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CHINCHILLA LIT

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Maybe all that good art achieves at the end of the day is being relatable. Not because the content, necessarily, references a universal experience, but rather because the way it is framed allows the reader to understand what is going on to an almost personal extent. And that, in turn, takes us closer to being collective, to understanding what it means to be human.

That's what we hope to have catalyzed through this somewhat-tardy issue (apologies!). The calming "Quixote," adorable "gaggle," and honest "Men and the Women Who Know Them" are only the first three pieces out of many that showcase this aspiration to make you empathize a little today.

The marvelous art in this issue, created by Izzy Barrett (go follow her Instagram at @izustrations *right* this moment), perfectly enhances and completes this issue. A lot of meditating, a lot of reflecting. Like the miniature creature on a leaf on our cover, we hope that you'll be able to browse through and emerge from this issue with some gratitude for everyone's varied lives and the nice, trusty, frank art that's birthed from them.

Warmest,



 Chase Wong
 Shian B

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Quixote

by Lucas Davis

In the midst of rolling hills,
a pack of giants roam.
Tall and pale, they stop and
gaze at the horizon,
prepared for change.
The giants seem happy —
waving their arms,
celebrating the breeze.

Lucas Davis is a 22-year-old poet from Macon, Georgia. When not writing poetry, he is drinking, researching, and making videos about tea. He can be found on Youtube and Twitter at @Oddi_Teas.



gaggle

by Nicholas Barnes

the hatchling
stands on tiptoes,
asking the silvermagic
bathroom mirror
when he'll be able
to trade gosling plumage
for a shiny new gander coat.

fearing that he'll look
like a child forever,
he keeps returning
to funhouse medicine cabinets,
angling triptych panel doors just right
in hopes of seeing hundreds of himself:

always wishing
to find a fully fledged face
somewhere in that crowd.

waking up one morning
twenty-something years on,
he washed his feathered visage,
and through another reflecting pool,
started to wonder if he could
conjure up that baby goose for a change,
desiring rewind instead of fast forward:

but there's nothing left—
his youthful imagination
dried up like a birdbath
on a sweltering mid-july day.

if only he could remember
how the world looked
when he was a lot closer to the ground.

Nicholas Barnes earned a Bachelor of Arts in English at Southern Oregon University. He is currently working as an editor in Portland, and enjoys music, museums, movie theaters, and rain. His least favorite season is summer. His favorite soda is RC Cola.



Men and the Women Who Know Them

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by Caitlin Andrews

Content Warning: Mentions of predation, age gap relationships, drug use, sexual harrassment, swearing, minor references to rape and gang rape, sex, childhood trauma, sexually-transmitted diseases, and minor references to depression and suicide.

ONE

FRED PERRY

I was walking home from school in the mid-autumn evening (and this was in rural Scotland, so it was already pitch black with the ever-present risk of a vampiric bat attack) when a cluster of disorderly adolescent boys wearing Adidas tracksuits and Fred Perry trainers rounded the corner and started shouting sexual profanities at me.

At first, I elected to ignore them; eleven-year-old me was objectively a bit shit-looking, and even at that age, I figured any kind of male attention was a misguided attempt at a compliment, so I held strong in my belief that this exchange was actually targeted towards whatever rogue Heidi Klum-type was wandering behind me and decided to try and make it home without further incident. No such luck.

As I kept my eyes firmly fixated on the stone wall in the distance and attempted, very subtly, to yank down the hem of my school uniform's kilt in case their badgering was prompted by a pair of unintentionally displayed Primark underpants, my refusal to engage began to antagonise them. They wanted a response. They wanted to be entertained. So, they started screaming about the girls in my year—if I knew Christie Balfour, if I could get a message to Ella Arbroath, and if it was really true what Jen McKenzie did with that boy in the year above over the summer holidays. As their words became sharper and more littered with lecherous hand gestures (you know the ones, where their fingers make O-shapes and jerking motions about six inches from their trousers, as though they were the first hominids to ever grow penises), I felt a lump begin to rise in my throat.

Home was less than three minutes away, but the concrete slabs of pavement were beginning to blend together, and I felt my feet become slack and sluggish, like those childhood nightmares of being chased by clowns, and, latterly, adulthood nightmares of being chased by rapists and dental practitioners.

Whatever happened, I wasn't going to tell my mother. I had already decided that. But I hadn't decided what I would do if things went really wrong; if it all took a turn for the worse; if the headlines read: "Local girl, 11, gang-raped in central Perthshire. Was reportedly wearing terrible underpants. Parents in shock." I simply didn't have the guts to tell my mother the truth—or worse yet, to repeat their crude, verbally incontinent words to my father, which would alert him to the inconvenient fact that I had a vagina—and watch the lines between her brows deepen in anger and fear before quickly concealing a guilty feminist rumination about what it meant to be forty and not have disorderly teenage boys shout sexual profanities at you anymore.

After a few moments of trying to ignore the boys' derisive snorts over my shoulder, I heard a large thunk as an Adidas-clad adolescent boy stepped off the pavement. My increasingly gelatinous legs refused to let me turn around and look him in the eye for fear of violent retribution, but I felt my cheeks begin to burn with shame as he offered up the final dose of propellant for my humiliation.

“Nice ass,” he said. “Can I fuck it?”

TWO

KIDS

When I was fifteen, I had been dating my first proper “grown-up” boyfriend for a little less than a month; a tryst that mainly involved driving out to the arable farms outside Crieff late at night in hopes of lying around partially naked in his silver Toyota hatchback and watching cerebral French animations from the seventies—half of which I couldn't fully comprehend and the other half emotionally undercut by the stabbing pain from a wayward seat belt buckle.

His name was Telly, a twenty-four-year-old aspiring screenwriter from the Central Belt, who blew thick, edible clouds of fruity vapour into the air and deemed the habit so much healthier than smoking cigarettes, in spite of his weekend proclivities for taking ecstasy and cocaine and roaming around the capital like Raoul Duke without the sunglasses. Our moments together were limited, which really just meant I didn't have time to analyse what the hell was going on.

After an evening spent trying to teach me how best to improve my sexual performance and the respective virtues of veganism, Harmony Korine, and Neutral Milk Hotel, my boyfriend revealed he had an announcement to make.

"I'm sleeping with a woman who sculpts," he yawned.
"She's in love with me."

Telly was clever, bonily handsome (in a way that rejected the need for conventional charisma), and had a surplus of creative talent that was only mildly polluted by a lifetime of women telling him he was too pretty for his own good.

Even my mother, a woman known for her shrewdness in adopting manual skills and picking partners with strong hands, fell prey to his impish charms on the night he first darkened our front door. She thought he was handsome; he thought she was beautiful; I tried not to think of it at all.

“When did that start?” I asked Telly, coughing a little from the vapour, and trying to dissuade myself from engaging in thoughts of my mother whilst semi-naked.

“A few weeks ago,” he replied cavalierly before pausing. “We used a condom.”

If it hadn't been for the sweet, boyish bagginess of his jumper or my own internal anguish at the premise of committing to a man whose mandatory “older guy” sex advice amounted to “Enjoy it more,” I might have considered plunging that little purple vape into his eye, but as it stood, I just refocused my attention on the Current Joys song playing over the stereo. After all, my own nights spent in the company of a man named Frank meant I wasn't in a position to protest.

Frank was an unapologetically boorish person who had been provided with the same nepotistic luxuries as a man like Telly but abandoned them in favour of some kind of middling office job, which meant he thought that access to a company car and a few anecdotal conquests about sleeping with the sisters of previously dismissive ex-girlfriends were the *pièce de résistance* of tantalising sexual conversation. Occasionally, we played pool (I, to a shitty proficiency, him to a level only accessible amongst men who sweat Guinness and live in pubs), drank lemonade, had semi-public sex, and more often than not, ignored one another in favour of people-watching or staring at our mobile phones. I never had the time to get comfortable with Frank—our interactions were always shrouded by my desire to spend as much time as possible away from my parents' house, and I went home most nights gagging for a shower.

“I believe you,” I said, after returning my attention to Telly, my brain bouncing around this half-hearted and heavily-penised betrayal and my newly increased likelihood of having HSV-2. “I’ve been seeing someone, too.”

He looked at me, and the saccharine puffing stopped.

“What?” he said, coldly, and we both heard my voice begin to falter.

“His name’s Frank. He has a beard.”

Telly stared at me quizzically, and for a few moments, there was silence in the car. He took a deep breath.

“You know what, Cait? I really think you might be a sociopath.”

THREE

QUARTER POUNDER

By the time I was sixteen, I spent most of my weekends reading old ladies’ obituaries on the internet and contemplating the efficacy of downing a few bottles of Mr. Muscle Drain Cleaner. After telling my mother I was taking a train to visit my ex-boyfriend at his parents’ house in Portlethen, I agreed to meet with Richard, a man who was a

full-time repeat traveller of the North Coast 500 and a part-¹²time dabbler in orthodontics.

If Richard had ever taken an interest in the music of Robert Smith or Dave Gahan instead of Def Leppard and Twisted Sister (or any of the other shit he kept on cassette tapes in the back of his car), he might have stumbled across my mother at an alternative gig in the eighties, though she was unlikely to have wanted to Pour Some Sugar on Him due to his already receding hairline and eventual middle-aged propensity for dating teenage girls.

The night we met, Richard drove us thirty miles out of our way to the McDonald's restaurant situated right next to the Broxden Roundabout—a location I remembered due to it being where a friend and I bought celebratory McFlurries upon completion of our second year at senior school two years earlier. He asked me if I wanted anything from the menu, and I shook my head before watching him grab his big brown paper bag from the young, colourfully-haired girl at the drive-thru and set off in awkwardly conversational silence.

“So, why are you here?” I asked once we had arrived at an

unoccupied car park, much like the stilted script of an underpaid counsellor who was probably committing at least six ethical violations.

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I hadn’t really thought about it. I guess this is just the kind of thing getting divorced does to you.”

“Oh, right. Yeah. Cool. So do you think I’m young?”

I watched the vein in his forehead begin to pop and quiver, as if to say, *Watch out, or we’ll pull a Rick Allen.*

“You don’t seem young,” he replied. “And I think that’s good enough for most people.”

I brushed the hair out of my face. Once Richard had finished wiping the thick globs of ketchup off his chin, I felt him insert his tongue into my mouth and push down hard on a contraption attached to the back of my chair, as if to relocate us to the cassette-tape-laden backseat in a manner only explicable by the existence of a James Bond ejector chair. Softly, he muttered something to himself

about my “hot little sixteen-year-old body,” and I felt the world fade out into a fat-fingered abyss wherein I concentrated my eyes on a piece of dirt rubbing shoulders with the fog on the backseat window. When it was all over, everything was silent. “Sorry about that. I’d have emptied the tank earlier, but I didn’t have time after work. What’s wrong?” he asked, staring out into the darkness.

“I’m not sure. Do you feel guilty?”

He took a breath.

“No. Do you feel like a victim?”

I shook my head no, and he smiled.

“So we’re fine.”

Later on, during the drive home, I thought about what the “Local Girl” news headlines would say this time, but I relegated that thought to the place in my mind where I hid

the smell of blackcurrant vapes and the feeling of Primark underpants and the buried desire I had for the pain to last forever, even if it meant following it wherever it took me. When we arrived, Richard wrapped me up in his arms.

“I’ll see you soon,” he said quietly, kissing me on the cheek

I paused.

When did you see me the first time? When did anybody see me the first time? I thought as he opened the car door and put his key in the ignition. But by the time the words came out in the order I intended them, he was already gone.

Caitlin (Cait) Andrews is an English Literature and Philosophy undergraduate, a freelance copy editor, a ham-fisted writer, and her own personal worst nightmare. You can find some of her work in a variety of online journals, including Antipoetry Magazine, MiniMAG, Soft Sound Press, and Grain of Salt, or via some light internet stalking at https://linktr.ee/caitlin_andrews.



suburbia summer

by Andrea Gerada

i've never had a suburbia summer. the kind with pavements so slicked with sweat under the wheels of pink plastic bicycles slaughtering white concrete and the neighborhood sisters are tied to a tree. staring with sleep-lidded eyes so gray around the mouth where rosebud should be. i knew we were part of that secret sisterhood that demanded chapstick-scented underwear and mirrors reflecting glitter but i was slippery, sky-swimming from the weight of that inevitable biscuit that i knew i just read it somewhere and you weren't real. i never had that kind of summer. the one with your aunt's antique dress and sister's kneesocks and we were feeling so good about girlhood we drank soda glass while dreaming of some life we didn't know about like white shutters and bad milk. like autumn fraternities and treehouses i mean this is what all literature is about. a nostalgia so faded only men with old dreams could have ever written it. those days we killed time living other lives i couldn't tell living from wishing. i couldn't tell the difference.

Andrea Gerada is a writer from the Philippines. She loves candles, cats, and children's stories.



Places to go to—

by Jayant Kashyap

1.

That big football ground where,
secretly,

we'd set up a bonfire once.

It was Christmas Eve, snow

had been falling again
for at least three hours, and you

wanted to have
a taste of gin for the first

time.

2.

That patch of forest where, once,

in teaching me how to swim,
you'd first pushed me in the shallow
stream,

and then followed.

I remember holding your hand,
scared,

all that time I was in water.

You'd look at me every once in a
while, smile, say nothing

but mean it's alright.

3.

That garden of snow
where, once, we kissed, randomly.

You'd said you felt like I

could be the one

you'd want to kiss.

4.

The abandoned house we'd gone to
thereafter.

That evening, the both of us
were almost sure
about what we wanted from our
lives.

Most of it was love.

5.

That street corner, by the clocktower,
where they place pastries and cakes

and whatnot, and your
face had lit up the one time

we went there.

I was running late already but,

sitting with you, I'd learnt
it didn't matter anymore.

6.

Home, to you,

over and over.

And not many places else,
but your heart, always your heart.

Jayant Kashyap has received nominations for the Pushcart Prize and the Best of the Net, and has published two pamphlets and a zine, Water (Skear Zines, 2021). His work appears in POETRY, Magma and elsewhere.



can a ghost be a palindrome?

by Leopold Crow

we danced to old CDs in the living room, tumbling
to the floor when you hooked your leg with mine,
or perhaps the other way around because we were
about as much dancers as fish are bicycles,
however many clumsy waltzes took place to radio 2 in our
kitchen. this is what my father used to dance to.

still on the floor, you kissed me on the nose, punctuated by a
crash of cymbal.

I wonder what the cameraman thought of us, with all our sad
sidewalk

parties and white socks dirtied from puddles.

still, your hand in mine, humans were made to fit
with each other - like a palindrome, our fingertips match up.
if you turned us inside out we'd still be one and the same.

but really, what is there for me to say? I am tired.

the translucent cotton curtains flutter, white like ghosts.

an open window, a breath of october and a sepia-tinted photo album.

your mother's lace doilies line your dressing table.

I am tired. and there you are, the outcasted angel who disappeared between the paper window panes with a breath of october and a white cotton skirt fluttering in the breeze.

Leopold Crow (he/they) is a young trans artist who can generally be found climbing something he shouldn't, making bad (fantastic) puns or doodling all over his schoolwork. More of his work can be found at <https://leopold-crow.carrd.co>.



His Wife

by Claire Beeli

Content Warning: Contains depictions of mental illness and neglectful parental figures.

The woman did not cry when her husband told her he was leaving.

No, she was a woman with a hard mother, a good mother, one who taught her to never become a wretch. A hard mother who taught her that men had hearts, but they were different from women's; they were colder, better for shaping, like biscuit dough. She showed the woman, then a girl, how to hold the dough, how to warm it enough to bend but not enough to stick. She showed the girl the wretches, the abandoned women, the ghoulish, vacant wanderers. She warned the girl to never join them.

Her husband told her at the table, the one she'd bought after they first married, stumbling around a furniture store drunk on love and hope.

Her head felt light, and strangely empty, like there was nothing inside her but a trapped hollow wind, screaming at itself.

“Hm?”

“I’ll take the children ‘till you’re back.”

The table was sharp, rectangular, featureless brown. He sat on the short side, the head, she on the long.

Funny, she thought. The table hadn’t seemed so sharp-cornered, so dull-colored, when they’d bought it. She stared at the corner now, the one closest to her husband, the sharpest one. Would it cut her, if she ran her hand over it?

“Kate?”

“Yes?”

“I asked about the children.”

“What about them?”

“Would you mind taking care of them? I’ll need time to... adjust. I may start taking them on weekends later, of course, but none of us are ready for that yet, I don’t think.”

“You don’t think,” she whispered.

He sighed, the mole on his chin bobbing downwards. He closed his eyes, laying a hand over hers. Parent and child, the woman thought. He was not really the father of their children, but the grandfather. The father of the wife; her guardian, her steward.

“I’m not coming back, dear.”

“Yes, of course you aren’t.”

He sighed again, mole bobbing. Strange. His sighs had always annoyed her, but that emotion, that strong feeling was only now a muted, fuzzy memory. Her other memories, all of them, were of him. His hands to hold her, to hold the children. His smile to lighten her, his touch to ground her, to support her, to contain her. She felt like a liquid, like something that would fall apart and splatter if he wasn’t there to give her shape.

“Goodbye, dear,” he said.

“Goodbye. Call me when you’re done.”

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“Goodbye, dear,” he said.

“Goodbye. Call me when you’re done.”

He cast one more sad look—sighing with his eyes, the woman thought—and shut the door behind him.

She sat at the table for a while longer, running her hand over its edges. She felt the seam of where her fingers met her palms, the dips between each, skimmed the creases over the table’s rough edges. She had a plate before her, but no food; she tapped her wedding ring on the ceramic, enjoying the sound it made, like a wind chime.

“Mother?”

Right.

The woman took care of the children. She cooked and cleaned for them. She did the laundry, separating darks from lights, lights from darks. Most of the time, she did not leave the gas on, or forget where she’d left the children, or let the bath overflow.

Her husband called once, to tell her that he would provide for her. She didn’t know what that meant.

He was gone, absent; what else could he give her but him?

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Her husband called once, to tell her that he would provide for her. She didn’t know what that meant. He was gone, absent; what else could he give her but him?

She took the children to school, and back. She fed the dog, walked it.

She walked it every day. Even birthdays, even her own. She didn't realize it was her thirty-seventh birthday until her mother called her, the strong one, the one who'd taught her how to hold men and shape them and to keep far from wretchedness.

She walked the dog in the park on her thirty-seventh birthday, while the children were at school and the laundry was done. Water hung in the air, mist stacked from the ground so thick and so hot it felt like a suspended, frozen-in-time tropic rain, infused with the smell of cut grass.

Strangers watched her, stared. The dog was aggressive, lunging at children, snapping at them until the woman could pull him back. She'd always figured that dogs learned their emotions from their masters, and his aggression must have come from her husband. She knew he'd always resented the children, deep down, and here the dog was, lunging and snapping, living proof of it. His

influence, his house, his children, his wife.

A stranger passed close to her, his unseasonable coat brushing her leg. He had a girl on his arm, a young, pretty one, with a curving figure and flashing white smile. He had a mole on his chin.

Him.

He also had a dog, the woman realized, and a house, and children, and a wife.

She turned on her heel and followed, dog protesting for a moment before giving in. It was still morning, the sun not quite risen enough to permeate the tree layer, and his face passed in and out of shadow. It twisted in the dark, becoming monstrous, wicked; it broadened, strengthened in the light, becoming joyful, steadfast. Hers—the girl's—never slipped out of sunlight.

The woman watched them. She did not care when the dog snapped again, when the woman it had snapped tried to shout at her. She did not care when the sun rose

enough to make her sweat, enough to signal it was time to pick up the children. She did not care when her cell phone buzzed, like a giant rainforest insect, in her pocket. She followed them, watching, dragging the dog through bare streets, through residential neighborhoods, emptier and emptier, farther away from the park, the city center.

Not once did they look back.

Not even as they entered the small, fine house, tastefully decorated, her husband holding the door open for the girl, the girl smiling broadly back at him. Not as their dog, a new one, a puppy, greeted them, unaware of the woman feet behind, staring into their home.

The door swung shut on its own.

The woman stared at it. It was dark, red wood, embedded with a stately gold knocker, an elegant handle. Gently swooping letters stood out on its surface, marking the address. She ran her hand along it, feeling the smoothness of the newly-sanded wood, the gloss of the varnish. She

could nearly see her reflection in its shine, a funhouse-mirror, distorted version.

Inside, he laughed. A deep, booming chuckle, one that vibrated through the woman's bones, grabbed her and shook her until her heart was loosening, rattling around in her chest.

All the saved-up emotion of the past months flowed from her at once. She clapped a hand over her mouth to muffle the sobs racking her body, contracting the muscles in her abdomen, the burning in her throat. Her eyes welled up, spilling over, unable to contain themselves. Her teeth clamped down on the muffling palm; she didn't feel it, only the dizziness in her head, the heaviness in her limbs.

Her dog barked, sharp and impatient.

The woman startled back to reality, as if waking from a dream. She sniffed, turning away from the door, ashamed; taking deep breaths, clearing the hot knot of feeling in her throat.

The woman walked her dog home.

She let in her children, who had been waiting some hours for her. She unlocked the door by moonlight.

She cooked them a meal, the best she'd made in months, with fresh tomato sauce and cut green herbs and ropes of starchy pasta. She sang them a song, put them to bed. She did her laundry, separating darks from lights, colors, and reds. She fed the dog and sat at the rectangular table until he snored, too, and the whole world except the woman was asleep.

She sat on the short end of the table. Before now, she'd never realized how direct the seat's view was into the side window of the dining room.

She could see the stars. The woman watched them from the head of her table, until she, too, fell asleep where she sat.

Claire Beeli is a writer from Long Beach, California. Her work is published or forthcoming in Polyphony Lit, Block Party Magazine, Londemere Lit, and Love Letters Magazine, among others. When she's not reading, writing, or volunteering at her local library, she's contending with a dog bigger than she is.

sappho of lesbos

by Keerthana A.

I'M WALKING ON THE LONG BEACHES OF LESBOS

asking the local crabs of her. / where is she, i ask the waves
that / fall against my feet in high tide. / i look at the cliff and
see the shuddering marble / rusting with the sands of time /
awaiting destruction. / yet when i blink / the sky is golden,
the ocean lapis lazuli / the trees sapphires / her skin
dripping gold, hair a waterfall to quench thirst / lyre on her
lap, lyric on her fingers, full mouth— / my sappho. /
sappho. / i whisper her name-prayer in the winds / my
brown hair turning me into bark / and suddenly i'm the
olive tree whose branches graced her hair. / sappho, i call
out to her / were you, on the cliff, just an illusion of sunlit
waves? / did i ever see you singing? / come, show yourself to
me. / let me hold you / let my fingers through your soft hair
/ like rapunzel let out of your tower. / sappho, please /
satisfy this devotee of yours / with a parched sight of yours.
/ but again / as i step into the waves / i don't want to hold
you / the way lovers do. / i want to hold you by the
shoulder / shake aphrodite's spell away / because sappho,
true love doesn't exist. / all that is there in the world / is

loneliness. / woman, why did your voice have to enter my
 body / of all places that it could go / why did the hymn of
 love enter me? / mother, i'm tired / so tired of all the voices
 / that tell me to love / in a country where romance will /
 never be mine. / sister, tell darling aphrodite eros kama
 venus / to remove the arrows entangled with my nerves / to
 stop this thirst for love / i am tired, sappho. / so i beg of you
 / let me out of your lyre. / look, the waves are rising / i'm at
 your salty door / my head streaming behind my ears / arms
 extended for you, for you / come here, sappho / let me
 remind you of our conjoined, romantic loneliness.

Keerthana A. (she/her) is an Indian writer and often describes herself as a "Mumbaikar living within a Tamilian", owing to her multilingual identity. She is a lover of poetry and has an avid learning for new formats and styles. An avid lit mag submitter, her works have been featured in Healthline, Ilinix, and is forthcoming in Fleuri Magazine and more. She is also working as a staff article and creative writer at Healthline Zine. She enjoys singing, swimming, watching historical shows, and running towards the nearest beach to feel the ocean waves.

