



ISSUE 3 | JULY 2023

CHINCHILLA  
LIT



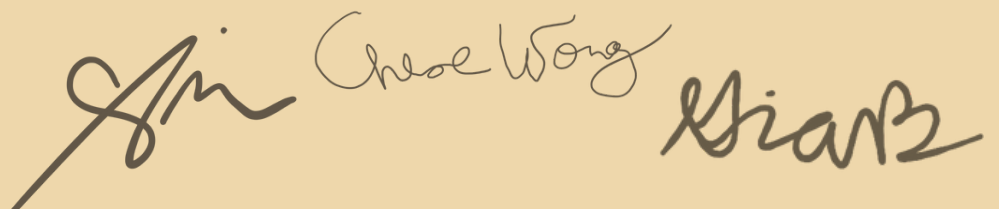
# FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

It's been almost a year since *CHINCHILLA LIT* was created—and wow, time is going too fast. Since last summer, we've read hundreds of submissions, spent hours on issue formatting, and, of course, published our beloved Fall and Winter issues. We've also welcomed three new Readers to the staff—Grace, Natalie, and Caitlin—plus Salvator, our Social Media Manager, and Lauren, our Graphic Designer. First and foremost, we'd like to thank them. Issue 03 wouldn't have been possible without their help.

And we'd like to thank you too; our readers, our submitters, and our contributors, whose words never fail to stun and ignite. The pieces in Issue 03 are vastly different, and yet they share the common thread of being deeply personal—from the contemplation of identity in Arya Vishin's "MY INDIAN DOG AND OTHER FOLKTALES," to the quiet reminiscence found in Hillary Neumann's "The Smell of Coffee." The work of our featured artist, Jaylene Cabrera, truly completes this issue (more of her vibrant prints, paintings, and drawings can be found at [jaylenenicole67.wixsite.com/website](http://jaylenenicole67.wixsite.com/website)). Issue 03 is a mosaic of vulnerability, self-reflection, tenderness, and beauty. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Warmly,



Grace Wong  
Natalie

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# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

*Jaylene Cabrera is a Fine Artist earning her BFA in Jacksonville, FL. In her work, she focuses on painting, drawing and printmaking through breaking boundaries of traditional creation. This is implemented by mark-making, mixed media, reclaimed tools in an unrestricted practice. She challenges herself by testing her knowledge of color theory, composition, scale, and media. Subsequently creating pieces that embody the boundless freedoms that artistry employs when given tools to work without reluctance. The works in Jaylene's collection are a glimpse of what the psyche sees when our minds and bodies express ourselves. By confronting her emotions, rather than suppressing them, she works without limitations.*

*Her social media is @shreduptheart, and her website is [Jaylenenicole67.wixsite.com/website](http://Jaylenenicole67.wixsite.com/website).*

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# Laguna

1

*by Frankie DeGiorgio*

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*Content Warning: TW: References to eating disorders, self harm, and suicide*

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When we were kids we used to fall asleep on the floor of your grandparents' beach house in Laguna, watching *Ponyo* over and over again, because it was the only VHS tape your family still owned, and the only part of the ancient box TV that sat on the floor in the living room that still worked was the VHS player. In *Ponyo*, as the main character Sosuke and his family sleep, the water rises to swallow his entire town. Prehistoric creatures swim down the roads. His mother waits for him deep beneath the surface, protected by ancient sea magic. We used to fall asleep convinced that we would wake up to find our small town had suffered the same fate, and that the waves lapping on the beach, lulling us to sleep, would be at our doorstep by morning. To get to the beach we had to pick our way down the cliff the house sat on the edge of. The climb was easy when we were young and small and quick like mountain goats.

The dirt trembled under our flip flops, nettles swiped at our exposed flesh, but we scampered down the makeshift trail like we were flying. Your younger sister would wait at the top until we had made it down, so we could catch her if she fell. She would whimper when the plants scraped at her skin. Our bare legs were covered in thin red scars by the end of the trip, yours always took much longer to heal than mine.

In the ocean we were invincible. We were like mermaids kicking with our powerful legs, muscular and strong from the years of soccer we played together, always on the same team. We would dive beneath approaching waves while your sister called for us from the shore. Seawater would shoot up our noses, sand would catch in our one-pieces, but these were small prices to pay. One day, you swam out further than we ever had before, to where the ocean became a darker, colder blue, and your sister's throat was sore from screaming for you. A lump of fear was caught in my own throat until you coasted in on a wave a few minutes later, holding a long length of seaweed triumphantly in your fist. I was silently relieved. The seaweed had little bulbs like eggs on the ends. You told us to dare you to bite one, and then did before we could, as we screeched with delighted disgust.



I used to push myself too far trying to keep up with you and eventually I got caught in a riptide a few yards from the shore. I tried to swim back to the beach but it was like running on a treadmill. My mind was fogged with panic, I couldn't remember to swim parallel to the shore to escape, and the last energy I had in my body I used to call to you. You were three months into junior lifeguard training, but you pulled me from the riptide like you were a pro, your arm wrapped tightly around my waist as I clung to your slippery skin and the tie of your bathing suit around your neck. You were so strong back when you were eating. When I collapsed into the sand, lungs gasping for air, you looked down on me, smiling, waiting for me to get back into the water with you. I stood right up once I collected my breath, and followed you back in.

We hadn't been back to Laguna in years when I stopped getting text messages from you. I thought maybe it was because I got into the private school we both applied to and you didn't, but when the silence stretched from weeks to months I figured there must be another explanation. I tried to ask you about it but you told me we just drifted apart, like it was something the both of us did, when really it was you who did the drifting and I stayed in one place, sinking.

The day I got accepted into college you posted an Instagram story of you watching *Ponyo* from your room in the eating disorder ward at the children's hospital. I thought by now we would be too old to still be going to the children's hospital, but in the background of the photo were little gray dolphins with big googly eyes painted along the wall, jumping over a cartoonish ocean. You had paused the movie at the scene where Ponyo, turned from a fish into a girl, finds Sosuke during the storm. The two animated children stared at each other with large eyes, as the ocean behind them threatened to swallow them whole.

The last post I saw on your Instagram was an invitation to your memorial service. All I could think about was how your mom got your login information, and whether you had left it to her, whether you had left anyone, anything, because you didn't leave anything for me. I went to the service and told your mom and your sister that I was so sorry for not returning the favor after you pulled me out of that riptide.



Today my friends suggested we go to Laguna for lunch and it will be the first time I'm there without you. When we hit the part of the coast where the hills drop off into rocky cliffs and the ocean is so big, so blue, I can almost hear your voice coming from the backseat of your parent's minivan. *We're here!* I wonder if I still remember where to turn off of PCH to find your grandparents' house, hidden far away from the Los Angelinos that flock to the little ice cream shops and kitschy boutiques on the main street like seagulls.

We walk down to the beach, but the waves sound different than they did back then as they crash against the shore. I look out towards the horizon and try to find you swimming out there, your little head bobbing up to the surface, clutching big green pearls of seaweed in your fist.

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*Frankie DeGiorgio is a current student at Barnard College in New York City studying English and Creative Writing. She is originally from Southern California. Her favorite kind of chip is sea salt and vinegar.*





# MY INDIAN DOG AND OTHER FOLKTALES

7

*by Arya Vishin*

my father really believes that our dog, blonder than I'll ever be, is indian. before dinner, he carefully cleans the curry off of my murgh makhani and slices the pieces into smaller bits—*baahar jao*, he says, and outside he presents the results to my dog, the raja of the household.

*it's khetsi mavas*, he says, *and we are kashmiris*, *so we must treat him extra nicely*; feed him first, as if he doesn't do that every day already. he knows I can't argue with kashmiri logic so I watch & wait. my dog is a stray from a county an hour and a half east, but my father loves him, and that makes him indian—it makes him family.

*chalo*, he says, before he takes my dog out on one of their hikes—my dog, like other indian men, does not speak much. I almost never join now that my father already has a perfect kashmiri son, but when I do, I walk behind. neither of them look back until we hit the summit, where my father stops & my dog turns, and when the sun hits him just right, his golden fur almost shines brown.

translations:

*murgh makhani* - butter chicken

*baahar jao* - go outside

*raja* - king

*khetsi mavas* - a kashmiri festival

*chalo* - let's go

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*Arya Vishin is a mixed Kashmiri-American & Jewish writer from San Jose, California. He is currently studying English & South Asian Studies at UC Berkeley. He can be found on Twitter @thewodensfang.*







# Sick Days

10

*by Sara Gorske*

*Chicken noodle soup*, my mom  
said when I was a hangdog hound dog  
content to never escape my bed, to sleep  
away the cold. She said it when

the pantry shelves were wiped  
clean except for the staples, celery  
carrots noodles stock. It was either  
that or pancakes, and you know which

I preferred at eight and also  
which she was going to feed me and somehow  
our taste buds never lined up  
though our teeth march the same

rows between our mirrored lips.

*Chicken noodle soup*,  
she said when she flashlit me  
crouched over the toilet bowl

woken by pangs disobedient  
to my circadian rhythm and I could  
stomach nothing but a hug from the inside  
out. She says it now, half a country

distant and I scoff at the idea  
of soup a panacea for an ailment  
invisible to the microscope and the mirror, reflected  
only in headlines blazing: *Breaking*

*News: Today's Youth*—the bugle harasses  
my feet flickering tiptoe toward the burner but my hands  
are steady measuring bouillon, julienning  
carrots to corn-size-shape cubes. No celery

because it browns faster than I  
use it but the noodles  
are wide and flat and rising with the simmer,  
chicken rotisseried, thyme basil parsley

caressing my septum. I choose  
my favorite bowl, the one with the cornflower

meander stamped along the rim. Ladle. Warm  
my hands. Eat.

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*Sara Gorske is a graduate student, yoga instructor, and writer currently based in Southern California. Her debut chapbook, *I Left a Piece of Me in a Dream and Now I Don't Fit Together Anymore*, was published by Bottlecap Press in 2022, and her work has appeared in or is forthcoming in journals such as *Soft Star Magazine*, *Full House Literary Magazine*, and *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, among others. She can be located at <http://www.sarafgorske.com> and on Instagram @meetyouonthe\_matsci.*







# in this poem, a ghost haunts my childhood home

14

*by Wanda Deglane*

You straighten the couch cushions. You wash  
my pillowcase. I'm grateful, but I'm also wary of  
anything that makes my life a little easier.  
But I don't remember making those fingerprints  
in the mirror. Don't worry. I'm a more frightening  
thing than you. I get you're angry but you don't  
have to rattle the kitchen cabinet doors. Look,  
I can't judge. I left my own soul in the lighting aisle  
of a Home Depot. It was weighing me down.  
Rumor says it's still floating among the chandeliers,  
starstruck at the way they twinkle and glitter.  
I hear you sighing. I wake with bruised limbs  
and ivy twining around my lungs. I wasn't born  
sad, I merely adapted. I merely grew into it  
like a hand-me-down jacket. And so did you,  
I can tell. We're all just shoddy replicas  
of something shinier and hand-wrought.  
You cirrus cloud. You lacy veil. Are you there?  
Have you been there this whole time? Will you  
teach me how to walk through walls? Will you eat  
breakfast with me?

I'll make us both banana  
pancakes. I promise I won't be semisweet.  
I promise you can come a little closer.

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*Wanda Deglane is a poet and therapist from Arizona. She has written *Melancholia* (VA Press, 2021) and other books.*







# Afterwards

17

*by Maxwell Griego*

Laughter punctuated by cans opening. A bonfire's warmth massaging my sore smile lines. A star or two standing proud as waypoints along the sky. Looking up, missing a joke, an awkward look. Taking a particularly large swig of beer. Fire crawling onto my face as voices melt into a harsh cricket song. My name. A smile at me. A cooling breeze tugging again at the corners of my mouth. A deep sigh. Drunkenly hugging silhouettes floating away from me. Opening my sliding door. Stars disappearing behind bland plaster. Sitting by the window. Marinating in silence.

Night starts its marring,  
making up hidden whispers,  
distorting real laughs.

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*Maxwell Griego is a 22-year-old poet currently enmeshed in the world of academia. His work tries to engage with parts of the world we don't always think about critically, and just whatever seems fun to him at the moment.*







# The Smell of Coffee

19

*by Hillary Neumann*

I don't drink coffee. I never have. Until I was thirteen, caffeine was off-limits in my house. My parents—my mom especially—believed it would stunt my physical growth and cause mental abnormalities. On special occasions, like road trips and holidays where my grandpa was drunk, my sister and I could have a few sweet, sweet sips of the twenty-three flavors that artificially combined into Dr. Pepper. But coffee was out of the question. Besides, I never wanted to try it. It smelled weird.

My parents, on the other hand, have always been coffee fanatics. When I imagine a morning at home, I think of the smell of my mom's coffee and the screeching of the Keurig as it filtered the grounds. My dad was overwhelmingly particular about his iced coffee. He even came up with the bright idea—or, in his opinion, a unique invention—to freeze freshly brewed warm coffee and then use these coffee cubes as the ice cubes the next day. This way, he said, he was maximizing his coffee consumption.

At the time I thought it was ridiculous, but after working at a diner for a few years and having people constantly complaining about their watered-down iced coffee, I realize he may have been a genius.

Dunkin Donuts became something of a commodity for my dad. We lived in Denver which was, like any big city outside of the east coast, Starbucks territory. My mom didn't care about her coffee chains and was something of an elitist, believing the best coffee was that made at home. But my dad would make us drive an hour and a half out to Colorado Springs with the clever cover-up that we were going to visit the mountains. As I got older, I realized that the reason we drove to the mountains so much was not because my dad loved them, but because there was a Dunkin Donuts at the top of Pikes Peak which had a large, iced coffee with his name on it. Looking back, this is obvious. My dad was oxygen deprived and my sister and I were both so little with tiny lungs. What was the benefit of dragging us up to an elevation so high our breathing became limited? The answer, of course, is that my dad could have his Dunkin coffee that he apparently needed to survive.

He typically got two coffees: one to drink then, and one to take home and use for coffee cubes. Having the largest hands between me and my sister, I would be tasked with holding the second on our drive home. The condensation would soak my clothes and make my hands cold. No matter how sleepy I was, I'd have to stay awake on that grueling drive down the bumpy mountain in the back of our rickety minivan and hold that coffee like my life depended on it. On one of these outings, my mom let each of us pick something from the gift shop; a rare but welcome occurrence as money had always been tight. I'd picked a stuffed mountain sheep, the kind with the big horns that curved behind his ears. He was seated on my lap between my legs while I gripped the Dunkin Donuts coffee as per usual. This day, I must have lost my focus, as the van glided over an unfortunate bump that caused the coffee to fly out of my hands, soaking the car—and my brand-new toy—in the frigid brown liquid. From that moment on, no matter how many times he was washed, my sheep smelled strongly of Dunkin Donuts iced coffee.



For a while after my dad passed away, I would sleep with that sheep every night and hold the part of him stained with coffee close to my nose so I could breathe it in. Eventually, it became too much. He was a cruel reminder of what I no longer had, the trips to the mountains we would never make again and the iced coffee cubes that we'd never have in our freezer. I stopped sleeping with him and set him on the shelf facing my bed. Sometimes, it was comforting. It felt like my dad was in that sheep, watching over me and making sure I was okay. Other times, it made me angry. Why did I still have that stupid toy when my dad wasn't even here? He was gone, and there was no use in pretending like he somehow existed inside a few pieces of fabric stuffed with cotton. When we moved from Denver to Arkansas, I got rid of quite a few of my stuffed animals. That sheep was one of the first to go.

I started a new life in Arkansas, one where Dunkin Donuts no longer played a role. There was still coffee, of course. Often on the weekends, we would go to our grandparents' house. My grandpa had a John Wayne mug that said, "Don't say it's a good morning or I'll shoot you." He used that every Sunday, no matter what.

He would make his special brown sugar bacon and my grandma would make pancakes that were infused with the blueberries she had carefully selected from the produce aisle, and he would intentionally hold his mug in such a way that John Wayne stared across the breakfast table at me and my sister. Every weekend, when he put his coffee in that cup, Grandpa would say, “My Sunday cup,” always pronouncing Sunday as “sun-dee” in his typical Nebraskan fashion. He was a man of ritualistic habit.

Sometimes we would go out to breakfast—but only on Saturdays, as Grandpa had to have his “sun-dee” cup. My sister and I always ended up pissed off because Grandma would order a second cup of coffee when we were almost finished with our meal, and then we would have to impatiently sit and wait for her to finish the whole thing before we could go home. I’m not sure what we wanted to do so badly, but our attention spans were too short to sit there and listen to Grandma’s long-winded speeches for what felt like hours as she finished her drink. My grandpa had a superhuman level of patience. He always sat and listened with rapt attention. Eventually he would look over at me and my sister, then look at her and say, “Grandma, we

want to get out of here,” and she would profusely apologize and take a few more sips of her coffee and leave it half-finished on the restaurant table.

My grandpa had this habit of using my sister and I as an excuse to get what he wanted. Whenever we were over on the weekends, he would tell my grandma that my sister and I wanted to go to dinner at a restaurant that coincidentally was his favorite. On lazy summer days where we sat inside engaging in our own individual activities, he would break the silence by turning to me or my sister and instructing us to twist his arm. We would do so, and he would say, “Alright, we’ll get ice cream, quit twisting my arm.” My dad, who had been in a wheelchair and unable to drive, had never been able to provide this fun for us. In this way, my grandpa became the closest thing I had to a father figure now that my dad was gone.

We lived in Arkansas for seven years. We moved there when I was nine. I celebrated so many milestones without my dad, but my grandpa was always there. My tenth, thirteenth, and sixteenth birthdays, he was there. He taught me to drive in a church parking lot. No matter how short the notice was, he would always be there to pick me up from various after-



school activities or take me to doctor's appointments or get me to school if the bus was canceled because of snow.

When we moved from Arkansas to Florida, we spent our last day at our grandparents' house because our beds had already been packed. We left on a Sunday morning. The only time I've ever seen my grandpa cry was over that John Wayne coffee cup, hugging me goodbye.

A new coffee ritual was developed in Florida. My sister had started drinking coffee and developed a Dunkin Donuts addiction like my dad. On Saturday mornings my mom and sister would impatiently wait for me to wake up so they could get my Dunkin order, occasionally opening the door to my room just loudly enough to wake me up. I would type my order into my mom's Dunkin app (she wanted the rewards) and then we would all slip on some flip-flops or "outside shoes" and pile into the car in our pajamas to pick up our coffee (except I drank hot chocolate) and breakfast sandwiches. The dog, as an equally valued member of the family, was typically invited as well. It was a major outing for us. Usually, when we ate out, my sister and I would go together for a snack while my mom was at work, or my mom would pick something up on the way home. This, though, was everyone. We were all involved in the process

from start to finish—making sure Hillary was awake, verifying the order in the app before it was placed, wrangling the dog in the drive-thru to make sure she wouldn't get into the food before we got home. It was the epitome of our family experience.

I get notifications on my phone whenever my mom or sister arrives home. I've left them on since being at college. My first weekend away from home, I got the notification around nine-thirty in the morning that my mom and sister arrived at home. It hit me that life went on even when I wasn't there. My family had just returned from our Dunkin outing, except I hadn't gone. I fell onto my bed and started crying. My life as I knew it was gone. The weekend outings with my mom were no more. Wrangling the dog was no more. My room would no longer be mine and my routine would no longer be mine and my life would never be the same.

I don't drink coffee because I can't stand the taste. But there's something about the smell of coffee that creates feelings I don't understand. Coffee smells like my dad in the car when I was six years old. Coffee smells like "sun-dee" mornings and my grandpa's red truck. Coffee smells like my

my mom and sister and I being together and my dog panting in the backseat. It smells like loss. It smells like home.

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*Hillary is a college student passionate about writing and art in all its forms. She has been creating practically since she could hold a crayon. While she writes often, she is previously unpublished and this is her first publication. When not writing, she spends her time studying history at university and with her cats, Ezra and Gus.*



