived in my bowl every evening.

“What *do* you know?” Seongsenim asked. “What is this?”

He stopped walking, and I joined him, turning toward the water.

In the soft winter light, the sun disbursed by a thick blanket of clouds, the ocean seemed to glow. It only made me think of my mother, a clam driver who was swept away. I would always be her son, but I was starting to forget what being that person *felt* like. The way *she* filled my bowl, the way she tousled my hair.

“I used to be someone, and now I’m someone else. It’s strange to be anyone at all.”

“Precisely,” Seongsenim said, patting my shoulder. “Existence is a baffling, beautiful thing, isn’t it?”

“So, what’s the point? If we don’t understand it?”

“An excellent question.”

That was all he said, resuming his silence as we looked at the water.

What is this?

Did the ocean ever wonder what it was? In some ways, it was always the same. Water, a shoreline, fish coming and going. In other ways, it was never even remotely the same. Some days it was glass, other days a mountain range, the hills rising and crashing into infinity. And still, like life, those waves crashed whether or not we noticed them. The shore was here for us to walk along whether we left the monastery or not.

“What is this?” I asked, my voice barely rising above the wind.

I’d never know the answer, but I found I finally wanted to ask the question.

What the Lamps Know

The brass lamps know
how grief settles in corners.

They've watched us
light wicks with trembling fingers,
each flame a small defiance
against forgetting.

We inherit rituals
like unfinished sentences—
passed down, half-understood,
but still burning.

Tidal Energies



luciferin

place your palm on the water.
the sea surface meets your skin readily in push-pull.
your mother says you have color on your cheeks
and at first you think it's a reflection of starlight
so you look up from that Mosquito Bay

and it fades. you have never paid attention in biology class
and your mother scolds you for it, so you christen it luminescence
without the *bio*. you baptize the lights as sea-fireflies,
the water cold like glass jars, your face warm.
chartreuse-tinted aureola of light flickers

and glints sharp in a swirl the moment you clench.
a fist is where you went wrong, see? you should've
been more careful with color on your cheeks
and none on your hands. you are better at chemistry
so later you learn that the luciferin oxidizes to release photons
your hand caves against water again

and stars burst at your fingertips. later you will read
in a physics textbook that light scatters with oscillating
electrons, but for now your head stays bent and your eyes sharp
and your mother smiles at you. all is well.

Tidal Light

The sea maintains its engagements.
with the moon,
even when we forget ours.

The water is to-night climbing on shore.
like it knows something
we don't.
Light splits into surface-sheet--
silver breaking itself
into yes after yes.

I am in that brightness ankle-deep,
afraid of how easy it would be
to disappear into motion,
to allow the pull to complete the sentence.
my life has been circling.

Beauty does not seek authorization.
It arrives full-bodied,
takes what it needs,
leaves us altered enough
to call it truth.

When I Dream of Whales

The ocean is alive with them—
orcas break its shimmering surface, stretching snouts
at a cerulean sky. Humpbacks and blue whales
twist pleated bellies, thrust their ribs like dancers
while I watch, laughing, from the tip of my own iceberg.

Something's swimming beneath the precision of language—
beautiful, dangerous, ready to tip yachts,
straining, heaving, coming up for air and,
for one glorious REM cycle, consoling, pressing love
into my skin through outstretched fins.

Once I dreamed my house had extra rooms—
a dusty wing walled off for decades, unknown
even to realtors. The whales assure me
I am spacious after all. I'm Atlantis,
hosting a raucous house party, blasting music, breaking tables,

till my dream breaks on the shore of morning—
a heap of frothy plastic pearls.
By day, the ocean is a rumpled bedsheet.
My surface is opaque, unyielding, closed.
It cannot hold the tear of fluke.

I want to plunder my subconscious like a touch tank
and two-finger-stroke my unwieldy potential.
I feel the sea inside me stretching, straining
against my aching ribs. I cannot hold
the tide for long. Look—

my eyes
are already wet.

Rough Life

When I die

I want to come back as a dog
that lives
on or by
the beach in California

Salt on my nose, licked
Fetching across the sand, sticked

& when I hear old guys on the shoreline talking bout money I can just bark
& they'll have no idea that I'm telling them they have no sense

For with any of my four paws in the sand I feel more life
than either of those men ever have in both their hands

& on Sunday when the fog rolls in they'll complain
& I'll be blissin

Theophany

You meet God on the living room carpet—the one you got for thirty-eight dollars on Facebook marketplace, the one with the army green vines and faded peach flowers weaving across a so-navy-it’s-black sky of polyester. You think you took a pill to get here, held it under your tongue in that soft fleshy part of your mouth where you keep your inner child, but now that you’ve arrived you don’t have a tongue anymore, or a face, or a body. You are just your eyeballs, pulled from their sockets and stripped of their optic nerves, perched on peach petals on that navy-black fabric that is your carpet but is also the sky.

God is a two-headed cat. Her black fur glows blue against the bright suns of Her three eyes—no, eight eyes. You count them again: three big blood orange ones where eyes usually are, one for each head and one shared between them; and then smaller ones on Her foreheads and cheeks, one blue and one pink and three yellow-orange, tilted sideways and unblinking. Three and one and one and three—yes, that makes eight eyes. All on you. All-knowing.

Both of God’s jaws open wide. Two sets of sharp teeth, two sandpaper tongues—maybe one of those tongues was yours once, before you took that pill and forgot how to keep it. Is She hissing at you? You wouldn’t know. You don’t have ears, don’t remember what it felt like to have them. What does a hiss sound like? You could swear you knew once, that your grandmother’s old tabby tomcat hissed at you when you pulled its tail, that it swatted you and took off running and you cried yourself sick about it because you were five.

God does not swat you, does not take off running. You cry anyway. Your tears are periwinkle diamonds, gleaming stars in the navy-black carpet-sky—the one from Facebook marketplace, the one with the universe inside.

Do You See What I See?



Tidal Light

A coin snapped across the water: rim, then green.
The sun planes the surface into hammered silver.
Gulls stitch the seam. Kelp signs the current slowly,
salt-handed, deliberate.

Men lift a fish so bright it wounds the eye.
Children build new shores from shadow and driftwood.
Under sand, worms ring like wire when waves pass.
Light gathers in the sea's palm and refuses release.

We stand at the edge and let the water give us back:
smaller, harder, minted clean in glare.

Sisters' Islands

Sisters' Islands are two small islands off the southern coast of Singapore. Legend tells of two sisters, who loved each other so much they vowed only to marry if their suitors were brothers, so they would never be apart. However, one sister caught the eye of a cruel pirate, who kidnapped the girl to be his bride. Distraught, the remaining sister chased after the pirate's ship, swimming into the ocean to keep pace. On board the ship, the kidnapped sister attempted to flee by jumping into the ocean. Both girls drowned, and from their waterlogged bodies grew the two islands.

I first heard the story, in inappropriately gruesome detail, in my kindergarten class. Immediately, I ran down the hall to the classroom where my sister was, two years younger. In those days, she often looked blankly at me, with seemingly no recognition. I could never tell if that instinct was borne from intentional cruelty, or was merely a sign that she hadn't quite grasped how to exist in her body yet. Nevertheless, I excitedly pointed to the islands on a map, telling her that she was the smaller lump of earth. She started to cry.

As we grew into young girls, people often mistook us for twins. Indignant, I would insist that we looked nothing alike. I felt like I'd barely had time to own my face - a mere two years to claim it as mine before a stranger came and copied it off me, wearing it and contorting it into shapes I didn't recognize. She would cry often, unprovoked but forcefully, like life itself was painful to experience. By the time I was ten, her teacher would often run into my classroom, desperately searching for reprieve. *She's crying again*, she would plead. But my sister would stop crying once I showed up. My face served as a mirror showing her a smile, and her face would reflect it back at me.

"It's kind of sad, isn't it?"

Sisters' Islands

"What is?"

We were lying in bed, mattresses pushed up against each other like we owned one giant bed, where we'd take turns to roll over to each other's side in the night.

"The sisters are right next to each other, but they can never touch."

I looked over. My sister was reading about the Sisters' Islands, about how a narrow channel separates the two, and how the currents in this channel are often hazardous and extremely dangerous for swimmers. I closed my eyes, nodding slightly. My sister cozied up next to me, locking into place, as if the space around me had been carved out to contain the shape of her. "Would you want to be an island with me?"

The thought frightened me, then. To become an island, unchanging and unmoving, locked in place next to my sister - it felt like a prison sentence. I said nothing, but kept my eyes closed and feigned sleep, eventually tumbling into fitful dreams about two sisters who had died to be together, who would never again feel each other's touch.

As our beds drifted apart, we did too, eventually moving into separate rooms - our own isolated islands. Doors would be shut, voices hushed in phone calls, screens turned away from each other. Clothes would disappear from my closet and reappear on my sister's body, eventually lodging in her closet permanently. My ID would vanish from my wallet when my sister decided my appearance no longer sufficed, she also wanted my name and age to get into clubs two years early. All the while, I was too busy looking at

Sisters' Islands

myself in the mirror to realize that my other reflection had turned into a stranger.

She had finally stopped crying at everything, like life had suddenly given her a break. Smiles and friends and words came easily to her now. But still, when I sometimes saw her outside of our home, I would catch for a moment, that childhood instinct to look at me without recognition, like she was confused to see a stranger who happened to be wearing her skin. But the moment would pass, and she would smile at me, cordial but distant. Like her reflection, I would smile back placidly.

When my sister announced her engagement, I hadn't even been aware she was seeing somebody. As she presented her ring, I swear it was my own finger that bore it. Till suddenly, the mirror shattered to reveal a hand that I hadn't clasped in years. I looked up at her and suddenly felt that her long hair, make up, slight frame were so unlike my own cropped hair, bare face, round body. So warped had my reflection become, that it had become a wholly different woman. I hugged her, wanting desperately to moor myself to her again, but feeling only the effect of continental drift, the rush of the channel between us.

That night, I dreamt of the islands. It should never have been a question whether we would become them - we had been born into them. But instead of the deadly currents I saw as a child, I saw pulling tides and shifting tectonic plates, inching the islands closer together. I felt sure, then, that the islands were bound to eventually, painfully, seismically come crashing back into each other.

I woke up, found my sister's contact, and pressed "call".

When she picked up, I felt the ground shift.

your finally unremarkable presence

the first few years after your heart abruptly
stopped contracting, you routinely visited my
midnight visions and I was delighted to see you but

I always sensed you were about to abandon me—
trembling on the cusp of an expected death
as my subconscious enacted over and over

the plot where I got to say goodbye to you—
and perhaps these tearful farewells, completed
partings, whispered love repeated through countless

hallucinations were finally performed enough to
sate my festering wound, because
last night you joined me in a quotidian

dream lecture hall where we sat primly in plastic
chairs prosaically listening to a presenter drone
without once needing to bid farewell

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Warmly,

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