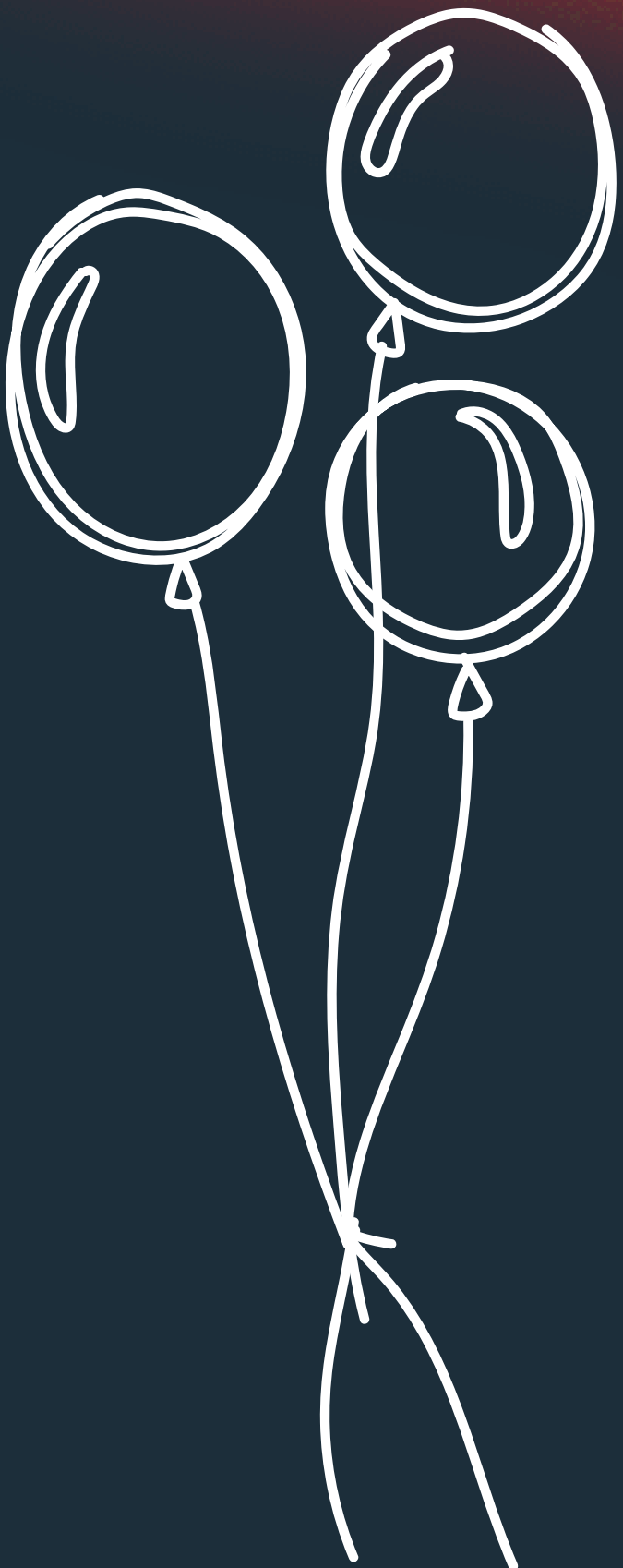


# Levity



**2023 OUTWRITE  
JOURNAL**

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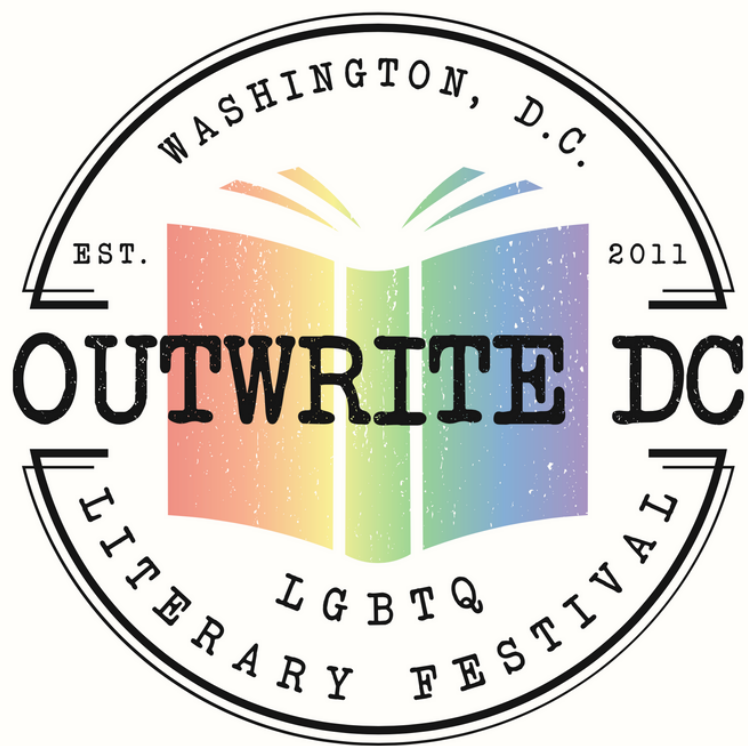
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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue is a free-flowing collection of creative writing celebrating independent thought and gay people—as we exist in society. That being said, this issue emphasizes that everything is gay—every mundane experience and every drastic realization. That a queer perspective is innate throughout the issue because a queer perspective is overarching and can not be tastefully parodied or replicated. Here, levity emerges as a way of being—echoing Sontag, it is not the position, but the disposition.

—SYLVIA JONES

Poetry

## Ishanee Chanda

Hum

i am bringing my girlfriend home to meet my parents in three weeks and it might be a shit show. i have never taken someone home. i do not know if they will speak or not speak. my mother will cook but will there be love in the mutton curry this time or just shame. my dad will sit and watch television and he will not make conversation except to maybe pat me on the back, but will he do that with tate there. i do not know. my little brother will be in the home office. he has his own laptop now so he will not come out except for food and shower and sleep. the house might be hollow even though it is filled with things. might be cold in the dead of texas summer heat. i tell tate, we have a pool and a hammock and a movie theater room and she smiles, she is hesitant, but she smiles. *i want to go swimming*. how will we be. two girls in the water. surrounded by flowers. will we touch or not touch. will we sing or not sing. i cannot help but imagine though. my dad. grilling fish and kebabs and corn while the music is playing in the background. my mom. animated by the pool sipping a glass of red wine. tate and i. cracking jokes. splashing my brother in the pool. my dad. smiling. a whole, knitted family. blooming slowly in the golden hour light.

## **Ben Truax**

### Temporarily Embarrassed Millionaires

We were not raised on plums,  
yet my father found time  
to read to my brother from the books  
of Pooh while mother smoked  
cigarettes in the doorway.

I nodded to sleep in the top bunk  
beneath a thin ceiling I could touch  
and neon glow-in-the-dark stars.  
*What is their reason for fighting?*  
Soft murmurs and smoke tendrils  
wafted in still air.

Our bedroom had a rug, a cartoon  
map of a city, and while my  
brother played Mathblaster! on the home-made  
family computer, I wondered alone  
why the rug people, who already had a school  
and police cars, had no McDonalds.

**Ben Truax**

The Vintner

A body linguist once told me  
I am repressed in every stance.  
And I feel it in my gut  
that I need another glass

of shiraz to swirl between  
the silences. Yes, I'm wary.  
I am tight-lipped, cautious,  
refrained. I am Scheherazade:

telling a-thousand-and-one stories  
at dimly-lit hours, tailored  
like impervious veils,  
prolonging the day I reveal

the truth I've pressed with bare feet,  
casked in oak like a promise,  
and keep locked in a cellar  
to mellow with age.

**Sarah Curry**

Toesies

The bearded toe  
Goes places no  
Others go—  
A brutal brute,  
A formidable foe.

The bearded foot  
Sprouts peach-like fuzz—  
Iron filings for  
calloused gloves.

Fat lil piggies  
Wiggle and dance—

Psilocybin reset,

Sparkly sprinkles  
In your soft doe eyes.

## Rose McCoy

### The New Generation

i make a stupid joke, and  
my sibling is surprised my mother gets it.  
i want to say baby, we have been around for ages,

this ain't new. they found male mosquitos  
humping in the sap that remade  
dinosaurs. don't you know

where the word *lesbian* came from?  
and my new friend is laughing with me,  
then cringing, saying, please don't call me bro

and i say you got it, chica, anything you  
want. and you see, it's not that  
i believe in lawlessness, i just believe in

love. so if my adult body is a haughty dinner date  
telling my second child, 'we'll both have XX, thanks,'  
i want my son to have the courage

to lock eyes with my firstborn and say,  
'actually, i think i'll have what he's having,'  
you see—i want my children to be free

to be themselves. i want the world to say,  
i take you as you are or as you will be,  
i want the kind of happiness that makes

Harvey Milk see us and say  
good God, i didn't know anything  
could be so worth it, the kind of world

that leaves each new generation  
on their knees, looking backwards,  
breathing *thank you, thank you, thank you.*

**Sara Lieto**

Swallow

The barn swallows  
circle the pond  
getting close just  
to shit. Ripples.

I want a grand life:  
The shit in the pond.  
The pond. The circling.  
A signature tail. To eat

with a beak. Watch how  
they fly. Recognizably.  
Watch me want. I want  
to be watched.

## Ronnie Sirmans

### Love Letters

It isn't that they never  
write back. They do, and  
say: *Don't write me back.*  
*Please*, they say tenderly.

W is two V's contorted  
closer than back-to-back.  
W's in we two: too distant  
yet as close as a paradox.

There is no I in *love*,  
but there is an e like  
in *team*, but it is not  
a group effort usually.

O, how some letters  
can be so duplicitous.

## **Ronnie Sirmans**

### Apples Of Sodom

My dapper diva friend really wishes  
to find some Sodom's apples to bake  
in a pie tasting so divine all the angels  
will want to slap their big old Daddy.

Shall I point out these apples of Sodom  
aren't like mischievous Granny Smiths?  
Shall I advise they aren't commonplace,  
missing that sweet flesh that whets us?

Rather, the blooms are as compact  
as our secret desires that start small  
before then engulfing entire towns  
with the kindling of our marrow.

The fruit, seeming hollow as smoke,  
hides silk inside, tastefully poisoned.

**Ronnie Sirmans**

Secret Identity

*Painting of Patroclus by  
Jacques-Louis David, 1780*

And how are we to be certain  
the turned face and back facing  
us belong to the warrior who  
was so brave at Achilles' side?

Doesn't he resemble Kal-El,  
the fabled last son of Krypton,  
resting upon that red fabric  
destined to become his cape?

Harmony forms on the bare back:  
deltoid and trapezius, sounding like  
a heroic duo who can foil schemes  
I devise to pillage the hearts of men.

**Marc Isaac Potter**

Marriage

Marry me!

I am a worthless man

With a raging sex drive.

Like the great French

Of the past ages -

I don't bathe.

Marry me!

I work at McDonald's

Two days a week.

I love Blink 182.

Or would you marry me

If I said this:

Marry me!

I gave Florence Nightingale

One of my kidneys.

I was the inspiration

For James Tate's

The Oblivion Ha-Ha.

I delivered mail to the

Gettysburg Address.

I gave Anthony Hopkins

His penchant for warm tea.

So now you see it.  
Through the ages  
Good and bad men have found mates.

Marriage is a wonderful coat.  
That keeps warm  
The one who puts it on.

**Siew David Hii**

New New New New New South

A child in the cold corner  
shouldering a weekend with no free-

reduced lunch, none of mama's paper  
to buy some neither. A soccer ball, though.

Enough friendlies to survive a world  
of sunhats and sundresses and potluck Sunday

brunches passed with their church face  
nined up for the dreadfully excited white people.

Convincing their friends that *honey*  
*is sweeter than blood* is a Bible verse

and not a painting. By the time they fall  
for the hydrangeas and humidity

and high ceilings and slow talking,  
it's open season on their heart;

charred euphoria of fish sauce  
and stone-ground grits

eaten with their mother on the wicker  
chairs of the front porch

--legs naïve to the will of the composite.  
Blue-simmered sky cubed by mosquito

nets. The moonshine made them glow  
so red. *The more you drink,*

*the sweeter you get.* It was true.  
They soaped the cast-iron,

a skillet they hoped to inherit  
without feeling like an imposter.

## **Siew David Hii**

### **Advertisement Placed on Stained Placard for New Cookie Writer**

No doubt I write mediocre fortunes—  
fish sauce makes  
the past palatable,  
star anise sweetens  
the present, wise men  
request umbrellas  
from the gods  
and are generally  
prepared for the future;  
however, I would like  
a home on the menu  
instead of complimentary  
plastic wrapping  
tossed in a brown bag  
longing to be the Friday special  
like the one I shared with my first ex-girlfriend  
in the backseat of her car,  
which was okay because her version  
of our story wasn't all bad:  
girl falls in the deep  
end of forbidden love,  
but I've seen enough tv  
to know that the Chinese guy  
skims the leaves from the boss's pool,  
washes the laundry,  
perhaps writes unpleasant  
fortunes, but mainly doesn't  
marry the daughter, mainly the first

two things if he prefers  
his neck the way it is,  
and anyway my version of our story  
includes a Polaris bag  
full of insecurities:  
you don't want to be a statistic,  
my basketball coach  
always said, driving on a rainy  
day with the temperature dropping  
faster than my armor  
did for this three-day boyfriend  
I thought I loved—  
admitting I'd always been that kid,  
the one hiding from adults  
behind my mother's legs,  
under a poly-nylon floor length,  
the cold bedsheets, the belly  
of my last car, and now my new boss,  
who looks like me,  
presses the slip of paper  
back into my palm and says  
it is, without a doubt,  
the worst fortune he has ever heard, too long  
with unlucky syllables, and that I never  
should have been hired, so I tell him  
his face is stupid  
and the sentence is an empty place  
to live and the reason  
that most people don't bother  
to unwrap fortune cookies  
before they throw them away.

## Austine Model

### Gender Trouble

They said  
they wanted  
and reached for –

to know me better  
a chisel

I lay stiff, stilted  
while they chipped

my body, away.

They mopped  
swept up the bones,  
until I didn't know

fat and flesh,  
bits of cartilage  
who was left.

# Timothy Nolan

## Watch the Birdie

The night was moonless out at Sheep's Pass Campsite in the middle of Joshua Tree, way before it became a national park. That was when I had my first telescopic vision. It doesn't happen all the time, but sometimes when I look up into a pitch-black sky it kicks in. If I narrow my focus, I can see each of Saturn's seven rings, the broken-up bits of asteroids, comets, and moons, all those chunks of ice and rock suspended in dust. I can see meteors headed our way, and then veering off left or right. That night I saw a ring of white gases circling at the center of the Milky Way. It was swallowing up everything around it; a dying star exploded into a supernova brighter than the sun, then instantly vanished into the abyss. My fellow campers agreed the sky was putting on quite a show that night, so I assumed they saw what I saw. When we returned to our work-a-day lives in the big city we were lucky to see the North Star with so many street lights, digital billboards, and motion lights popping on every time we thought we found a dark enough patch of sky by one of those big fancy houses near Griffith Park. It seemed like a lifetime ago, but when the picture of this thing they called Sagittarius A\* popped up in my news feed the other day I thought, I've seen that before. The caption said it was from the Event Horizon Telescope project and its 300 scientists from 13 institutions were pretty stoked about finally seeing a black hole at the center of our own galaxy. If I'd known what I was looking at back then I probably could've saved them a ton of work. Who knew black holes were so bright—shouldn't they be black? When I tried to explain what I saw my friends thought I was tripping. I started to think maybe I was. It was a blur; the way memory serves up the past in cloudy courses with no sense of proportion. All I know is whenever I'm out in the middle of nowhere, I look up and hope to see that ominous white ring again. I look for astral fireworks from billions of years ago. It blows my mind every time. But then so do the little pointy-headed birds on the power line just out my window, when one follows the other as if in perfect choreography. First one wing extends and retracts, then the other, a quick preen and a good full-body shudder. And so it repeats with each bird on down the line, like they're in some birdie Busby Berkeley production.

## Timothy Nolan

Marsden Hartley's Canuck Yankee Lumberjack at Old Orchard Beach, Maine, 1941, Oil on Fiberboard, Addresses the Befuddled Tourist Dragged to the Museum by His Artsy Wife on Their Third Day in the Nation's Capital

I know, I have a really small head. But let's face it, that's not what you're looking at. You're looking at the shadows in my little pink swimsuit and thinking to yourself, I guess that's what they mean by dressing to the left. I didn't notice it at the time, heck, I didn't even notice the old guy sketching me on the beach, but there it is for all to see, front and center on his canvas. Please don't let my manhood distract you from that miraculous strip of crashing blue paint foaming up behind me, or the fact that the waves meet the beach in a perfectly straight line that looks like it wants to cut me off at the knees. And don't be intimidated by the hair on my beefy chest. It's not a competition, dude! And what'd you expect, eh? I'm a lumberjack for god's sake! Just focus on that cotton candy cloud echoing my right bicep in a crazy freeform halo. Okay, maybe I'm projecting here, but I think the old guy thought I was a saint or something. I mean my eyes are closed like I'm in some kind of trance state. Listen, I'm no angel. I could tell you stories about what went on at Old Orchard Beach back in the day. But hey, if I can be the old guy's muse in his final days, me with my head that's way too small for my hunky bronze body, I guess I'm cool with that.

## Ashley Elizabeth

### Control

My students dissected sheep hearts in science class  
and I feel for the lamb plucked from the world early

or maybe it was a sacrificial thing,  
after all they hear is “no”

when this was a guided activity until the end  
and they got to prod around,

mash and knead things to their liking  
reminding me of them begging to control their environment

to keep their phones in their pockets,  
to leave the classroom to work in the tower

to walk around the building without being in line  
for the locks to come off the bathroom doors

for the first real time.  
They have already lost so much.

Two friends and a handful of teachers later,  
we are all tongue-tied and tired.

**Fiction**

**Chukwu Sunday Abel**  
An Unwanted Two-Spirit

When a snake sloughs its skin, it doesn't lose its dreadfulness with its old skin.

You came to us with good news of salvation, we accepted it. You came through our land borders uninvited and handed to us your books of alphabets, we embraced them even at the expense of our own tongue(s). You told us to discard our flourishing authorities, they were primitive and unpopular — we accepted your acclaimed error-free rule by majority. Thereafter, you tethered on our necks your strange supreme books to guide our indulgences — we didn't rebel even as the sleeping eyes of our ancestors glowered angrily at us . You told our children to slough their God-given soot through the help of your hot anti-melanin oil, and we turned blind-eyed, but the silent voices of our sleeping ancestors warned us, told us of their wrath, called us unworthy sons. However, we never questioned you, we didn't complain, we gobbled them gluttonously so as not to offend this our nonreciprocal bromance.

Now, you came with this gospel of self-determination, gospel of free-choice. You told our women to stand and pee, to climb our palm trees, to become sons, to become husbands; and our men, you told to become wives, to bear children. Aru! Were snakes to lose their dreadfulness, women would use them to bind their hair.

~~~~~

There was no place like home, one's home, one's ancestral home, especially when one's first name was Echezona, "do not forget". Don't forget your root, perhaps. "Don't forget where you come from", a maxim from my father before his death.

Google told me: "Nigeria, an African country on the Gulf of Guinea, has many natural landmarks and wildlife reserves...."

Then, "Anambra is a state in southeastern part of Nigeria...." nothing was said about culture and tradition, nothing about ajoagwo nor Ngenebaka— " they were predominantly Christians and spoke Igbo", Google said. My father before his death told me nothing about Ajoagwo nor did my mother who died before him.

When our flight touched down on Muritala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, I knew that I have not only made myself happy but made my father proud. Lagos was the most populated state of the 36; was soiled by numerous carcasses of woebegone nylon bags, discarded empty plastic cans, bagged refuses, and human faeces in black nylon bags. Perhaps, in the absence of a well structured waste disposal system, the residents of the bellicose but accommodating city that emerged from collective unpremeditated floridness from the past and present residents, the reason for its longstanding apothegm: shine your eyes, resorted to littering the face of their unsmiling city with their dumps; maybe in protest of incessant failed governments or as evidence of deficiency in the midst of sufficiency.

They drove competitively and recklessly on the road in a bid to overtake whomever, whatever was in their front. Nobody waited for another.

Patience was time-wasting. It was unsafe to adhere to the traffic regulations. Whoever wanted obeying religiously the traffic rules ate his dinner on the road or passed the night on the Lagos roads. But Google didn't tell me this nor did my father.

Lagos to Anambra was about 480 km by road and would take about 9 hours. By flight, it would take less than an hour. But I was on expedition, having a better view of the countryside would be to go by road. It was the longest of the road trips I had ever made. But it wouldn't have been as time-taking as it was if not for the military and police checkpoints that punctuated the flow. The checkpoints were notable as much as they were characteristic: woebegone concrete filled drums, coated yellow paint with uneven black stripes that punctuated its overall shade of yellow, stood tactfully on the road in such a way that only a single vehicle would be able to move slowly in between the drums in a zigzag. Atop the drums were tires sprinkled with green leaves of weeds struggling for sunlight. The policemen(for police checkpoints) or soldiers(military checkpoints) stood side by side on the road, with longstanding Russian A-K Forty Seven held menacingly in their hands. They pervaded anxiety in the air as they smiled this time and frowned in the next second leaving passengers numb. They conspired in low tones and yelled spitefully in a coerce pitch at unyielding bus drivers. Many changed their route at their sight, to avert a possible extortion or mistreatment. Sometimes, buses sped off, tried maneuvering the policemen who would wave conspiratorially at the drivers to stop. The drivers would decelerate and then jam on the brake.

One of the policemen would handshake the bus-driver looking into the passengers' faces to know if there were any potential threat, a perceived stumbling block to his handshake with the driver. He would then shake his head and hail the driver— a sign that he has been passed. Same thing he did with other commercial buses coming after and after until the day ended and another came. Shaking hands and head or pointing at the side of the road with the shout of park well if the driver refused to shake hands with him; he would be delayed for so many hours over particulars, loads on board, licence, etc., after which the bus would be taken to the police station for a crime that would have been overlooked with a mere handshake(bribe) with one of the policemen. This was the core task of policing in this part of the world that Google didn't tell me.

The historic Niger bridge that lay over Mungo Park-discovered Niger River (Mr. Mungo Park must have dug-up the river from the bowel of the earth) was the gateway to the southeastern part of the country and to my destination, Anambra state.

Amerikanah nno, welcome, they said one after the other— men and women, boys and girls. One thing was peculiar in their looks, their skin stood out, nitid in its unusual whiteness. Scurfy, parched, harmattan-whited. Their lips were caked by that same harmattan, some of them trickled out blood which was usually licked cursorily. The people visited, then the totem of the land—they moved pridefully as if they owned the land, fearless, territorial and arrogant. The closest I had come with snakes was during my college days at Messiah College, Mechanicsburg. They said whenever a visitor entered the community, these arrogant snakes came to welcome them.

It was in the middle of the night when I was jolted by rope-like creature descending onto the bed I lay in from the room window. The room was starkly dark, the power holding company was not aware of the existence of Umunri community, also, the water corporation. I switched on my torchlight and the 9-foot variegated (brown, black, white) python was bared to my petrified eyes. My spinal cord shivered. I scurried to my feet, directed the ray of the torchlight at its head, its eyes flickered. The thought of the Singaporean woman swallowed by a python haunted me as much as the one before me. Then you realized that you were in a different, strange-yet-familiar environment in which 911 was useless and in which there was no replica. Then, the situation was: kill or be killed.

~~~~~

The day you strolled into this our land, the atmosphere smelt differently. It was a Christmas period, dry season but the heavens heralded the misfortune you would bring upon our land. The bright and dry heavens bellowed, unleashed its fangs on us — lightening paralyzed the *Udala* tree at the village square. The *Udala* tree, one of the remaining monuments of our ancestors, where we had our gatherings. The unusual downpour disrupted our festivities, the cloudburst, as thick as hailstorm, pelted our bodies. They said you had returned from a land that knew no lack— where fallen crumbs could be picked up in their garbage-dumps and eaten. They said it was a land of no-lack except for mosquitoes and roaches and rats, unless one wanted to see them in places where they were preserved. They said where you came from lacked darkness also, it must as well lack culture and manners.

They said that you were born in this our land by a man from this our land and a woman from this land. How then did a leopard change its skin? How did coyotes and wolves become allies? Nobody knew who you were even though we knew that you were the only child of Mazi Okonkwo, who went missing so many years ago. It was said that he left with the whitemen that brought message of salvation to us. We knew when you were born but now, you have been reborn. We saw you as a woman from your looped hair touching your torso, your pendulous legs, your glowing sun-untainted skin, fake mascaraed antenna-like eyelashes, rouged pinkish cheeks — not until you were caught climbing Mazi Uchendu palm tree. Thereafter, you told us you were not a woman. You showed us at the village square what made you a man. You said you were a man. You agreed to be part of our village gatherings, to obey our traditions and culture, you drank from the cup we drank from — because you called yourself a son of the soil. No sooner had we done these, than you went to the sacred river of our deity, Mmiri Ngenebaka and swam in it. You told our youths to kill the sacred fishes of the Ngenebaka river, to hunt the crocodiles — to ridicule us, what made us. As if the killing of the fishers was not enough, you massacred the sacred bride of Ajoagwo Arusi, our sacred peaceful pythons. Were you not told that our forefathers met these sacred pythons in this land ? Were you not told that one who killed our python died? Not only did you kill these pythons, you told our youths to disbelieve that the pythons had protected them, prospered them and kept our farmlands fertile from the time of our ancestors.

As if the wrath of the gods you had brought upon yourself were not enough, you did that which the tongue had never spoken in our land — that which no ear has ever heard of, which no heart has ever conceived, in our land. That which was capable of making the gods open up the earth to swallow us. That which made our farmlands weep and produce no crops, which caused our streams dry off.

Without fear for the gods and your chi, under the split crimson moon of the night, and at the paralyzed Udala tree, you were caught soiling the chastity of a bearded man like you. Aru! He said you gave him a cigar that made his head woozy, his legs wobbly and his organ stiff. He said that you told him that where you came from, the land that knew no lack, that a man was free to go in with a man, a woman free to go in with another woman. When the Ikoro, gong of war went, summoned everyone at the village square over your act, the strangest and rarest in our land. You told the elders and chiefs, children and adults, men and women of Umunri that there was no wrong in your wrongdoing. You said, though you were a man, you were also a woman. Amerikanah Wonder! As you offended the land, the gods, the land in turn unleashed on you its venom for killing our sacred pythons, desecrating the sacred river of our deity, and for soiling our land by your unspeakable alien culture.

~~~~~

The Ikoro gong of war plumbed sonorously in the night, throughout the three clans that comprised the seven villages in Umunri. From strategic locations in each clan, sharing same message.

The night became extremely uncommunicative, noiseless, aside the chirps of some unconcerned crickets. Even owls which usually relished the blissful night breeze, observed silence. The moon withdrew into its shell stealthily, making darkness incomprehensibly thicker. Kerosene lanterns displaying yellowish tongues of fire, and smoke puffing into the air from its perforated cork, were the only source of luminance. Everywhere seemed to be bearing hovering evil spirits as if the gods had already unleashed their expected fangs. Something urgent must be done to avert that. Shrubs appeared like humans when sighted from distance, leaving the viewer terrific with head as if swollen. That Ikoro, gong of war sounded was to parade a nocturnal unusual rapist, and to officially announce the end of strange foreign practices. A nocturnal rapist who despoiled the longstanding values of the land.

Echezona now called Amerikanah by Umunri people, continued his staggering, his sagged scrotum slapping against his thighs. His penis shrink, maybe catching cold, but it wouldn't be catching cold in that dire condition. Not when he already received uncountable strokes of canes in addition to his agbara infested body. The youths steered him to the village square where bigger crowd had gathered, awaiting the arrival of the miscreant. His partner in their alien act, walked beside him. On their heads were crowns of abomination, woven from tender yellowish fronds. Their waists too, were wreathed with same fronds. Their bodies, from head to toe, gleamed with ashes. The culture and tradition of Umunri was clear and direct on this — as it was unpardonable. In Umunri, the sacred pythons of Ngenebaka were indeed inviolable in acts and in words.

They were gods in disguise. They were tamed by the gods, toothed and venomous yet harmless. Must be revered, praised by the lips of the women, eulogized and thanked by that of the men. When it lay in your bed at night before you, the gods needed it, you were to sleep on the bare floor or enjoy its warmth and poking in your bed. Whoever killed any must carry out a burial rite for it. The type of burial rite and ritual so befitting to a chief who had collected so many titles before his death. The chiefs with the red conic cap with two white ugo feathers by the side. A number of goats must be slaughtered to accompany the murdered god, python to its meticulously dug grave. Numerous spotless fowls must be sacrificed to the gods as to appease them; to restore the purity of the land and ward off the evil spirits that might come in consequence. These rituals and rites were required to wash off the curse of the gods, to wash untimely death off whomever killed the inviolable python, and to restore his progress.

Every child of Umunri knew why the sacred pythons, ajoagwo arusi were inviolable, why the fishes in the sacred Ngenebaka river were sacred, why the river itself wouldn't be swam both by intent and in an error. The story of why these must not happen had been told in hoarse voices, clear voices, in day's light and in the night's darkness.

The ancestral father of Umunri, Nwanri had migrated from Nri with his three sons, also his daughters, wives and the wives of his sons, to settle in the southern part of Ngenebaka river. His daughters and wives were constantly abducted by neighboring villages, sold into slavery or offered as sacrifices to the gods of their abductors.

Nwanri and his household could not match his enemies militarily, as a result, he offered one of his virgin daughters as a sacrifice to the goddess of Ngenebaka river by burying her alive at the bank of Ngenebaka river; he pledged his loyalty to the Ngenebaka's river-goddess, demanding protection and prosperity from her. The river-goddess prospered him and protected him from his enemies. She fought for him physically with her pythons and spiritually as well. That came about the sacredness of ajaogwo deity.

But the previous cases in Umunri were either the killing of the sacred python, or the killing of the fishes in the Ngenebaka river. There hadn't been a case of blatant disregard for the culture of the people as was in this. Or a case in the time past involving the three offence committed by one person. Or a case of a man doing that that could only be done with a woman with his fellow man.

When they arrived at the square, the crescendo of Umu-ada chants thundered into their mulish ears, piercing his heart and clouding his mind. His mind in which he thought why human life would be ranked below that of a python in this part of the world and in this 21st century. This part of the world in which one's sexuality could sully the land and invoke the wrath of the gods. This part of the world in which the right to self-determination was neglected.

Among the irate youths, some said their blood should be used to purge the land of their sins, some said they should be ostracized, some said they should be castrated, but none said they should be forgiven. The gods were angry and must be appeased.

“Was it limited to killing of the sacred pythons and swimming in the mmiri Ngenebaka, Amerikanah will be treated with mercy, but considering the magnitude of the last of the offense: sodomy, it’s unpardonable”, one of the gyrating youths said.

Echezona stood before the unrepentant Umunri people, naked, body sprinkled ashes, his hair scraped— those were the inevitable recipes required to appease the gods of the land in such occasion. The culprit must be paraded naked with chants from the youths that relate with the abominable act, after which the final judgment would be passed by the Ndi-ichie — Chiefs-in-council. He stood feebly on his wobbly legs, awaiting the Ndi-ichie's pronouncement— his fate.

In Umunri community, whoever killed the sacred python and refused carrying out the rituals and rites, died. In Umunri, from time immemorial, whoever was caught having sex with an animal, was ostracized. Whoever was caught having sex with his or her blood relative, was sent out of the community with the partner and never to return. But there hadn’t been a case of a man sleeping with another — the gravest, rarest crime in the land.

# BIOS

**Chukwu Sunday Abel** is an Igbo-born journalist and writer whose literary works have earned several prizes including the creator of Justice Literary Awards by the International Human Rights Art Festival Awards, New York.

**Ishanee Chanda**, a Texas-native, is the author of two books of poetry titled "Oh, these walls, they crumble" and "The Overflow." Additionally, her work can be found in the Eckleberg Project, Stoked Words, Emerging Texas Writers, Flypaper Magazine, and Apricity Press. She lives with her little family in Brookland, D.C.

**Sarah Curry** is a Baltimore born teacher, artist, and poet. Her artwork has been displayed at the Mount Royal Tavern and the Katsea Gallery in Towson. One of her newest paintings celebrating poetry and the life of Edna St. Vincent Millais called "The Poets Dream" will be displayed at the Overlea Arts Festival this August 11, 12, and 13th. She is a new poet and this is her first published piece.

**Ashley Elizabeth** is a teacher from Baltimore, MD. Her writing has appeared in Honey Lit, Voicemail Poems, and SWWIM, among others. Her chapbook, black has every right to be angry, is forthcoming from Alternating Current. When Ashley isn't teaching or writing, she posts on Twitter and Instagram (@ae\_thepoet).

**Siew David Hii**

**Sara Lieto** is a poet, a software engineer, and a member of the Brooklyn Poets Mentorship Program's 2023 cohort. Sara's work has most recently appeared in Wax Nine Journal and Struggle Magazine.

# BIOS

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**Timothy Nolan** is a writer and visual artist living in Palm Springs, California. He has exhibited extensively for three decades and his poems appear in Fourteen Hills, Puerto del Sol, unbroken, The Museum of Americana, Rough Cut Press, Rise Up Review, the Fifth Wheel Press anthology Flux, and Troublemaker Firestarter.

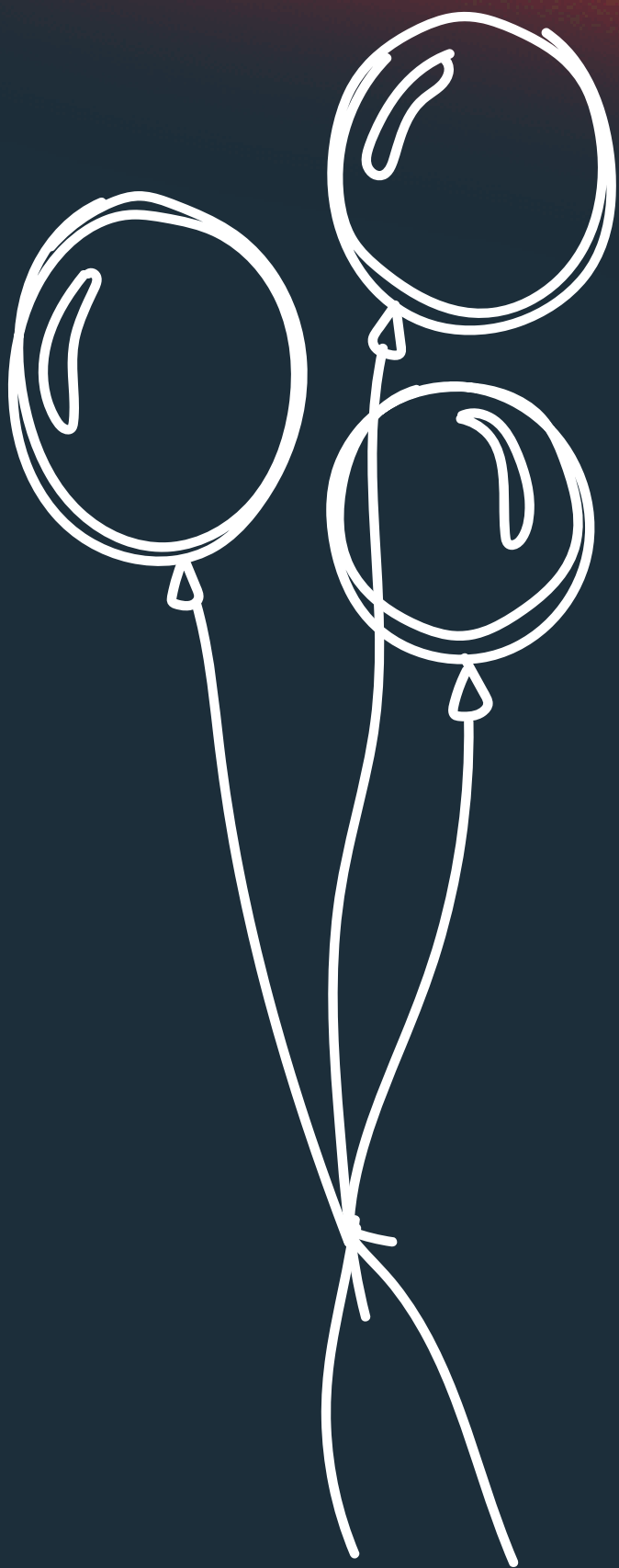
**Marc Isaac Potter** (we/they/them) ... is a differently-abled writer living in the SF Bay Area. Marc’s interests include blogging by email and Zen. They have been published in Fiery Scribe Review, Feral A Journal of Poetry and Art, Poetic Sun Poetry, and Provenance Journal. Twitter is @marcisaacpotter.

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# Levity

**2023 OutWrite Journal**



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Rose McCoy  
Sara Lieto  
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