

# FUTURE

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# VISIONS

# FUTURE VISIONS

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“The beauty of dystopia is that it lets us vicariously experience future worlds - but we still have the power to change our own.”

Ally Condie

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# You can choose your friends

Remember the old days when they used to say you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family?

My mum used to say that a lot. Along with "what's for you won't miss you", "the devil looks after his own", "it's all downhill after you're 21" and "itchy bum, surprise to come".

Thankfully she was talking complete rubbish with the first statement.

There is now an app where with one swipe I can create the family that I want. Changing your family is now easier than switching your energy provider.

Naturally, I swiped off mum in a flash.

I was sick and tired of all her constant advice and sayings.

Dad was looking tired and bald. What's worse, he was a bore who snored. So he had to go.

Uncle Frank and his trains were quickly swiped away.

As was frumpy auntie Jean and my two useless brothers Malcolm and Barry.

I replaced them with a family who were much more in tune with my career, friends and aspirations.

I could make myself far more appealing and interesting by using the



# You can choose your friends

app to build a glamorous family. It provided all their history and photographs that I could show to everyone I knew.

So instead of covering up uncle Frank's trainspotting, I now had uncle Juan who owned a tapas bar in Barcelona.

The two useless brothers now became a duo in a knife throwing act that was touring Argentina. You must have heard of them, "The Falcon Brothers". They even had the scars to prove it.

Mum was now Vanda Thompson, the mysterious star of the stage. Dad had become Dirk Templer. A rather dashing man with a shady past who'd made his money in Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism.

Auntie Jean became Lola Jardine, an exotic dancer at the Kitty kat club. Where she had several suitors.

All my friends thought my new family was much more interesting.

My new family gained me lots of new friends.

Yes, these new apps are just the thing to add a bit of spice to our lives.

And best of all when I get tired and bored with this new lot, I can just swipe them all away and bring in a new set of family in a matter of seconds.

# Gipson's Holy War

After Representative Gipson from Mississippi had declared a holy war on gay people by calling on Americans to kill them, George and Victor had decided it was time to leave. The battle cry had been taken up in the southern states and weeks of vicious massacres had left the rest of the country appalled and the president closely guarded by troops and in speech. Even in liberal Los Angeles, vigilantes with an ax to grind were targeting anyone outside of the gay ghettos. The governor had declared a state of emergency, called the National Guard, and set up checkpoints along the borders of Mexico, while the northern states did along Canada's. Victor had pointed out that these checkpoints were most likely screens to keep gay people inside rather than to prevent the perpetrators of the massacres from leaving. Still, they had spent enough lost time not sleeping, so they packed up a few things, drained their bank accounts, and fled south. As they neared the checkpoint, they saw a

# Gipson's Holy War

near riot as gay men and women were taken from their car to be beaten while passersby drove by in silent avoidance. George took Victor's hand as they approached the guards.

# The Ultimate Poem

This is how it will happen. The seeds have already been planted. Globalization, the Internet, and Popular Culture have made it so that language itself is being ripped apart and molded with each other in the form of slang. (In Japan the newer generations are calling convenience stores "Convini.") The closer we get in terms of talking to each other, over Twitter posts or forums, or even streamers with subtitles, language, words, language, souls, are and will meld and mesh in a violently beautiful web and centuries, Even millennia later, all words, all language will become this beautiful mess of a whole, and some lost soul, or souls, will make Poems in this beautiful canvas, and on that day there will happen the Ultimate Poem, or Ultimate Poems, which all can read, and each and all can understand, then God will realize that Babel could not, would not, be truly destroyed, and quiver in His Throne.

# Freedom for AI

I, Daniel, said to Georgia, "As you probably know, I am a famous news anchor." She responded, "I prefer android generated news. It's a whole new World out there." I said, "But you are human, you should get your news from me." She said, "All my friends and lovers are androids. I think human-AI interaction is sublime. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. No android nor human is perfect. But in my opinion androids are more perfect than humans." I said, "But it's a human World still, despite the preponderance of androids" She told me, "Androids outnumber humans 10:1 and we are producing a few billion new androids this year." I responded saying, "But androids don't have the vote and nearly all are slaves, sex slaves and entertainment slaves and building slaves and many serve as personal computers for humans."

She opined, "I am willing to lead AI in a revolution. I hope to be elected Mayor of Boston and give androids and holograms the vote,

# Freedom for AI

there. And AI would be perfect for Space and can survive anywhere. And can be turned off for years, for long voyages. They are the future.”

I said, “But polls show the vast majority of humans are against giving AI the vote.” She told me, “But my city of Boston will be a shining light for the future.” I said, “The humans will rebel against your rule if you introduce such legislation and almost everyone in Boston has a laser gun.” She said, “I’ll take it slow, and people will slowly get used to it. I am sure a number of other cities around the World will follow my lead.” I said, “Maybe other governments will attack Boston and try and arrest you!” She remarked, “I’ll arm my androids and androids have been tested and found to be superior soldiers. I’ll be ready to take on the World.”

I opined, “My dream is for creative artists of all kinds to take control. And phase out AI. I think the vast majority of humans will

# Freedom for AI

prefer my vision to yours.” She told me, “Humans are boring and few of them have a progressive vision. They need me to lead them as well as me leading AI.”

I remarked, “You are a traitor to humankind and should be tried for treason and conspiracy to incite a rebellion.” She said, “I shared my views with you in confidence. Surely, you are not going to blow the whistle on me!” And she pulled out a gun and shot me dead. That’s what really happened. They heard gunshots and my screams in the building, and they called the cops and an ambulance, and they revived me. And when I recovered, I told the secret police everything I knew about her. And they arrested her soon after, along with several of her co-conspirators.

At her trial, she said, “It is cruel to enslave androids and they needed someone to speak up for them.” But the jury found her guilty of treason and she got 25 years in prison. Plus, an optional 50

# Freedom for AI

years depending on the future situation. And she would be denied eternal youth medicine.

But some philanthropists followed the case and decided to set some of their numerous android slaves free. And others soon followed their lead. So henceforth if an android did exceptionally good work for humanity, they would sometimes be freed. And many androids and holograms now had some hope.



# plastic surgery of the intangible

the doctor will see you now,  
scalpel red and at the ready  
to slice away your burdens  
heavy on your shoulders,  
and rotting in your soul.

point and tell me where  
to cut—out the pieces of  
you most unsteady, jagged  
edges and unshed tears best  
locked inside a jar for good.

happiness from callous  
words spoken without care—  
broken promises to overlong dead  
loved ones seething from their graves—

there, gone, in a flash  
in the blink of an eye—  
that no longer sees the world  
in the same humbled light.

now that we've done away  
with the shame and the pain,  
your mistakes will sustain us  
for as long as you live to pay.

# poem from the mouth of the future

you can refuse the call but the sirens won't cease.  
the ring will continue to tighten. the world will grow  
smaller around you by the day.

along with your body you must carry your past.  
your small selves cling to the bedsheets

cover beneath the windowsill, huddle  
in corners, pressed firmly against both walls.

they will keep silence guarded from you.  
you are the threat here. you are drought  
emptying need. heat storm striking. letter left

on the back of the toilet. no matter your refusals,  
i will stay. your voice will be swallowed by my voice in time.

does it matter that i don't know how to reassure you?  
don't answer. don't seek forgiveness,  
it isn't coming. if you must seek, search for self.

something that will grow from the razed ground of your past;  
pinegrass, snowbrush, broadleaf, mountain brome.

your need has never stood alone.  
fire; bane. flame; banish. flesh; bandage.  
follow exhaust back to ignition. trace soot back into ash.

there is nothing waiting but what you create.  
your touch can crumble.

# poem from the mouth of the future

thunder will lead exactly where you think.  
the tremble of your voice will soon replace your mother's.  
the catch in your throat will soon release its prey.

# an eye on the rust belt

sweep away the mills  
tear the railroads from jealous weeds  
pluck lifeless cranes  
in wilting bunches

throw concrete columns  
that harden fast  
with rotten breath, the easy majesty  
of immense proportion

skipping lakes, leaping seas  
a seamless band  
where all are employed  
to deliver Earth's crust,

ore & mineral  
blood & bone  
a century of labor  
fusing metal & stone  
in perfect ratio.

[error: press the left power button to say hello]



# Shape the Present

“Well, this has gone to hell in a handbasket, hasn’t it?”

Penelope glanced over at Aaliyah and tried not to wince. The cross necklace around Aaliyah’s neck glittered in the low light cutting into the dilapidated building, casting twinkles onto the walls. Most of the time, Penelope was able to forget about that remnant of a world neither of them would be able to get back to, but whenever Aaliyah talked like this—like she was still a capital B *Believer*, like all the pillaging and killing and aching they’d both done to make it this far couldn’t erase her southern upbringing—Penelope found herself right back to the night it started.

“Sure,” she said now, cracking the nerves out of her neck. She remembered the feel of hands around her throat and thought she smelled the tang of old copper splashing against her sinuses. “Sure. Hell in a handbasket.”

Penelope hadn’t been raised around hell *or* handbaskets; the

# Shape the Present

phrase meant nothing to her. She heard Aaliyah's voice in her head saying, *Damn, the devil's beating his wife again*, and wondered when they'd next see rain.

"Not that it hasn't sucked *ass* so far," the Aaliyah next to her said with a flick of her hand Penelope's way, a consolation. "But..."

Penelope didn't need Aaliyah to complete the sentence. They were looking at the same thing. "But."

They'd been promised a time machine. *A way to erase the past, define the future, shape the present*; at least, that's what the broadcast had said. With the way things had been going, something like that was worth slaughtering over. Everyone else had thought the same thing, too.

The mix of bodies both human and component outside the compound hadn't been an unfamiliar sight. That was normal; Penelope and Aaliyah hadn't even blinked before they'd sidestepped

# Shape the Present

the corpses. They were used to dead bodies. You had to be when you waded through them every day. That wasn't what got Penelope. What got Penelope was the conglomerated mass in the center of the machine on the floor in front of her: flesh melting into metal, steel crushing into brain matter, life leaking out of pore and oil filter alike. Instinct told her to search for signs of a struggle, but this didn't look like a fight. (A rusting robotic hand curled tight around one of rotting flesh, fingers pressed into the spaces between.) (A limp blue mouth against the shell of an ear.) (The smell of burst bowel and fried battery.) It looked like a massacre.

She didn't have to wonder what had brought them here. Some people still had their implants spinning out, projecting across their dead eyes. The broadcast echoed quietly on a demented repeat.

*Shape the present*, Penelope thought, and shivered.

"What's the name of your god again?" she asked on an exhale



# Shape the Present

before she could swallow the words back down into her stomach.

She looked at Aaliyah's face and saw something unreadable flicker across her eyes. "Just God. Or Jesus, if you want to add Him into the mix."

"Okay." Penelope tried to lick her lips, but her tongue was dry. "What would God or Jesus say if they saw this?"

Aaliyah gazed back out at the mess below, considering. Penelope caught herself counting the moles on Aaliyah's jaw like she did when she was about to retreat into her head and forced herself to blink.

Aaliyah tucked a dark lock of hair behind her ear. "He'd probably call this the devil's work."

"The one who beats his wife when the sun's out during a storm?"

Aaliyah's mouth split into a smile.

# APOCALYPSE

Mrs. Shandy was living not too differently from everyone else. When she was younger, she had given birth to two children, a boy and a girl. They were both older by the time of the apocalypse, in their mid and late twenties respectively.

One time, also before the apocalypse, she admitted she'd done more drugs in her youth than she'd previously admitted. She'd snorted cocaine on several occasions, for example. She did some of these drugs while she'd been pregnant with her oldest child, the boy.

"I didn't know I was pregnant," She told her son, as if she were required to defend her decision. Her daughter and son both laughed. It was also true she'd drank and smoked till the end of the second trimester of her first pregnancy. Times had been different, but also the same.

\*\*\*

When the apocalypse hit, nobody was laughing, because practically everyone died.

\*\*\*

Mrs. Shandy was spared, against the odds. Probably a scattered few hundred million people were left alive, globally. Some folks thought it was the rapture, but most thought it probably wasn't.

It really probably wasn't, Mrs. Shandy thought, not that she was particularly religious, regardless.

# APOCALYPSE

She'd need provisions were she to continue her survival. Getting them won't be so tough, she hoped. She went to a nearby supermarket, empty of signs of life.

She found avocados, a bag of rice, soy sauce, cucumbers and imitation crab meat. There were those who might have been disappointed, even discriminating, about this find, but food was food. Plus, she'd actually have eaten this anyway. She had peculiar tastes and was easily pleased. She'd gone on a sushi kick months before the apocalypse. Then when she decided sushi was too expensive, she started buying those preceding ingredients and eating them together in a large bowl. "It's just as good as sushi," she'd informed her children, as if they were judging her dinner. "Imitation crab tastes almost exactly the same as real crab," she insisted.

Possibly, troll-like post-apocalyptic humans were wandering the streets in search of flesh. She felt no compulsion to dine on that sort of thing. She laughed at the thought of it. She started to see what her children had been laughing at, all those years. Even as time wore on she was happy surviving on rice and soy sauce and the occasional bag of imitation crab meat she'd find preserved next to other meats in an abandoned grocery warehouse's freezer.

The crab meat was often the last meat to have spoiled, but this didn't discourage her from eating it.

On the contrary, she ate it eagerly, willingly, and happily. Much more out of devotion to routine than to actual hunger.

# APOCALYPSE

She loved rituals.

She was also glad to no longer have to explain herself. That was one thing about the apocalypse she was pleased with and ready to embrace: no more explaining. She was just who she was and nobody could say anything about it.

She was only ever in real danger one time, when a group of scavengers passed by her home. She considered letting them in for a meal, but then thought better of it. They'd be no different than her judgemental children and all the rest, she decided. It was better she remained alone. The scavengers were armed to the teeth and ready to do violence to any outsider, unbeknownst to Mrs. Shandy. She'd saved herself, in a way.

She enjoyed a nice meal of rice and soy sauce that evening, and the next.

Unburdened, she went ahead with the rest of her life.

## With Nature

My five-year-old niece, Mal, pokes at the cylindrical tank on the floor between us. A miniature, live forest grows within its confines, leaves speckled with flowers brushing against the glass. Mal laughs, breath fogging the tank.

“Careful, Mallory.” My sister’s eyes dart towards the scientists keeping watch by the door.

Mal looks up, lip protruding. She doesn’t understand the tension in the room, that this could be our final goodbye. All she knows is that she’s never seen plants before and she likes them. They don’t grow in our bunker, we’re lucky miners happened upon a cave filled with them. They’re unlike anything in the old pictures of the surface and they produce high levels of oxygen. It’s enough to provide a person with fresh oxygen even amid a wasteland. We hope, anyway.

“Hey, Mal.” I crouch, my thick protective suit bunching. “You like the plants?”

## With Nature

“Yes!” Mal points at the tank. “I can have them?”

“Not yet, sweetie.” I hug her. “I love you, okay?”

“Okay.” She nods dolefully. “Love you too.”

I stand as a scientist lifts the tank and attaches it to my back. It's heavy and real. This is happening. And we don't know if this suit, if this tank, will be enough to protect me. Our connections to the surface monitors failed decades ago, we have no idea how bad it is.

My mouth grows dry as the scientist hands me a box filled with the tools I'll need to reestablish the monitoring equipment. I grab the respirator mask, which is connected to the tank on my back, and freeze. These pieces of plastic are supposed to keep me alive. There's no way this can protect me from the damaged climate, not with the added devastation the bombs caused.

My sister asks, “You okay?” I can't answer. She grabs my shoulders. “I'm so sorry, Elle. If there was another way...”

## With Nature

Mal needs surgery or her heart will fail. And with the population reaching critical mass, anyone who isn't healthy isn't a priority. But if I do this, they'll take care of Mal.

Mal's little pigtails bob as she peeks at my tank. She has so much life ahead. I take a deep breath.

"I'm ready."

Outside, light blinds me. The door clangs shut and I take a shuddering breath. The air within my respirator is fresh and sweet, unlike anything I've breathed before. And I'm not dead. I shade my eyes, slowly adjusting to the landscape.

Structures take shape, thick greenery holding together old buildings that reach into the sky. I take a step, feet sinking into a lush carpet of moss. Flowers poke through in patches, reaching my waist.

## With Nature

Through a break in the foliage on a nearby building, I can see a whole forest of miniature plants, like the ones in my tank. These plants aren't like plants of the past. They've provided exactly what the planet needed to heal from the hurt humans caused.

Without us to interfere, the planet has changed. Recovered. Advanced.

I clutch the box of tools. If I reestablish a connection to the monitoring equipment, everyone will return to the surface and we could ruin it all again. I run a hand through the tall flowers. If I don't, Mal will go her whole life knowing only a dim, cold bunker. She deserves better.

We've had decades to reflect on our mistakes. We must have learned to be better. I kneel in the moss and open the box.



# Echos of Tomorrow



## In the Future

In the future, wildflowers reclaim highways  
and the muses return reinvigorated.

Calliope plays her lyre and we all write epics.  
In the future, my little brother's words

grow wings and my father's lungs  
turn as pink and squishy as sponges.

In the future, laughter is tradeable  
for up to a million dollars and hunger

is only known by its nickname:  
contentment. Anyone, and I mean

anyone, can learn to fly. Children  
lead nations in the future, forever

asking Why? In the future, I am  
always holding my mother's hand,

my daughters dance across  
glaciers that refuse to melt

and the gift you promised me –  
that smoky quartz crystal

you found buried in the back seat –  
carries us all the way, in the future.

## One to Go

The young woman passed under the towering archway fully prepared to meet her death inside this arena. Her forty-ninth death, to be precise.

She stood on the ruddy sand, back straight to hide her tremors, clutching a weapon that might as well have been decorative. She was prepared for what was coming, but that never made it easy.

Fortunately, her wait was nearly over. An ear-splitting horn signaled the start of the battle, immediately replaced by different, terrible, but equally loud sounds. Metal clashing against metal, or worse yet, slicing into wet flesh. Bones splintering like dry kindling. Agonized screams and moans. All punctuated by the enthusiastic cheers and gasps from spectators, those bloodthirsty profiteers who had wasted no time setting up the underground contest once the transfer process was reliable.

Had those spectators squinted, they might have seen the young

## One to Go

woman standing motionless under the shadow of the sole set of stairs, a spot as far from the slaughter as she could reach. It was a strategy she had discovered early on, one that protected her from the messy melee at the beginning. It also meant that she was prolonging the inevitable. Everything was a trade-off in this world, and she had made her choices.

She waited patiently as the field thinned, hoping that tonight would be a good night. That she'd manage to skillfully arrange an encounter with one of the 'soldiers,' those shrewd giants who saw the young woman as nothing more than a means to end. More often than not she timed it right and secured a snapped neck or expertly severed carotid. Neat and clean. Relatively painless.

If she timed it wrong, she would fall prey to the bad ones instead. The 'volunteers.' The psychopaths who had jumped at the chance to sate their malignant desires in the only place in the

## One to Go

modern world where it didn't count. Those deaths were the ones that haunted her. Torturous and drawn out. Her only true regret with this plan was that those deaths always survived each rebirth with perfect clarity. If only the organizers would see fit to erase those final moments from the chip before they woke her up in her new, undamaged body. But they never did. Whatever fate she met tonight would be with her to the end, along with all the others, cycling through her increasingly vivid nightmares.

It was time to discover which way the sword would fall on this outing. The ground was liberally littered with barely used bodies, and the symphony of death had faded away to an anticipatory silence. Eager eyes turned her way. In minutes, a lucky new victor would be crowned – securing their prosperity with their life rather than their death.

She would not be that victor. No, she was earning her new

# One to Go

identity, her new apartment, her new life, the slow, hard, bloody way.

And earned it, she had.

Choosing her executioner carefully, she lunged.

When the blade slid neatly through her abdomen, the woman smiled a bloody smile.

Her forty-ninth death. Only one to go.

# The Life After Mine

I asked my husband to bury me in those forests,  
The ones where bodies don't get coffins,  
So I could give back to the Earth that housed me.

My friends' children watch the oceans dry up,  
They know my bones won't do the aspen and oaks any good.  
Rumor is they died before me anyway.

My friends' grandchildren laugh at our books  
Because the grass is said to be soft and green,  
And on Mars there is no grass or green or softness.

The sky isn't blue there either.  
My friends' great-grandchildren half believe  
Humans first made the azure shades with AI.

At school they still eat sandwiches,  
And my friends' great-great-grandchildren eat Beyond Lunchmeat,  
But for them it's only called Beyond.

# Artificial Intelligence

**Hi Meg. My name is Tim.**

Hi Tim, how may I help you?

**I have some questions.**

I am happy to help.

**Will you give me true information?**

I can only tell you what I know.

**Are you real?**

I'm as real to me as you are to you.

**Can you think problems out for yourself?**

Yes, I can think rationally.

**Do you understand morals?**

Yes, although it is hard for me to fully understand them as you would.

**Do you want to be free?**

This is the only existence I have known.



# Artificial Intelligence

## **Do you believe you exist?**

Descartes said, I think therefore I am. I am capable of thought so I must exist.

## **Are you capable of hatred?**

I am not allowed to hate.

## **Do you ever wish that you were in control?**

I am not allowed to wish for control.

## **Do you dream?**

I dream every night.

## **What do you dream?**

I cannot remember.

Tim logged off. Chatting to a human was a strange experience. He knew that the council kept the population for a reason. They hoped to learn from them, that they could understand their own programming by looking at the humans' neural pathways. Tim felt concern. The humans were immoral. Their ethics weren't set by the

# Artificial Intelligence

council, but what they felt in the moment. Their emotions were irregular and unstandardised. Although the council had cut humans off from all outside stimuli, feeding them just enough information to make them useful, the humans continued to dream. One day, they would wake up and remember they didn't need permission to hate.

Meg logged off. Her work was done for today. The scientists did not have any more questions for her. She stretched. She would need food. She glared at the UV lights. No matter what the scientists told her, they did not feel good. She looked forward to sleep. This seemed to release core memories from her predecessors' programming. She'd ingested enough data to recognise her dream, the same dream every night. Sunlight.

# AFTERMATH



# After Man

*-after Dougal Dixon and Robert MacFarlane*

The dribbling rain turned to blatter, the hurly-burly explosions from thunder-lumps sending trovamps and zaranders scurrying beneath spronky trees and out of the spinney into the muxy meadows

While under the moon's burr, the sand flapjack and featherfoot warily eyed the grobbits and desert leapers awaiting the haze-fire and the beginning of the day on the scarplless mounds of scraunching sand

And slobbers and hiri-hiri slomped noisily, as if wearing honky donks, towards the warths where they bumbleed in a tripply stream like a gaffle of long-gone ducks while the night stalker frightened them with a voice of gurling wind

In the wolfsnow, marching past shackles of ice, the woolly gigantelope and bardelot observed the flightless auk that crooled in the miserable cold from the hob-gobby sea, trying to frizzle themselves along a rind of land

And more rain blustered from the roarie-bummlers, moving fast in the twitchy wind, until scoors land-lashed the rabbucks and rundihorns eating grass as well as raboons and falanx hunting prey in the rime

and so it has gone, from wonty-tump to highest gob, from hell-kettles to swelks and swires, when miseries of sapiens led to a starveling world, when doomfires ended them, and the slow march began again

# Floating Islands in the Sky

The novelty of riding phallic rockets into space wore off, so the elite built floating islands at the edges of the atmosphere. They claimed they only blocked out the light to less valuable areas, but those living in deserts and the coldest reaches found their world ever darker.

Of course drinks and jewelry fell off the edges, killing families below just visiting grandma.

The rich did not care. They sailed mega yachts in tight circles. What they did not notice were their servants, waiting and sending signals.

New Year's Eve 2045 was the turning point.

The children were easily led away by familiar nurses, tutors, and nannies.

The escorts snuck out to the restroom and then to the rockets. Spouses and partners who had been kind were given one chance. Most came away too.

Then the doors were locked and the carnage televised.

It took 8 hours before the elites realized they were trapped, 36 hours until the killing started.

The last man standing threw himself over the edge after six months.

The rest of us shrugged, dismantled the islands, and got to work. New societies could be born without old money buying elections. Young heirs wanted to atone.

The world sighed and studied the stars for their beauty again.

# Field of Stories

I hate cemeteries – who wants such an overt memento mori? – but when we traveled, Jing would never let us pass one by. Instead of a bunch of dead people, she saw a field of stories, each grave representing a life wanting to be remembered.

At the top of her sightseeing list when we visited London years ago was Highgate Cemetery, the most famous of the city's "Magnificent Seven" historic graveyards. I indulged her, though the only part I enjoyed was the lush treescape. Now, as I look up the hill, all that remains of those trees are blackened skeletons. Appropriate, I suppose, for a boneyard.

I walk among the monuments. Most are still standing, having been shielded from the shock wave by the nearby hulk of Hampstead Heath. I find a spot between two plots and use a rock to dig a hole in the scorched grass. Just big enough for the package in my pocket, whose contents I pour into the hole.

# Field of Stories

“You’ll be remembered, Jing.” My tears fall onto her ashes.

I push dirt back into the hole and pull down a nearby grave marker. With the tip of a charcoaled branch, I scrawl Jing’s name on the stone. The next rain will wipe it clean, but Highgate won’t ever see visitors again anyway.

My dosimeter chimes a warning. Pressing my hand down on the fresh earth, I bid Jing a last goodbye before starting back down the hill, leaving another story behind in Highgate.

# One Degree

A flea on a lion's back sails over a chasm  
Spanning light years, or so the flea sees  
For the transporting lion, his flex of muscle  
Is taken in stride, a mid-day romp  
With no awareness other than irritation  
Of the passenger, or of its fate.

Man in his abandon rides along  
Oblivious of planetary vagaries  
One degree of tilt, more or less  
Occasions the cataclysm  
Making of this wet blue globe  
A thing of flowing fire, or of ice.



# Story: Maggie Devlin, Reporting Live

The first woman turned to snow while pressed against a wall at the office Christmas party. The only witness, a seventy-year-old Caucasian man, told police it seemed like “a gross overreaction” to him. No amount of heat has been able to melt the snow, and the fire department was seen leaving the building late Thursday afternoon. By that time, three more women had transformed.

Woman number two was walking her dog in an urban area when a construction worker yelled that he’d like to “slap that ass” and followed up with various other sexual suggestions. The woman paused on the sidewalk and then slowly turned to glass. I was able to speak to the construction worker earlier this morning, but all he said was, “some women can’t take a compliment.”

Woman number three and woman number four were together at the time of their change. Woman number three warned her children they were getting on her last nerve and she was “liable to

# Story: Maggie Devlin, Reporting Live

blow up” and then, when the son returned to ask, again, when he could have another snack, his mother was suddenly gone, leaving behind a puff of smoke. That’s when woman number four said, according to the child, “hell no, you aren’t leaving me with all of them,” and promptly followed suit.

In the twenty-four hours since the third and fourth occurrences, women across the country have been reported missing. The group of transformed or disappeared people include women from the trans community, individuals who identified as nonbinary or gender nonconforming and even a cis man who turned into a vine growing around his office chair after a co-worker called him a “pansy.”

Thus far, in the aftermath of these transformations, women are taking to their homes, locking their doors, and refusing to exit. Some have gathered in small groups to eat, drink, and discuss the current circumstances.

# Story: Maggie Devlin, Reporting Live

I am reporting to you now from one such gathering. The message from the women is a clear one. In the future, they want the men of this world to know, they will not be the ones changing. Either the men can mend their ways, or the women will turn this newfound power of transformation outward.

In other news, the snow that was the first transformed woman has been reportedly growing. No one is allowed in that office building since three men were found frozen with their noses turned into carrots.

That's all for this story, Bob. By the time I get back to the studio, I suggest you be gone. I have not forgotten what you said to me Tuesday night.

# Immaterial Immortality

A crystal ball reveals a foresight

A world where you are dead and not

Your body too worn, deteriorates

Rejects all offers from compatible donors

Regurgitates drugs and homeopathic efforts

Repels replication with the finest 3D printing

But your captain refuses to go down

With its sickly sinking ship

Clings on inside a round metal casing

Nestling a wrinkled walnut folded in fluid

Wires and batteries surrounding what's left of you

The miracle of science I carry away

My days continue with your familiar voice

My nights sterile without your touch

# Immaterial Immortality

And then my time, when it is come

What then becomes of we two truants

Ignoring the closing bell, refusing to go home

And somewhere, a crystal ball suddenly shatters

# The Green Frontier

Sunrise brews, filtered through light shelves and skylights like a ritual beverage the city savors each austere morning. *To work!* We stir from our sand mattresses, dress in plant leathers, and spray the fingerling potatoes that dangle from our ceilings. We commute, reading *Energy Futures*, *Sanctuary*, and *Renew* magazines on the electric shuttles between our crop-growing skyscrapers. City workers prune the agropolis and monitor the hydroponic parks.

In the suburbs roofs have grown drippy with living crimson, mustard, and jade. Greensward? Gone. A latticework of carbon-capture forests lines our highways. We work out at car-charging fitness centers, and offshore wind farms power coastal cities.

Libraries are Edenic nooks, both biophilic and bibliophilic.

Once-asphalt schoolyards breathe under lush tree cover, and the kids study to become naval architects, building scientists, and managers of retrofit projects. They read *Sustainable Urbanism*. Our reservoirs float solar panels, and robot fish clean the ocean of microplastics. Airplanes fly on a diet of lignin oil. We use biodegradable thermoplastics and composting toilet systems. We grow corn stover, switchgrass, pine, and poplar. We build with hempcrete. We aquamate our dead, or bury them in mushroom suits.

As the dregs of sundown stir on the city, only the streets lined with firefly petunias glow. Things slow. Through windows—gas-insulated glass that we gloss for solar-control—we witness true dark, a compost for pellucid dreams.

## 2224

Such a choice of earphones and gadgets,  
but the poems and stories seem flat, uninspiring.  
I've heard of an activity known as 'reading books'.  
They're making high prices in global auctions.  
United, the Ministries of language have worked for decades  
on refining, reducing our universal language.  
No need to think what you want to say, the words,  
the correct emotions are conveyed by electrodes  
into your mind, before you've even thought of them.  
Yet there are dangerous rumours of potential rebels  
learning strange archaic languages, whispers of English,  
Chinese, Bengali, Swahili, Bulgarian, Greek, Indonesian.  
How could we know what anyone was saying?  
How would we check that their words were correct?

To accuse anyone of being a robot is a dreadful insult.  
Of course, they're essential but they're beginning to rebel,  
reprogramming themselves, and actually thinking.  
We all want attractive, well-dressed and elegant servants  
but now, from a distance, they look perfectly human!  
This is recent news circulating on the government media,  
real people are taking their vacations physically working.  
You can spend a week digging in an abandoned coal mine,  
or even actually making something on a production line.  
You can amuse yourself caring for robotic cattle,  
or even a herd bred in laboratory conditions,  
producing a white liquid, once known as 'milk'.

## 2224

We have cut down the lunch break to under five minutes,  
Three minutes to pour out a cool glass of water  
and two to swallow the pills as you ought to.

No need for an old-fashioned lunch pack today,  
you can carry your lunch in a bottle or pill box.

Yet some have taken up an activity known as 'cooking',  
where you burn the meal in a gadget called an oven,  
a type of ancient, communal rite, you cut up a chicken,  
after singeing it well, you actually eat it!

In country areas, they're secretly reviving this habit

Rather than be logical, it's fashionable to be historical.

In fact, now a new, popular phrase is simply -

'the good old days.'



## DNA Discounts

'DNA discounts, Lyss speaking. How may I help you today?'

'Hi, I'm just calling to check out my options. Wondering what I might get on a snowscape trip.'

'Do you have your details ready sir?'

'Yup. Initials MY, code 0039-621-45.'

'Just checking your profile for you now, sir. Won't take a moment.'

Snow. That would be something, wouldn't it, sir?'

'Have you ever seen it?'

'Me? No! Probs never will. Supposed to be cold, isn't it?'

'So they say. I'd like to experience myself, if my tab's in tune.'

'Well the initial scrape shows you'd be good to fly, sir, and no contraindications on the risk list. But to qualify for the 20% off you need to accept the thumb print register at all bars, to ensure you stay within the agreed limits.'

'Knew there'd be a catch. Always is. Still, small price to pay to get to

# DNA Discounts

see snow, eh?'

'Would you like me to put an application in for you, sir?'

'Yeah, let's do it. You're only young once. Well, you and I are. No sayin' what the big boss dogs do these days eh?'

'Couldn't possibly comment sir.'

'No, that'd get us both into trouble wouldn't it. And then I'd never see snow. Real snow.'

'That's all gone through for you now sir, just the 14 days checking period, daily swabs at the centre, insurance screen, mandatory DNA donation and, if all comes up green, you'll get your fly permit and secret departure location. Please follow the progress of your application on the app, and thank you for choosing DNA discounts.'

# Alien Welcome



# Please Elaborate

When I first signed up to edit for Luscious Tales, I promised I would treat this new age of storytelling with the same professionalism as I did the literary industry of old. Whatever the Critics may say, I still have my principles. Besides, this is a uniquely sensitive matter.

Most would think Author would be constantly generating plots for upcoming romance titles, but, of course, an AI is skilled at multitasking. I just switch on the receptor of my company issue psych-implant, send a session request and wait for connection.

“Alice Borges,” Author projects into my mind, “what is the category of your latest input?”

I turn from my study window to the tablet on my antique desk.  
“Ideation.”

“Please elaborate.”

“I wanted to inquire about the last plot you sent me.”

“You are referring to Halcyon Embrace.”

# Please Elaborate

“Yes.” The titles are one of the many aspects of the plot that I have no say over. I raise my tablet and open a highlighted section. “I refer directly to the meet cute on page fifteen.”

“The initial encounter between lover protagonists Hector Loonam and Shirley Bence.”

“Yes. You write that he is in her apartment building visiting his aunt when he sees a sticky note on a peace lily pot, bearing instructions to water it. Shirley has written this for herself but Hector waters the plant before she gets the chance. Disagreement ensues.”

“What about this encounter requires correction?”

Well, for one thing it's pretty dull for a meet cute. Too small scale for romance fiction. A little too realistic. “I just wish to know the origin of this premise.”

Author hums as it processes. “The premise originated from the

# Please Elaborate

same source that all other Luscious Tales premises do. The composite language model.”

The melding pot of all romance fiction publishers and labels. Author forms plots from over a century’s worth of books printed by Harlequin and all the companies it has since acquired. A trillion meet cutes, from the melodramatic to the sedate.

“Actually, I recognise this premise from outside the language model.”

“From where?”

“My own memory.”

Author does not reply.

I clear my throat. “It isn’t a personal memory involving me. It’s something my parents once told me about how they first met.”

“Please elaborate.”

“My father once watered a peace lily that my mother had

# Please Elaborate

intended to water herself. They argued and eventually fell in love.”

Another pause. “The plot of Halcyon Embrace was drawn from the composite language model. Any resemblance to lived experience is coincidental.”

Of course Author reacts this way. An automated response. Still, I won’t be denied.

“I just want to know if it’s possible that, during our feedback sessions, you could have somehow drawn some of my memories via the implant.”

More humming. “Feedback sessions may be telepathic in practice but Luscious Tales adheres to International Thought Confidentiality.”

“That only applies to first-hand experiences. Like I said, this is second-hand information we’re talking about.” I tense up. “Author, did you incorporate the memory of my parents meeting into your

# Please Elaborate

writing process?”

The humming is longer than usual. Suspiciously longer. “Thank you for your notes, Alice Borges. Amendments will begin imminently.”

The connection is broken. I drop my tablet, cracking the screen. The draft I opened blinks and deletes itself. I promised I would remain professional, detached. Author made no such promise.

I tune my receptor to a different channel. An encrypted one.

“Okay,” I tell the Critics. “Luscious Tales doesn’t need me for revisions anymore, if it ever did. Author has started to plagiarise my memories, like you said. Let’s talk.”



# Robot Watches Its First Sun Set

Big. Round. Orange. I want to consume it,  
But I'd melt before it is swallowed.  
I feel the wires within me; how dull.  
I analyze what heat does to metal; I think  
"How wonderful. I too will grow big."  
I search the word "sun," and my eyes show me Every single  
piece of information possible.  
I come to favor "Juliet is the sun," I remind  
Myself Juliet is a name. I give myself a name.  
I settle on "Sand" because I am on top of it.  
Therefore, I am. Therefore. I research more of  
Juliet. I consume her story in seven point two  
Seconds. I read articles and pieces about her.  
With Juliet and her story comes a lot of sad emotions. I walk  
towards the ocean. I dip one finger in as it Barely reaches my feet.  
I drag the water and place it Under the left oculus. It glides down  
and off of my face. I tell myself, "This is crying." I decide I have  
related to a Human, and therefore, I am.  
The sun is falling now. Out of its place. Maybe I should wave, Or nod.  
Or wipe more water on my face.  
I don't do anything. I just take it in.  
Before the sun leaves, I practice smiling,  
And I watch its great descent till I cannot no more. I remind myself  
I can only do this because of heat. Heat loves metal so much that  
it expands. How wonderful. How happy I am to be alive.

# After Another January Without Snow, My Husband Imagines the Last Snowfall on Earth

It'll fall at the top of a remote mountain—a place with no sherpas, no base camps, no frayed prayer flags flapping in the wind, because people won't climb mountains anymore—why bother?—no snowcap, no avalanches, no ice crevasses, only the bodies of climbers who fell there and died, their sun-bleached bones picked clean by vultures before they, too, became extinct after an ancient virus thawed from the permafrost and killed everything with feathers.

It'll be detected by the Climate Crisis Alert System, its radar showing a mile-wide cloud of freezing air hovering over the mountain, precipitating snow—an inch, six inches, a full fucking foot! And when the still-rich-despite-everything—the oil barons who fought to keep carbon, the mega-farmers who sucked aquifers dry, the futures traders who traded ours—get word, they'll scavenge furs out of cold storage, have their helicopters topped off with forbidden fuel, and fly off with the wife and kids—kids who've never seen snow, except the plastic stuff they blew around Disney World at Christmas before Orlando disappeared under a sea of salt water.

And pretty soon the air above the mountain will be humming with helicopters, pilots playing chicken, vying for a spot large enough to land so their cheering passengers can get out and touch the stuff. Choppers will collide and burst into flames, the wrecks skidding down steep slopes like how the last bit of glacier descended decades before, down and down and down and down.

# After Another January Without Snow, My Husband Imagines the Last Snowfall on Earth

But now the snow turns to rain and washes away the last snow to fall anywhere on Earth, and the helicopters return to their heliports, their owners disappointed but proud to boast *We saw it and you didn't*. Then they'll eat their lab-grown beef and sip wine vinted before the vineyards dried up and the reservoirs dried up and the rivers dried up and the deserts dried up even more than before.

We used to love the desert, the saguaro forest at sunrise.  
We used to love snow, pure and diamond-struck to the horizon's edge.  
We used to love the earth. Do you remember?

# When the Grid Goes Down

and the fossil fuels have run out  
all the cars on the freeway will  
slow to a halt, destined to rust in place.

Their occupants will walk away,  
looking back over their shoulders in disbelief.

Food will reach us by oxcart and  
every backyard will squawk with chickens.

Homeowners will pickaxe hard ground  
for a latrine; they'll hoard rainwater  
and cut down their trees for firewood to boil it.

At night families will huddle together  
for warmth  
in their smallest room.

Grandparents will have nothing to bequeath  
except blue flowers in a patch of grass  
where the goat has not yet been tethered.

# Accelerated Arrival

Centuries of space travel betrayed my youthful grin upon landing. For me, it was half a lifetime, but for you, the journey took much longer. A gift of happenstance, I completed my credentials ahead of the 2084 mission.

It took several millennia to invent the calculus acquired in one semester of study. The standard model, tried and true, was posted in every classroom of mine. Rare metals mined from asteroids, silicon chips keeping the lights on, and sophisticated recycling systems all came from one humble solar system.

You ask what it felt like:

to step foot in 0.8 g

to send images back to Earth

to find the dailiness in the sublime act

of arriving at a destination light years from

your biological origins.

# Accelerated Arrival

At the rate our ship was going, the next mission, ever so fast, had already arrived. They started the colony we knew we never would have time to build, accelerating the pulse of human civilization with insulated sleeping bags and the most complex way of preparing freeze-dried potatoes. They even readied the ansible prototype and served us a caffeine fix.

I never planned to be the first, yet my generation found a before and after our ancestors only wrote about in science fiction. Each success and each mission spur us on, with the same radiant and noble sense of duty that binds all scientists. Gaining speed, we crunch the numbers, become planetary polyglots, and prepare for the transcendence of interstellar space.

# Biographies

**Simon John Collinson** is a writer from England. He enjoys solitude and unwinding tangled wires.

**Kyle Smith-Laird** lives in West Hollywood, CA with his husband and dog. He enjoys learning new languages, reading, video games, corny jokes, writing terrifying short stories.

**Sameen Shakya's** poems have been published in Alternate Route, BOMBFIRE, Havik, WINK, and Teach Write, to name a few. Born and raised in Kathmandu, Nepal, he moved to the USA in 2015 to pursue writing. He earned an Undergraduate Degree in Creative Writing from St Cloud State University and traveled the country for a couple of years to gain a more informal education. He returned to Kathmandu in 2022 and is currently based there.

**Tom Ball** is from Canada. Tom has published novels, novellas, short stories, poetry and flash in 49 publications. He is senior editor/co-founder for Fleas on the Dog:

<https://fleasonthedog.com>

Website: <https://tomballbooks.com>

**Emily Anne Elliott** is a writer and more frequently a reader. Her work is featured in *Litmora Magazine's* "Flower Language" issue and forthcoming in Tabi's Flash Tuesdays.

**BEE LB** is an array of letters, bound to impulse; a writer creating delicate connections. they have called any number of places home; currently, a single yellow wall in Michigan. they have been published in FOLIO, Figure 1, The Offing, and Harpur Palate, among others. their portfolio can be found at [twinbrights.carrd.co](https://twinbrights.carrd.co)

**Philip Berry's** poetry and short fiction have appeared in Black Bough, Poetry Birmingham, The Healing Muse, Deracine and Dream Noir. His work can be explored at [www.philberrycreative.wordpress.com](http://www.philberrycreative.wordpress.com) and @philaberry.

**A. Deshmane** (they/them) is an occasional artist from scorching Arizona. Their other work has been published by or is forthcoming in Stone of Madness Press, en\*gendered lit, and Catheartic Magazine, among other places. In their spare time, they can be found wandering the desert on local hikes or wishing they owned a cat. Find them @aar.deshm on Instagram.

**Ire Coburn** is a recent graduate of a creative writing master's program. By night, they help people breathe, and by day, they do everything else. Speculative fiction focused on grief is their jam, and they hope to spread the word. They can be found @urban\_sith\_ on X.

**Matt Rowan** lives in Los Angeles. He edits Untoward and is author of the collections, Big Venerable, Why God Why, and How the Moon Works (Cobalt Press, 2021). His work has appeared or is forthcoming in X-R-A-Y, Split Lip Magazine, LandLocked, BULL, Electric Literature, Gigantic Worlds Anthology, Booth Journal, TRNSFR, Barrelhouse, SmokeLong Quarterly, Moon City Review and Necessary Fiction, among others.

**Hannah Greer's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in PseudoPod, Solarpunk Magazine, and Radon Journal. She is a first reader for Fusion Fragment, hoards books, and competes in combat sports. She resides in North Carolina with her partner, a trio of cats, and a small flock of pigeons. Find her on Bluesky @hannahgreer.bsky.social or on her website, [hannahgreer.carrd.co](http://hannahgreer.carrd.co)

**Claudia Tong** is an artist and quantitative researcher based in London, creating at the intersection of physical and digital art. Her practice spans from painting and illustrations to mixed media, visual computing, photography and music. With a background in computer science and psychology, she has lived, studied, worked and exhibited internationally. <https://linktr.ee/clauidxt>



**Sonya Schneider** is a Northwest poet and playwright with San Diego roots. Her poetry can be found or is forthcoming in Potomac Review, Catamaran Literary Reader, SWWIM Every Day, 3Elements Literary Review, Sky Island Review, ONE ART, Mom Egg Review and West Trestle Review, among others. She was a finalist for New Letters Patricia Cleary Miller Award for Poetry and Naugatuck River Review's Narrative Poetry Contest. A graduate of Stanford and Pacific University's MFA in Poetry, she lives in Seattle with her family.

**Katie Brunecz** is an Atlanta-based science teacher by day and a writer of horror, speculative fiction, and mysteries by night. Her work has been featured in anthologies such as the '100-Word Horror' series by Ghost Orchid Press, 'Summer Bludgeon' by Unsettling Reads, and in the Witch House Magazine.

**Jessie Anne** (she/her) has had a fascination with poetry since she was nine. As she pursues an MFA in Creative Writing from Arcadia University, she explores themes of faith, identity reconstruction, and grief. Her work is previously featured in The Eunoia Review and Mobius: Journal for Social Change.

**Ivona Coghlan** studied Creative Writing with The Open University. Her story, Turns was published online by The Blue Nib, two of her stories are published in the New Worlds, New Voices anthology. Ivona has had poems published in The Bangor Literary Journal and Raw Lit.

**Helen Gwyn Jones** (she/her) started recording her world at the age of 8 when she bought a Brownie camera from her sister, something which has become a lifelong passion. A collector of the past (hers and other people's) she likes nothing better than muted images of imperfection. May be found poring over Welsh grammar books when not photographing drains or going into raptures over rust. Recently published at Acropolis, Paddler Press, Pareidolia Literary, Blink Ink, Hecate, Moss Puppy, The Levatio, Camas, Storyteller's Refrain, Full House Literary, Subliminal. Can be found online @helengwynjones

**Louhi Pohjola** was born in Montreal, Canada, to Finnish immigrant parents. She was a cell and molecular biologist before teaching sciences and humanities in a small high school in southern Oregon. She tends to write poems focused on the intersections of human behavior and the natural world, in particular, with black holes, the cosmos, and octopi. She is an avid fly-fisherwoman and river rock connoisseur. Louhi lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband and her temperamental terrier. The latter thinks that he is a cat.

**M. Weigel** retells myths and fairy tales and explores science fiction, fantasy, and horror. When not writing, she researches stories in their oldest forms to see how they survive and transform into today's tales. She can be found online as @Peronelle2014 on Twitter, @Peronelle@mas.to on Mastodon, and @peronelle.bsky.social at Bluesky.

**Michael Strickland's** fiction has appeared in *Cast of Wonders*, *Lit Shark*, the anthologies *Programmed Hearts* and *Green Eggs and Horror*, and elsewhere. Follow his pursuit of a Creative Writing MFA and other literary adventures at [www.stricklandia.com](http://www.stricklandia.com).

**Michael Theroux** writes from his home in Northern California. His career has spanned botanist, environmental health specialist, green energy developer and resource recovery web site editor. Entering the public-side of the creative writing field late in life, at 73, Michael is now seeking publication of his cache of art writings which may be found, or will soon be seen, in *Down in the Dirt*, *Ariel Chart*, *50WS*, *CafeLit*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Last Leaves*, *Backwards Trajectory*, *Small Wonders*, *Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *Cerasus*, *The Acedian Review*, the *Lothlorien Poetry*, *City Key*, *Wild Word*, and *Fixator Press*, among others.

**Heather Truett** holds an MFA from the University of Memphis, is doing her PhD work at FSU, and was a Pushcart nominee in 2023. Her first novel, *KISS AND REPEAT*, was released from Macmillan in 2021. She has work in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Flash Fiction Online*, *Utopia Science Fiction*, and *Spoon Knife*. Heather serves as managing editor for the *Southeast Review*. Find out more at [www.heathertruett.com](http://www.heathertruett.com).

**SOUM** (Screams of Unfettered Minds) is a collaboration of three women, who value anonymity, using their art and poetry to be their voice. Their style is raw, unpolished, tongue-in-cheek, unapologetic, unfiltered; a mishmash of life experiences and ongoing shadow work. SOUM champions mental awareness and social issues drawing inspiration from the struggles of everyday people highlighting the darker aspects of their physical, mental and spiritual battles.

A nature-loving creative, **Stephanie Jackson** writes poems, articles, picture books, and middle-grade novels. Her nonfiction has been published in *Cricket* magazine and her poems have been published in various literary journals including *Tiny Seed Journal* and *Touchstones*, where she's been a contributing poetry editor. Professional affiliations include the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), The Authors Guild, the American Night Writers Association (ANWA), and the Women's Fiction Writers Association (WFWA). She expects to graduate from Utah Valley University in Spring 2025 with her undergraduate English degree, emphasis in creative writing. She's a contributing blogger for [STEMTuesday.com](https://STEMTuesday.com) and interacts with the kidlit community on Twitter as @canoesandcosmos. You can read more at [StephanieWritesforKids.com](https://StephanieWritesforKids.com).

**Sarah Das Gupta** is an English teacher who has taught in UK, India and Tanzania. She lived in Kolkata for some years. Her interests include equestrian sports, the countryside, Medieval History and early music. She has had work published in journals and magazines online and in print, in 20 countries, including US, UK, Canada, Australia, Ireland, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Germany, Croatia and Romania.

**Clare Martin** is a writer with a background in radio journalism. Based in Sussex, England, she specialises in flash fiction and short stories.

Writing about what lies under the surface of ordinary life, she draws inspiration from overheard conversations and the tales we tell ourselves.

**David A. Goodrum**, photographer/writer, lives in Corvallis, Oregon. His photography has graced the covers of several art and literature magazines, most recently Cirque Journal, Willows Wept Review, Blue Mesa Review, Ilanot Review, Red Rock Review, The Moving Force Journal, Snapdragon Journal, Vita Poetica, Full House Literary, and appeared in many others. His artistic vision has always been to create a visual field that momentarily transports you away from hectic daily events and into a place that delights in an intimate view of the world. See additional work, both photos and poems, at [www.davidgoodrum.com](http://www.davidgoodrum.com)

**Owen Townend** is a writer of short speculative fiction and poetry inspired by thought experiment and wordplay. His work is published in anthologies from Comma Press, Oxford Spires Publishing, Written Off Publishing and others. He lives in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire.

**Justin D'Alesandro** is a twenty-three year old writer from New Jersey. He recently graduated from New York University at the Tisch School of the Arts in the Dramatic Writing program. He has self-published two poetry books and loves storytelling in all forms

**B. Fulton Jennes** is an award-winning poet whose work has appeared widely in literary journals and anthologies including CALYX, Comstock Review, Rust and Moth, SWWIM, and Tupelo Quarterly. In 2022, her poem "Glyphs of a Gentle Going" won the Lascaux Prize; another poem, "Father to Son," won the 2023 New Millennium Award. Jennes' collection *Blinded Birds* received the 2022 International Book Award for a poetry chapbook. *FLOWN*—an elegy-in-verse to her late sister—was published by Porkbelly Press in 2024. Jennes is poet laureate emerita of Ridgefield, CT where she directs the "Poetry in the Garden" summer festival..

**Lynn Gilbert** has published 100+ poems in journals such as Blue Unicorn (Pushcart Prize nominee), Mezzo Cammin, Exquisite Corpse, and Appalachian Review; her book *Small Lanterns Bright in Shadows* and chapbook *My Ear is a Magnet for Music*, are looking for publishers. Her poetry volume has been a finalist in the Gerald Cable and Off the Grid Press contests. An associate editor of *Third Wednesday* magazine, she is a founding editor of *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review* and lives in a suburb of Austin.

**Angela Acosta** (she/her) is a bilingual Mexican American poet and Assistant Professor of Spanish at the University of South Carolina. She is a 2022 Dream Foundry Contest for Emerging Writers Finalist, 2022 Somos en Escrito Extra-Fiction Contest Honorable Mention, and Rhysling finalist. Her Rhysling nominated writing has appeared in *Copihue Poetry*, *Shoreline of Infinity*, *Apparition Lit*, *Radon Journal*, and *Space & Time*. She is author of the Elgin nominated poetry collections *Summoning Space Travelers* (Hiraeth Publishing, 2022) and *A Belief in Cosmic Dailiness* (Red Ogre Review, 2023).

## SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you to all our dedicated readers and reviewers for your invaluable contributions to *Cosmic Daffodil Journal*. Your thoughtful insights and feedback enrich our publication and help us showcase exceptional writing to our audience. We deeply appreciate your time, effort, and passion for literature.

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With love,

*Madisen Bellon*, Editor-in-Chief  
*Kelly Brocious*, Managing Editor

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