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likeness

m a g a z i n e

under pressure

Low Entropy is headquartered in Kwikwetlem First Nation Territory of the Coast Salish people, and in the shared territory of the səliłwətaʔtəməxʷ, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Stz'uminus, Qayqayt and S'ólh Téméxw nations.

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About Low Entropy: Founded in 2015, the Low Entropy Foundation is home to free programs and events that focus on personal and community growth through empowerment, authenticity and meaningful interpersonal connections.

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Foreword

Within atmosphere and environment we feel push and pull, our hearts tumbling into our stomachs in uncertain instants or our ears gently vibrating from the sinister whispers of our peers. We need this, though. We live here, and it's just like this.

Without pressure what would we be, after all, but shapeless and formless? Aimless. Structure, direction, imperative . . . we need these bones, tactile and reassuring, to brace ourselves for the next crescendo.

And as we push, we push away. All the world's a stage, but it's kind of also like an arena, or a field, or a diamond maybe. We learn from a young age that we can stress and be stressed, feel and be felt. We can exert force, but it exerts back.

Or maybe we try to rise above, where the air is thinner, but if that secret were real, surely it would have been exposed by now. At the moment it just seems like those who try are only able to speak thinly. Their lungs pushing, pulling under the weight of expectation, just like ours. No. We all play the same.

We've felt it, and we've had a chance to breathe. This is what came next.

Simon Cheung

Editor, Low Entropy

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“Only able to regur-
gitate two-dimensi-
al, repetitive



scribbles that do
not contribute to the
collective culture.”

Photo by Kit

**ALEX-
ANDRA
LOPEZ** Alexandra Lopez recently earned her Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Calgary. She enjoys spending her time writing short stories and poems exploring her cultural background and the significance of empathy for social reform. When she is not bent over at her laptop, you can find her hiking with her dogs, Koda and Arlo.

Abstract Signs

Alexandra Lopez

Marla wakes to the soft rain pattering on stained-glass windows, casting a myriad of jewel-toned shapes into the studio. The air is congested from the midday heat, only offering the recycled breath from metal blades as relief. Fluttering her eyes open, Marla lifts her chin from her hand, wiping off the sweat that outlines her upper lip.

“One more hour till pick-up,” she notes, shifting her gaze from the clock to her desk, polluted with dried acrylic paint.

Sticky notes, with the header *Concept*, lay crumpled and discarded in front of her. Each idea killed with a red slash. Above her station, pinned to the corkboard wall, is a torn-out criticism piece from the prolific art magazine *Apollo*. The title, “Is Marla Stephen considering an early retirement? A review of Stephen’s newest, self-titled collection,” snarls at her. The words *boring*, *redundant* and *basic* are bolded throughout the piece, like spots of mold growing on the bathroom drywall—indisputable.

Ripping free a new sticky note, she jots down “*Concept: A collection of impressionist paintings of my studio from different angles.*” Ignoring her compulsory need to reach for the red pen, Marla shoots up, knocking down the water dish onto her grave of forsaken thoughts. Carelessly throwing a paper towel onto the mess, she grabs a paintbrush, ignoring the apprehension festering in her stomach. Squeezing a light green onto her palate, she dots a single spot onto the white expanse.

“If I focus on capturing the light, I’ll just be seen as a lacklustre Monet.”

She hesitates, bringing the end of the brush to part her lips. She briefly considers using negative space to create silhouettes of objects, but rejects the idea with her next exhale.

“What am I, back in first year?”

Marla releases her grip, letting the wooden handle roll from her fingertips onto the checkered vinyl. Wiping off the phantom paint on her smock, she lowers

herself onto the floor, letting the cool tiles soothe her cheek. The coarse bristles prick her fingers as she rolls the brush around, a familiar sensation that calls her to reminisce. Inhaling, her senses recall the odor of lingering perfume and sharp ammonia.

Gifted, her professors called her. Unique, complex.

“You’ll do big things”

seemed to be the consensus. Yet, her art went from hanging in museums to galleries, and now, living in hotel lobbies for toddlers to wipe their breakfast on. Could her new collection even be considered art? The academic community that once venerated Marla had now reduced her to the title of printer. Only able to regurgitate two-dimensional, repetitive scribbles that did not contribute to the collective culture. Closing her eyes, Marla imagines her body calcifying into the ground, the thought eerily peaceful. A low ring pumps blood back into Marla’s limbs. In an instant, she remembers Jamie. Scrambling from the floor, she reaches for her phone on the desk.

“Hello? I am so sorry, I’m on my way to school right now.”

Marla runs up the basement stairs, her joints suddenly nimble.

“Ma’am, Jamie was waiting outside with the supervisor, but when she left to talk to a parent, he ran off. We thought maybe he came home.”

“No, he didn’t. I would’ve heard him open the door. Why would you leave a five-year-old unsupervised, how am I supposed to find him?”

“We apologize, but—”

Marla hangs up the phone, unable to listen to the list of overused excuses while her son wanders aimlessly.

“Jamie!” She screeches, anticipating hearing his soft voice call back at her. When only an unnerving silence answers her cry, Marla rushes out of the front door and into her car.

Reaching the park, Marla sprints towards the playing children, slipping on the sleek grass. She releases a desperate call, her tears collected by the hair blowing into her features.

“Mommy?” The gentle, yet cautious tone of his voice warms her face. From under the slide emerges her most precious creation, caked in mud and decorated with a red smile. “I walked to the park.”

“Yes, I can see that.”

After securing Jamie into the car seat, she walks towards the slide, curious to understand the allure for her slippery five-year-old. Crouching down, she cranes her neck under the slide, planting her hands in the hole made by Jamie’s butt in the dirt. On the backside, placed sporadically on the metal canvas, are muddy handprints. Some are fresh, made with splodges of copper, accented with pieces of grass. Others, fingers and palms of clay, dried into a vibrant burnt sienna. The curve of every finger is different from one print to the next,

leaving behind an identity,

like cave paintings from thousands of years ago. Marla spots Jamie’s print in the center, the lines dripping and blurry from his eagerness to share his existence. Letting her fingers brush against the primitive textile, her cheeks flush with disconcertment. Marla realizes that she has, for so long, over-intellectualized her art, stripping herself of any freedom of expression. Her paintings, lost in a metaphysical conceit. The sense of relatability brushed away with each coat of varnish. Leaning back, she captures the image with her phone, and in her notes writes “*Concept: Art is in us in our most basic forms.*”

ALEX ANDY PHUONG

Alex Andy Phuong earned his bachelor of arts in English from California State University, Los Angeles in 2015. Emma Stone inspired him to write passionately after he heard the song “Audition (The Fools Who Dream)” from *La La Land*.

The Color of Loyalty
Alex Andy Phuong

Crimson red
Royal blue
Anything to remain
Loyal and true,
And even if the color green
Represents youth,
There is a great deal of importance
Within the power of truth,
So even during the darkest hour,
There can still be hope and light
As well as opportunities
To create and appreciate
Stories filled with possibilities,
And by being bold
While crafting stories that must be told,
People could find a reason
For being here
While living underneath
The celestial sphere,
And the significance
Of honesty and integrity
Can indelibly impact
The nature of reality,
And being mature
Is actually a choice,
So have the willpower to care,
And share a voice

“how do you work with a team in which you were placed by chance, and not for the sake of affinity?”

Collaboration and Respect

Ana Kely Braga

Nowadays, being collaborative makes all the difference, especially in the corporate environment, when thinking about interpersonal relationships and the quality of work. When we are admitted to a workplace, we don't know who we will work with, we don't choose the people who will be part of our team, we don't know the professionals who will be around us. Respect is one of the pillars of the work environment. However, it is not always present. So how do you work with a team in which you were placed by chance, and not for the sake of affinity? And most importantly, how can you be, in fact, collaborative, if you feel disconnected with others? What I will propose are some points to think about that can bring light to this situation.

Why can't I respect my coworkers?

The purpose of this question is not to raise controversy, but rather to be honest with yourself and think about what may be behind your lack of respect for others.

- Do you perceive your team as incompetent, disorganized, unmotivated?
- Are there differences in values or communication styles?
- Does your frustration originate at some specific time or is it something constant?

Perhaps your perceptions are being motivated by perfectionism, stress or your own ego. It is worth reflecting on this possibility.

Self-reflection can also lead to understanding that perhaps the problem is in the team. Why not? Or if it is a matter of perception or tiredness, no one is free of it.

Define what kind of respect we are dealing with

Often, when talking about “respect,” it is understood only as admiration or emotional connection. In the professional context, there is *functional respect*, something seldom addressed, but so important to consider, because it highlights the importance of someone, regarding their responsibilities and skills, focusing on the potential for collaboration that this person brings to the work environment.

You don't have to admire someone's personality or work style. Being collaborative doesn't mean being everyone's friend. Functional respect highlights the ability to work towards a common goal, despite personal differences.



Photo by
Adomas
Aleno

Some strategies to maintain professionalism

If changing teams now is not an option, I suggest some possible strategies to maintain focus, productivity and professionalism, even in a difficult environment. Here they are:

1. Focus on the greater purpose: think of the real inspiration of why this work exists and why it is important to you. Look at the impact of results, rather than the people who deliver them, and make the customer or purpose your greatest source of motivation.
2. Practice neutral communication: communicate in a clear and objective way, leaving aside aggressive or sarcastic comments, which will not contribute to the good progress of the process. Instead, they can bring even more frustration in an environment already lacking in confidence and admiration.
3. Protect your energy: limit yourself to necessary interactive, focusing on the tasks and maintaining professionalism. Document your decisions and focus on what is within your reach. Don't waste energy trying to change people who aren't open to it.
4. When possible, highlight skills: highlighting strengths can bring lightness to the moment in a

group. This will not cost you anything. Recognizing someone's positive contribution in the workplace is a noble thing and helps to reduce tensions.

5. Meet your own standard: keep your deadlines, your clear communication, your agreements. Maintain your integrity, independent of others around you. Don't allow a toxic environment to lower your level.

Finally, if none of this works, maybe it's time to plan your exit. The important thing to think about is your mental health, because it's not worth working for hours in a toxic, sickening environment where you have to sacrifice your values.

You don't need to be friends with everyone, but you should learn to deal with them with a minimum of respect and professionalism. Practice admiration; if it is not possible, cooperate. Cultivate confidence; if it is lacking, communicate clearly. And if, even then, the environment becomes unsustainable, don't hesitate to change—your career needs to advance, but never at the expense of your peace.

“use your
skills, your
resources,
your con-
nections to
uncover the
truth”

The Weight Of The World’s Last Secret

Prateek Sur

Investigative journalism, I had long concluded, was a profession designed by masochists for masochists. The pay was abysmal, the hours were inhuman, and the subjects of your investigations had an alarming tendency to either disappear mysteriously or develop sudden, inexplicable cases of amnesia. Yet, here I was, Vera Blackwood, 37 years old and possessed of a cynicism so profound it could corrode steel, hunched over my laptop at three in the morning, chasing shadows and conspiracy theories with the dogged determination of a bloodhound with a particularly stubborn cold.

The tip had arrived via encrypted email, naturally. They always did. Anonymous sources were the bread and butter of my profession, though in this case, the bread was stale and the butter had gone decidedly rancid. The message was brief, cryptic, and utterly compelling: “The weight of the world’s last secret is crushing the planet. Literally. Meet me at the old observatory. Come alone. Trust no one. Especially not yourself.”

The last line was a nice touch, I thought. Paranoid, but with a certain philosophical flair that appealed to my jaded sensibilities. The old observatory, perched on the outskirts of the city like a forgotten monu-

ment to humanity’s cosmic aspirations, was the perfect setting for a clandestine meeting. Atmospheric, isolated, and with enough shadows to hide a small army of government agents, corporate assassins or particularly aggressive pigeons.

I arrived at the appointed time, my press credentials tucked safely in my jacket pocket, along with a digital recorder, a backup recorder and a small flask of whiskey for emergencies. The observatory was dark, its dome silhouetted against the star-strewn sky like a giant, metallic egg. The door was unlocked, which was either a sign of trust or a trap. In my experience, the two were often indistinguishable.

Inside, the air was thick with dust and the lingering scent of old books and forgotten dreams. A figure emerged from the shadows, tall, gaunt and wearing a lab coat that had seen better decades. Dr. Elias Thorne, according to his introduction: former seismologist, current pariah and

keeper of the world’s most dangerous secret.

“Ms. Blackwood,” he said, his voice a whisper that seemed to echo in the vast, empty space. “Thank you for coming. I wasn’t sure you would.”

“I’m a journalist,” I replied, settling into a dusty chair. “We’re genetically incapable of ignoring a good conspiracy theory. So, what’s this about the weight of the world’s last secret?”

Dr. Thorne’s eyes, pale and haunted, fixed on mine. “Tell me, Ms. Blackwood, what do you know about the Earth’s core?”

I shrugged. “Hot, molten, responsible for our magnetic field and generally not a place you’d want to vacation. Why?”

“Because,” he said, pulling out a thick folder filled with charts, graphs and what looked like seismic readings, “it’s not just molten rock down there. It’s a repository. A vast, planetary-scale storage system for human consciousness.”

I blinked. “I’m sorry, what?”

“Every thought, every emotion, every memory that has ever existed,” Dr. Thorne continued, his voice gaining intensity, “is physically stored in the Earth’s

core. The planet isn’t just our home, Ms. Blackwood. It’s our hard drive.”

I leaned back, processing this information with the sceptical efficiency of someone who had spent years debunking UFO sightings and Bigfoot encounters. “That’s . . . quite a claim, Dr. Thorne. Do you have any evidence to support this rather extraordinary theory?”

He spread the charts across the table, pointing to a series of increasingly erratic seismic readings. “These are measurements from the past 50 years. Notice the pattern? The frequency and intensity of earthquakes have been steadily increasing, but not in a way that correlates with tectonic activity. The tremors are originating from the core itself, and they’re getting stronger.”

“And you believe this is because of . . . stored thoughts?”

“Not just stored,” Dr. Thorne said, his voice dropping to a whisper. “Accumulating. The core is reaching capacity, Ms. Blackwood. The weight of human consciousness is literally crushing the planet from the inside out.”

I stared at the charts, my journalistic instincts warring with my common sense. The data was compelling, if utterly insane. “Assuming, for the sake of argument, that you’re not completely delusional, how do you know this?”

Dr. Thorne’s expression darkened. “Because I’ve been there. Not physically, of course. But through a process I developed, a form of deep meditation combined with seismic resonance, I’ve been able to access the core’s data. I’ve seen it, Ms. Blackwood. The accumulated weight of every human thought, every dream, every nightmare, pressing down on the molten heart of our planet.”

“And this is the world’s last secret?”

“The last one that matters,” he confirmed. “Because once the core reaches critical mass, once the weight becomes too much to bear,

the planet will collapse in on itself.

Not a nuclear apocalypse, not climate change, not an asteroid impact. Just the simple, inexorable pressure of our own collective consciousness.”

Photo by Paxton Tomko



I felt a chill that had nothing to do with the observatory’s temperature. “How long do we have?”

“Based on my calculations, six months. Maybe less. The pressure is building exponentially, and there’s no way to stop it. Every thought we think, every emotion we feel, adds to the weight. We’re literally thinking ourselves to death.”

I stood up, pacing the small space, my mind racing. “This is insane. If this were true, if the Earth’s core was some kind of cosmic storage device, someone would have discovered it by now. Scientists, governments, someone.”

“They have,” Dr. Thorne said quietly. “Why do you think I’m a pariah? Why do you think my research was discredited, my funding cut, my reputation destroyed? The secret isn’t that no one knows. The secret is that everyone who matters knows, and they’ve decided to keep it quiet.”

“Why?”

“Because there’s no solution. No way to reduce the weight, no way to stop the accumulation. The only option is to

accept the inevitable and hope that, when the planet collapses, it does so quickly and painlessly.”

I felt the weight of his words settling on my shoulders, a crushing pressure that seemed to echo the very phenomenon he was describing. “So, what do you want from me? Why tell me this?”

“Because,” Dr. Thorne said, his eyes burning with a desperate intensity, “you’re an investigative journalist. You dig for the truth, no matter how uncomfortable.

And this truth, Ms. Blackwood, is the most uncomfortable of all.

The weight of the world’s last secret isn’t just a metaphor. It’s a literal, physical force that’s slowly crushing our planet to death.”

I stared at him, my cynicism eroding from a growing sense of dread. “And you want me to publish this? To tell the world that we’re all doomed because we think too much?”

“I want you to investigate,” he said. “To verify my findings. To use your skills, your resources, your connections, to uncover the truth. Because if I’m right, if the core is truly reaching capacity, then the world

deserves to know. Even if there’s nothing we can do about it.”

I looked at the charts, the data, the haunted expression on Dr. Thorne’s face.

Every instinct I had screamed that this was madness, a delusion born of isolation and obsession. But there was something in his eyes, a certainty that chilled me to the bone.

“I’ll investigate,” I said finally. “But I’m going to approach this with the same scepticism I bring to every story. If you’re wrong, if this is all some elaborate fantasy, I’ll expose it as such.”

“And if I’m right?”

I considered this. “Then we’re all in a lot more trouble than I thought.”

Over the following weeks, I threw myself into the investigation with the fervour of a convert. I contacted seismologists, geophysicists, anyone who might have insights into the Earth’s core. Most dismissed Dr. Thorne’s theories as pseudoscience, but a few, speaking off the record, admitted to anomalies in their data. Unexplained tremors, unusual magnetic field fluctuations, patterns that didn’t fit conventional models.

The deeper I dug, the more unsettling the picture became. Government agencies with classified research into “consciousness-matter interaction.” Corporate think tanks exploring “psychic weight distribution.” Academic papers, buried in obscure journals, hinting at the physical properties of thought and emotion.

And then, three weeks into my investigation, I felt it. A pressure, subtle at first, but growing stronger with each passing day. Not physical pressure, but something deeper, more fundamental. As if the very act of investigating the secret was adding to its weight, contributing to the crushing force that Dr. Thorne claimed was destroying the planet.

I tried to dismiss it as stress, as the psychological toll of delving into such a disturbing possibility. But the pressure persisted, growing heavier with each new

piece of evidence I uncovered. It was as if the secret itself was alive, aware of my investigation and actively resisting my efforts to expose it.

The revelation came, as revelations often do, in the most mundane of circumstances. I was sitting in my apartment, reviewing my notes, when I noticed something odd. The weight I felt, the crushing pressure that had been building for weeks, wasn’t constant. It fluctuated, ebbing and flowing in rhythm with my thoughts. When I focused on the investigation, on the implications of Dr. Thorne’s theory, the pressure intensified. When I allowed my mind to wander, to think about mundane things like grocery lists and television shows, it lessened.

And then, with a clarity that was both terrifying and liberating, I understood. The pressure wasn’t coming from the Earth’s core. It was coming from me. From my own mind, grappling with the weight of the secret I was uncovering. Dr. Thorne wasn’t describing a planetary phenomenon. He was describing the human condition. The crushing weight of knowledge, of awareness, of the terrible burden of consciousness itself.

The Earth’s core wasn’t a storage device for human thoughts. It was a metaphor. The “weight of the world’s last secret” wasn’t literal. It was the psychological pressure of knowing that our own awareness,

our own capacity for thought and emotion,

was the source of our greatest suffering. We weren’t thinking the planet to death. We were thinking ourselves to death, one revelation at a time.

And the ultimate secret? There was no secret. Just the crushing realisation that the weight we felt, the pressure that threatened to destroy us, was entirely of our own making. The world’s last secret was that there were no secrets left, only the unbearable lightness of being human in a universe that didn’t care. And that, I realised, was the heaviest burden of all.

PRA-TEEK SUR My name is Prateek Sur and I am a daydreamer by birth, a mechanical engineer by chance, and an idiot by choice. A hardcore movie buff, working as a film critic and enjoying life as a Bollywood reporter. Helping people get through career troubles and giving advice from personal experiences. A voracious reader, and a passionate singer at heart. An extrovert at heart, and an introvert in the mind. Well, that chaos is pretty much me!

Jayne Seagrave is a BC bestselling author. The ninth edition of her book *Camping British Columbia, the Rockies and the Yukon* was published by Heritage House in April 2023. Over 60,000 of her camping books have been sold. She also writes fiction, non-fiction and freelance articles, and occasionally teaches writing and publishing courses. Recently retired, she spends her free time travelling internationally and in the province she adores, learning the French language, exercising, and writing.

When I'm 64

Jayne Seagrave

I know, I know . . . it's such a cliché to say, "How did I get here/where did the years go/I don't feel this old," but like everything else that is easy to attribute to someone else's life and not your own, when push comes to shove, it would seem I am just the same as everyone else. When it comes to accepting my age, I do not want to do it.

A few days ago, I turned 64, suddenly acknowledging that I have reached a certain stage of life. When one celebrates being 30 or 40 or 50 or 60, milestones are achieved, but thanks to Paul McCartney and his immortal lyrics to "When I'm Sixty-Four," which for me epitomizes old age, I have had considerably more trauma in reaching this landmark than with the previous decades.

"Age is just a number", friends tell me, adding that "60 is the new 50." But is it really?

Although I want to deny it,

I know my memory is fading and my bones are creaking. I want to be in bed early, and dread an evening invitation that requires my participation after 10:00 p.m. I misplace my glasses all the time. I find it amaz-

ing that I enjoy routine. I get annoyed and stressed when I go to a restaurant that does not have a printed menu and necessitates the use of my cell phone to scan a QR code to see what is on offer. I still want printed boarding cards when I get on a plane. When did all these changes that

complicate my life

happen? How come I was not consulted?

My favourite songs are from my teenage years. Oldies radio stations are a delight. I know all the words, but cannot remember who the artists are. Being older means there are a lot of things that have been forgotten: TV series, books, weddings, past boyfriends, influential teachers. At the same time, old friends are changing subtly, they are gaining extra pounds, their hair is greying, they stoop, they are slowing down. In contrast, new acquaintances of a similar age appear old from the start (do I look *that* old?).

I recently started a French language course for seniors, where most of the predominantly female cohort were over the age of 60. I spent a long time in the classroom preoccupied, not with the French grammar nor the subjunctive tense, nor with improv-



Photo by
Aysan
Aghili

ing my accent, but in studying the women of my age. In reaching 64, I find I am a little obsessed with how one should dress and act when this old. My research found there were two typical styles for women the same age as me . . .

Style Number One demands short, sensible, grey (not coloured) hair and looser-fitting clothes. These garments tend to be brightly coloured and chosen for comfort, with little attention to what colour goes where. A lot of pink. Scarves. Flat, sensible shoes (a characteristic of everyone older than 50, it seems). Practical glasses. Bag strapped across the chest, as if expecting it to be stolen at every turn. Rotund body, rounded shoulders. Stomach and breasts sagging. Age spots. Could be 64, could be 74. Looking at me as if I am a martian, and a loud martian at that. Cannot understand why I am only wearing a T shirt and Levi's (same attire I wore at 20—see why I really need this research?) and when I mention the menopause by way of explanation, they blush and

move away from me at speed.

Style Number Two is epitomised by the wearing of big, colourful eyewear. I like this style, as it hides wrinkles, age spots and can look trendy (note to self: invest). Clothing features linen, wide-leg pants and looser tops, stylishly hiding the bulges. Big jewelry.

Hair shoulder length or longer, good cut but sensible, coloured any shade, often streaked (grey, blond, purple, blue, white), but not dark. Lipstick. Designer large bag. These women will talk about menopause, wet spots in their underwear after sneezing and a lack of sexual desire with confident detachment, as if reading a bus timetable aloud. They are self-assured.

They are my heroes.

While I should be concentrating on my French, I am studying my contemporaries, hoping by osmosis to learn what it is to be old, what being 64 actually means, and the style I need to adopt now that this time in life has been reached.

But it is not all depressing. I have found that age brings with it a definite sense of relief. Any ambitions about changing the world have expired—being well past their due date. There is a self-acceptance, a confidence to be yourself and to like yourself, which was not evident in my youth. It is also amazing and immensely gratifying to have had the same friends for decades and to have shared experiences with these special people. It is lovely to be growing old together and to compare notes. So maybe being 64 is not so bad . . . especially when I do not correspond to Mr. McCartney's clichés.

Tuhin Talukder is a newcomer to Canada navigating the challenges and joys of building a new life. With a passion for storytelling, he draws inspiration from moments of connection, compassion, and cultural adaptation. He enjoys exploring a variety of ideas in his writing, often reflecting on how changes shape us.

The Drift-Keeper

Tuhin Talukder

“The ocean never fails to draw me in,” said the veteran captain, Ren, gazing at the distant horizon. “There’s a mystery in it I’ve never been able to resist.”

Photo by
Chase
Baker

The *Silent Current*, Ren’s weathered but impeccably maintained yacht, cut a quiet path through the steel-blue waters off Haida Gwaii. The day was sunny, and the ocean seemed calm and steady. From the serene surface, no one would have guessed a tsunami had hit these shores just three days prior. The epicenter lay hundreds of miles deep in the ocean, but the tidal bore had flooded a few hundred meters inland. Above, the deep blue sky held the bright sun at its center. White clouds floated on the sky like enormous lumps of cotton. No one could have asked for a more perfect day for diving.

Ren and Maya had sailed 15 nautical miles offshore to capture footage for a marine life documentary for Channel Nova. Maya would dive while Ren monitored from the vessel. Ren, a former deep-sea research captain in his mid-50s, was known for his unwavering physical and mental strength, especially in times of crisis.

Maya cleaned her camera, the *Silent Current* swaying gently. “Still can’t believe you took the fall for the Triton project, Ren. Their faulty equipment, their



shortcuts . . . and you just let them blame you. Your career, your reputation . . . you lost everything. And you never breathed a word. Not to the press, not to the board. How could you?”

Ren, his gaze distant, said, “Some things are more fragile than a man’s reputation. Their carelessness could have shattered an entire ecosystem. My Silence was a small price.”

Maya checked her mask and suit insulation, then she slipped on her fin-like diving shoes. Ren helped with her oxygen tank while she tested the regulator, buoyancy control device and depth gauge.

Ren, ready with his monitoring computer, confirmed that the signaling device could send and receive signals from Maya. He was just as prepared as she was, wearing an identical black suit with blue linings. Maya knew he was always ready to dive in without hesitation for his companion. He had done so before, sometimes

injuring himself in the process, but never gave up, the very reason to prefer him over every other contender.

Maya descended into the water. Even after countless dives, the thrill always returned. Beneath the surface stretched an entirely separate world. The first sight was the coral-covered seabed, looking strangely beautiful in the blue depths. Then came the kelp forests, their towering fronds swaying in the currents while sunlight filtered through the emerald canopies, casting dancing patterns on the ocean floor. Within this living forest, marine life moved in silent harmony—a vibrant, hidden world thriving just beneath the waves.

Small fish darted between coral and kelp, their movements pulsing with shared rhythm. Suddenly, a school of orange rockfish appeared, glowing mesmerizingly against the blue, their sharp spines making them look fierce, despite their size. Then there was a flock of pacific salmon busy in search of food.

The cold, nutrient-rich water supported an astonishing variety of smaller species, like sea anemones and colorful nudibranchs. Maya felt the colors here couldn’t be recreated above water in her world. The sunflower sea star resembled an octopus with countless arms. To film these delicate species through the kelp, Maya occasionally switched her lights on. She captured a brief, steady clip of a lingcod from a safe range.

And then she spotted it, a giant Pacific octopus. It could be her catch of the day, a prized shot for any marine photographer because of their striking appearance. The documentary would be far more attractive with this big guy included. She chased after the monster, but the monster proved incredibly clever, evading her time and again. She managed to capture a few clips of it gliding through rocky reefs, shifting colors as

it moved. But none were sharp or steady enough for her project.

The giant went deeper, trying to escape, but that only contributed to luring Maya after it. The deeper she went, the darker it grew, causing Maya to switch her light on. After a good 20-minute chase, she finally captured some clear footage. The right background score and a compelling narrating voice would make an excellent documentary, she thought.

Her pursuit had pushed her to the boundary of safe diving depth. The area was dark, and her device showed water pressure was high. She had to return now.

Suddenly, blue lightning snaked across the dark ocean depths. In that flash, she glimpsed the opening of a deep cave. Curious, she hid at the entrance and peered inside. The lightning was gone, leaving her unable to see clearly. She knew she was pushing her limits, but couldn’t just turn back without having a look. She couldn’t risk using her light, it might attract unknown dangers.

Ren signaled her in audio, “You are in a dangerous zone. Should I come after?”

“I’m fine,” she whispered. “I’m after something. Hold on.”

She hesitated, then entered the dark cave but stayed near the opening. The blue lightning occurred again, brighter and covering more area. Inside her mask, her mouth fell open in awe. In that brilliant light, she saw it—a majestic luminescent creature. The cave water moved violently with its movement,

nearly pushing Maya out.

She prepared her camera right away, though protocol demanded she flee immediately to safety and report to the authorities. But moments like this came once in a lifetime, if at all. She observed the creature while capturing it on film.

It slightly resembled a dolphin, but was much bigger. Its length could be around 30 feet, Maya guessed, but far grumpier than a playful dolphin. Glowing lines ran across its lower body and fins, but the creature



Photo by
Sigmund

could control the brightness. That made Maya think it came from much deeper waters. No known creature looked like this, and such light wasn't needed at this depth. Its fins were massive and undulated like wings. The creature's body looked soft, almost gelatinous, but it moved slowly, far slower than a dolphin or shark. Maya assumed it carried higher body weight, built to withstand the extreme pressure of the deep sea.

It had two large, bright eyes with blue centers. Why did Maya sense sadness in those eyes?

Could it be from a solitary life? Or being displaced from home? She kept capturing everything, video and stills.

She marveled at what a great artist nature could be! We tend to forget it in our mundane life. The depths we rarely reach have life we can not even imagine. Just then, the creature turned and saw her. A ripple of fear passed through her. What if it could electrocute the water? Its massive fin alone might knock her senseless. It could be carnivorous. She couldn't afford losing consciousness within its reach. Heart pounding, she knew it was time to return.

She slowly backed away, trying not to startle the marine giant, and reached the cave opening. The giant created a massive wave that drifted her far outside, a clear signal to leave. It didn't chase her. A *true gentleman*, she thought while returning.

This had to be a new creature, unknown to the world, she figured. The Drift-Keeper—she gave it a name, in her mind. Ren kept sending signals periodically, which she had ignored so far. Maya knew he could determine her safety from his computer indicators. Now she replied that she was returning.

On her way up, Maya imagined the reaction of her new discovery. Social media would tear itself apart from queries. Divers and submersibles would rush in to search for the Drift-Keeper. Biologists would analyze it and categorize it into a genus and a species. Maybe it would be the single species of its own kind. "I was beginning to worry," Ren looked tense as she surfaced.

After carefully reviewing the pictures and the video clips, Ren said, "It must have been swept away from its habitat by the tsunami. Just waiting for a way back."

"Ya, why didn't I think of that?" Maya exclaimed.

"But you caught it on film, anyway," Ren looked at Maya with deep admiration. "Take a bow lady, you are about to be famous!"

"I am afraid I am not," said Maya disinterestedly.

"You are not? Why?" Ren looked at her questioningly.

"If they find out about the Drift-Keeper, they will dissect its body for at least two reasons—how does it survive in the immense pressure that deep, and how does it produce organic light? Worse, they will imprison it for life and who knows, some might push it into a circus for amusement when they are done with studying it. They might start hunting the rest of its kind."

"That they might do," Ren agreed, then took a pause, "So . . . ?"

"I went so close to its reach, and it just let me return. I can't summon death for his entire community in return," Maya said.

Ren saw a small teardrop in the corner of her eye.

"If you fear so much, then don't tell anyone," Ren offered gently.

Maya stared at him, eyes wide.

"Yes, that is exactly what I am going to do. I have captured enough for the silly documentary. No one has to know beyond this. And you," she added with a faint smile, "you're the best secret-keeper I know."

Maya started deleting her captures of the Drift-Keeper, without regret.

"Aren't you keeping a copy for yourself?" Ren reminded her.

"No, this much greed can cost a species their peace," Maya stated.

The *Silent Current* turned, heading back toward the distant lights of civilization. Below, in the vast, silent depths, lay the mysteries of the dark ocean that would keep calling them toward it again and again.

"I was a complete beginner and I was working with things I had access to at the time"

On Music

Darrion Payne

I found my passion for music production in my teenage years from a desire to connect and make friends in high school. In 2016, when I started high school, new sounds and trends were happening in music, and it was cool if you were up to date about it and it gave someone something to discuss with their friends. Many musicians, specifically hip-hop artists, started their careers as teenagers, which I found inspiring, and I decided to explore the art form for myself at that time.

I remember when I first started my music production journey, I was a complete beginner and I was working with the things I had access to at the time, such as a tablet and my voice. Once I became more confident in my skills, I would start to write my own songs, rather than freely recording them. It served as a productive outlet for me to express my feelings and thoughts, and I began to take my process for making music seriously. This prompted me to seek out music tools, such as microphones and recording software, to improve my recordings.

I became more confident in my music and writing skills through educating myself on YouTube about improving styles and generating ideas. Managing a

music blog for three years had developed my social skills by exposing me to the music community and the different aspects of it. My work developing and collaborating on projects for the Canadian music blog *Loc Files Canada* allowed me to connect with a few awesome people, most notably a Vancouver hip-hop duo called Ato-Mik who have been supportive of my music endeavors and educational goals.

Managing *Loc Files Canada* challenged me to communicate with people of diverse backgrounds and knowledge, and improved my ability to be adaptable and patient, which has prepared me for my post-secondary program in communications. Performing my own songs at music events such as talent shows and open mics throughout five years in the Port Coquitlam and Surrey area improved my public speaking skills, and it has always felt exciting and fulfilling playing songs for the first time, especially when I would receive positive feedback from audiences about my work.

My music journey has allowed me to celebrate milestones, such as new visiting recording studios in 2018 and 2023. Attending a studio appointment in a bigger environment helped with my personal de-

Photo
by Steve
Harvey



velopment, as before then I had recorded many of my songs from my bedroom on my laptop. Another milestone in my music journey was getting a song of mine on a local radio station called Vancouver Co-op Radio in 2022, which gave me more confidence in my work. It was cool that my music was showcased to more people in my area.

I attended an online music production school called Beat Lab Academy in 2020 that allowed me to gain formal training and be comfortable using professional recording software called Ableton that I use today to create my music. Throughout this course I

learned everything, from music theory and production techniques to understanding the business side of music. During Beat Lab Academy, I learned from established recording engineers, and it was valuable to receive feedback on my music from them. The knowledge I gained from that program helped make my music better.

The amount of positive experiences that have come from pursuing music is the reason why I am so passionate about it, and these experiences have benefitted me in other areas of my life.

**GUR-
LEEN
KAUR
BAJWA** Both a prolific reader and writer, Gurleen likes living inside exciting stories. She's working on making her own the most exciting of all.

Sunflowers on a Spring Day

Gurleen Kaur Bajwa

Please note that this article includes a description of a fatal accident.

The body that Ren was inhabiting had been dead for 36 days.

It had been a tragic death—though that was always the case for someone so young. Humans only lived for 100 years or so to begin with, but it was especially sombering for a life to have been cut off at a meager 15 years. To Ren, 15 years were barely the span of a singular breath of his mountain as it heaved up and beyond. Not nearly long enough to have experienced much at all.

Ren had watched it happen too. With open curiosity, from the top of Siyanush Mountain. The boy had taken a tumble in a moment of clumsiness, his foot catching on a root. Humans were fragile beings; such an ill placement had compounded and pulled the scrawny body back and down the slope. Over and over he went. Ren watched him. Amused, almost. Up and over, screaming the entire way. Until he hit himself at the bottom of the cliff with a heavy thud, and Ren felt the shake of the trees in the thrum of his being. Ren could feel everything alive on the mountain. Could do so ever since he'd come into existence on Siyanush. The slow crawl of time had become a



pleasant companion as it had grown alongside him. But he should not have been able to feel the boy.

Travelers did not often come to Siyamush. Not animals nor humans. Only the children of everything that had once grown here remained. And the one who watched over them all and felt the life of them through his own unliving being; Ren.

But he should not have been able to feel the weak heartbeat of the boy at the bottom of the fall, pulsating in and out desperately. It was a curious sound. Enough to draw Ren off his perch and down. He'd

Photo by
Marius
Matus-
chzik

always been told, by those who did not matter in the grand scheme of things,

his fatal flaw was his curiosity.

The limbs of the creature—the human—had been twisted oddly, battered against stone and ground, and crimson blood dripped from the crevices left between the skin. His clothes were torn and strewn, and all in all, it was a pitiable sight. His eyes were open. Ren leaned down next to him, curious.

Humans could not see spirits. Too engrossed in selfishness, in temperance and permanence. They thought no further than themselves, no longer than tomorrow and no deeper than the apparent. Ren had lived long enough to remember when humans *could* see him, more attuned to the world around them. He’d even made a few acquaintances back then, and watched them age. But that had been a long time ago. As of late, very few humans, if any at all, seemed to know he existed at all.

That was, ordinarily.

The boy’s eyes, glazed as they were, fixated on Ren. Ah yes, Ren mused. For a being on the verge of its own demise, there was little to reach for, but that which he had distracted himself from so desperately in life. With death upon oneself, there was little to distract anymore of its inevitability.

His lips were moving. Ren leaned down closer. A hand grasped onto him, barely.

“Help me,” the boy whispered, and a tear fell out his gaze. “Please.”

Ren caressed a hand over the boy’s auburn hair. It was soft to the touch. Beautiful, as humans were.

“I cannot,” he said. “Safe travels. Child.”

Akio! The shouts echoed into the night. Akio! Footsteps trampled over the dead and silent leaves. Distracted, bright lights flashed in the darkness. Akio!

The boy’s name, Ren learned, had been Akio.

Ren watched, as he always did, from the mountain precipice. Watched the human scurry back and forth between the foliage. Many days passed in their search. Many cycles of the moon and sun chasing one another across the skies. In the end, they did not

find him, and dispersed, returning to the village. Ren returned to the peace of the mountain.

The desperation though, clung to him. Disturbingly.

He’d never quite seen anything like it before. Such a deep-seated and anguished emotion. Ren had seen happiness. He’d seen sadness too—for the two travelled hand-in-hand. He hadn’t felt them, could not feel them, but had seen them on the temporary visages of humans. He had not however, quite ever seen, such grief, such greed, for life. He had watched it eke out of Akio’s eyes, and yet remain in the corpse left behind.

It drove Ren mad with curiosity.

What did he have to be so desperate for? Humans did not lead good or joyful lives. They instead spent the entirety of the short, miserable time afforded them under the illusion of immortality, only to always regret it at the end, after a lifetime of running away from the bitter reality of death. They did not love the Earth from which they came, and they did not show gratitude to the time they were given. They were selfish, despicable creatures. So what was it for which Akio had yearned so desperately?

Curiosity, Ren had been told a very long time ago, was his fatal flaw.

The body had begun to decompose, sink into the earth below, when Ren returned to it. The evidence of the passage of time surprised him. It had not occurred to him till that very moment, that even in death,

time moved very quickly for the living.

Insects crawled over the bloated skin of the boy, fluids mixing with the soil. A foul order surrounded the air around the unmoving flesh. Ren crouched, much like he had the first time, and placed a hand on the boy’s forehead.

It was suffocating, occupying a human body. Every movement of Akio’s arms and legs felt restrictive, and Ren could not reach as far as he wanted. But the physicality of it was an easy adjustment, compared to the mind. Ren’s own mind was clear. He did not think much, did not need to. Being was an easy state to exist in, pulled along on the trajectory of time,

and he was complacent enough to be pulled along. Ren did not think about the past, the future or the present. He simply *was*. But Akio—*humans*—differed here, Ren learned. There were too many thoughts in their heads, cluttered and unfocused, zooming back and forth, lost one second and then recalled another. Nothing was important enough, but nothing was unimportant either. It all existed in a limbo. Useless tidbits about food, calculus, sports teams and, frankly, terrible analogies. Information that Ren had no desire to know—even with his curiosity.

And then there were the emotions.

They were faint, in a way. Not his. Ren felt them at a distance, through the eyes of another. But there was that yearning again, in the pit of his stomach, that pulled him down the mountain. There was quite a bit of commotion over his reappearance and then none at all, as if Ren—Akio—had never left at all.

Things tasted familiar, his voice sounded familiar, and the roof of Akio’s bedroom was familiar, but it wasn’t. Not really. It was the memories of someone else’s familiarity. It was new to Ren. But it did not take long to lose its novelty.

The mundanity of the life of humans bored him—days were no more distinct than they had been on the mountain. Meals an unfamiliar elderly face on a dining table stretched out for years, and the buses at the rest stops ran minutes late that felt like eons. Even the rain was excruciatingly languid, resting upon Akio’s skin as if it would reside there for eternity.

The desperation in Akio’s eyes, Ren reflected- had it been for this? The food? A forevermore late form of transportation? Rain? Is this what Akio had yearned for so agonizingly?

The day was warm, and humans could not adjust to weather—heat and cold both bothered them. Ren had always considered this fact amusing, but it was irritating now. He pulled on the collar of Akio’s uniform pointlessly. The sun beat down on the bus stand as he waited. The wood creaked before the elderly woman took a seat next to him.

She offered him the brightly coloured ice, shaped in a form meant to be consumed without utensils.

Popsicle, Akio’s mind acknowledged for him as he took it. *Grandmother*, it told him of the woman-though Ren knew that by now. They sat under the heat, barely combated by the *popsicle*, waiting.

“It is about to rain,” Akio’s grandmother told him, looking up to the sky. One hand rubbed over her knee, almost absentminded. Slow.

Time, Ren reflected, passed slowly for humans.

It was an odd realization.

He’d always presumed the opposite. It was such a short span of time that humans were allotted that he’d never given it much attention. Humans he’d met over his own, unending existence, seemed to age astoundingly quick. In the shade of one sun they’d rush up the mountain, on the eve of another their bones no longer held them up.

But under the sun on the bus stand, life was dull and boring and mundane and still.

Was this, Ren thought again in the stillness with the fruitful taste of the popsicle on his tongue, what Akio had yearned for?

A prick of something cold landed on his fingertip. The raindrops were placating on Akio’s skin, and Ren watched it. There was a rush of wind that swept into his lungs and the trees whistled in it. Akio’s grandmother lamented the weather. The headlights of the bus shone in the distance and the popsicle tasted familiar on Ren’s tongue.

“Akio.”

Being alive, Ren thought, was terribly dull.

He rose from his seat and followed.



Stumbling block/ stepping stone

Balreet Sidhu

In a Bob Dylan song the words reflect the theme. The storms are raging on the rolling sea . . . and ain't seen nothing like me yet. The unknown is still there and I am still here. The picture title *Stumbling block/stepping stone* depicts a choice.

