

swim meet lit mag



Issue 3
submerge

Editor's Note

We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land from which *swim meet lit mag* operates, the Yugambah people, whose land was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

Thank you for finding your way to the third issue of *swim meet lit mag*.

I was blown away by the response this theme prompted. The record-breaking number of submissions I read suggested that maybe we've all been feeling bogged down in something. Though *swim meet* themes can be interpreted at the surface-level as being swimming-related, very few of the pieces sent to me were actually about swimming or water—tough times can have us feeling like we're underwater, but rarely is this actually the case for most people.

In this issue, you may find yourself transported to adjacent worlds; Tim Loveday's 'two worlds' is a meditation on this very phenomenon. Much seeing in the surface of a swimming pool a warped reflection of the real world, these creative works hold a mirror to grief, boredom, routine, parenthood, isolation, and even imposter syndrome. As the theme of 'Submerge' suggests, this is a darker world than the playful, summery scenes we've been invited into in our previous issues. With that in mind, please take note of the content warnings for this issue:

Content Warnings: nudity in artwork (page 44), abuse, domestic violence, and alcoholism (work beginning page 6), coarse language (works beginning on pages 6 and 39), grief (work beginning page 26), medical procedures (work beginning page 32).

Finally, I would like to acknowledge our incredible cover artist, [Emily Heasman](#). You may recognise the style of their work from Issue 1. Here's what Emily had to say about the cover art for Issue 3 and what inspired it:

'The relationship between life and death is enchanting and there is supposed to be a wondrous harmony within all aspects of nature. This piece reflects the beauty in that relationship while demonstrating how humans are destined to be consumed and returned to the very environment that we devour and destroy.'

Please submerge yourself in the wonderful work in this issue of *swim meet lit mag*. As always, if you enjoy these issues and want to see more, please support us through our website's donation options! Now, welcome to 'Submerge'.

Svetlana Sterlin
Founding Editor
swim meet lit mag

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LI(N)E(AGE)S | [Eréndira Ramírez-Ortega](#)

In the dark, he waits for her. One in the harem.
A cold silence like those country mornings in Salinas where
He roamed vast campos of lechuga and fresa as a boy,
Catching a ride on the back of a truck with his brothers,
Rising up before dawn to return after dusk with enough
Money to put in his mother's hands.

In the dark, she presses his neck, scaling
Lines carved by years of sun;
His heart, a pulse under her callused fingers.
And in the fecundity of her womb,
A seed is planted in packed soil:
A vine—a climber, tended

By the husbandman to bring forth
Much fruit; tendrils twining
Vertically, reaching capacious ground,
Fortified on a hill, towering like
A mammoth—
Woolly, prickly.

This daughter, a summoner of oblivion,
A light, face to face with her father's wife;
And for a while, the wife will study this
Girl's features in awe,
Incongruous, the roots almost furtive, the unfamiliar face
Suddenly solved in a hidden sum.

Later, this girl will learn that her father's wife
Threw him out with all his things—
The folded photo he kept—tender and beloved in his sight—
The one her mother pressed into
The lines of his palm.
Etched dirt on his hands.



Archival natural pigment print on Italian cotton rag, 2021, 48x32"

Artist statement: 'Documenting trees and plant forms was unconscious; hauntings from my internal world of dreams, untold stories. The shadows gradually asserted themselves as markers pointing to a doorway or stairway. Eventually, they covered the entire picture plane. Allowing these whispers to come forth into consciousness, their symbolic language is a reminder of the ways the past influences present life. Listening to their call and remembering that we are governed by the presence of invisible forms—the echoes of ancestors, parental influences, our hidden dramas—and engagement with the mystery of these is key to becoming truer to who we are.'

Among the Jellies | [Anna Roscoe](#)

I am walking away from myself, along the border of two unbreathable worlds: one made of seawater, the other of fibreglass. I'm wearing my old backpack from lighter days at uni. My lunch is sandwiched between two fat wads of student debt. Every workday starts in the grey of Southern Cross Station; only the seasons change. The air fluctuates between summer heat and winter chill, depending on how far I've slid through time. Mornings stick to my shoes and I track them along the same bland road, day in, day out.

When I reach Docklands, my commute takes me along the waterfront. Microplastics, chemicals, and syringes thicken the water but there are also the ocean's own jellies: soft, colourless, oblivious. They remind me of dreams, small talk, or, perhaps, a swarm of abandoned breast implants.

Every storm washes dozens of them past the boats to the ugly sludge where ocean and land try to claim one another. In the mornings, before the footpath deposits me at the office building, I look down at the jellies and wonder if their little alien bodies feel something like relief when the ocean calls them back from the lip.

Entering work, I track jellied time into the elevator, across the open-plan office. When I notice the minutes and hours I've smeared around, I apologise profusely to any coworkers in earshot. I clean off all traces with some paper towels from the ladies' bathroom where a girl from the nicer office next door often goes to throw up and brush her teeth. This becomes my routine: I walk jelly to my desk, and nobody comments on it. As the months cool and harden, heat and melt, I stop caring about the mess of time I leave everywhere.

One day, my only work friend, Charlotte, arrives with her own time dripping from the bottom of her tote bag. When I point it out to her, she takes the bag to the bathroom, and slowly tips her minutes down the sink. The time has already been wasted; there's no point trying to salvage it.

We eat lunch on a bench near the water and recklessly squeeze forty minutes out of our unpaid half-hour break. Time is trickling from the soles of our office-appropriate footwear and sliding thickly into the sea. If I lean forward, both of our reflections are submerged among the jellies, but soon this will change: Charlotte is leaving Docklands for a new job in the hope that it won't leach away so much of her time. I say I'm still here because I want to finish my contract, but we both know I'm drifting through the months, waiting for circumstances to wash me to another shore.

A couple of seagulls sidle over, sleek and plump, eyeing our lunches expectantly. We watch them squabble over our crumbs. They could so easily lift up off the concrete and fly away to a shore where the waves don't cough up cigarette butts.

*

Land is just ocean that has forgotten where it came from. Sometimes, traces of one world get washed through the border into the other. This happens after Charlotte leaves; on the floor of the open-plan office, the discarded mess of time thickens together into something alive—a jellyfish, which my colleagues narrowly miss on their missions to the photocopier. I'm worried that this soft, passive entity is hiding a sting, so I fish a disposable glove out of the first-aid kit and pick up the jellied handful to take it outside. Its form is fragile, slippery. Delicate tendrils stick to the glove.

I press the elevator button with my elbow. No one looks twice at what I'm carrying.

Outside, it's a sunny day and the ocean glitters with grit; the sheen of motor oil is a melted rainbow. I walk along the waterfront, past the shallows, cloudy with flotsam, past the boats in their docks. Away from the sludge, I drop the jelly into the deepest blue I can reach; it pulsates a little. When I take off the glove, the wind takes its chance and steals it for the ocean. The glove sinks just below the surface, its emptied fingers moving with the memory of a hand, brushing against the jellyfish like a greeting.

Author's note:

'This piece is loosely based on my memories of languishing in a job in Docklands, Melbourne. I was wasting time and feeling stuck, so I had some fellow feeling for marooned jellyfish that I used to see in the shallows of the nearby waterfront.'

Eternal Return | [Kristian Radford](#)

there's little comfort in

routine

just a nightmare

I fight

in slow motion

every day I

go back

under all this

snow-

dust

my chest

pulled

by yesterday's

coat hanger

I stare into

the frozen lakes

of my footprints

while the real day

hides

in the depths

Prayer | [Kristian Radford](#)

In the end, a healthy perspective is a puzzle
pieced together from long evenings and inkdark
dreams, from fragments of the stone
that hangs over the softest part
of your heart.

But when you chip at such things yourself
you need to know what to take
in exchange: a bright blue sky
for example, or a perfect voice, yours
just for a note.

And since fairness is a burning
illusion, you have to profit before the fuel
is exhausted, before truth's cigarette ash
blows away like bees
humming along the banks of a polluted creek.

I tell you all this now while the acid's trickling
into your ears, while you're still young enough
to make an incision. And I hope that just once,
after midnight, the stars come down
and let you hold them in your palm,
that for a moment every heaviness in you breaks loose
like a sheet of gauze in flight over the sea.

Blue Pond | [Jo Curtain](#)

[This piece has a content warning. View it [here](#).]



The Person I'm Dating Loves to Watch Monster Movies | [Elaine Mead](#)

[This piece has a content warning. View it [here](#).]

Movies with titles like *Mega Shark vs Mega Squid* and *Attack of the Giant Lizard*. They watch them almost nightly, chatting on internet forums with other fans of the genre. I tell my friend Jay about this when they join me for after-work drinks at our local bar.

'They look at me quizzically as they pour us each a glass of wine. 'But you don't like these movies.' It's more of a statement than a question.

'No,' I reply.

'So, are you dating them because you actually like them or because you're bored again?' they ask as we clink glasses.

I try to shrug off the probing with a laugh. 'Aren't we all bored?'

Jay nods distractedly, eyes darting around as they swirl their drink before adding, 'You get bored more than most. Where did you even meet this one?'

I sip from my glass and recall the troupe of incompatible lovers I've allowed to march through my life and bed. They form a line, extending back into the echo chambers of my mind, trapping me in ways I know I should have broken away from by now. Tee, the person I'm dating, was one of those peripheral people—kind of always there, a friend of a friend who would show up at various events, but I can't say I'd really noticed them until they asked me out. I couldn't think of a good enough reason to say no, so I said yes. And here we are.

Before I know it, my glass is empty. I hold it out for a refill.

*

For our fifth date, Tee invites me to the cinema in the gentrified part of town. It's showing a double feature, *Mega Shark*, followed by *Mega Shark vs Military*

Submarine. I'd told them it wasn't my thing, but they insisted I go, laying on the guilt that I needed to show more interest in their interests.

'How are we supposed to bond if we don't share these experiences?' Tee asked. I'd let out an awkward laugh, thinking they were joking because who really says stuff like that, but their blank expression told me otherwise.

I run late after getting off at the wrong bus stop. Tee's visibly agitated but remains passive-aggressive about it. I dawdle at the cinema bar as the server waits for me to decide. Tee tuts and taps their watch.

'Haven't you seen these movies a dozen times already?' I ask, finally choosing an artfully printed craft ale apparently brewed just around the corner. The server jolts into action, giving me a thumbs up, as they turn to open one of the fridges.

'That's not the point,' Tee snaps, already holding their beverage.

We enter the theatre and take our seats. I crack open my over-priced craft beer as the black screen fills with the dark blue void of an unnamed ocean, and the movie title floats into view, the graphics waving across the screen like sunlight filtering through waves. I take a big, noisy gulp of my drink, and Tee shushes me aggressively. Usually, this would make me feel guilty, but on this occasion, it tickles me. A smirk creeps at the corner of my lips as I suppress a giggle.

Partway through the movie, I glance sideways at my date as the poorly animated shark rampages across the screen. I catch them transfixed, mouthing along with what little dialogue the movie contains. Jay's questioning echoes back to me, and I find myself wondering why I agreed to this—why I keep agreeing to things I know I won't enjoy.

I look around at the other movie-goers, intrigued by these characters who all seem enraptured by the mindless shark-fuelled scenes, wondering who these people are that would give up their Saturday evening to watch these movies. Are they as devoted to the genre as Tee, or have they been guilt-tripped like me? Do they all know each other? As soon as the thought crosses my mind, I get the uncanny feeling that *I* know these people. The light from

the projector flashes, and I have to squint to make out the side profiles. One person, sitting two rows in front, looks very familiar. I wish they would turn a little more so I could get a good look. Just as I'm about to give up, the overhead lights flash and stay on, indicating an interval before the next movie. I didn't realise the first one had finished. I glance around, and as I look back, the person I've been staring at finally turns in my direction.

My fingernails dig into the armrests of my seat as I realise they are the spitting image of Tee.

Their back is to me as they leave their seat and head toward the exit. I stare open-mouthed as they leave.

'What's wrong?' Tee asks.

I shake my head, thinking I must be seeing things. 'Nothing.' I smile. 'I need to use the bathroom. You want another drink?'

Tee hands me their empty beer bottle, nodding.

In the bathroom mirror, I study my reflection, inspecting my eyes for anomalies. It's one of those trippy bathrooms where a mirror is positioned both in front of the sink and on the wall directly behind, so you see yourself reflected to infinity.

'You're seeing things,' I mutter, and my infinity of reflections mouth the words back at me. I poke my tongue out at myself, who grin back at me. Wondering what's gotten into me, I grab our drinks and return to the theatre just as the second movie starts.

The doppelgänger is back in their seat, but I don't look at them. I keep my eyes fixed on the screen. This movie opens in the dark belly of a military submarine. A large army-attired man with a greying crew cut gives a pep talk to his team. Their mission? *To find mega-shark and destroy it once and for all.* I can't contain my snort of laughter, and it comes out louder than I intended. Tee shushes me angrily as two or three other attendees turn in their seats to look. The light from the projection flashes bright, and I see the other attendees

clearly for the first time. Like the doppelgänger two rows in front, I realise their faces are identical to the person I'm dating.

I turn and stare at Tee sitting next to me, a tsunami churning in my stomach. They notice me staring and make a face, lean over, whispering, 'What's wrong with you?'

The words repeat over and over in my mind, dancing around in a geometric cage, reflected to infinity until out of the depths of my subconscious, a mega-shark swims up and swallows them whole. Devours my mind in one giant gulp.

I can't help myself. I laugh.

It starts as a barely contained chuckle. I try to keep it stuffed in my mouth, but it prances across my ribs and fights to crawl out my nose. I shake with quiet glee, my shoulders rocking with the effort of holding this madness inside me. I picture the infinity mirror in the bathroom and feel myself start to sink into its depths. I blink, and I'm no longer within my body but submerged in an alternate dimension, watching the scene wavering above me as though I'm underwater.

I watch as my physical form throws its head back, and a lingering howl of a laugh bursts forth, wild as a wolf. A dozen heads whip around to look at me as Tee leans back, mouth gaping.

I am *crazy*, I think with the most clarity I've experienced in a long time, and the laughter keeps coming. Tears stream from my eyes, and my body sucks air noisily as it struggles to fill my lungs with enough for another round. More than once, someone shouts, 'Shut the fuck up!'

But I won't be stopped. Not yet.

One by one, the other patrons stand and make their way to the exit. I see clenched fists, hear cusses and feet stomping up the stairs. Someone chucks a bucket of popcorn in my direction. I just keep laughing.

Tee has flipped between watching me in horror and apologising profusely to everyone as they walk past. Now we're alone, I watch their lower jaw jerk and bulge with the clenching and unclenching of teeth, deciding how to

handle me, incensed that I have ruined this experience for them—for everyone. Finally, they stand and throw their drink down at my feet. ‘You’re fucking nuts!’ they yell.

I’m still laughing, quietly now, a low mumble, and I feel myself settle back down into my body, ease slipping over me with the familiarity of physical sensations, but something’s different now. I wipe my cheeks with my sleeves and nod, agreeing with them wholeheartedly. ‘Yes,’ I chuckle, ‘yes I am.’ Crazy enough to say yes to watching these movies despite hating them. Crazy enough to keep repeating the same behaviours, expecting a different outcome. Tee steps over me to exit the row of seats and storm out.

I sit and try to regulate my breathing, inhaling long and slow through my nose, the odd giggle still gurgling its way out from the bowels of my body. I take another deep breath and let it out with a contented sigh.

I’m composed enough to catch the end of the movie as the mega-shark swallows the final part of the submarine wreckage with the army captain on it. The credits roll as the theatre lights beam on.

I take one giant inhale of air and release it slowly. I collect the beer bottles from the ground and make my way to the exit, depositing them into the garbage bag being held open by the confounded cinema employee.

As I emerge outside, there’s still a thin trace of daylight cutting across the skyline, and I embrace the discombobulation that comes with the feeling of exiting the dark into unexpected light. I feel better than I have in months.

Author’s note:

‘Playing on the old adage, “laughter is the best medicine”, and the surreality of sitting in a dark room with strangers, engaged in a fictional universe, “The Person I’m Dating Loves to Watch Monster Movies” explores what happens when we realise where we’re going wrong in life and the process of coming up for air.’

Man on a Boat | [Ion Corcos](#)

The deep lake in his eyes,
blue the peace of still water.

Oars at rest, just touching the surface.
So far from shore, the boat

could vanish into the lake
and no one would know.

The man dips a finger into the water;
a deer runs from the banks.

So far from shore, the boat
seems to sink,

to become the lake,
the early morning sky.

It has not rained yet;
there has been no storm, no steel sky.
No lightning, nor wild winds

like the ones that will later turn
his boat over.

Mum makes eggs for us every day. Fried eggs she calls sunny side up and scrambled eggs and, one morning, a cheesy omelette with green leaves in it.

Dad doesn't have a job anymore but Mum works at a shop in town. She puts on a black skirt and a black shirt and golden earrings and she leaves in the morning and comes back at dinnertime.

For lunch, Dad always makes us peanut butter sandwiches with the crusts cut off, and he brings our plates into the lounges room so we can watch ABC Kids together. But one day, when Mum is at work, Dad doesn't put on Octonauts or Olivia, Wow Wow Wubbzy or Timmy Time, or Mister Maker. He turns on THE NEWS.

Dad, this is boring.

Evie, it's not boring. This is important. Look.

I sit beside him on the lounge.

There was a tsunami—a big wave—in Japan this morning. Look, it climbed over the sea wall and hit land. People only had eight to ten minutes to get out of there.

Cars are swimming on the street. Water is bubbling around the wheels and making the cars bob up and down. They crash into each other. There is a man with a mask on, sitting on top of his car like it's a surfboard, like cartoon Caillou on his little red boat out at sea. He needs to get off. There is another person still inside their floating car winding down their window. People are climbing up buildings. Japan is drowning.

What if they can't swim, Dad? Dad, could that happen to our beach? Dad?

I like the beach but I can't swim yet.

Whoosh—like if you took all your toys into the bath: farm animals and Hot Wheels and dollhouse furniture. And little dolls. *Whoosh*.

The water comes like when Mum forgot she was filling up the sink to wash the dishes because she was in the lounge room arguing with Dad. A giant cloud of bubbles on the sink, water rushing across the kitchen floor.

Dad, I'm hungry.

Dad? I'm hungry.

He gets up and makes me my peanut butter sandwich. He washes four strawberries under the tap and puts them on my plate.

Every night Mum comes home from work and makes dinner. Sometimes it's fish cakes with mashed potatoes and broccoli. Sometimes it's minestrone with buttery, seedy toast. Or bangers and mash and green peas. Or meat pie and green peas and mashed potatoes. Or spaghetti and salad.

Every night, there are onions.

*

When I am in kindergarten, she cuts carrots into sticks and makes sandwiches with ham and cheese and sweet yellow pickles for my lunchbox.

I wonder if Dad is eating peanut butter sandwiches without me.

She makes me Vegemite and cheese rice cakes that are a bit soft and chewy by lunchtime. And *ants on logs* out of celery and peanut butter and sultanas—until halfway through Term 1, when the teacher gives me a note saying *no peanut butter allowed*.

In Term 2, Mum bakes things late at night. She makes Milo slice and Anzac brownies.

After school, Dad meets me at the gate with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on ground. We don't talk on the walk home but he makes me hold his hand when we cross the road.

When we get home, Mum's still at work and the house is quiet. I can smell peanut butter.

Dad says, *How was school?* And I say, *How was home?* He laughs and goes to the fridge to find some fruit for afternoon tea. He looks and looks in there. He moves things around and keeps looking. It feels like he's been watching tsunamis again.

Mum makes blueberry muffins when Dad and I have already gone to bed. They are there in the morning, eleven of them in a plastic container on top of the microwave. The twelfth one is already in my lunchbox.

Donation Status Pending | [Steph Amir](#)

[This piece has a content warning. View it [here](#).]

The not-yet-baby is imprisoned
behind a vision board compiled
by financial interests aligned
with the updated style-guide,
smooth fair skin, smiling faces,
genes in all the right places.

I am at the end of my tether.

Seventeen forms are sent from nine
email addresses, bound by threads of
legislation and corporate inclination,
entangled in a bureaucratic web. The
spider is nowhere to be seen, but all
forms must be dated and witnessed.

At the end of my tether is a tweet.

On the forum, couples beg for not-yet-babies. We're
Mandy and Scott, aged 39 and 41. Twelve years of trying.
Four miscarriages. Two dogs. Anna and Dave, 35 and 36.
Five years. Three miscarriages. One cat and a fishing boat.
Bec and Minh. Nathan and Gill. Isabella and Carlos and Blake
and Raine and Clem and Xavier and Magdalena and Luis and

At the end of my tweet is humanity.

Transport@clinic.com.au advises that
the not-yet-baby may be relocated on
a Tuesday in six or more business days,
once an approved non-partner person
e-signs the hardcopy waiver to confirm
the not-yet-baby may not ever arrive.

I don't know where humanity ends.

The voice says, your call is important to us.
I say, it's the not-yet-baby who is important.
I'd rather not call at all. The voice asks, have
you seen our website? I ask, have you? The
voice says, we bring together the brightest
minds. Our technology is outstanding.

Author's note:

“Donation Status Pending” was written in response to the frustrations of corporate bureaucracy that have made it difficult for my partner and I to donate the embryos leftover from a previous IVF cycle. There are so many people desperate for children, but the breadth and opacity of red tape (government legislation, which is publicly available, and private corporate policies, which are not) make embryo donation exceedingly difficult. Many requirements don't make sense for queer couples, and are much more prohibitive for people with disabilities. I'm in both cohorts, and have been grateful for support from other queer and/or disabled parents.'

Hands Cupping Her Belly | [Julia C. Spring](#)

[This piece has a content warning. View it [here](#).]

Doug and our four-year-old, Sarah, were splashing in the warm lake. I watched them from a distance, pleased that they were together—and that I was by myself. She had been clinging to me since his recent hospitalisation. He and I knew that the results of his chemotherapy were not good. We wouldn't have any more summers like this.

They were holding hands as they ambled up the beach to where I was laying out our picnic. We drove home in the dark, Sarah asleep in her car seat. Doug carried her in to bed.

In early December he was nearing death. I had told Sarah that Daddy was unlikely to get well and she asked me to let her know when he was about to die. I'd said I would try but I had never been around someone dying before, so I might get it wrong.

On a Friday I had a strong sense that Doug would die in a few days, even though the doctor didn't think so, and I told Sarah. My memory is of speaking to her in our dim hallway, but that was how my mood made every place look. She nodded and went back to her toy ponies.

That Sunday, Doug, semi-conscious, was sitting on the sofa next to my sister, Cynthia, who had come to help for a week. His hands were picking at the edge of his T-shirt. I spoke to his doctor on the phone several times about taking him to the ER; she now agreed that his death was imminent and reminded me that he would just be made uncomfortable in the hospital.

Sarah was ping-ponging: going to a playmate's home (all the local parents were on high alert), coming back after twenty minutes, then leaving again in a quarter hour for another friend's place. One time when she came back to our apartment, I told her I was pretty sure Daddy would die soon. Sarah said she was going to yell at him; I said no, she could go in her room and yell, but we

were all being gentle with him. We went together to her bedroom, and she didn't yell but she threw some stuffed animals around and stomped on the floor.

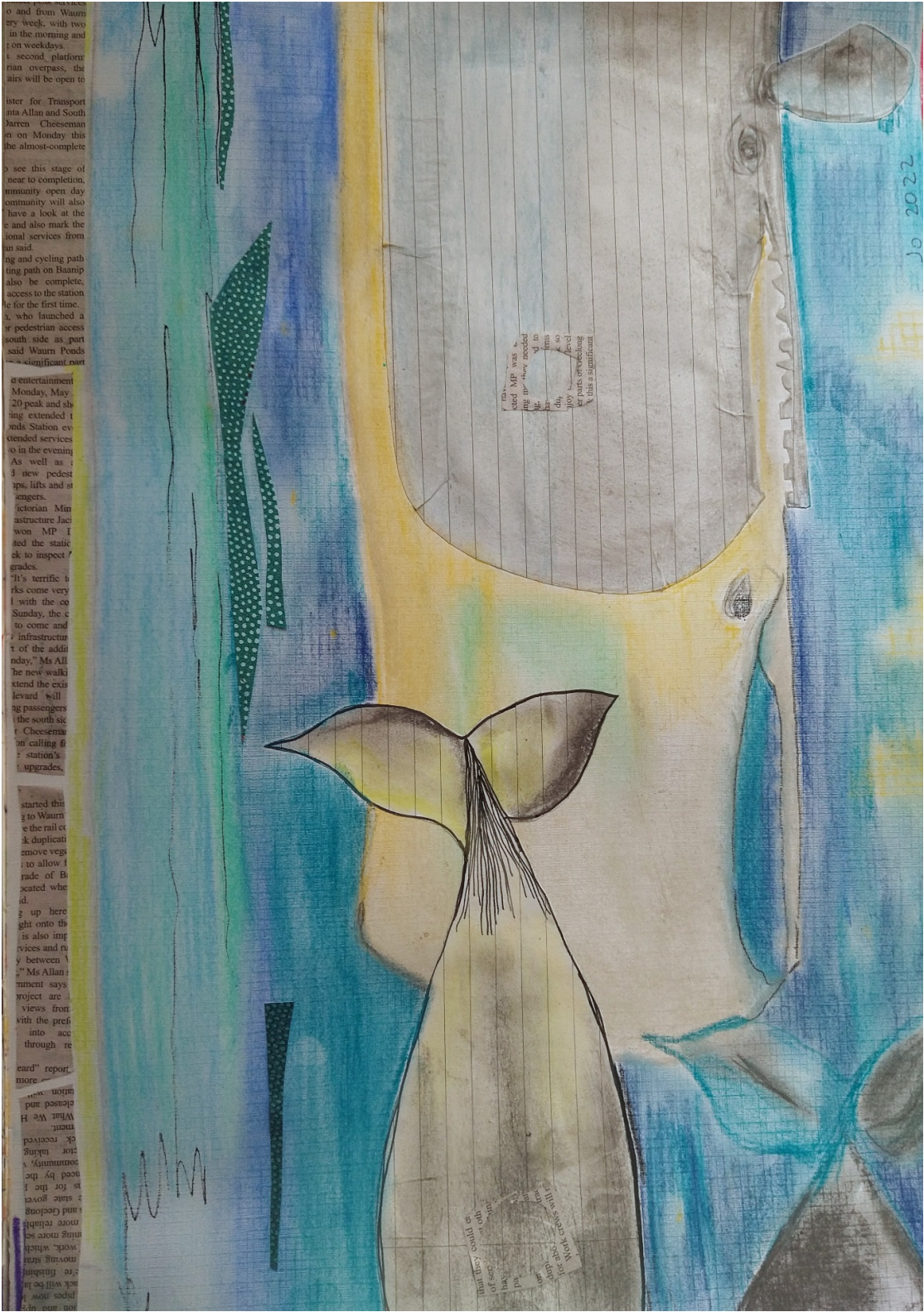
Shortly she was ready to leave again, standing by the front door in her school-bus yellow jacket. Cynthia told me Sarah had spoken to Doug in a voice too soft for him to hear. I asked Sarah if she wanted to tell Daddy something and she nodded. Holding hands, we walked over to him, still upright on the sofa. They blew each other kisses. She said, 'Daddy, thank you for teaching me to swim.' He ruffled her hair and she left for her friend's home.

That was almost the last moment Doug could have responded to her. Soon Cynthia and I helped him to bed and he lost consciousness. He died the next morning, Monday, right after she had taken Sarah to daycare. At his memorial service a few days later, the minister spoke of her thanks to him. Sarah beamed.

Several months later I asked Sarah what she had meant by Daddy teaching her to swim, because she couldn't actually do so yet (not that I pointed this out). She told me about that July day at the lake when Doug repeatedly cupped his hands under her belly to help her float, taking them away only when she asked him to.

The bittersweet memory of his support for her buoyed me, and I resolved to provide the same support for Sarah as she grew up without her father.

below the line, they travel unseen. | [Jo Curtain](#)



Sperm Whale | [Martha Webster](#)

The sinking fluke of its dive
leaves surface eddies lingering

long after it's gone. Down
so deep, its retinas bleed.

It hunts with pings
that brain-stun by the acre.

Under upwelling currents,
the north-south *California*.

The *Humboldt*.
Mucoid rivers, flowing opposite.

Tentacles one way, tail the other.
By convulsion, squid escape.

Tectonics | [Martha Webster](#)

Gravity and tidal
undertow, shoving downward
the continental land mass.

And driftings: a whale skull
along the silty bottom.
Pock-marked with vent holes,
the abyssal floor.

The only lights
are from jellies,
barbels—bioluminescent.
Strange synapses
coding a whale's clicks.

two worlds | [Tim Loveday](#)

[This piece has a content warning. View it [here](#).]

my mum
had this dream
of an above ground pool
a vision of what
our backyard could be
a weathered timber deck
a clunky set of stairs
banana chairs
encircling
her inverted submarine

she hummed
with stories of
late night swims
on sticky days dive bombs
and webbed fingers hot bricks
alleviated by squelching
footprints games
of shoulder wrestles
chlorinated kisses dripping towels
slung over
fences

days falling
from the flesh in glassy
beads

for mum there
were always two worlds
a floor could become
a ceiling

a gurgled rope
the modulation of breath
bubbles the only tether
 between
 them

all my childhood mum
begged my father *for nothing*
too fancy
just a cheap fibreglass whale
to breach their back window
each hot afternoon
alive with the wet screams
 of me and my brothers

don't you remember
my mum used to say
my parents had a pool
and they were broke

yes my father would
grumble your parents
were cheap real
pools are bloody
expensive

mum's dad pop
who looked like saint nick
rode waves on
his stomach

made a point of never flushing
the toilet

he always said that
water was precious

so on days
after rain he'd meet
my mum at her school gate
untie her laces pull off her socks
hold her hand and swing her high

her feet cracking
the puddles

each night my father was plagued
by commercials our expectations
visualised in the quarter acre
flat screen our bodies
huddled injured olympic swimmers
side-lined from the relay

the kids who had taken
our places the glistening slides
the glittery bodies

me and my brothers
we floated
in the blue glow of mum's envy

narellan pools
and their jingle teasing us

summer is fun

for most of her childhood
mum couldn't touch
the bottom her toes
searching for a slippery
surface

she'd sit with her dad
on the pool's edge
in her parents'
backyard

their toes wriggling

those little white
fleshy fish being nibbled
by make-believe
tadpoles

pop

telling jokes
that made her
belly
do cartwheels

as beer
worked its magic
through his system

father always said
pools were too damn *much*
imagine the cost of maintenance
a pool wouldn't add a cent
to the house's valuation
besides above-grounds
were ugly and one day we'd
have enough money
to buy *a real pool*
like our neighbours
the rich family
on our street who incidentally
owned a water
purifying company

mum tells me
her childhood
house was so
close to the beach that nan
hung a red towel over the railing
of their back porch meaning
dinner's ready come home
get a feed

the water will be there
waiting

tomorrow

mum reconciled
my father's resistance
by taking a bath twice weekly

in winter she'd dress us in boardies
tell us stories about her brothers
who were surfers
and whenever we bought shoes
and the clerk remarked *what big feet*

mum would reply *they were born*
 to walk on water
 it's in their genes

when mum's brothers went out
 on the waves
so did my mum she'd sit
on the points of their boards

her feet rushing against
 the froth

we never did quite
learn how to surf like our uncles
who were known in some parts
as surfing aristocracy

my father was always on
about *shark shark sharks*

and the beach was always just
 a little bit too far

some days
the neighbours invited us
to swim in their pool mum's body fanning
across the blue

a waterlily
in full bloom

she taught me how to float on my back
how to spit water trumpets
how to cup
my hand around water
how to listen to its
reverberations how to speak
its gargled language

pop drank
like he could
find the ocean in
a beer bottle

a glassy oar that
sent him in circles

he moved like water

sometimes raging
sometimes trickling

on long hot nights
he'd strip to his
tighty-whities

and let
the blue-black
water
wash away
long days at
a switchboard

for some years
almost everywhere i went
i was wearing a rashie

it's as if mum
had whispered into my crib
you never know
when water might
appear

and like that one day it did

at the dinner table in the peak
 of summer 2004
there was a man with a bundle
of shiny brochures
each one depicting a pool
fit for a resort each one promising
a future i'd long given up on

each one speaking
the language
of water

its gurgled
hypnotic
sonnet

there were always
two worlds
a floor could become
a ceiling

there was always
further to dive
further to rise

mum was weightless

her fingers
painting
her movements

mum was never sold
on the big showy pool
she'd always wanted
something *simple*
easy quick cheap

she'd hadn't come from money

water had always been free

the construction alone
would take over a year

they'd need excavators
and concreters light technicians
and fibreglass specialists
they'd tear up
the land and plonk
a pool in its wake

she'd tried to show my father
second-hand above grounds
online bean-sized pools
 that were less than a grand

but father kept repeating
only the finest *for my family*
besides our other neighbours
who weren't rich
 had just bought themselves
 a sauna

to this day
when mum
recalls her first date
with my father

she talks about
his tight red shorts
and his big soggy thongs

everywhere he walked
he clapped storm clouds

she had to take him
to the far end of the beach
where she knew
no one else
would go

in those days
father worked as an
apprentice plumber

he ground out the hours
controlling water

but

all of it he said proudly
was *full of shit*

this time unlike most
mum
didn't let up

she insisted to get a new pool
they'd have to take out
a second mortgage

it's ridiculous

they'd work themselves
into the ground
and for what

that's the bloody
point we want it
in the ground
father would grumble

above grounds
were an embarrassment

besides
where would they put the plumbing

we'd see everything

mum had grown up
around long-haired yahoos
and beach bums
and beach bogans

with naturally forming dreadlocks

on the water they were musical notation
they skipped and slid across waves
cooing and singing

when they left their boards
they were always
laughing

they dived into water freely

and yet on land
they looked wobbly

the only thing
they seemed
to take seriously
was drinking

so perhaps
on that first date
she saw a safe bet
in my father

a lighthouse permanently
anchored to a headland

this man
with his shorty shorts
the colour of sunburn

this man who thought beer
tasted disgusting

when they finally
got started on the pool

the clay rocks in our backyard
were harder than expected

when they went
to deliver the fibreglass shell
the truck got bogged

and the concrete
was fractured

look at it
you can't un-notice it
my father would say
about the tectonic splits
in our driveway

they had to rip out
precious gums reroute the
drainage

retile our roof
for the solar
panels that he
insisted we were
getting

as the months then years
wore on and the construction
seemed endless

father was always
complaining
that the hole
in the backyard
was a hole in his pocket

bloody hell
i told you pools
are expensive

perhaps my pop
mum's dad

had sensed my father's
resistance to water

perhaps he saw a man
who was bathed
in a bucket
as a child

whose mother never let him
go beyond the shallows

the first time he met my father
his eyes fished
around his beer

so you're the guy fucking my daughter?

or perhaps my pop saw
a part of himself
only worse

no outlet in which
my father could
let go of the world

the best days in that pool
lived without heating without concrete
without mechanised
cleaning systems
or tiling

they were the years the months of excitement
when the pool was just a fibre glass
hole in the ground

when the pool was a figment
of our imagination
realised in a splashing

when nothing was finished

no debts to be paid

when the water was murky

when we reached for a surface
but were never
quite certain

even years later
after my pop
died of skin cancer
my father called him
a beach coma

reciting the first night
he stayed at my mum's parents' house
how pop
walked
in front of the tv
and out into the back yard

wearing only
a towel slung over
his shoulder

pop's bung-hole
on full display
it winked at my father
as he threw himself
head-first into the water

for my father
pop was *disgusting*
full of shit a poor drunk

by the time the pool
was built i was halfway
through
high school too old
to enjoy it

every day the ducks
came built a dam
from their shit

the water reeked the pool was a hazard

my father started calling it
your mother's liability

every few months it seemed
that something had to be fixed

more salt added the solar heating
rewired

the glass fence at the back
began to crack

even the gardens grew over
splitting more concrete

besides
swimming
wasn't another world

it was a mirror of my reality
my body having grown
in all the wrong

directions

and didn't i know
pool parties were
expensive

my father always said
the bloody sharks
are circling

and yet occasionally
my mum
would
come to me *how*
about a
swim?

she'd say

a cold beer in her hand

and i'd remember
how water in her presence
had
a language

how water was a
currency without a metric

a skin that always fit

so i'd
follow her out watch her
dive head first

crack the water
into a thousand fragments of
self

there were always
two worlds a floor could become
a ceiling

there was always
further to dive
further to rise

mum was weightless

if only in those moments

Author's note:

'This prose poem is an extract from my verse memoir, *your father was a bastard*. The poem critically examines masculinity, rurality and intergenerational violence, particularly in the scope of the 2019–2020 Black Summer Bush Fires.'

submerge | [Anna Jacobson](#)



About the Contributors

Steph Amir (she/her) is an emerging poet with a background in science and social science. Last year she was a Writeability fellow at Writers Victoria, a fellowship for writers with disabilities. Her poems have been published internationally in print and online, including recently in *Burrow*, *The Gamut Mag*, *Ghost Girls*, *Mantissa Poetry Review*, *Otoliths*, *Phantom Kangaroo*, and *Wordgathering*. She lives in Melbourne with her partner and two children. Steph can occasionally be found on Twitter and Instagram [@steph_kaymir](#) and will be adding poems to her page at: <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/stephamir>

Award-winning photographer **Natalie Christensen**'s focus is ordinary settings, seeking the sublime. She deconstructs to colour fields, geometry, and shadow. Christensen has exhibited in U.S. and international venues; she was a UAE Embassy culture tour delegate, recently was invited as Artist-in-Residence Chateau d'Orquevaux, France, and Setanta Books, London published "007—Natalie Christensen." She has work in permanent collections and her photography has been featured in many noted fine art publications.

Ion Corcos was born in Sydney, Australia in 1969. He has been published in *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Wild Court*, *The Sunlight Press*, and other journals. Ion is a nature lover and a supporter of animal rights. He is the author of *A Spoon of Honey* (Flutter Press, 2018). Website: www.ioncorcos.wordpress.com | Twitter: [@IonCorcos](#)

Jo Curtain (she/her) is a poet and short-story writer. She is a creative writing student at Deakin University. She is the editor of *Anomaly Street: poetry with a difference*, a Geelong Writers publication. Find her work in Geelong Writers anthologies, *Blue Daisies Journal*, *Sour Cherry Mag*, *Pocket Baby Zine*, *swim meet lit mag*, *Coffee House Writers*, and elsewhere. Find Jo on Instagram [@bertielikestowrite](#).

Emma Darragh lives and works in Wollongong, on Dharawal Country. Her writing has appeared in *Cordite*, *Westerly*, *Meniscus*, and *TEXT*. Emma is soon to complete her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Wollongong, where she is also a sessional academic. Her website is <https://emmadarragh.com>. She occasionally engages with social media as [@emmaldarragh](#) on Instagram and [@Em Darragh](#) on Twitter.

Emily Heasman is a pen and ink artist based in Meanjin/Brisbane. They graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in Creative Writing, in 2019. Emily now has an appreciation of producing whimsical but gothic ink pieces to portray the grim realities of humanity in a unique and refreshing light. More of their work can be found at [@shayneos_sketches](#).

Anna Jacobson is a writer and artist from Brisbane. *Amnesia Findings* (UQP, 2019) is her first full-length poetry collection, which won the 2018 Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. In 2020 Anna won the Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Writing, was awarded a Queensland Writers Fellowship, and was shortlisted in the Spark Prize. In 2018 she won the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. Her poetry chapbook *The Last Postman* was published with Vagabond Press (2018) as part of the deciBels series 3. Her website is www.annajacobson.com.au.

Tim Loveday is a poet, a writer, an editor and a clown-lark. As the recipient of a 2021 Next Chapter Wheeler Centre Fellowship, a 2022 Melbourne City Arts Grant, and a 2022 Writing Space Fellowship, he critically examines masculinity in Australia. His poetry/prose has appeared in *Meanjin*, *Griffith Review*, *Cordite*, *Mascara*, *Meniscus*, *TEXT Journal*, and *The Big Issue*, among others. A neurodivergent dog parent, he is the verse editor for XR's Creative Hub and IPEd's Student Adviser. He is represented by Jacinta Di Mase; they are currently shopping around his verse-memoir, *your father was a bastard*. You can find more of his work at: timloveday.com.

Elaine Mead is a freelance writer and book reviewer currently residing in nipaluna (Hobart). Her flash fiction and short stories have been published internationally in both print and digital media. She is passionate about the ways we can use literature to learn from our experiences to become more authentic versions of ourselves and obsessed with showing you photos of her dachshunds. You can find her online at www.wordswithelaine.com.

Kristian Radford lives in Melbourne. He writes poetry and fiction, and his work has been published in *Meanjin*, *Westerly*, *Rabbit*, *Cordite*, and other journals.

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Anna Roscoe grew up in Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country but she now lives in Asia. In her writing, she likes to use supernatural elements to explore feelings and memories. Her work also appears in *Going Down Swinging*.

Julia C. Spring is a mostly retired lawyer/social worker who began writing short memoir pieces when her teaching and professional articles began yearning toward the personal. Quite a few have been published in journals including *Funny Pearls*, *Pure Slush*, and *Persimmon Tree*. Her essay on compassionate healthcare won third prize in a 2018 *Intima* contest. This story of father and daughter swimming is too late for the US Father's Day, but just in time for the Australian one.

Martha Webster lives, writes, and swims in Los Angeles. She has published widely in the USA.

Thank You

Thank you for reading our third issue. *swim meet lit mag* is a volunteer-run operation and relies on the generous donations of our readers and submitters. Donate anytime on our website, or during the submission periods by choosing the paid options provided. We will always accept free submissions, and our publication will always be free to read. In this way—and, hopefully, in our approachable tone—we hope to remain accessible.

swim meet lit mag is taking a hiatus for the remainder of 2022, but we will be back in 2023! Keep an eye out on our socials and sign up to our mailing list via our website. We will be sharing some contributor interviews over the coming months; if you're interested in submitting to future issues, it can be helpful to hear from past contributors.

The theme for Issue 4 will be **FLIP**. More details will be released in 2023, but for now, interpret this how you will! In any case, we'll be keen to see your poetry, prose, visual artwork, and hybrids.

Remember, above all, we're just looking for work that stands out. It doesn't have to stick to the theme, but it has to be powerful. See our **submit** page for guidelines.