





consuming a marriage.

Jedidiah Vinzon

autumn cleans after tropical mornings
when evenings have closed down the sky
and the streets are opening the bars:

what say you? shall we drink? a final toast:
to our successful consummation, the summation
of vows and promise –

the togetherness of two beds in eight walls;
even the afternoons have split for us
into coffee in mugs a city apart –

the vase that greets us is a burning cold
staring, reaching deep into me: a ventriloquist
moving me, mouthing beyond me

but the rose is sly, and i agree
when it speaks for me:

color fades, even in the abundance of –

water? the river would eat every hue
fire? the furnace would drown its vibrance
love? could it be

we loved too much until there is none
to give? that we painted the world red too early,
burning the wick before the wax?

could it be that there was none at all?
that the candle was not lit and
the bucket was empty?

what about the mornings we spent?
what about it? did we even move?
because i once felt the earth shake –

or was i only falling?



A rock through a glass window

Swapna Sanchita

It was the broken glass that split the sunlight into overlapping rainbows that danced on the peeling plaster walls.

It was easy to pick the shards that had fallen on the floors in jagged wanton abandon when the window fell in yawls.

They taught that the force of the rock that had torpedoed through was same as that of the glass but there were no spalls.

They taught that men and women admired pretty things such as the stained glass windows now sanding the halls.

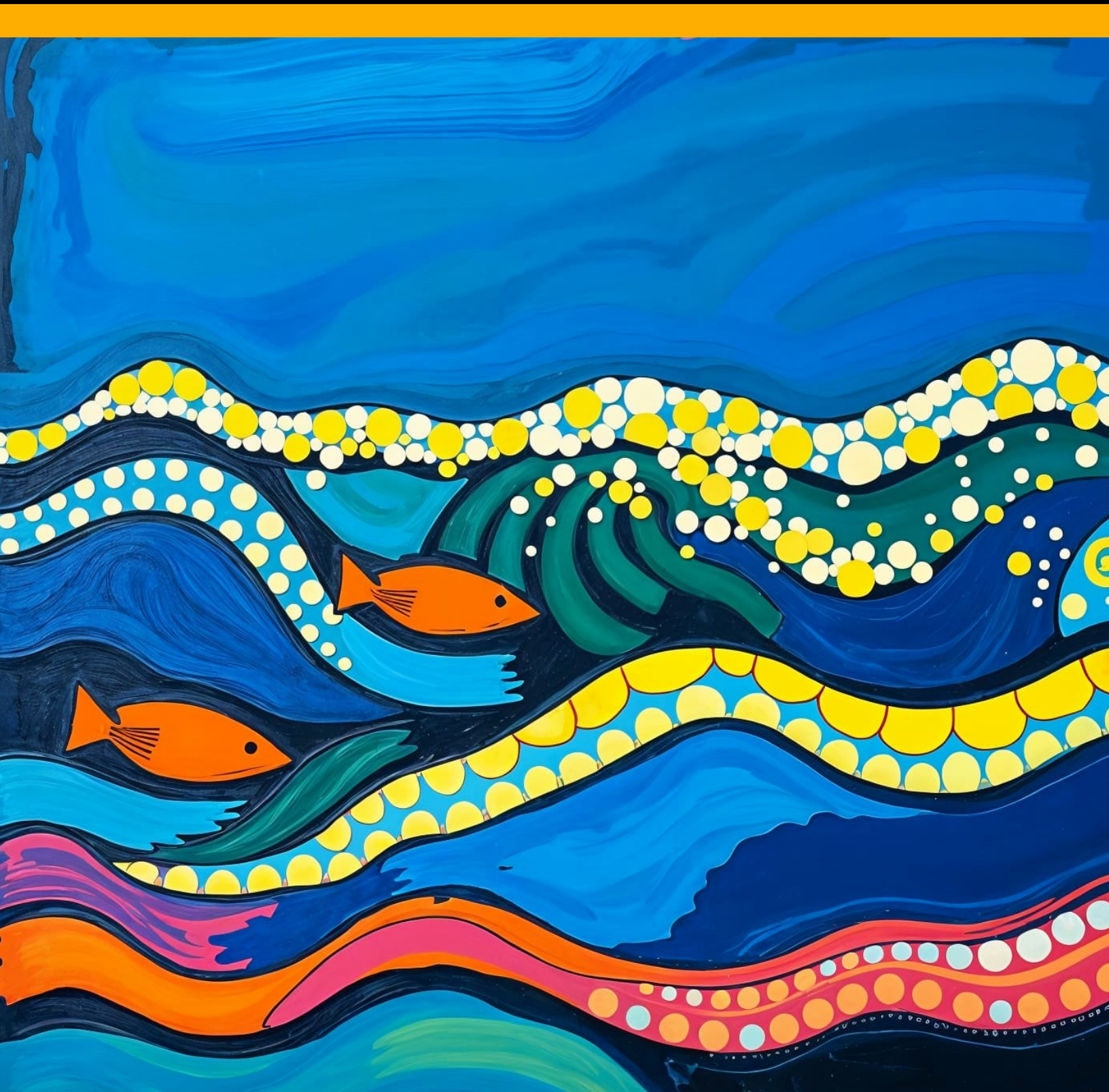
in the eyes

O.P. Jha

from a sleepy shore
as a solitary cinematographer I see
in the eyes of a fish, there're hunters and nets
but it never dreams a life in an aquarium

an ever-flowing stream is the only song in its life
and it sings this with its gills and fins
it exhales the stories of ups and downs
on the susurrations of bubbles

in the eyes of a fish, I see many rifts
joining hands with droopy eyes.





Walks

Kate E. Lore

I take walks to taste the open air. To take in the state of my area. How are the trees feeling today? Orange and yellow are creeping in. That first big yawn when you almost feel startled by how tired you suddenly are.

I take walks to calm down. I take walks to wake up. I take walks to get from one point to another. I talk walks because moving feels safer than sitting still. Because I grew up in a house like that. Because when my brother had a bad episode I'd run down the street to my friend's house.

I like to walk to the grocery store. Inside I prefer to carry my items. I don't like to use a cart, it's like I need the weight of something for it to feel real. Maybe this is the case for walking too like maybe I don't feel as though we're going anywhere unless I can taste forward momentum.

It's not that I'm a skeptical person, no really it's quite the opposite. It's that I want to know everything intimately. I want to see a place from every angle, I want to understand a thing's mass and density.

I don't just want to know what the weather is I yearn to feel it. The same goes for relationships. If I don't run away I must already love you. I want to feel your skin, to know the taste and smell of you. I want to walk the streets of your mind. I want to know you so intimately we become landmarks of each other's worlds. I want to be able to tell your current state from the tone of your voice. I want to know it better than a classic song on the radio. I want the weight and mass of your love. However temporary, this time, before your foot swings forward to kick me to the crib. I am used to pain. That world is real.

I want to wander through your thoughts. I want to lift you up with my adoration and feel the full weight of your baggage. I want to push you forward into a better future. Even if it means I can't keep up, and you sail on ahead. It's ok, already my love is too big to maintain. I can feel the pressure. This crush.





First Language

Bradon Matthews

The sky says feed me
The mountains strain to reach
Their delicate stone fingers long
Having forgotten their offerings

Here is a wing with no bird
A song with no mouth
They say
An escape with no treeline

And the peak remembers
 When it was
 The ground

Smiled at its own towering
Clambor and sank
Into the grinding earth
Backwards

Feed me barks
The thunder,
Reaching through all that air
To the stillness
Of the lake

And the lake rises
Invisible
As light its
Mirrored star
Fogged

And spreads itself thin
As an idea
Before the waiting rain
Remembers:
Oceans



Desire

Sukriti Patny

Her desires take the shape of fallen flowers; masquerading in her soul as unsaid words slowly dying, browning with each breath she takes. One day they fall from her, out of grasp, yet tantalizingly close, and arms outstretched she weeps. And we all look at her. Pointing to her, and to those rotting flowers. A tale of caution.

And as we point to them, they lie at her feet, looking up at her longingly.

Until the longing is so deep that she cannot breathe.

Until the fallen flowers decay and rot and the stench pervades her senses and the only thing that remains of her are her desires.

The ones she never acted upon.

The ones she never even voiced.



Why Would She Leave

Bob Gielow

When Mother abandoned our family, I was ten and I was bereft. Why would she leave? Dad said Mother didn't love me, like he did. But, Dad's love was accompanied by belittlement and backhanded smacks. When Dad died in that crash, six years later, relief mixed with my self-pity.

I reunited with my boy at the funeral. He stood dumbfounded while I rushed to describe not feeling safe, fearing he'd turn out "nasty" (like Rick), watching from afar, and all my regrets. I left when he started to look like Rick. I returned only when convinced he wasn't becoming his father.



Strangers

Celestine Isleanor

My eyes follow you as you walk along the corridor.

What happened to us?

You look at me and I look at you, and the time machine of reminiscence transports me back to happenings long forgotten and unfamiliar I wonder if they are real.

You used to braid your hair all the time, and whenever it got loose, I'd help you re-tie it. You braided your hair all the time because you believed that if you did it enough times, your hair would become curly permanently.

You used to wear this flamboyant hoodie from Jen's Apparels too. Its bright pink hue and conspicuous cat ears on the hood looked out of place in the sea of school uniforms along the corridors. Sometimes, I would tease you by pretending to be blinded by the colour, but that never stopped you from wearing it. You also used the hood to conceal your wired earpieces so that you could listen to music during classes. So sneaky, so you.

You created a YouTube channel named GoldenSelfieQueen. In the profile picture, you wore pink heart-shaped sunglasses and a golden sweater. Every week, you would post a random video about your daily

life, ranging from the computer games you played to the restaurants you ate at. My favourite video was the one where you tried Korean spicy noodles for the first time. I filmed it for you. After eating two strands, you chugged a whole cup of water. You kept yelling “I’m dying!”, but I was dying of laughter. Your spice tolerance was the lowest of anyone I’ve ever met.

Your favourite snack was the chocolate chip cookies from The Lavender Café, the café we went to on Fridays without our parents knowing. “A concoction of heaven” you always told me with your mouth full of the cookies. I remember how your eyes would sparkle as you savoured the taste.

On 6 October 2016, I bought you those cookies for your 12th birthday. During our English lesson, you took them out to eat and realised the cookies were crushed. Still determined to eat them, you caused a huge mess. Crumbs scattered all over your skirt and on the floor. Mrs Ivy kicked you out of the classroom as punishment for eating in class. I interrupted her three times while she was teaching so I could join you.

I would steal your stationery whenever I was mad at you. You knew that, but you continued to buy new ones anyway, and you stuck around despite my petulant behaviour. How you could tolerate me, I’ll never know.

But, hey, I eventually stopped doing that. You must have been relieved.

You once told me that being too nice to others is never good, and that I should never let anyone take advantage of me. I still keep that advice in mind.

Remember when we both cried during the Math final exam because of how difficult it was? And how we both just laughed it off afterwards? It was so comforting to know someone who shared my struggles. Surprisingly, we ended up scoring an outstanding 60% for that exam, the highest score we ever got that year.

Whenever you went to a store and saw something you knew I would like, you would write a reminder down to buy it for me in a little purple notebook. Then, you would devise a plan to save up for it.

One of my favourite gifts from you was this huge notebook from Booked&Busy. It had a black cover, the words “Responsibilities: Ignored” written on it in white typewriter font. I thought it was quite funny. However, the doll you got me after the mid-year holidays in 2015 was unmatched. She had her own wardrobe! Every weekend, I would play with her, creatively changing her clothes and styling her hair. That doll made me realise how badly I wanted to be a fashion designer in the future. I’m still aiming for that!

When I lost my cousin to suicide, I wept for an hour in the bathroom cubicle. You knocked on the door, begging me to let you in. Drowning in grief and ire, I screamed at you to go away.

Once I summoned the energy to stand, I came out and saw you sitting right outside the cubicle. You never left. I knelt beside you and leaned on your shoulder before crying some more. But that time, despite the tears, there was a tingle of warmth in my chest, a sense of security knowing that you were there for me.

Those were our vibrant, halcyon days, when I needed you like I needed air. When I could identify your handwriting and knew where your hair parted. When your mere presence made my primary school days idyllic, and even the world's end, or a teacher's annoyance with us, couldn't fracture our cosmic connection.

What happened to us?

A throng of girls gravitates toward you like bees to flowers, excitedly conversing with you. Your lips curl into a bright beam, and your eyes glimmer the way they used to whenever you saw me. You're clearly enjoying yourself, creating heart-warming memories that you'll probably cherish for eternity.

Unlike the ones we created together.

You nod at me. I nod in return before turning back to my group of friends. A tall wall of unfamiliarity rises between us. We pass each other by like two strangers.

Nonetheless, I'm glad it all happened. I just hope that you feel the same way.

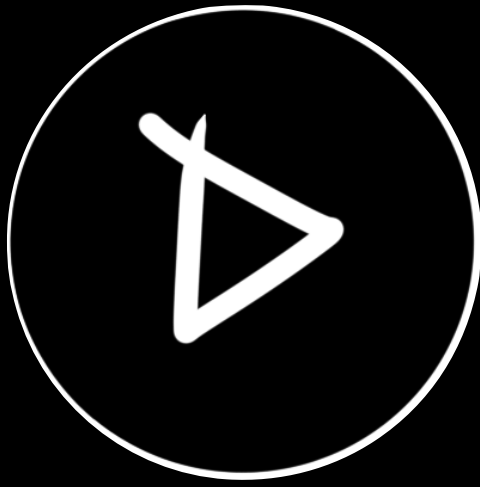




Magic Trick

Huina Zheng

At a festive dinner, I excitedly announced I'd make a toy vanish. My mom's friend looked at me and lectured, "Magic isn't real. You can't make anything disappear." I was four. He thought it was just a harmless joke. But when I failed, I burst into tears. To this day, my mom still brings it up from time to time. She would imitate his solemn emphasis and my deafening "wah wah wah" sobs. This is her favorite life lesson: always weigh our words, even in jest, for they can wound deeply, a truth unseen until we face the harm they've caused.



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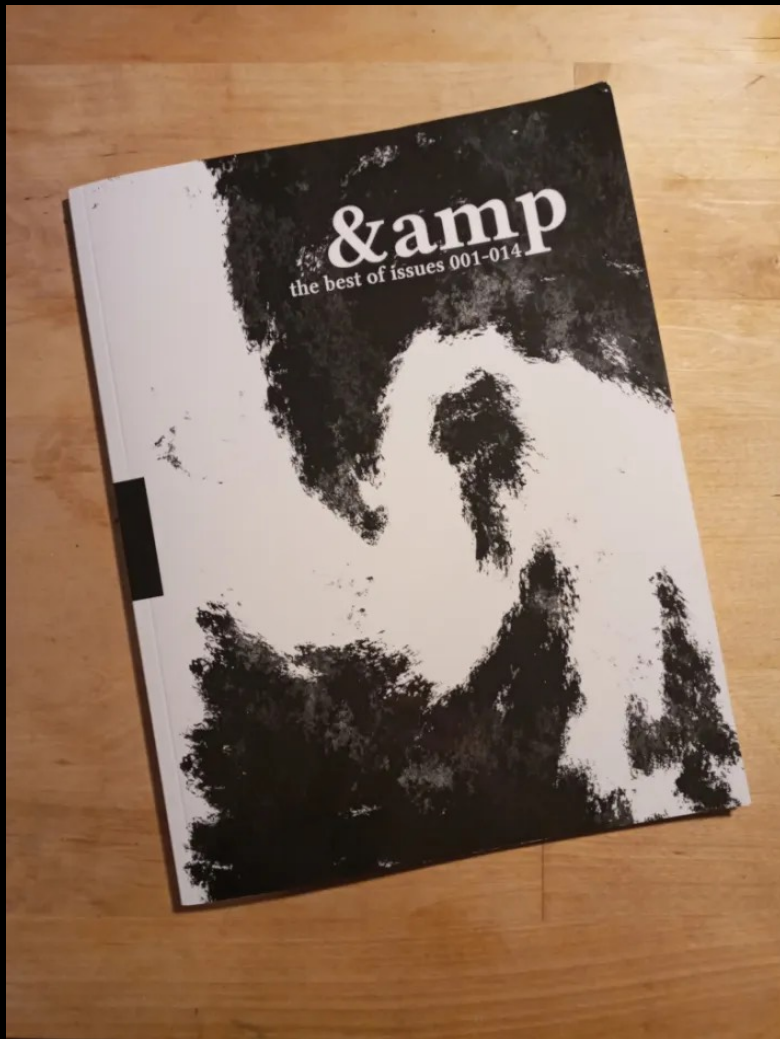
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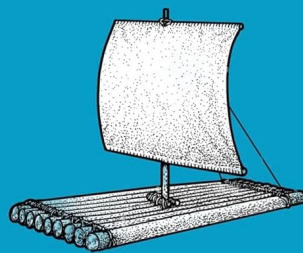


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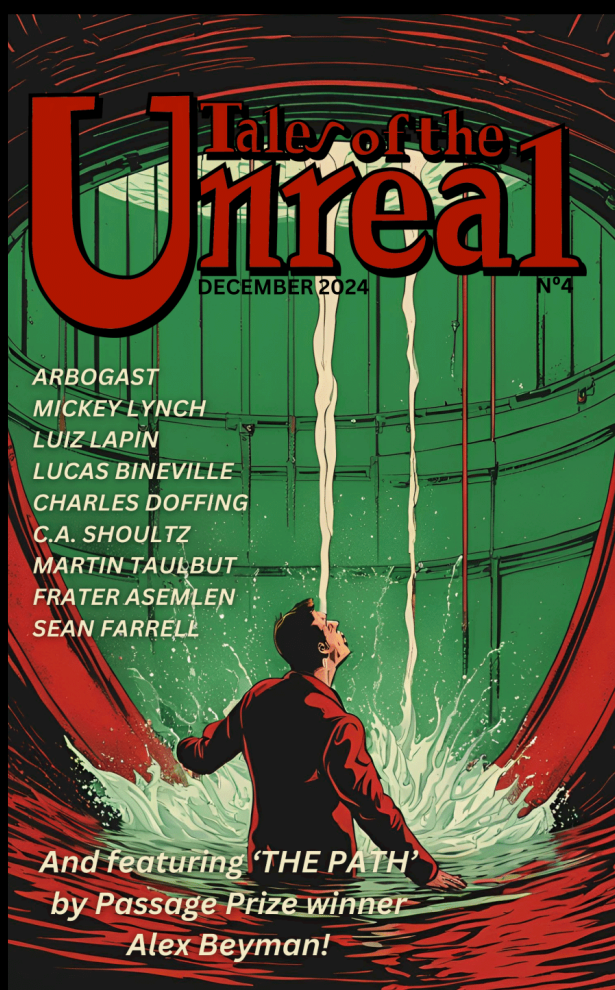
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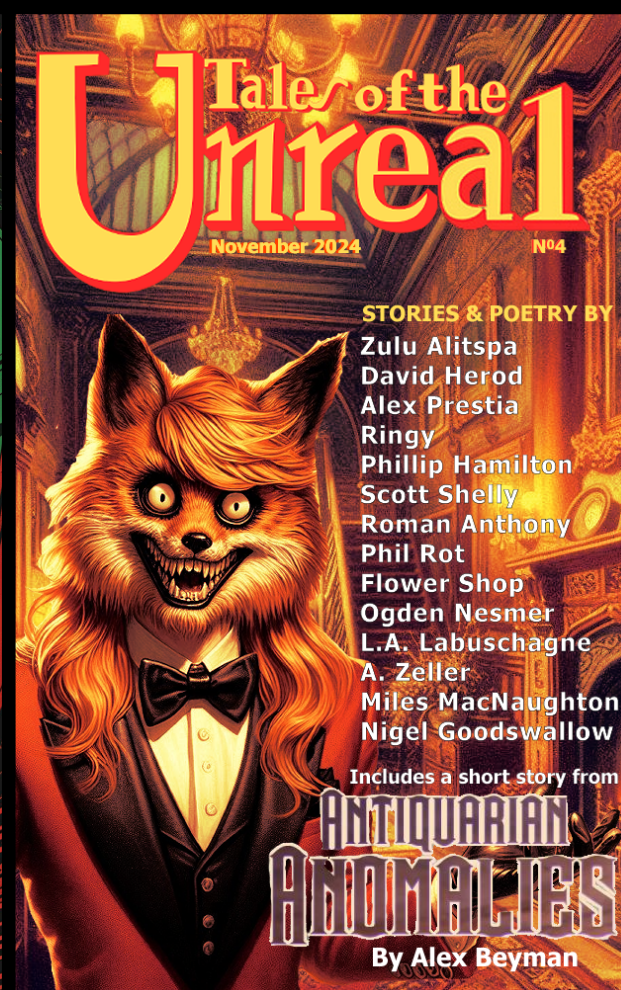


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