

JULY-OCTOBER 2022 - ISSUE 12

# Dreamers

Creative Writing

A Portrait of Madness  
by Sarah Milne-Flamer

These Aren't Poems  
by Cindy Dean-Morrison

Winners  
2022 Haiku Contest

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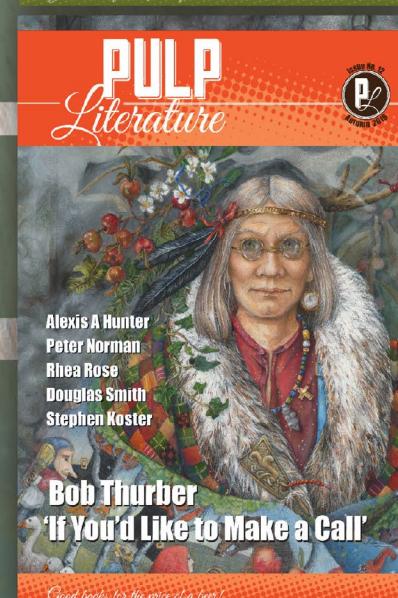
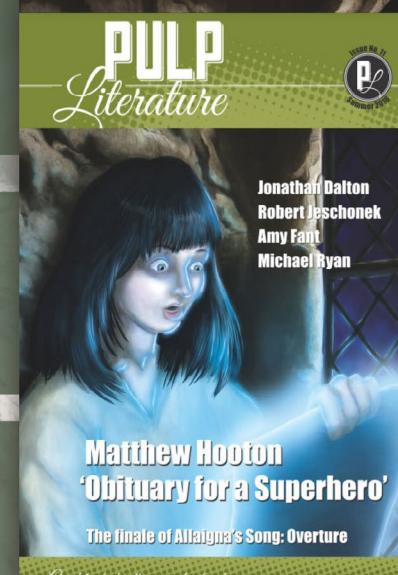
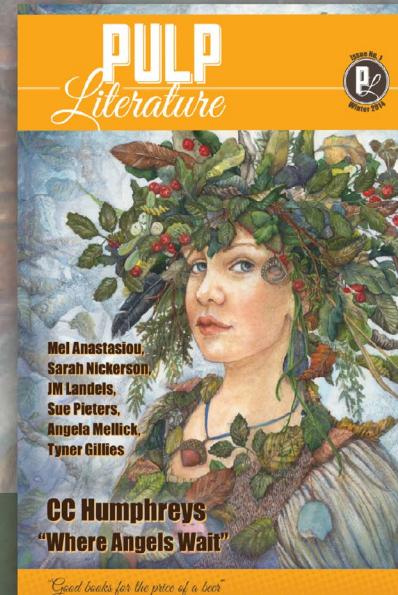
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No, I say. There is no sin in knowing.  
It's the other way around.

—Cathy Hammond

## EDITOR'S LETTER

I'm writing this letter with a sense of euphoria I'm not used to. The global news is, as usual, full of doom and gloom, but my personal happiness managed to eclipse the issues of the outside world, at least for a little while.

I got married!

On June 25th, in true literary style, Ryan Clark and I said our vows in our secret garden followed by a wonderland tea party at the Dreamers Writing Farm.

Conscious of Covid risks, we held our wedding outside and with only a small number of close family and friends around us, and it was perfect. Finding joy despite the stress and pressures of a turbulent world is something to be celebrated.

In this issue of the Dreamers Magazine, you'll find stories of sadness, but there are also moments of joy. Both teach us what it means to live, and love, in a scary world.

Congratulations to the winners of our 2022 Haiku Contest! The winning haiku by Elijah Kazlauskas, Gouri Prakash, and Kewayne Wadley, can be found on page 3. This issue also contains 3 featured stories (2 nonfiction, 1 fiction), as well as 2 flash stories (1 fiction, 1 autofiction), and a book review of Grace Lau's rebellious poetry collection, *The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak*.

I hope you've been able to find your moments of joy these past few months. Make sure you celebrate those moments - they're hard won! And remember, keep dreaming...

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Congratulations to the winning poets and thanks once again to our judge, Reinekke Lengelle!



**FIRST  
PLACE**

**Samantha**  
by Elijah Kazlauskas

Snow falls into rain  
Since I lost all but eight words  
That Samantha gave.

**SECOND  
PLACE**

**Varnished Wood**  
by Gouri Prakash

Pungent aroma  
Sits atop, dead varnished wood  
Cup of memories

**THIRD  
PLACE**

**Full of Posies**  
by Kewayne Wadley

I folded my heart  
And placed it in your pocket.  
I am dressed in you

# A Portrait of Madness

Nonfiction by Sarah Milne-Flamer

*There's something ear-splitting about the kind of silence that one experiences in a psych ward. In my case, I was given pills that sent me deep into a psychotic hole, then left alone in the noise of that silence, in agony. They later apologized for the state they pushed me into, and I smiled, as a sane person smiles, and said, "no worries, you were doing your best, and clearly it's quite hectic in here. I think it would be better if I just dealt with this at home." That's how I got out of that place – by performing the role I have so often longed to embody, of the sane person.*

\*\*\*

This essay is my attempt to examine sane privilege. My exploration into the complexities of mental health and how our society treats those they deem 'mad' is as messy as my mind is. By engaging with literature on mental health as well as my own experiences with it, I hope to portray some of the hardships experienced by people in the psychiatric system. I believe the oppression that many with mental illness face stems from institutions with the power to impose on people their definition of what it is to be sane. I am an able-bodied, queer, white woman, who in some spaces is perceived as mad, in others sane, and that has affected my freedoms, sometimes in a positive way, other times negative.

Dr. Phebe Ann M. Wolframe, in "The Madwoman in the Academy," unpacks the ways in which people who aren't perceived as "mad" experience invisible privileges, explaining that how people see us is tied to how freely we get to move through the world. She begins by pointing to the privilege that sane people have when it comes to representation in the media, noting how easy it is to find positive depictions of themselves, whereas mentally ill people are often seen as more violent, or manipulative. However, I think it isn't that sane people are necessarily portrayed as more positive in media but rather that they have the privilege of being viewed as multi-dimensional. Media has consistently framed mental illness as violent, or tragic, but rarely more, portraying characters who either need to be incarcerated or institutionalized. In fact, while mentally ill white characters are more often written as merely tragic in mainstream media, non-white mentally ill people get depicted more frequently as violent, further oppressing the already oppressed. In both cases the person is viewed through the single dimension of madness rather than as a fully nuanced multi-dimensional individual.

Wolframe notes "the presumed threat of violence is used as a justification for not only the sanest policing of mad people in educational and employment environments, and public spaces, but also for forced incarceration, both physical (hospitalization, criminalization) and chemical (drugs)." When I was hospitalized, there were many times I noticed how my identity both awarded me and restricted me certain freedoms. I was taken to the hospital for a suicide attempt. Instead of EMTs, the police came to take me to the ambulance. My room was a mess of pills, bottles, and blood, but I had called 911. There I was, the most vulnerable, scared, and in need of help I had ever been, and

two big male officers tried handcuffing me. "Get off me!" I protested. "This is for our safety. I'm sorry," they responded to my pleas. I looked at them, these two huge men with guns strapped to their waist and I couldn't believe they thought I could harm them in anyway. "Look at me! Look at my room, look at the state I'm in, do you really think I would hurt you? This isn't about you, I just need you to help me, please help me!" I saw one officer glance at my pink blanket and my wooden carved yin yang jewelry box, then he put the handcuffs down and helped me wobble my way into the ambulance. I believe my whiteness, my gender, and my short height made me seem safe to them, and my possessions all probably seemed unassuming enough to signal that I wasn't a threat. In that moment I had some freedom because of the portrait they painted of me. It was only once I got to the hospital that I began to see how other parts of my identity limited me in a psych ward.

That first night I spent in a room with a glass wall along with a couple of other patients. We had nothing to do, no books, no TV, just our thoughts, so I did what I always do when I'm alone with my thoughts; I asked for a pen and paper to write. I had so much I needed to pour out of me. I needed my fear to be removed from my body and placed on the paper, so I spent hours and hours writing pages of scrambled thoughts and images. For me it was cathartic, but to them I looked like the archetype of the mad artist, too unhinged in her own manic world to be trusted. I believe that my poetry, my sketches, my writing all fed into the 'crazy artist trope' and that is what made them feel justified to medicate the madness out of me. The irony was that the medication I was given made me temporarily unreachable, or as a psychiatrist later put it to me, "I looked at you, and saw that the lights were on, but no one was home."

In author/artist Ellen Forney's graphic memoir, *Marbles*, she explores the idea of the 'crazy artist' through her personal experience with bipolar disorder. She makes a list of artists, writers, and poets who probably had manic or major depression, and she uses this list to comfort herself after being diagnosed. Although the stereotype of the 'crazy artist' was a source of solace for her, it also made her not want to take medication for fear of losing her creativity. "I don't want balance," she says, "I want brilliance! Meds would hold me down!" In the psych ward, I didn't get to choose whether to take medication. When the doctors finally entered my room, they took one look at my pages of writing, and immediately decided to medicate me without my consent. My writings were a jumbled mess of ideas, sure, but I believe that the 'crazy artist' archetype was used as a reason to forcefully medicate me.

Wolframe describes an experience she had where she told an acquaintance "that the people who write the DSM [*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*] are not primarily interested in consumer welfare, since in many cases, they work for pharmaceutical companies." The acquaintance accused her of being paranoid. This experience and others like it made Wolframe feel that

That's how I got out of that place –  
by performing the role I have so often  
longed to embody, of the sane person.



being labeled as mad somehow takes away one's ability to critique any mainstream system, even those experienced first-hand. Judy Grahn, in her poem, "Mental," as quoted by R.M. Rust in their essay "A Geography of Disparate Spirits," criticizes the power given to mental health institutions and the way that power is used as a tool to further silence already marginalized individuals:

*"no need to fear your hysteria will bring chains  
or a ring of whitecoat people terrified of getting  
sued, or a ring of bluecoat people terrified unto  
death.  
and shooting you. you-shooting-you."*

Grahn wrote this poem in response to the Mad Pride movement, a movement to shift away from mainstream psychiatry and resist the institutionalized roots of oppression. The Mad Pride movement was sparked by a woman named Elizabeth Ware Parkard, whose refusal to conform to traditional submissive gender roles led to her husband having her committed to an insane asylum. Another poem by Grahn, "Edward The Dyke," confronts the institutionalized use of conversion therapy to treat homosexuality, while another pushes us to dream up a world where we don't need to live in fear of not falling in line with societies' norms:

*"What if we don't need to choose  
between lockdown asylums and the streets  
what if we create a geography of disparate spirits?"*

These poems are all examples of how writers use their craft to push societal and institutional norms. That's what Grahn does

in her poetry and what Forney does in her memoir. With words or with images, artists paint the world that they experience and internalize within them, and project that outwards. I believe the 'crazy artist' trope came to exist in order to discredit this artist-driven discord. If artists are defined as crazy, then their critiques of society become less credible, thus making it harder for them to disrupt the institutions that oppress them.

For a long time, I lived in fear of defining myself as mentally ill, or queer, or a feminist or even a writer. I felt all those definitions would turn me into a stereotype, instead of a multi-dimensional human. In the hospital I felt as though I was treated as a mad artist until I was able to perform as a passive and polite young woman, but in the process of doing that, I made myself smaller. To clarify, I'm not against diagnoses or medication, but I am against the psychiatric systems way of cementing you into a portrait they paint – or at least that has been my perception. Wolframe writes about her fear of authority in medical settings and having to go to a hospital two towns away to receive treatment when she accidentally cuts her wrist, in fear that her medical record would cause her local hospital not to trust that it was an accident. We need a system that trusts the patient, a system where the person who's suffering gets to paint their own self portrait and repaint it as many times as they need.

I am not ashamed of my "madness". By making art, and writing about my thoughts and emotions, I have been able to free myself from the trauma that my experience in the psychiatric ward left on me. Whatever else happens to me, and no matter how "mad" my work appears to others in the future, I'll never stop creating.

# The Other Side

by Frances Koziar

Love is never simple  
to walk away from  
just as you were never easy  
to love—forged, as you were,  
in some long-lost war, honed  
to indiscriminately destroy  
anyone who got too close—but I  
did both, voice choked  
with caution, anxiety churning  
in my gut, and as I went  
my love for you shuddered

behind me like a waterfall  
parting; for one moment  
I glimpsed you  
beneath the lies and the masks  
and the violence  
and I saw  
the past, the other side, the in-  
between; I saw you,  
my love, my darling,  
and with each step away  
another scar traced its way  
across my battered heart  
like the promises  
you never learned  
how to keep.

# Reaching Out

by Frances Koziar

If you asked me  
why I kept thinking of your voice  
on the phone, it would be difficult  
to tell you: you said nothing  
that I could say was proof  
of your gentleness, how you are teaching me  
that *loving* is something that a person  
can be, no. Your voice  
was ordinary, we spoke  
of nothing, and yet you drew laughter  
from lips too jaded  
to speak, a spark  
from eyes more used  
to staring listlessly  
at the ruins of my life. All  
you did was talk to me, reach out  
inadvertently like some rainbow  
spanning the sky, and all I could do  
was take your hand in mine and wonder  
that this storm could have something beautiful  
inside of it.





# These Aren't Poems

Nonfiction by Cindy Dean-Morrison

I was a failure.

I tried so many times to write three pages every morning or 500 - 1000 words daily, respond to writing prompts, free write, write using outlines. I bought beautiful journals and an embarrassing number of writing books. But I always failed. And it really kind of destroyed me. Oh, big talker me – *I love writing, I can't wait to have time to write*. Reality hit hard when I retired from teaching and couldn't sit down and just do it. I had time. I had all those pristine journals and writing books. But I kept failing.

Until September of 2016, while sitting by a snapping campfire at Jackfish Provincial Park. It was cool and damp, the last days of camping. There had been a ferocious storm the night before and tree debris littered our site and road. I love trees with their delicate fingers reaching overhead, their whispering nature and staunch protection.

Beside me by the fire pit was my usual stack of reading books plus a notebook – again pristine. I picked it up, and smoothed its cover while I “talked” to my battered trees, remembering how just the day before they were magnificent in their fall beauty. Then I opened the notebook and wrote a poem about the “conversation” the trees and I had just had.

*Sept. 10, 2016*

*Talking to Trees @ Jackfish Lake Site 102*

*today the tallest ones  
are almost shouting  
they shake out a tale  
of brutality  
of storms  
that ravaged their limbs  
stripped away flesh*

*but yesterday  
they all in community  
talked to me  
as I walked amongst them –  
the caragana shared  
shimmering, light stories  
summer joys, now leaving*

*the maples, aspens, birch  
spoke more boldly  
whispering at times  
when the wind softened  
and thought to reveal us*

*but the stalwart pines  
asked me over to touch them  
smell their beauty  
look skyward  
to the climax of their age-old story*

I looked at the poem but didn't reread it. I just liked that I had done it. It was then I decided quite simply to write a poem a day for one year. Just one year. Just a few scribbled lines. That I could handle.

This writing challenge was not unique, clever or ground breaking. Rather it was something I had probably once read about in one of those writing books. I committed to write a daily entry, much like a journal entry, but short and simple. I would continue to use the notebook I had started with on that September day. I would date each entry, underline it and then just throw down whatever came to mind. I would do it for just one year.

I developed a few “rules” almost immediately. If I was to do this and not become paralyzed by my inner critic, I had to promise myself that I could/should:

- 1) write crap (and often do)
- 2) keep it simple
- 3) never go back and edit
- 4) if I miss a day or two (or five as I did twice), simply catch up. And these catch-up sessions often were rewarding because they tended to follow a difficult event in my life and were cathartic.

What happened to me as I wrote daily?

The practice sharpened my word choice and my observation skills. I read more. I felt a thrill of accomplishment each day as I turned to start a new page and especially when I started my second fresh notebook. Most importantly, however, it helped me through some significant griefs – it became my safe venting place. In extreme situations, my writing actually became long paragraphs attempting to unravel my latest challenge.

For example, on Thanksgiving weekend, 2016, one of my daughters was taken by ambulance to the Intensive Care Unit at the hospital after she sought a release from this world. We stood vigil for the first day, but by day two our small family was able to begin regrouping, travelling through the dark space into light. We were changed people. I had taken my notebook and, in an effort to lighten the mood, I enlisted my family's help with an acrostic poem like the ones my daughters wrote as children, the ones my young students used to like to write. It was an exercise full of laughter and silliness naming all we were thankful for like tea, Adirondack chairs and ice chips.

About one month later I was again in an ICU with my brother's family enduring a most tragic time. We lost a treasure, my beautiful niece, to suicide. We stood vigil, we made difficult

decisions and ultimately, we changed as people yet again. After that experience I went back and wrote as I struggled with the loss. Some days I wrote the briefest of entries, but it was enough.

Nov. 10, 2016

*I am gutted  
numb*

Other days I quoted writers who seemed more capable of expressing my grief. I still go back to these particular words (lyrics by Chris Young, from the song *Drowning*) and find comfort there:

Nov. 20, 2016

*missing you  
comes in waves  
and tonight  
tonight I am drowning*

Just before our Christmas celebrations replete with lefse, rosettes and fish – yes, I have a strong Norwegian background – life again took me to CCU (Cardiac Care Unit) this time as my husband suffered a heart attack. Again, I lost many days of writing but was determined to make up those days and did. Below is the entry one day before the heart attack. The 20th would have been “heart attack day”, but as you see, I wrote it much later.

Dec. 19, 2016

*I am looking for  
a map...  
ah, there's the rub  
I should be designing it*

Dec. 20, 2016

(written on Dec. 26 due to Ray's heart attack on Dec. 20)

*you are mine  
every part of you  
I will put my hand  
on your chest  
bless it with a wish  
a wish for wellness and  
forever...*

To say this simple practice has encouraged me regarding my writing is true. I have learned tricks and reaped benefits along the way. If you do decide to develop this practice, here are some suggestions:

First, let what you are currently reading kick start ideas. Every morning I read from a variety of non-fiction books from Buddhist philosophy to self-help books to writing advice. I sometimes stop in the middle of a paragraph that particularly strikes me, grab my notebook and explore my feelings immediately. Then I go back to reading.

Second, review your poems periodically. Which ones resonate? What are they telling you? For example, I found I write a lot about paths and maps and finding my way. By

becoming more aware of that motif, I am planning my life more deliberately lately.

Third, don't limit yourself. I have actually written more in other genres and am even submitting them since starting this practice.

Jan. 29, 2019

*these aren't poems  
they are my unpolished thoughts  
strung together  
for the purpose of release  
for the purpose of purging  
for the purpose of giving thanks*

*these aren't poems*

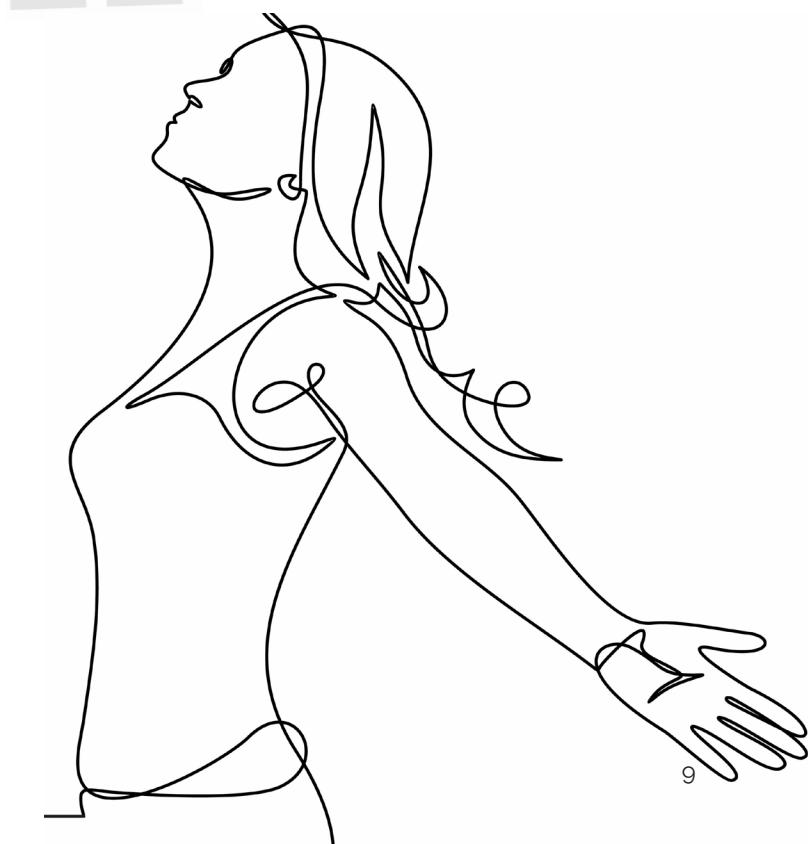
*they are me breathing*

It is now 2022, and I am well into my fourteenth little notebook of poems. They perch in a skittery pile on my desk with multi-coloured tags sticking out from pages marking poems I deeply love. Each day I take the current little book, open it, reread the previous poem then dive in deep.

When I look back over these “poem a day” entries, I see my life reflected in four to sixteen-line purges. And I have noticed a change in me. I am less critical about what I do write. My poem a day practice keeps me humble (because remember, a lot is crap), hopeful (look at all those notebooks) and excited about writing in my own simple, authentic way.

Regardless, I am no longer a failure.

*these aren't poems  
they are me breathing*





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# Lau Shares Universal and Personal Revelations in *The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak*

Book Review by Carole Mertz

To tell us who she is, Grace Lau must speak in various tongues, but her poetry, I conclude, is mainly a language of rebellion. As such, *The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak* has an enviable strength, and though love serves as a poetic vehicle, it barely conceals the struggle the poet endured to arrive at her current identity, a mature child of Chinese-Canadian, and Christian, emigrants; as such, she also carves out her own poetic niche in her parents' adopted land.

"Now, I understand the flowering of my parents' pain," she writes, "when they tried pouring love into me," (from the poem "What I Learned from Growing Plants"). This poem tells us that to speak in her clearest tongue she must follow the twists and turns of the roots and the foundations on which her people stood. "It is the only way I can share the earth with my ancestors."

Many of her poems include Chinese terms for which she provides explanations in her "Notes" section. We also find poems with Biblical allusions, but these are used mainly to demonstrate her rebellion to the teachings of her parents. They also demonstrate an equally strong desire to remain connected to her family's culture. In her poem "The Levity" she states, "There really is no good time / to tell your mother / you've never liked boys."

Her forsaken faith often places her in uneasy stations, sometimes depicted as a longing for the unreachable, sometimes expressed as a longing for Hong Kong.

In "Letter to Longing" we read her desire, through these lines:

"Tonight our blood wakes  
to rebellion  
  
in the way a body adapts to being  
starved of freedom"

And—

"Tonight the soul is longing  
for our bones  
  
like a lonely lover  
at dusk, you will hear us singing"

There is an eloquent lyricism to these lines, and we can certainly feel the longing. Her "Notes" tell us the poem is a tribute to Hong Kong during the 2019 protests against the Chinese government extradition laws. To me, the poem expresses a communal, as well as a private, longing.

In other poems, Lau plays with allusions to pop culture, many portrayed to comic effect. These poems include "Red Lips" with its references to a gay bar in West Hollywood, and a Frank Ocean mixtape; "In a Silicon Valley Coffee Shop" with allusions to Musk, Zuckerberg, and Bezos; and "The Look of Love as Seen by Eve Polastri" - Agent Polastri is Villanelle's arch-rival in the British spy drama. Other poems offer comments on the Philadelphia 76ers, a beach in Cuba, Shaolin, a Buddhist monastery in China, and Sophia, the robot with AI who was granted Saudi Arabian citizenship, demonstrating Lau's wider awareness. (In hilarious deadpan, she tells us Sophia has expressed a desire to have children.)

A kind of Chinese cross-dressing issue presents in her poem, "When Yuhua Hamasaki Went Home." Here she tells us cross-dressing is not so strange, since "our men have been painting their faces and / singing in soprano since / the Six Dynasties."

I've added Lau to my list of creatives with whom I'd love to meet for dinner, though I suspect our arguments regarding our shared religious heritage would run into the wee hours. Reading *The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak* requires, for this reviewer, a kind of forgiveness, a kind of cosmopolitan tolerance. The collection's artistic thoughtfulness makes it easy to extend that forgiveness.

**About the Author:** Grace Lau is a Hong-Kong-born Chinese Canadian poet. She grew up in Vancouver and now lives in Toronto where she works as an editor and writer in the fields of advertising and technology. She holds a B.A. in English Literature and Psychology from The University of British Columbia. *The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak* is her debut collection. Her poetry has appeared in Arc Poetry, Contemporary Verse 2, and PRISM International, among other venues.



# Gold

Fiction Story by Edward Cloney

Ted climbed the ridge-crest and saw the distant mountain. Saw its perfectly coned summit white against the blue October sky. The mountain had no name; he had checked his map earlier – it was only one of many unnamed peaks in this remote corner of north-central British Columbia. The sharp, pyramidal symmetry of the mountain was striking.

"Looks a bit like Mount Fuji," he mused – and because of finally sighting the mountain he did not notice the end of the 'cruise-chain' slither past his foot until it had gone ten meters too far.

"Chain!" he shouted, running and snatching up the trailing end.

"Back!" he commanded, and dragged the nylon-rope chain back the ten meters he should not have allowed it to go.

He could feel the resistance in the rope as he hauled Liam, his compass-man, back with it. Ted quickly followed along the chain's fifty-meter length, occasionally hanging strands of fluorescent-coloured ribbon so as to mark the 'cruise-line'. In his fieldbook he made comments on the local terrain, and on the forest's overstory. When he got to the end he saw that Liam had already selected a 'plot-center tree' and was busy tagging it to mark the location of the 'sample-plot'.

"Sorry about that," Ted said.

"See the mountain?" Liam asked, the mountain now out of view.

"Yeah, figured we would. So perfect – looks like Mount Fuji almost."

"Where's that?" Liam asked, done at the plot-center and with a can of spray-paint in hand ready to number the trees in the plot.

"Most famous mountain in Japan – I'm going to climb it someday," Ted said.

He stepped to the plot-center and viewed the surrounding trees through his 'basal-area measuring prism'.

"Those three are all in," he said, pointing confidently to three stout Douglas fir trees standing nearby.

He waited while Liam swiftly painted the numbers 1, 2 and 3 onto the tree trunks.

"Why?" Liam asked.

"Because it's beautiful, that's why – and sacred, too."

"Whoo – whoo," Liam purred, done at tree three.

"That white spruce is four," Ted said, as he continued to circle the plot's radius as measured by the prism.

And now Liam was ahead of him, as usual, estimating correctly which trees were in the plot and which were not – positioned

at the tree ready to paint before Ted confirmed it through the prism. Ted smiled, for it was this – Liam's uncanny ability and physical agility – that contributed to them being the fastest 'timber-cruise team' in the Company.

The trees of the plot now identified, Liam went up to each in turn, hooked on his 'diameter-at-breast-height-measuring tape' and hollered the tree's species and its diameter: "One – Doug fir – fifty-six point four. Two – Doug fir – sixty-four point two."

Ted recorded the data in his 'tally-sheet' as Liam spoke. To maintain accuracy it was Ted's strict rule that there be no talk – no small talk, till these three data points were recorded for all the determined trees in the plot. That way there would be no misinterpretation and they could leave the sample-plot confident that it had been accurately measured, and that it would pass any random checking routinely conducted by government 'check-crews'. While recording the data Ted also slowly circled the plot with his head raised and closely inspected each tree from top to bottom – looking for defects that also had to be noted: broken top, fire-scar, mistletoe infestation.

On occasion Liam hollered out a tree's defect he had found: "Tree six – conk," (the conk indicating probable rot).

The final task was to select two 'sample trees' – trees representative of the average height and age of the forest stand they were in. Ted did the heights; Liam the ages. Now they could gab again.

"That's pretty far isn't it - Japan?" Liam asked, drilling the first sample tree with his 'increment-borer'.

"Not that far," Ted answered, aiming his 'inclinometer' at the top, then the bottom of the tree Liam was drilling. He triangulated the tree's height and entered the result in the tally-sheet.

Liam carefully withdrew the age-core. "When ya going?" he asked. "Counting."

"Some day," Ted said, reflecting on the thought but with no further comment, allowing Liam to finish his count.

"It's ninety-one," Liam said.

With the information of the second tree recorded and notes made of the understory vegetation and the general health of the forest they were ready to proceed to their next plot – two hundred meters ahead – the plot located by Liam's chain and compass. Rock-steady he shot the line's compass-bearing and with chain in hand set off. "Be watching the chain not the mountain," he said, grinning. "Fuji-Man."

"Be off," Ted said, already searching for the white of the mountain through the green of the forest.

Liam disappeared into the trees, the chain snaking behind him. Ted checked the time – the plot had taken thirty-five minutes to complete. At that rate, he calculated, they'd be done early – time perhaps for a short hike closer to the mountain.

\*\*\*

At noon they had completed six plots and stopped for their lunch-break. Liam made a small fire to heat their sandwiches – ham and cheese tasted so much better with the cheese melted, the bread toasted, the ham hot. A hot lunch was Liam's one rule he insisted they follow. Since he had begun working with Liam six weeks ago they had a campfire every day and Ted soon eagerly agreed to it – the simple luxury of it helped fight off the boredom he was increasingly finding the work to be. They rested by the fire and ate, and were warmed by the fire, the hot sandwiches, and the October sunshine.

"Lost sight of the mountain an hour ago," Ted remarked.

"Should come back when we head up the new line," Liam said.

"When do you pick the car up?" Ted asked.

"Payday – then I'm a free man."

"I remember my first car – lasted all of three weeks."

"What happened?"

"Long story."

"I'll bet."

"What is she – you said?"

"Chev Impala, a ninety – just two years old – big three-fifty in her."

"Christ," Ted muttered, "go easy with it will ya?"

"Sure."

Ted looked at his young compass-man quietly eating his lunch and not for the first time saw himself from some years ago.

"Girlfriend will like it I'll bet," he said.

"Told ya before – ain't got one," Liam said, quickly adding: "maybe now."

"Oh you'll hook one now, Liam – don't you worry."

"Road trip somewhere would be good," Liam said.

"Where to?"

"The coast – most definitely – never seen it, the ocean."

"Really – you haven't?"

"Nope. Like to."

Ted pictured them in his mind's eye heading for the coast. "Ah – youth," he said, "another cig? I'll bet we're way ahead of those two bastards – we'll only end up waiting for them at the truck."

"Sure," Liam said.

"Give me a light," Ted said.

They smoked and lay sprawled in the noon-day sun and talked of cars and girlfriends and traveling and what they'd rather be doing instead of timber-cruising. Ted nodded off and Liam's stomping out of the fire brought him back.

"Let's go Fuji-Man," Liam said.

"Stop calling me that."

"Okay Teddy-Spaghetti." And he was gone.

\*\*\*

An hour later they were on their final cruise-line, the undergrowth much denser now and it slowed Liam's compassing – only short shots. While he waited for Liam to compass out each fifty-meter section Ted was able to enjoy the mountain-view. And daydream of being in other places, doing other things. Three years at it now and he'd had enough of timber-cruising. He liked working in the bush, being in the wild, but the repetitiveness demanded by the work had grown mind-crushing. The cruise-lines he followed all day seemed like a prison holding him back from what he really wanted to do – travel and explore white mountains, hike them, climb them – not merely peek at them from afar.

He had the chain draped over his boot so he could detect Liam's progress and at the same time view the mountain. But now, for several minutes the chain had not moved, was well-short of having gone its fifty meters. Difficulty getting a good shot, no doubt – but no – it still wasn't moving. He looked around and dug out the aerial photo from his 'cruiser's vest' locating where they were.

"The little bugger," he muttered.

For Liam was at a creek and Ted knew what he was doing there, why he had stopped there. Liam was looking for gold. Not as preposterous as it sounded, Ted acknowledged once more. This part of the province was so remote – only one logging road in and it less than a year old – there well could be undiscovered gold in the creek beds, though it was highly unlikely you'd ever stumble on any. But it was Liam's childish passion and he pursued it far more often than Ted cared for.

"You're getting paid to cruise timber not prospect for gold," he'd tell him (not near as angry as he pretended to be).

Liam's cheerful reply was always the same: "Split it with ya – what I find."

Ted noted the meter-length of the stopped chain – 37, and walked down it to the creek. He spotted Liam's red vest; he was crouched on a small gravel-bar examining the sediment. Ted shook his head indulgently – what was the harm? He knew they'd have plenty of time to spare waiting for Rat and McPhee to show up.

"Hope you're not planning to pay for that Chevy with gold nuggets," he called out.

Liam turned on his big grin. "Found some," he said.

"Bullshit."

"Someday – you'll see," he said, "split it with ya – what I find."

He quickly moved back on line and shot his compass.





"You need thirteen more meters," Ted said.

"Okay, Mr. Fuji."

\*\*\*

The afternoon and the white mountain slowly slipped away. At three-fifteen they finished their last plot. A half-hour hike brought them back to within sight of the truck. There was no sign of the other crew.

"Ian wanted me to check if there was any bedrock south of this timber that could hinder a road into it," Ted said. "I'm going to do a quick recce – you wait at the truck – okay dude?"

"Might be a creek around," Liam said, mischievously.

"No looking for fucking gold!" Ted snapped, truly annoyed now. "It's late, wait at the truck – those goons should be out before I am – understand?"

"Yes, sorry." Liam walked towards the truck, raveling up his chain as he went.

\*\*\*

Ted strode into the forest, upset with himself for having lashed out at Liam. But sometimes he needed it, he rationalized; sometimes Liam didn't take the job seriously enough. He studied the air-photo, located himself and followed along where the proposed access-road would go. Carefully he checked for bedrock outcropping. A half-hour's reconnaissance found none and he wrote a brief note saying so in his fieldbook. He began the trek back, soon alarmed at how fast the daylight was ending. Ted well-knew how quick darkness could descend this far north this time of year, had even considered not doing the recce. But that was that – done – Ian would be pleased. He quickened his pace, his exit helped considerably by the ribbon strands he'd taken the time to hang going in. He sighed relief when he caught a glimpse of the truck through the trees. Relieved, also, as he drew near and saw that Rat and McPhee were there – now they could all drive to camp, the day's work completed. But when he came up to them there was no sign of Liam, and they were behaving strangely. They were laughing – howling with laughter – bent over – laughing uncontrollably.

"What's going on?" Ted demanded. "Where's Liam?"

Rat spoke: "Listen! . . . Listen!"

"What?"

"Just listen," McPhee said.

Perplexed, Ted turned to where they were pointing. And from there he could just barely hear Liam – thrashing about in the bush. It sounded like he was bashing the underbrush. At once he knew.

"Oh for Chrissakes!" he said. "He didn't fall for that did he?"

He looked at the two. Rat was now slapping his knees, so obviously pleased at the success of their gag. Disgusted, he went to the back of the truck and unloaded his gear, dismayed that Liam had fallen for it. The old 'snipe-gag' where you convinced someone gullible enough, to go into the bush and flush out snipes – a supposed rare gamebird – so that others waiting on the road would be able to catch the birds when chased out.

"They're real plentiful this time of year," or some other encouraging comment was the convincing hook.

Ted grew angrier at the cruelty of the pair. He hated their guts to begin with because they were slackers – never managing to get their daily quota of sample plots. He walked over to the edge of the road, cupped his hands and hollered:

"Liam – let's go!" He waited for him to emerge but he didn't.

He hollered again: "Liam – you hear me?" There was no reply.

Instantly he realized the danger – it was close to complete darkness. He raced to the truck, clawed the air-photo out of his vest and scanned it in the fading light.

"You bastards!" he shouted. "There's nothing in there but alder swamp!"

"Good snipe habitat," Rat said, giggling.

"Jesus!" Ted swore. "He's got turned around!"

He ran to the edge of the road.

"Liam!" he shouted. "Liam!"

There was no response. He lunged into the alders; a branch swatted an eyeball.

"Christ!" he winced. "Liam! Liam!"

Ted stood abruptly still, rubbed his throbbing eye, controlled his breathing, turned and made his way back to the road. The others were hanging sheepishly by the truck door. He roughly shoved them aside, jumped in and pressed on the horn. He started the ignition, reversed – the headlights shining into the bush. He got out.

"McPhee," he snarled, "you blow that fucking horn."

He leapt to the high side of the road's ditch and between blasts from the horn called Liam's name until his voice was too hoarse to continue. Rat joined him and hollered.

"You bastards," Ted croaked.

"It was just a joke," Rat said.

They continued signaling for a quarter of an hour but there was no sound or sight of Liam.

Ted paced in front of the headlights and calmly spoke, his voice pained.

"All right – both of you – drive back to camp fast – McPhee you drive – bring a party with lots of good lights. Ian will know how to manage it. Go to Ian. Can you do that? Can you do that for me?"

"Yes," McPhee said, getting in the truck.

"It was only a joke," Rat repeated, joining McPhee.

"Please hurry."

When they sped off, Ted took the flashlight he had retrieved from the truck and in its light gathered tree debris and soon had a small fire burning. He tried to stay focused, positive. Ian would spare no resources – that was good. It was fairly warm, the heat of the day having not much dissipated – that

was good. Also good, Ted tallied, in the six weeks he had worked with him, Liam had grown increasingly bush-wise (despite having been sniped). He felt reasonably sure that Liam would stay put in one spot and wait for help. And, yes, get a fire going – he was good at that. The fire could be smelled – seen. He lit a cigarette. Rolled the lighter in his palm. Looked down at the lighter. At the yellow lighter. Liam's lighter.

\*\*\*

They searched all night but it was morning before they found him. He lay curled on his side, hands between his knees, under a ragged cedar tree. He was completely enshrouded in the four inches of wet snow that began to fall around midnight. He had made it through the alder swamp and gone another full kilometer straight into the forest.

\*\*\*

At the funeral Liam's father accepted Liam's compass from one of the Company bosses. He spoke of his son's recent happiness in a job he had come to enjoy very much, and of the comradeship he spoke of having had with the crews. Beckoning Ted to join him, they stood beside Liam, and Ted recited the poem he had selected: Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

At the graveside Liam's father gave Ted the compass.

"He'd want you to have it," he said, "I'm sure of that."

\*\*\*

What happened to Liam? He got lost looking for gold. That was the cause, as put to Ian by Rat and McPhee from the very beginning. The cause was readily accepted by everyone – crews and bosses – because Liam's gold-seeking penchant was well known. Ted did not dispute it – they'd only deny it.

His anguished thoughts were elsewhere – a private grieving for having departed Liam in anger, for not having given him back his lighter. He saw no solace or peace in exposing them. Besides, he reasoned, a quest for gold was far more noble than one for snipes – he could at least give Liam that.

Work carried on as usual and in a very short time, Liam, and all he had been, was on the way to anecdote.

\*\*\*

The alarm on Ted's watch woke him at midnight. Outside his tent, wearing the warm clothes he needed for the final push, he donned the small pack containing his full water bottle, the packet of powdered, energizing sugar, his small camera and Liam's compass. Turning on his headlamp and gripping his hiking-poles he set off for the summit.

Five hours later, breathless, dehydrated, light-headed but steadfast, he trudged on till he heard the snapping of the wind-whipped summit pennants announcing his success. He sat down to rest, the dark world and all his cares far below. When it arrived he stood and bowed slightly to the rising sun, turned and descended, his final cruise-line completed.

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# The Knowing

Fiction by Cathy Hammond

I used to be a fig. I was every fig on every fig tree. In the morning the sun woke me. In the afternoon the rain fed me. Under the watchful moon I grew.

When weary travelers reached for me, the wind whispered in their ear. Have faith in this fig's power. Each swallow will make you stronger. So men and women loved me, and I loved them. I was everyone's favorite fruit.

Then some men gathered in a secret nave and wrote a story about a man named Adam and a woman named Eve, and they changed me to an apple. An apple!

Those reckless writers warned the man and the woman not to eat me. They said I'd doom the world with all I knew about

good and evil. How silly. Surely, the man and woman would know it is right to share water but wrong to steal it. They would know that soaking in the sunshine is good, but blocking it from another is not. Even a fruit knows these things.

Yes, I know good from evil. I have seen travelers share their barley brew with thirsty strangers, and I have felt the steam of cheating lovers as they roll beneath my tree. But the world's wisdom does not quiver inside a fruit.

Knowledge rushes through the bushes, shaking every leaf. It bangs against the shore, spraying droplets on the rocks. When the man and woman come for me, the taste of my flesh will change nothing. In time, they will learn why rivers run and mountains rise, why songbirds sing, why people cry.

“But the world’s  
wisdom does not  
quiver inside a fruit.

Everything there is to know they'll know.

What matters is the desire.

Eve appears. I test her by making myself look spoiled and sickly. When she snaps me off and puts me to her mouth, I applaud. The first step is the hunger. Then Adam arrives. I lean back on my branch to see how much he wants me. With his bite, I feel an instant of delight.

Eden smiles and grows greener. Fresh leaves unfurl. Sunlight fills the empty spaces. The wish to know, the urge to grow, it makes the forest shiver.

Stop, the pious penmen howl, we won't allow it. They send lightning. They make the thunder clap.

We know too much, we've gone too far, the man and woman whisper behind a branch.

No, I say. There is no sin in knowing. It's the other way around.

We're naked, the woman cries.

We're vulnerable, the man yells.

That's how love starts, I shout so they can hear me through the tempest.

Reaching out is wrong, the wicked writers rage.

Reaching is the only way, I say.

But my voice is lost among the trees. Adam and Eve bow down to the charlatans. The liar writers win. All those bitter little godmen.

And so man and woman go forward with the children of their children, leaning on their borrowed books of babble, hunting witches, chopping off the hands of hungry men, teaching religion with shrapnel. So many hearts of rubble.

Yet coins drop in tin cans. Blood flows from giving veins. Minds and bodies work together to keep the lost alive. I'm not surprised. You are the knowing and the unknowing, the growing and the ungrown. You are the leaves, the waves, the way, same as me, true bounty of the tree.



# On Saturday

by Holly Matthews

I briefly had a crush on the  
doctor who administered my vaccine

it was the elixir of biceps and hope  
how I suddenly considered the possibility  
that we might all survive this godforsaken season

how the convention center was full of fatigues  
and folks feeling grateful, floating, smiling  
under their masks

how we shuffled from dot to dot  
how we treated each other like precious things  
touching nothing, tossing the single-use pencil  
with which we signed our consent

he flirted with me I think  
though I'm grossly out of practice  
he asked me about work  
made a mental health joke

actually that was the best day  
I'd had in a very long time  
and maybe it was the morning rollerskating  
with my daughter in the school parking lot  
that set me up to love Dr Parsons  
so brashly for about 10 minutes

it was the sunshine, the glide  
the grace of my beautiful girl  
the bulk of knee pads  
the flash of hair

It was my body remembering  
what it once knew about the breeze  
It was my legs leaning into their strength  
It was the way it only works if you lift your gaze  
and focus on where you'd like to go

# an unknown package

by Joey Salomone

the weatherman said the sun is dead  
a locked front door  
an unknown package  
get a signature  
before  
the end of the world

the reflection in a window  
I squint to  
identify if it's shut  
bolted

is the chain on or off?  
locking me in or you out?

being trapped inside this  
brain and living room  
are the worst two

yes, I'm still watching, well, sort of as  
I look up periodically from my phone

as I stumble steadfast around  
this shelter in place  
muttering excuses to  
myself about why I  
can't just sit down and write

dishes  
trash  
laundry  
headache  
exhausted

it's all garbage anyways  
that will just end up  
twirling around inside  
the Texas sized trash ball  
in the ocean.

# Melrose Place

by Alan Semrow

I've walked by the opening now  
Defined by prime  
My prime  
My best, my past

There in, lived four people  
My people  
Chosen family  
Wine-soaked nights  
Diatribes about boyfriends  
About work, too

Most weeks now, I spend by myself  
Thinking about days  
Where something about timing brought us all together  
In harmony, in love  
Though all things end  
Even if it's lightning in a bottle

Now, I can't find them  
They're gone, but still here  
And the endless search for what was  
For what I hated sometimes, too  
The cycle continues on  
My flash in the pan no more

And here I am now  
My present is my future.

# At Swedish Hospital

by Alison Jennings

I see patients, apparently named  
for their capacity to wait,  
defenseless, afflicted by disturbances  
in biorhythms, the ebb and flow.

We used to know our bodies,  
felt connected to the earth,  
knew that morbid mixtures  
of our humors could cause damage:  
fevers in the flesh, murmurs of the heart.  
We vibrated with the flow of energy,  
sensing rain, or earthquakes early,  
without instrumentation,  
predicting fate,  
and the time to laugh, the time to cry.

Ancient medicine  
mocks modern sensibilities,  
with its inscrutable instructions,  
beeped at us from impersonal machines,  
ordained by irksome tests  
that gouge us, grab our blood.  
X-rays peer into bones,  
surgeons slice open flesh,  
deadly rays bombard the cells,  
but all will fail to penetrate  
the central layers of our being;  
the soul remains elusive,  
nowhere to be found  
within the gray mass in our skulls,  
or fibrous tendons of the heart.

Healing is a blessing  
from an unknown source. Lines of life  
dissolve, when miracles are no longer  
expected, and so, do not appear.

The body shrinks, illness  
the only way it has  
to fight its own confusion.

# Blame the Bricks

Autofiction by Janice Vis-Gitzel

Running along the new brick road. The grout is still young and lovely.

You were young and lovely. Your one ear that had an elvish point, your penchant for buying only the fanciest possible soap for our bathroom, and your one nose piercing that always caught the light.

I've always gone for a run when a tragedy arrives. Most come exactly as scheduled, after a couple months of hospital care in someone's eighth or ninth decade. Real heartbreak, but heartbreak with enough mercy to announce its arrival. Your tragedy was different.

You were twenty-one.

You sat in a plane.

You died.

“

I've always gone for a run  
when tragedy arrives.

You didn't die like people expect to die on planes. No turbulence tossing you out of the sky, no exploding engines or ocean crash-landings.

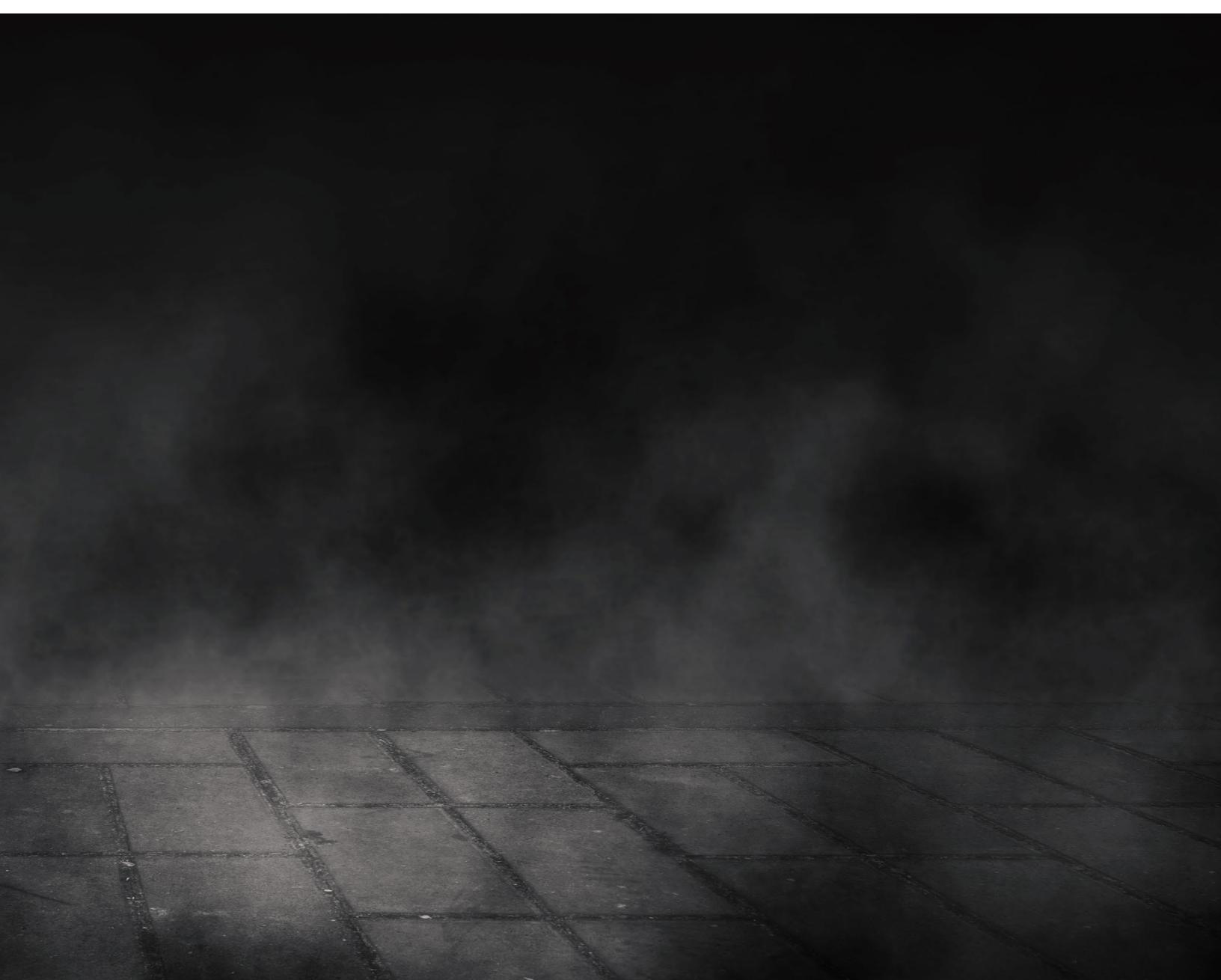
There isn't even a hijacker to blame.

Maybe I could blame the stewardess. She found you and whispered the dark new secret that had snuck unwelcome into our world and made it real: "Chloë is dead."

But that never happened. She didn't even know your name; you were a seat number, maybe 22b. 36a. 18d.

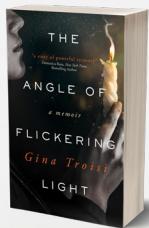
So, today, I blame these new bricks that dare to still be young and lovely.

Running, my shoes grinding dirt into the grout.



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