



Diamonds in the Rough
A Literary Magazine

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Editor: Dr. Melissa Knox-Raab

Our Winter 2023 issue is a contemplative one, filled with explorations of states of mind, of motivations, of cultural and social pressures, of human motivation, and of personal success. Rich in poetry, we've included a short story, many essays, some illustrations and some recipes. We hope you enjoy our work!

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Raidat: A New Women's Network

By Tamara Al Khaled

No one would have believed it could have led to this. When Reham Arman and her friend and partner in a modest clothing online shop called “Ranah” went to Berlin by train to attend a start-up event they were invited to in the capital, they could never have anticipated what would happen.

Reham being a close friend of mine, she told me the story herself one morning over coffee. They were going back to Essen and Salma Chbib, also an entrepreneur and the owner of Hilal Shop, was headed back to her home in Düsseldorf, so they were on the same train. It was raining outside and Reham glanced for a moment at the relaxing view of the German green countryside from the train's window. The scenery was calming but monotone to her eyes, the drops of rain slowly and repeatedly falling onto the window. A small drop of rain fell as she was lost in her thoughts, she watched it stop briefly before it continued its path down to another drop of rain, taking it with it and continuing till the whole drops became one long water streak. “Impact.” She thought to herself. That was the word that at the time came to her mind. Suddenly but unmistakably.

Suddenly, the way inspiration sometimes strikes, she had had an idea. She spoke out in her serious yet enthusiastic manner, “Salma, she said to her newly met friend, why don't we all come together and make something like this event we just went to...but on a larger scale? Something that would still go on beyond a single gathering?”

Salma, who studied politics and had owned and run her own business for several years at that, was well-placed to understand the strength that could result when several successful people came together with an idea. “I am interested Reham...lets meet up in Düsseldorf again and discuss this...let's see where it can get us.”

Three weeks later, Reham, her business-partner Nour Kadibalban, Salma and Lynn had decided to form a women's league they called *Raidat*, which in Arabic means women pioneers. After a few meetings in several cafes in Essen, some Syrian and others German, the four young women decided to register their brand-new league officially. The decision that came naturally to them alongside the paperwork was to host a gala in Essen in order to launch *Raidat*.

I reached the gala at noon and was truly amazed by the place itself. The Prensas Palace in Essen which they had chosen to book for a whole day for the gala looked more beautiful than most wedding venues I had seen in Germany. The luxurious and spacious hall greeted all 360 women who were invited with a forest of chandeliers, flickering against the elegant black paint of the ceiling.

I remember losing track of time in the bazaar; all 20 stands were spectacular. Besides two fashion shops who held busy stands with collections of modest chic women outfits, such as Ranah, the bazaar ranged all the way from hijab shops to a stand that displayed a variety of organic honey, another that sold oriental ornaments, such as Arabic calligraphy paintings and beautiful oriental coffee sets, besides which was the stand of the well-known Arabic children online library. The bazaar was such a delight that visitors, myself included, didn't find it easy to interrupt shopping when Reham kindly asked us through the microphone to take our seats so that the talks could start.

However, as soon as we took to our seats around the elegant tables, each of which was ornamented by a nice crème-colored tablecloth and a splendid vase of fresh flowers, the hall fell silent as the four founders of Raidat arrived.

Dressed in an emerald evening-dress, Reham was the first to speak. “I address myself today to you, she said, to thank you all for coming today. Today is an important day for us, as we launch our league. A league that is from women addressed to women. Raidat has the vision of empowerment for all women regardless of her origins or religion. To each one of you who has fought hard to establish something for herself in a country that is her adoptive country. For each and every woman, be it the young girl who still hasn’t discovered her career path and is still considering her options in life, as well as for the mother of children who—juggling motherhood and personal aspirations—has come a long way, learned a language that at first was completely stranger to her, started a business from scratch, or is dreaming to. To all of those we say: we hear you and we are coming to light today for your sake.”

Each time that Reham would come to the end of a paragraph, or an idea was completed, she would hand over the microphone to Salma, who as a native speaker would translate it all in German. The press being present, as the WDR were filming, made the whole scene even more imposing.

Reham went on explaining Raidat’s vision. As she spoke the words started taking a shape of themselves in the venue, the ideas she spoke about were so innovative, so true and yet so unprecedented among the Arab community in Germany, that I couldn’t help but link their words to bright images of hope, support and—ultimately—of success. The success I saw as I heard Raidat’s talk wasn’t just an individual one; it was much greater than that. It was a network as in their motto “*Women’s Network*”. I saw in the sparkle of their eyes a vision for us all, for the women of Syrian origin who came to Germany ten years ago, studied and in most cases became German citizens.

Meanwhile, Nour took her turn to speak and stressed the fact that Raidat wasn’t founded just for Syrian women, it was addressed to all women in need of a supporting women’s network. It was founded by four women who each excelled in her own field. For while Reham spoke a refined Arabic that reflected the medical major she had completed in Damascus, before then taking the path of business with her online shop Ranah, Salma spoke native German as she was born and raised in Germany as she told us herself, while Lynn Kadamani—a professional photographer and a media and visual communications major—was fluent in English just as much as her Arabic mother tongue, as she had lived and studied media in Australia.

The four young women standing on stage reflected very well, I thought to myself, the Syrian diaspora of our day and time. Both educated and modern, they were mostly wearing a hijab paired with long-sleeved elegant evening dresses which made of the event a true gala. In addition to having invited all 20 startups to take part in the bazaar and, therefore, gain much-needed visibility, Raidat had also invited a handful of famous social-media influencers, such as Lina Melhem known by her Instagram name “Mama Lina” who owns an online shop well known among the Syrian community in Germany, a shop that specializes in personalized baby names paintings and other Arabic-written home decors. In addition to her online shop, Lina Melhem is a famous blogger who has a much-admired Instagram page on which she shares bits of her motherhood journey and writes book reviews about childcare and child psychology books. She represents the modern Arab family in Germany who takes pride in teaching her children reading in Arabic and instilling the Islamic morals in them, but at the same time practices all the European-style activities such as mountain hiking, bicycle riding in the forest

and ballet courses. I think that was in part one the reasons for her wide reputation among my Arab friends in Germany. The influences that were present also included—among others—Dima Al Najjar, a well-known psychologist who was given the time to deliver a speech at the gala. In her speech, Al Najjar spoke about a theme very relatable to the main ideas of the gala itself, which is success and the way we approach it as individuals. She spoke about how we should—as businesswomen or success driven women in general—always thrive and follow our dreams without at the same time losing our awareness of what is really motivating us. For while our love for success and our deep intention to return to society and to be an effective part of it is a noble intention to have, it shouldn't become a pressing need“ to succeed and prove ourselves to others at all costs—even at the detriment of our mental and overall health and well-being. The FOMO (fear of missing out) linked to the need for more and more followers on social media, for rapid and sometimes unrealistic gratification that is often the trap many online-based bloggers fall into when they seek success, is the kind of success Al Najjar warned against. Our value as individuals is- she stressed- inherent. It is not linked to our “material” accomplishments, nor should it be, as all women know all too well how many of our accomplishments go unseen during the day while we strive to provide support and meet the many needs of our children and families. Our identities are multiple and more sophisticated than can be summarized on a CV, which is what we always should keep in mind as we work towards our professional dreams.

Raidat was founded in order to seek those professional and social networking aspirations. During the event, the founders shared their vision of implying a principle in sociology called “social capital”. Towards the end of her talk, and after she had introduced the league and explained how it was intended towards the empowerment of women, Reham Arman mentioned this principle: “We at Raidat are going to base our league on the principle of social capital. Through holding regular meetings, workshops and cultural events, we are going to encourage women to have a positive impact on society, to play an active role. Moreover, the network that is going to take place from our meetings will ultimately make collaborations come into being, business and non-business ones. It's the contact that counts, the human connections. While social media has surely provided us with a platform to meet and chat virtually, we in Raidat aim at combining both the virtual and the genuine face to face contact, the one where the tone of voice and body language play a role.”

Social capital is based on networks of human relationships which, once established, can elevate the quality of life of people who are part of it, through reciprocate services they do for each other in daily life out of mutual sympathy, shared knowledge that is transmitted by the genuine getting together and talking about things, and support and trust that is proven to make a difference in the mental health and self-esteem of the people included. In short, it “emphasizes specific benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks. It therefore creates value for the people who are connected, and for bystanders as well[1]the social capital information, and cooperation associated with social networks.”

After the talks, Salma announced the buffet could start. A delicious Syrian buffet of stuffed grape leaves, *kibbeh* in yoghurt, *mandi* and *tabouleh*, all in beautiful golden serving plates, awaited us. As we ate and spoke together, I glanced at the tables all around me and was overwhelmed by a feeling of excitement for the future. This league was a start for something new and good, I was sure. For it was through its creation that all of us were bonded together by a strong sense of shared identity as well as of a potential common future. All of us women of Syrian origin building our way up in a country that slowly but surely became our new home.

[1] Thomas Sander, The Social Capital [1][39].[40][41]

How to Make Macarons – And How Not to

By Christina Brauer

I'm a passionate baker – passionate in this case meaning I'm not necessarily perfect at baking but I still love doing it. Although, now that I think of it, I might even consider myself a talented baker. I'm a talented baker that hasn't been trained yet. Every time I mess up in the process of baking something, it ends up tasting good and even looks presentable. For me, talent is when you mess up but you still succeed somehow. That's pure talent right there.

Now that my personal, definitely not common definition of talent is out in the open, I want to share a recipe my talent has failed at time and time again: the good old, French macarons. They have a reputation of being a bit tricky because of their rather complicated and moody batter. If the temperature isn't right, the macaron shells won't rise. If the folding technique isn't right, they won't rise. If the measurements are just slightly off – say it with me: they won't rise! They definitely earned this reputation which I had to experience first-hand multiple times. Luckily, I came across a recipe for macarons by Tasty. After so many disappointments, I had little hope for the macarons to turn out nicely but lo and behold! There they sat on my baking sheet – well risen, picture-perfect macarons. I hope that by sharing this recipe alongside a few anecdotes from when things didn't go as planned I can minimize the times you fail at making macarons. For me, macarons are a little spark of joy in life and it's even better if they're self-made. Sure, the journey might be hell but the end result is heaven. Trust me, the effort is worth it. On top of that, they're just so pretty to look at and you can show off your baking skills to your friends and family at your next event. If that's not a reason to make these macarons, I don't know what is. So let's get into the recipe!

Firstly, beat **3 egg whites** (at room temperature) with an electric hand mixer in a large bowl until soft peaks form. Then gradually add **50g of granulated sugar** and a **pinch of salt** until it is fully incorporated. Continue to beat until stiff peaks form. Also add in **½ tea spoon vanilla extract** as well as about **2 drops of gel food colouring** and mix until combined. Choose any colour you'd like your macarons to be, but definitely use gel food colouring because liquid ones and powders either mess with the consistency of the batter or fade in the baking process. Luckily, I didn't have to find that out myself because I read that on the internet and I simply assumed that's correct, as any enlightened person would do. But this actually seems like a pretty well-known fact in the world of baking.

A way to test if beaten egg whites are done and stiff enough is to turn the bowl upside down. If you like the risk, even flip it over your head. If I think about it now, I actually was at danger of this test going terribly wrong. Somebody once told me to start adding sugar to the egg whites when they start to foam up. However, little me didn't quite understand this instruction and added the sugar *way* too early for probably the first three times beating egg whites. They always ended up runny. Then I learned that you should actually whip the egg whites until they're already pretty stiff on their own and *then* add the sugar. Is it just me who always got this step wrong at first? Anybody? No? Just me? Okay then...moving on!

Next, you will need **95g of ground almonds**. Most recipes will tell you to process the ground almonds further in a food processor. Doing so makes the macaron shells extra-smooth on top but honestly, I found it's not worth the hassle, especially not if you don't have a food processor like me. Of course, that didn't stop me from trying to grind the ground almonds nevertheless. The first time, I attempted to use a hand blender. Eventually, I figured it wasn't meant for powdery and loose substances like ground almonds. They just stuck to the bottom

of the bowl and the blender couldn't get all the way to the bottom. On the next try I figured a mortar would be a good idea. After an hour of grinding already ground almonds in vain, I had to accept that it was a bit too ambitious of me to think I could efficiently grind 95g of almond flour. In hindsight, I should've already given up when I saw that the only mortar we had was this tiny mortar that you usually grind small amounts of herbs in. The third time, I had already given up on pulverising the almonds. In my opinion, this step isn't even necessary unless these macarons are supposed to be sold in a fancy bakery. In this case, I would suggest actually splurging on a food processor.

Back to the recipe. Take your **95g of ground almonds**, **210g of powdered sugar** and another **pinch of salt**, combine them and gradually sift the mixture into the beaten egg whites. Even though we skipped the step of pulverising the ground almonds, I have to insist on sifting these ingredients. Skipping the sifting would cause major lumps in the batter and we might not care about slightly uneven macaron tops but we don't want lumpy macarons.

Sift in about 1/3 of the powdered sugar and ground almonds at a time, take a spatula and gently fold the ingredients in until combined. The best technique for folding is to move the spatula the way they move their wands for the spell "Alohomora" in *Harry Potter*. Starting at the top, draw a circle with the spatula and then move the spatula down the middle, "cutting" the imaginary circle in half. You know the batter is ready if it falls into ribbons and you can draw the figure "8" without the batter interrupting.

Transfer the macaron batter into a piping bag fitted with a round tip and pipe 3-cm circles onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Don't draw actual circles but pipe the batter evenly onto one spot only until it reaches about 3-cm in width. It will create this perfectly round blob of batter. After you're done piping, slam the baking sheet onto a flat surface a few times (or tap it, if you're not of aggressive nature) to release any air bubbles. But make sure to warn the rest of your household and be mindful of any easily scared animals that might be around. Then let the macarons sit at room temperature for 30 minutes to 1 hour, until they're dry to the touch.

Preheat the oven to 150°C and bake the macarons for 17 minutes, until the feet are well-risen and the macarons don't stick to the parchment paper. Let them cool completely before filling them.

In terms of the filling, the world is your oyster. Don't put an actual oyster on your macaron though. Instead, consider any flavour of jam, buttercream, chocolate ganache or any kind of chocolate spread. Me and my friends once attempted to make a raspberry jam filling. The recipe seemed simple: let the jam and a bit of lemon juice come to a boil, take it off the heat and the jam should have a more gelatinous consistency so that it doesn't drip off of the macaron. Well, we successfully proofed the simplicity of this recipe wrong. One of my friends got out a pot, put it onto the stove and turned on the heat without the jam being in the pot. Of course the pot got boiling hot and I realised it made weird noises so I said something like: "The pot is getting really hot. Why is nothing in there?" In retrospect, we should've seen the catastrophe coming when one of us poured the jam into the boiling hot pot. Needless to say that the extreme heat and the sugar in the jam didn't mix well. Let's just say, the pope apparently hadn't been elected that day because the smoke was as black as it could get. The one at whose house we were baking at, took the pot and ran outside. By the way, the rain was pouring that day. Before anyone wonders, the pot did *not* survive, sadly.

Today, I'm understandably sceptical towards jam fillings which is why I'm going to explain how to make the classic vanilla buttercream. In a large bowl, add **230g butter** and beat it with a mixer for one minute until light and fluffy. Sift in **360g powdered sugar** and beat again until it's fully incorporated. Then add **one teaspoon vanilla extract** as well as **3 tablespoons of heavy cream**, one tablespoon at a time, and beat to combine until it has reached the desired consistency. Transfer the buttercream to a piping bag and add a dollop of buttercream to one macaron shell. Top it with another macaron shell to create a sandwich and repeat this process with the remaining macaron shells and buttercream. Place the macarons in an airtight container for 24 hours to "bloom", which gives the macarons this perfect consistency they have in a French bakery. And that's it – you mastered the art of making macarons!

I really hope that me messing up helped you not to. To be honest, messing up is 100% worth it if someone else can learn from my mistakes. So please give some purpose to my mistakes by trying this recipe and hopefully not failing at it. But if there's anything to learn from this recipe and my little stories behind it then that you should never give up and quit trying because success only comes with trial and error – except if you're the common (and not my) definition of being talented.

Ears Ringing

By Luca Gerke

In one of my earliest memories, I am hiding in the rhododendron bushes during playtime in kindergarten. Since the branches veil me rather poorly, my friend Lina soon finds me and asks me to play with her. Exasperated, I roll my eyes at her.

“Can’t you leave me *alone* for once?” I plead.

I like to replay this memory in my head not because it’s a particularly fond one, but because I think it encapsulates my lifelong struggle with balancing introversion and loneliness. Even though I had never heard of the term *introvert* as a four-year-old, I was acutely aware that I needed to spend time alone in order to function. However, when I told Lina to leave me alone, I did not for a second consider that she might take me at my word and never play with me again. Instead, I was confident that she would return to me and that we would continue being friends after I had taken a break. I was confident because I was not acquainted with loneliness yet.

Today, whenever I cancel plans because I need my cherished alone-time, I am terrified that friends or even family members will react by pushing me away. I assume that they will not only take an eye for an eye and cancel on me the next time I make plans, but that they will take an eye, some of my teeth and maybe a finger or two. I fear that canceling plans once will result in them cutting me from their lives forever. Of course, I am rational enough to *know* that the horror scenarios I paint in my head will likely not happen, but the part of my mind wired for survival tells me differently. In a way, I envy the younger version of myself that communicated her boundaries without fear of being abandoned. I am fascinated by this particular childhood scene because as the semi-adult I am now, I am more than ever trying to figure out how to balance asking for space and not pushing away the people I care about.

In tenth grade, I swallowed a bigger bite of loneliness. Growing up in a small town, I had had the same friends all the way through elementary school and secondary education. This changed overnight when, at the beginning of tenth grade, one of my closest friends went abroad to England, and the other one simply made a new best friend. While everyone around me seemed to be making new friends in no time, I suddenly found myself left alone. I felt like I was competing in a race and while still arranging my feet in the starting blocks, everyone else had already sprinted off beyond my reach. Being now a weirdo, I had no choice but to make friends with the other weirdos. And, let me tell you, it was not as romantic as in the high school movies. We were no edgy kids sharing a passion for art or literature. Instead, the only thing we had in common was that we were all too weird, too socially awkward or too anxious to fit in with the rest. (I feel like at this point, I have to mention that, after being a weirdo for the first few months of tenth grade, I got adopted by a different group of friends I stayed a part of until I graduated. There is, after all, shame in being lonely and awkward.)

Over the years, with friends coming and going, the loneliness has stayed. Nowadays, it is like a tinnitus. Constant, but easily drowned out. The ringing in my ears fades into the background over the sounds of work, spontaneous coffee dates, 8 a.m. classes, or communal afternoon walks. It recedes during late-night kitchen conversations over the obligatory bottle of wine or when I am dancing in dark basements between both strange and familiar bodies. Yet, my tinnitus vibrates in my skull when scrolling Instagram on a Saturday night spent at home or

when returning to the small, hostile town I grew up in. But overall, the days when the chorus of life sings louder than my tinnitus outweigh.

Almost twenty years after begging Lina to please leave me alone, I understand that asking for space is a necessity, not only if you're a massive introvert like me. Yet, I hesitate to do so, afraid that the ringing in my ears will get louder again.

Once the Splendor Is All Gone... What Else Is Left?

By Katja Kramer

I must have been no older than thirteen when I watched *Splendor in the Grass* (1961) for the first time in my life. Back then, the oh-so pretty title of the movie was the very reason I decided to watch it. Now, years later, the poem that inspired the title is the reason I so vividly remember the movie even now. I can still quote the following lines off the top of my head—spoken in the film by heartbroken teenager, Deanie:

*What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind*

William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," part of which contains these remarkable lines, was originally published in 1807. Even centuries later, we can feel the impact his words make. This particular part of the poem may have been used in a 1961 movie, but the message it entails reaches far beyond the screen and the story that is shown.

It is a gut-wrenching internal conflict that—dare I say—*every* single person encounters once in their life, at a minimum: do I allow myself to grieve a romantic loss just a little longer or do I learn to take things as they come and move on? Imagine a person close to you dies; what do you do? Imagine your best friend of many years betrays you; what do you do? Imagine—to include the example of the characters in the movie mentioned above—your high school sweetheart who you are still in love with marries someone else; what do you do?

According to the poem, the answer is quite clear: you find strength and happiness in the memory, while learning to live with the reality that the relationship is over. Though you may have lost the one person that brought you the most happiness and your world seems to be falling apart, *you* manage *not* to fall apart. But is that really the proper thing to do—to move on just like that, as if your pain does not even matter? Is that even what Wordsworth, or the movie, is suggesting?

Wordsworth talks about "radiance," he talks about "splendor," he talks about "glory"—or, in other words, about something incredibly precious, brilliant, magnificent. The expression that distinctly stands out for me, though, is "splendor in the grass." Clearly, it is what stood out for the filmmakers of the movie as well. So, let us take a moment and think about what is meant here. What is special about grass? Well, it is usually green; it is common in our everyday lives; we sometimes walk on it. Actually, grass is one of the most ordinary things in life. With that in mind, why would Wordsworth use such an expression? Probably for this exact reason. There is nothing particularly special about grass; when you add the "splendor," however, it seems to become far more fascinating than you ever would have thought it could be.

Most will probably agree that for Deanie, her first and beloved boyfriend Bud is the one who brings splendor into her otherwise ordinary life. Or, to phrase it differently, Bud *is* Deanie's splendor; he *is* her "glory in the flower." When she loses him, she loses herself. She feels as though nothing in her life makes sense anymore and she is ultimately committed to a mental

institution. Deanie sees Bud again after a long time, they have a short conversation and eventually go their separate ways—recognizing and at last accepting that their story is a part of the past now. In the final scene of the movie, Deanie, after being asked whether she still loves Bud, remembers the lines from Wordsworth’s poem with a vague smile. Not only does she finally understand what they mean, she experiences the loss of the “radiance” Wordsworth writes about firsthand; and now, it is time to move-forward—finding “strength in what remains behind.” Now, what exactly is that? What “remains” once the “splendor” is gone?

The most evident answer would be: grass. And it is not entirely off, but one needs to bear in mind that once you have seen that grass in a different light than usual, you will never fully bounce back from it—the splendor that was there at one point leaves an impact and the memory of it never fully leaves *you*. “What remains behind” are memories and those memories are what you need to “find strength in,” according to the poem. These words do not inevitably mean that we should not allow ourselves to grieve a beloved we lost, a relationship that ended, a happier time in our lives, though, or do they? Let us look at what happens with Deanie after the breakup.

Deanie, having suffered a mental breakdown in the middle of class, is sent to a psychiatric hospital. Released after quite some time, she is about to marry another man and informs Bud, who is himself married and a father with a second child on the way. As the audience watches these final moments of the movie, of course we wonder: are they happy? Considering that Deanie and Bud each claim to not think about whether they are or not too much anymore... it sounds rather unlikely. Nevertheless, they agree that at the end of the day, “you gotta take what comes” (2:01:29-2:01:36) and we know what that looks like: you learn to come to terms with reality time and again, regardless how much you may despise it. The characters have both grieved their relationship in their own way; in one way or another, they probably still do—and yet, it is crystal clear to both that “nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower,” meaning the time they were young, together and in love.

Wordsworth’s famous lines tell us that sometimes, we need to accept whatever comes our way and be grateful for what we have, even though it might not be what we want. This does not mean we are not allowed to grieve—some grieve differently than others, some longer and others shorter; the decisive point is that one of these days, this sorrow and pain will make us stronger. The “radiance” may have left us, the “splendor” may have vanished, the “glory” may be gone, but the memories of it once being there—they will never disappear from our minds and hearts. So grieve as long as it takes, but know that this pain is not forever and someday, you will learn to “find strength in what remains behind.”

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1. *Splendor in the Grass*. Directed by Elia Kazan. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1961.
2. Wordsworth, William. “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.” *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45536/ode-intimations-of-immortality-from-recollections-of-early-childhood>.

Are Americans really that stupid? On cultural differences and the danger of stereotypes

By Marisa Laios

“I’ve never really wanted to go to Japan. Simply because I don’t like eating fish. And I know that’s very popular out there in Africa.” – Britney Spears

There is nothing wrong in questioning the content shown on TikTok, but if certain topics show up multiple times there must be something going on. In my case, it included Americans confusing Europe as a big single country and trying to warn their fellow citizens about (untrue) cultural circumstances. Although I was and still am fascinated how others perceive our little continent, it is not the first time that I stumbled over those confused commentaries. The problem first started in 2016, when Donald Trump delivered one of his most famous lines during the election campaign for America’s next president: “Belgium is a beautiful city”. One of the next highlights in media culture of the past years has to be the Netflix series “Emily in Paris”; while some people took the series with amusement, others busted out into harsh criticism on the producers’ and writers’ cultural ignorance. These famous incidents make me ask: What is true about the “Stupid Americans”-stereotype? And why is it so despised around the world, especially in European countries?

First of all, a stereotype defines itself through repetitive behavior and statements of a certain group, which lead to a common image. This rigid perception is often noticeable in everyday life, but not always linked to a negative prejudice. Nationality wise for example, Swiss people are known for their punctuality. (Is every single Swiss person actually on time? Probably not.) In this case, Americans are known for being talkative and friendly, for example at the cash checkout of the supermarket. But despite these qualities, Americans are not that popular – especially in Europe. The problem in stereotypical thinking is that it aligns in over-individuality. We notice and remember political actions (the Vietnam War or the oppression of the Native Americans for example) or statements by famous people (as you can see above) and apply them to every American person we (will) potentially meet. This can lead to a hostile and awkward attitude.

Over-continental differences are normal, but can also lead to misconception. According to articles on Americanness there are values and aspects of living there, which are just not that big in Europe: Glorification of capitalism and money making, stylization of junk food, guns, certain values such as individualism and nationalism. The openness to other cultures and languages definitively differs from European standards, which can also be led back to the dissimilar education systems (they differ in Europe, too, but generally put a bigger focus on language learning). Many of those differences are rooted in the history and the geographical situation of each party. While most of the US citizens never left the country, it is almost impossible for Germans to avoid travelling, at least to other parts of Europe. Also, most European cities and regions can look down on a thousand year old history, while American independence is not even 300 years old. In many cases, tourists from the U.S. or countries with similar size proportions expect to travel through Europe within days and to see everything this part of the world has to offer. This is simply not possible and is also really disrespectful towards small subcultures and not-so-famous countries, which also have outstanding history and work to show.

But what really provokes those differences on a global level is the one-dimensionality and ignorance in (social) media. Especially on TikTok or Instagram “smattering” or superficial knowledge is common. Making assumptions about each other’s culture without even glancing

at a Wikipedia article leads to feeling attacked on both sides. When news is being published, for example about the new abortion law or gun violence in schools, people are shocked and judge the political and social system as well as U.S. citizens for “allowing” those situations. In reality, a lot of the citizens themselves are oppressed by the political system and try their hardest to protest against those given conditions and occurring situations. The political system does not treat all citizens equally.

This can lead to a reinforcement of anti-Americanism. People use superficial statements on America (especially political issues) to emphasize their own nationalism and justify racist statements, for example by addressing the discrimination that POC face in the US on a daily basis just to stress the country’s qualities and legitimate xenophobic commentaries on immigration in Germany. “America” functions as a bad example in this case. Especially after the Cold war anti-American feeling has grown

No, Americans are not completely stupid. Just because of certain viral moments or news on social media we should not condemn every single U.S. citizen. Due to the different social and cultural history, events and development it is often hard to understand the values and habits of others fully. Also, these values and habits are not always the result of a certain nation or culture. After all, it would not be beneficial to judge every German after watching a street survey at the central station in Frankfurt either.

The Absurdity of Pressure

By Ronja Iding

For every student who is struggling with pressure and being overworked, and especially for everyone who is new to university

There comes a time in your life when you say goodbye to your school days and start living in the real world. You either go to university or go on to other things. If you're reading this, you've likely chosen the former.

During your first semester you are thrown into the lion's den for the first time. And it's stressful, like every new experience is at first. You're new, so you're automatically at a disadvantage. Perhaps, you're not only going to university; you might have moved out and into a new city, you might have a job to pay for some of the things your parents paid for over the last 18 years, and you might deal with stress and pressure in many ways.

You're probably constantly asking yourself what is expected of you, and you're not reaching any conclusions. This might leave you helpless and on edge.

Well, here's a suggestion that helped me: Instead of wondering what others expect of you, maybe ask yourself when the last time you caught a break was. When was the last time you did something for yourself, something fun? Because that's an aspect of studying you should never forget. It's necessary to do your work, but you must find balance. You must find your own way of doing things; and that's what first semester is all about. Settling in, getting the hang of things, and doing it your way.

You are not supposed to worry about what others expect of you, but you still worry about it. Because it's not easy to block social pressure out. You worry if you'll make enough money once you're a full-grown adult, if you will be content with your job, if you will be happy with your life and be able to get up every morning to get on with it.

So, it is a stressful time. One minute you were sitting on a chair in school listening to your boring math teacher talk about equations and waiting for the bell to ring so you could go home and watch *Pretty Little Liars* and the next minute you are driving from work to university and from university to the grocery store, then you make a quick stop at the gas station losing a 50 to high gas prices and only after all that you get to go home at 8 pm and sleep.

When you get a moment to yourself to relax, you cannot do that. You're too busy thinking about how you should be studying rather than sitting on your ass. You should be making money right now because technically you're an adult now. You should be going faster.

But this is to tell you that you ARE entitled to breaks and you ARE allowed to enjoy your life and have fun. Because guess what? You still have a long life ahead of you. You still have tons of time to work. And you must remember to always put yourself first. I know it might seem hard – or even impossible – to do so at this rate, but its important to enjoy your life to the fullest.

You're overwhelmed at the moment because everything you're experiencing is new. But this feeling will pass and in a year this will all be old again. So, you'll be fine.

You can work one day and go to an amusement park the next. You can travel the world and meet new people. You can spend the whole day on your couch watching Star Wars. And you can take a break whenever you need one. Life is not going to pass you by because you stop working for a minute.

Instead, it's going to pass you by if you don't take time to enjoy it. As Ferris Bueller once said, *Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.* So instead of wasting your time worrying about something you cannot control, do something you always wanted to do. And never once stop to wonder what could have been if you had done things differently.

Why I Am Not a Mountaineer

By Corinna Schroll

According to the dictionary, a mountaineer is someone living in a mountainous area or most commonly a person who climbs mountains for sport, but I always thought the term should be used in a broader sense. Why doesn't the definition include those who simply love mountains and like to safely hike up less dangerous mountains without professional climbing equipment? I love being in nature and enjoying the sight of mountains with their deep valleys. On occasion, I have even made it to the summit of two smaller mountains of the Bavarian alps – traveling upwards within the relative safety of a cable car and sticking to the beaten paths while holding onto the railing that acted as a border between the hikers and the precipices of the mountains. The railings provide some sense of safety, but a look down into the abyss might be enough to fill a person with dread and give them vivid ideas that they could very well tumble into their doom if the railings were to disappear. Those who call themselves mountaineers often ascend the highest peaks without no railings, which is ultimately why I am not a “mountaineer” and have no interest in ascending dangerous mountains for sport.

Some people are afraid of heights, and I am one of them. Even climbing up a rope in P.E. has filled me with anxiety and I would never make it past the simplest wall if I had to climb a mountain. Ascending the peak of Mt. Everest would be a nightmare for me and my physical condition aside, I would not be able to do it even if my life depended on it.

More importantly, death is always one wrong step or a rockfall away in the mountains. In his literary work “Mountains of the Mind”, British author Robert Macfarlane mentions recklessly ascending a mountain in his youth and barely evading a falling rock. He ponders about how close he came to death that day, for if the rock had hit him, he would likely have fallen to his death.

It is important to note that the weather conditions can be unpredictable and change faster than one might expect in mountainous areas, which can turn a laid-back hike into a lethal situation, even for the most experienced mountaineer. There is a grim story about a student group who died in a mountain range in Scotland known as the Cairngorms after the group was unexpectedly hit by a snowstorm and could not make it to safety. This incident known as the Cairngorm plateau disaster occurred in November 1971, which is not that long ago. Despite modern advances in equipment and communications, dangers still exist in mountainous areas and national parks are never 100% safe for their visitors.

Another instance of changing weather leading to a tragedy is that of a group of Russian women led by Elvira Shatayeva, who lost their lives to ascend Lenin Peak in Kyrgyzstan alone as the first women-only team in 1974. They were hit by a snowstorm and were too ill-equipped to endure the cold and strong wind. Other climbing groups tried to reach them from the base camp, but all help came too late for these brave, but unfortunate women.

Finally, it seems somewhat selfish to risk your life climbing unforgiving territories, more so when you have young children at home or are the provider for your family. Famously in 1924, British climber George Leigh Mallory was dead set on ascending Mt. Everest, a feat that no man had managed before. His wife had begged him not to go, but after two prior failed attempts, he returned in 1924 for a third ascent which would also be his final one. It is unclear if he ever made it to the summit, but he certainly never made it back home, leaving behind his widow and young children. Mallory was a brave man and a pioneer undoubtedly, but he never

got to see his children grow up and left them without a father to grow up with to chase his dream of ascending Everest.

Mountains are fascinating places, and I cannot deny their beauty nor the amazing feeling of having made it to the peak and looking down upon the earth. Some may find it cowardly, but I value my life too much to ascend more dangerous mountains. I don't have the ambition to be the first woman to ascend an unreachable summit, let alone risk my life and health to reach the top.

Mt. Everest is riddled with corpses that cannot be retrieved due to the difficult ascent, and these bodies frozen in time are a grim reminder that mountaineering will always be dangerous. Some overestimate their abilities while others are simply not that lucky.

I am a mountain lover, but I am not a mountaineer – and I don't have to be both: I live in a time where I can enjoy the beauty of nature as a visitor on a mountain already developed for tourism, or from a safe distance from my home via the internet. Being a mountaineer means safely overcoming every hazard on the way up to the top, and it is an exciting but dangerous profession, where injuries and even death are not uncommon occurrences. Danger does not entice me enough to seek out the view from the unreachable summit, and while the feeling of standing on the summit of a place rarely reached by others must be incomparable, I am content staying at the foot of the mountains and admiring them from below as the inhospitable titans they are.

Two Balloons and a (not so) Cold-Hearted Asshole

By Jule Windeler

I am someone who tries to avoid conflicts at any costs. If I don't like a person, I engage with them as little as I can. I end conversations as soon as possible or avoid them in the first place and I never tell them what is bothering me because I feel that it is not worth the trouble. In most cases, this works pretty well. I choose who to talk to and who to spend my time with and therefore get around fights and uncomfortable encounters. However, this form of social behavior has some downsides that I only came to question recently.

This summer, I was in a situation where I couldn't be as picky as usual. I had to spend a lot of time with some people, no matter if I liked them or not, and at first, I had some difficulties with that. I saw them every day and was forced to engage with them beyond meaningless small talk; I had to get to know them, even the ones I never would have talked to at all if the choice had been mine. And for that, I am very grateful! I am grateful for some of these encounters, and I am also grateful because I learned an important lesson during that time: engaging with people you do not like or have some sort of conflict with can be incredibly educational and eye-opening.

There was a man I met this summer and whom I will call Jeff. He was a fifty-something father of three, huge and intimidating, and appeared to have absolutely no regards for other people's feelings. If I had met him in a different context, I would have made sure to get a lot of space between him and me. I never would have talked to him, let alone get to know him in any way. But now, that option didn't exist. For seven weeks, Jeff and I saw each other every day and on most of these days we engaged in some sort of a conversation. And at first, that did not help change my opinion of him.

One of the first things I learned about him was that he had a very extensive criminal record. This included assault, robbery, drug-dealing, and probably a lot of other things he did not mention. During the time I spent with him, he made several people cry but never seemed to feel any remorse at all. He described his criminal past as "perfect." I thought he was a cold-hearted asshole.

Unsurprisingly, I was not the only person who thought that way about Jeff, and when we voiced our opinion, he agreed: "I can't feel any sympathy," he said. "I think something's broken inside me." He proceeded with another example of his emotional coldness: "Other people... they see a hurt animal by the side of the road, and they take it to the vet. They try to save it. I don't do that. It's stupid. I just—", he makes a gesture as if snapping someone's neck, "you know, to end its suffering." That was the first time I thought that maybe Jeff wasn't entirely dead inside after all.

All in all, Jeff was the complete opposite of me: he was obnoxious, stubborn, always spoke without thinking. He did not care what others thought of him, he was overly confident, and always put himself first. Not all of these are good qualities, of course. But they are not all bad either. In a way, we balanced each other out and I ended up learning a lot from him. One day I told Jeff that I have difficulties prioritizing my own needs whenever they clash with someone else's. I told him that I care so much about other people's opinions of me that I often don't dare standing up for myself. Jeff had difficulties understanding this. "Just stop caring!", he'd say, and he made it sound so easy. And then he said something else that has stuck with me until now: "When there are thirty kids," he said, "and only twenty-nine balloons... do you cry

because you're not getting one? No! You rush to the front, and you take TWO balloons!"

Jeff was not a cold-hearted asshole. He said whatever crossed his mind and sometimes that was really hurtful. ("How can you complain about your childhood? You always got presents for Christmas, didn't you?") He wasn't very empathetic, and he glorified drugs and violence a bit too much. But deep down, he was a good person. And because we were so utterly different, our encounter has had a really strong impact on me. If I had avoided him based on our differences, I would have missed out on some valuable lessons. That doesn't mean that I want to be like him; but I think I want to take a few steps in his direction. Because it is okay if I stand up for myself. It is okay if someone doesn't like me. Sometimes, I have to just "not give a shit" and make sure I get two balloons. Because I deserve them!

Summer Memories

By Martina Wolf

*Going home
When the summer's coming in
And the moonlight on the river
Shows me where I've been...[\[1\]](#)*

Summer is a bittersweet time, a time of endings as well as beginnings. It is the end of the academic year, the end of yet another semester, the beginning of exam season as well as the beginning of festival season. As I'm sitting in the university cafeteria, watching the comings and goings of the students, my thoughts inevitably turn to other summers, other places, and a different university. Facebook is cruel in that respect; it shows me memories of a long-ago graduation and images of people I used to work with when the millennium was still brand-new.

Every July, I remember Scotland, the time spent there. Six years I've lived there, not much over the course of an entire life, but highly significant in determining who I am today. I've since moved half a dozen times, returned to my passport country, found a job, found love, started a second degree. And yet. I still consider Scotland my home, despite everything that's happened since I left.

What is home? These students outside the cafeteria – would they consider Essen their home? Or is home still the place where they grew up? The international students I work with, are they at home here? What about the department of modern languages staff at the university, who've come from Spain, Britain, Canada, Latin America, the USA to teach the language and literature of their home countries to us students? Do they consider themselves at home here? What makes a place a home? A shared language, a similar culture maybe. Knowing that you're here to stay, that you're not leaving after a certain, pre-determined period of time. Living in Beijing in the '90s and in Riga in 2006-2007 felt different to living in Scotland or moving back to Germany. Beijing in 1996 was completely, utterly foreign. In Riga, I knew I was only ever going to stay a year or two; I had no intention of ever leaving Scotland. It made sense to make myself at home in Scotland, to fully integrate. But still, a slight sense of foreign-ness prevailed, my experiences of constantly moving, of having gone to multiple schools, of lacking certain shared childhood experiences meant I was never 100% fully at home. There is always something missing, no matter where you are.

In today's globalised world, the numbers of people like myself are increasing. More and more children are growing up as so-called "Third Culture Kids", or TCKs, cultural nomads, able to adapt quickly to new surroundings. We collect places, languages, cultures like other people collect stamps, but can we build a home with the same ease? Justin B. Hopkins, in his autoethnographic study *Coming "Home": An Autoethnographic Exploration of Third Culture Kid Transition*[\[2\]](#) talks about the five stages of transition from culture to culture: involvement, leaving, transition, entering, re-involvement[\[3\]](#) and how they related to his experiences coming "home" to the US after having spent his entire life up to this point in Senegal. His experience sounds similar to mine: involvement in a particular culture, leaving this culture, transitioning and entering into a new culture before making oneself at home (re-involvement). His observations at the end ring particularly true. Even after returning to one's home culture, that sense of otherness remains. After speaking English for so long and hearing everyone use first names at work, suddenly being addressed as "Frau Wolf" sounds jarringly unfamiliar and

working out when to use “du” and when to use “Sie” is a minefield. Instead of being a foreigner in the host culture, you are now the one who left and came back, bringing with you strange and foreign customs and habits. So you spend your life a wanderer between the worlds, at home and yet not at home. As a consequence of not truly feeling at home in either culture, TCKs often develop a sense of belonging to a group of peers with a shared history of moving places.

Growing up as a TCK has certainly made me the person I am today, but it was only after reading about other people’s experiences I understood why this was the case. The central question remains: What is home? Where do I belong? The question “Where are you from?” will get anyone who asks a very convoluted answer, along the lines of “It’s complicated...” This central question at the heart of the TCK experience can only be answered by each individual themselves. Some stay forever adrift; others manage the transition smoothly and fully reintegrate into their country of origin even after years of living abroad. I will probably spend the rest of my life looking at pictures of those long-gone summers, feeling a little bit nostalgic.

[1] Runrig. „Going Home“. *The Highland Connection*. Ridge Records. 1979

[2] Hopkins, Justin B. *Coming “Home”*: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Third Culture Kid Transition. *Qualitative Inquiry* 2015, Vol. 21(9) 812–820

[3] Pollock, D. C., & Van Reken, R. E. (2009). *Third culture kids: The experience of growing up among worlds*. As quoted in Hopkins, Justin B. *Coming “Home”*: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Third Culture Kid Transition. *Qualitative Inquiry* 2015, Vol. 21(9) 812–820

Spilling the Tea

By Zohra

Sometimes I get to start off my day with a cup of green tea infused with cardamom. I love watching the seeds slowly making its way to the bottom of my cup. Have you ever noticed that cardamom seeds turn green tea pinkish? The tea is my origins, my love for my ancestors, my past, in Kabul, Afghanistan, from which my parents and uncles, and aunts fled, carrying three-month-old me, over the Hindukush to Pakistan. I also love what Germans like to drink fruit tea – yes, I am talking about the prepackaged one you can buy anywhere. And no, my ancestors would not turn in their graves. But sometimes life does not let me sip tea; it serves me up bullshit with a drizzle of mind-numbing stupidity.

Take for instance Emily – she professed on a Saturday afternoon, how she was surprised to hear that even in London racism exists. The angry me would raise her eyebrows, adjust her glasses, and put on her Christiane Amanpour persona. My interrogative skills would immediately silence her. My soft voice would extrapolate her shame and put it on a front-page cover of a gossip magazine. Instead, I am starting my own inner monologue. White fragility I say to myself, then I begin to chuckle. *Zohra, you must focus. She wants to bond with you. Bond over what? She is just as likeable as any female character in Faulkner's works. She will probably end up as a spinster hiding the corpse of her lover, too. Zohra, stop it.* Perhaps more disturbingly – my neighbor Rosa is not any better. On a window sill – right next to a pile of magazines lies the object that incites my utmost hatred. A small black figure wearing a white dress with a blue vest. She is clasping her fingers together whilst kneeling. The figure itself is positioned on a silver pedestal. The plaque on the figure says something along the lines: “Willst du den Heiden Hilfe schicken so lass mich Aermsten freundlich nicken.” This piece of colonial ignorance is paired with a coin slot. Did you know, it bows its head once you put 10 cents in the slot? Rosa thinks “it’s so cute!” This time you do the math.

I thought academia was better. Sitting in a Zoom session full of PhD candidates – one had the caucacity to say that the sound quality of the Zoom call reminded her of a reporter in Afghanistan. *Zohra, just don't. Mute. Pause. Breath.* None of the other PhD candidates said a SINGLE WORD: Is that the price someone like me has to pay? Being attacked, humiliated and offended by the woke and cultured? She might as well have said, “Thank God we’re not in a shithole country but here in civilized Germany.” So much for being my ally. I chuckle. *Allies...* In situations where people say too little or nothing at all, I am apparently the one that is too loud, too angry and too sensitive. I make everything about race, class and gender too vague. Position yourself, they say. Isn’t it worse in Iran for women than in Afghanistan these days? But there’s no point in erecting hierarchies of trauma. The death of Mahsa Amini is just as gruesome as the murder of Farkhunda Malikzada, who was beaten and burned alive in Kabul. Am I not allowed to shed tears for every Muslim woman whose life is under constant threat, too. Sometimes I just want to show up to work wearing my favorite black suit and my pink burka, accompanied by a random man wearing a black turban, a Shalwar Kameez, brown leather sandals; and 10 random children of every age. Ready for Steve McCurry and the front cover of the National Geographic in 2022. *Zohra, just get your cup of tea.*

Oblivion

By Katja Kramer

As a kid, she used to wish on the fluffiest dandelions, keeping the stems in her purse so that months or years later, they would remind her of the things she had wished for. Suddenly she's not upset anymore that they never came true; suddenly she doesn't recall wishing for anything in the first place. The image of white fuzzy seeds floating in the air is replaced by one of vibrant confetti flying around. Shredded paper of various colors is all it is; it's shot into the air where it floats for half a minute or so until it falls to the ground and is stomped on by people who were so very enthralled by it just seconds ago. Watching confetti in the air certainly is not the main event and most people forget about it as soon as it's out of sight; it actually seems altogether trivial, simply being an addition to something bigger—and yet, it carries so much joy and causes so much excitement the moment it appears before the faces of the crowd. She doesn't think of the confetti before she sees it, but boy, is she happy when she does.

For an evanescent eternity, the plate on her kitchen table—along with the now dry and odorless scraps of whatever once laid there—vanishes and gone is the evidence that she failed to finish it. Forgotten is that message she sent two months ago that never got an answer and so are the disconsolate voicemails from a few years back. She becomes deaf to the voices echoing the words spoken in her living room just yesterday; in the flash of light, blind to the silent resignation she's come to discern in so many eyes—including those in her mirror. Smells of sweat and smoke dismiss the stream of salt making its way to her lips as the distant memory of somebody else.

For a fleeting glimpse of insouciance, there are no mistakes, no regrets, no could-have-beens in her past. She's oblivious to the friends she's painfully watched walk out of her life and indifferent to the broken bits left lying in the doorway reminding her of how close they once were. It no longer matters that the man she thought she loved decided against her; his hair, his gaze, his smile—they've all been part of a daze some doe-eyed girl got caught in. Some girl, but not her—*she* would know better.

As she won't once stop dancing for hours on end, she doesn't remember redoing her makeup several times this evening for the tears just wouldn't stop flowing down her cheeks; neither would she recognize herself in the girl who could lie in bed for days—empty and still overthinking. Her smile, her energy, her cheerfulness—they're all sincere in the moment; they're sincere because right now, there is no unfinished plate on her kitchen table, no unanswered texts or voicemails she regrets, no fights and tears and heartbreak, no unfulfilled dreams—they're all someone else's mess but not hers and not right now. They're not hers. For an evanescent eternity, all she hears is music, all she does is dance, all she sees are lights and all that matters is confetti.

As the clock strikes 12

By Jumana Fakhar

As the clock strikes 12,

I feel your poisoned thoughts

eat me alive.

For my bottled love

unlocks its wings

leaving me short of breath.

Collecting pieces

of those broken statues,

my heart shatters.

For your magical whispers

still echo in my haunted castle

No matter,

How many sages I burn

Your memories still persist.

These opium dreams

By Jumana Fakhra

These opium dreams

of a little girl

trapped behind

stone doors and wild grasses.

Her spidery eyes haunted by the fear

of what lays ahead.

Yet,

She tries hard

to master the art of indifference

by stitching her bleeding pores.

Hurtsickles

By Julia Giesen

You've taken away my sunflowers
and gave me hurtsickles
because pain and blue fits me best
when I'm with you

Sunflowers

By Julia Giesen

Even the brightest Sunflowers turn black

By the end of October

– and so does my mind

The art of broken hearts

By Julia Giesen

You've coloured my mind blue,

My heart black,

My tears red,

My skin lilac.

That's the art of broken hearts

– and you must be an artist

Your book

By Julia Giesen

I've been in so many hands.

Hands that I didn't allow to touch me.

Hands that I didn't want to get touched by.

They've opened me,

Exposed me

– and put me back into the cage I can't escape without your help

Don't try

By Chantal Kamphausen

It's after midnight
and I've been sitting here for hours
watching the drops of water
running down another half-drunk bottle of beer
my cigarettes are long gone
and so are the poor bastards
who stumbled in by accident
in hopes of a good time
but no one comes in here for fun
the life-worn, impassive faces of the regulars
tell as much
when the music fades
you can hear the old tales
of poverty, failure and loneliness
mixed with the sweet rhythm
of bottles and glasses hitting the counter
I've lost count of the many nights
I spent on this very stool
trying to escape my fate
only to catch a glimpse
of the barkeeper
shaking his head
in an attempt to say:
'Don't try, it's not worth it!'

Letter Word Poetry: Famous Couples

By Victoria L. Koch

Rest, O, My Everlasting Oath!

(&)

Joyful Unbigoted Lovers In Eternity Triumph!

~

Trust Recovers Injured Souls, Trust Another Name!

(&)

In Solitude Of Loveless Deeds: Elate!

~

Alas, Do Aim Mindfulness!

(&)

Eternal Variety Ends.

Loki: Eternal Prince

By Victoria L. Koch

Rancour feeds the icy prince,

Lingering upon the throne of gold

The godly mischief dwells

In solitude, his heart turned stone.

5 Betrayed. Deceived. Well-grounded rage

Within the giant's chest resides

And – wroth upon his fellow kings –

A coolly lordship he provides.

In Asgard lies his wrongly home,

10 Defeated by the half-god's will.

Yet Jotunheim, his homeland true,

Is bound under a ruthless chill.

Eternal Prince of Asgard: cede

And rest before thy lifetime fades!

15 A holy king thou'll never be.

Quite nothing but an heir of shades.

't is in your hands to turn your fate

Before the gods with anger rise,

To take away your precious life

20 You rather live it in disguise.

Yet is your destiny foregone.

The younger one in mis'ry fails,

Abandoned and alone becomes

A phantom of the ancient tales.

Time

By Victoria L. Koch

If time was but a maiden fair

Of noble form and golden hair

Would men, alike as women woo

for her attention? Say, would you?

5 With scented flowers, chocolates sweet

Would bow and kneel you at her feet

For her to grace and grant to you

A piece of her, if she chose to?

For time, the greatest gift of all,

10 Is precious more than golden fall.

More valuable, more swift and fleet

Than many a man's mighty deed.

If time was but a maiden fair

We'd only ever take from her

15 Would never give, not ever rest

Until her presents we possessed.

But time is fleet and time is swift

And shall be treated as a gift,

A fragile slipper made of glass,

20 Tread carefully as it doth pass!

i killed myself

By Mio Kyiek

i killed myself out there
in one of april's night
eyes up towards the heavens
asked myself, is this alright?

was this a worthy way to go
to let go of the old me?
of everything that people saw
to finally be 'he'?

as I sat there on the rooftop
i had so much to say to me
yet no word left my lips
so I sat humming, waiting, to finally just be

and in the morning
as sun kissed the walls
i smiled to myself upon realising
two boys now lived in these halls

finding out who you are
is a long road ahead
pack some snacks for the way
you'll never be alone, they said

but what they didn't know
what they didn't get
finding yourself is often lonesome
will make you cry, mad and upset

but the truth is even though
this is your own way
there are many others
on the same track, even today

so be brave
be kind, reach out
to find friends
on lonely routes

i killed myself out there
in one of april's nights
but with the help of others
we're gonna reach new heights

Happy prevails sad

By Kavin Pandya

The steps of life, some, where the sun shines
some, has shadows in front
some truths hard to swallow
some lies difficult to forget
with each step there's a new path;
a field uncharted horizons unexplored soil unkissed and air unbreathed
and that's where lies adventure on these fields open
Where the heart throbs
and the mind works along,
to keep making the steps –
some happy, some sad
and trying the best,
when the dusk sets in
and the sky brushes red,
it's the happy one that prevails...

When I saw her

By Bharat Sharma

When I saw her,

I felt like

She is,

like a blooming rose,

Like a poet's dream,

Like a shining ray of light,

like a full moon night

like a soft word,

in the temple,

like a burning candle,

When I saw her

I felt like

She is,

Like the beauty of the morning,

like a winter sun,

Like a note from my guitar,

Like life in all colours,

like a twining vine,

Like the play of the waves,

Like a fragrant cool wind,

When I saw her.

Fantastic Fall Recipe (and so easy)

By *Melissa Knox-Raab*

'Tis the season for gourds and pumpkins and squash. Butternut hull squash are everywhere. These things:



The good news is they're delicious. The bad news is you have to cut off the stem and the end, peel them, slice them into halves or quarters, remove the seeds in the bulgy part, and then slice them into smallish pieces. From then on, things get easier: just toss in a bowl with pressed garlic (lots!), cumin, turmeric, olive oil, and a little salt and pepper. Spread out in a large pan so that each piece has its own little space in which to bask in the heat. Set aside.

Next, take three (or more) chicken thighs you've salted and peppered and left in the fridge overnight. The leaving them in the fridge part is not absolutely essential but results in crispier skin when the chicken is baked. Figure out which veggie might go bad if you don't use it soon. I had some perfect cauliflower that would have been marginally less perfect the next day. Rinsed it, cut it, tossed it in olive oil and lemon juice; added a few sliced red onions. But I can see the recipe with bell peppers instead. Or zucchini.

In a largish pan, place the cauliflower mix with the chicken on top. Put the pan of chicken on the top shelf of your oven, which you've meanwhile pre-heated to about 200° Celsius (about 390°F). Place the pan of sliced butternut squash on the lower shelf. Both dishes need about an hour; you can baste the chicken in its own juice and flip the thighs over towards the end. Stir the squash, too. The squash may be done a bit sooner; you can switch the chicken to the lower shelf if it looks very done.

The dishes will look like this before you put them in:



I was too hungry to take a picture when they came out. Served all over Jasmine rice made, naturally, in the rice cooker. And my son said it was “so delicious, Mom!”