



*The Kingdom
Where Nobody Dies*

a RENESME LITERARY pamphlet

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Published by RENESME LITERARY

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“Childhood is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age
The child is grown, and puts away childish things.”

—Edna St. Vincent Millay, *“Childhood is the Kingdom Where Nobody Dies”*

“Edward held out his hand. Charlie took my hand and, in a symbol
as old as the world, placed it in Edward’s. I touched the cool miracle
of his skin, and I was home.”

—Bella Swan, *Breaking Dawn*

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Editors' Preface

Dear Readers:

When we first launched *RENESME LITERARY*, we had no idea that our little *Twilight* fever dream would resonate with so many. In just over two months, we have made a number of literary friends, become an active member of an incredible community of writers and readers, and even completed our first submission call featuring seven fantastic artists. *The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies* is the culmination of weeks of hard work, and we are so excited for you to dive in!

Since its inception, *RENESME LITERARY* has referred to submissions as “abominations.” An “abomination,” like our journal’s namesake, is a living, breathing piece of art that, by all accounts, should not exist based on genre specifications, literary hierarchies, and generally-oppressive systems of power imposed upon art and artists. We also consider abominations to be any piece of art that fosters the autonomy & artistic power of marginalized writers—that is, those writers regularly excluded from these aforementioned literary systems.

These five fantastic writers of *The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies* represent the incredible breadth of work emerging from contemporary artists, and they do so with their own distinct interpretations of this pamphlet’s submission theme: the emergence of selfhood as childhood turns to adulthood. Like Bella walking down the aisle to her new life, so do these writers walk headfirst into explicating growth, life, and childhood. We invite you to dive in headfirst and experience their brilliance!

And, as an important note, we wanted to remind our readers that Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* massively exploited the land, culture, and history of the Quileute nation, effects of which are still being felt today. We encourage everyone to visit the links we share on our social media, Linktree, and future website. We of *RENESME LITERARY* produced *The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies* on the unceded lands of multiple indigenous nations, including, but not limited to, the Poarch Creeks, the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas, and the MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians. Furthermore, we have made a donation to the Native American Rights Fund, a nonprofit organization that has been defending the legal rights of indigenous nations since the 1970s. *RENESME LITERARY* does not charge submission fees and is an entirely self-run organization by two working and studying writers, but we do encourage all of our readers to perform further research into the indigenous lands on which they reside and make financial and physical contributions to different nonprofits, organizations, and nations.

Thank you very much for reading *The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies* and supporting *RENESME LITERARY*. We are so excited for you to read!

Jillian & Joy, Co-Founders & EIC of *RENESME LITERARY*



Blankey Blanks

Izzy Astuto

You have this blanket. You've had this blanket since you were 4. The story goes that you grabbed a throw off your parents' bed and no matter how much everyone yelled you refused to let it go, so you got to keep it.

For years it was typical, a child's favorite toy. Then it was cute as a preteen, tucking it beneath your pillow at sleepovers so no one else would see. It got slightly odd throughout high school, when you had no reliance on it anymore and never brought it when crashing on a friend's couch, but kept it anyway. When you went to college it stayed behind, but you still couldn't find it in you to throw it away.

On the last night of Christmas break, as you lay restless, debating how many melatonin you think you'll need tonight, you remember its existence suddenly. You remember your parents' taunts that they would throw it away while you were gone and a surprising amount of dread builds up in the back of your throat as you begin searching frantically. The panic settling into your bones is so childish, the logical side of your brain protests, but when you finally find it trapped between your headboard and wall, your whole body sags in relief.

It's only rags at this point. You have no clue how it's even holding itself together. It hasn't been cleaned for at least six months, and it smells distinctly off. You pluck a feather off of it and wonder where that would even be from and clutch it to your chest for a minute.

You can't fully piece together why you've always loved this blanket so much. Other memories and keepsakes from when you were a child make you cringe, if not actually get upset. You don't like your room and the memories of your life from Before and who you used to be.

Maybe it's the fact that it was never supposed to be yours, never supposed to become your most prized possession. You ignored stuffed animal after doll and finally latched onto a rug. It was a decision you made all on your own and it may be ratty and old and slowly becoming a biohazard, but it's yours. Tomorrow you'll leave for the airport, leaving it here again. But for now, you're happy to confirm that it's safe, here in your arms.

Morning I wake up

Kimaya Diggs

Deck littered with the naked bodies of baby birds.
They crack like potato chips when I touch them
with a stick, scoop them onto a piece of cardboard,
carry them across the yard, pour them into the tall
grass, mark the spot with a pink flower pulled out
of the jar on my kitchen counter.

My life was bright and faithful, too. But my bird
cracked like a potato chip when my mind paused
and my foot rewound like tape, shimmering,
shimmering, like a heatwave. Like an anvil.

Hearts Race for Lost Loves

Leslie Cairns

There were all of us in that room, siphoning vibrations & spitting out songs that made our hearts race. In the early 2000s: straightened hair, hot red or black mini dresses. Actual strobe lights & dangly earrings. None of these are trendy now. But back then: they mattered & everyone was listening.

My boyfriend sidles up to me. The gym walls foam inwards, as if to display the padding.

“We’re dancing now,” he says. Twirling me in a semi-circle; I hope the popular girls are noticing me. I wasn’t uncool, but I wasn’t savvy enough either, to bend towards popularity like an enchanting owl cooing us to sleep. The time capsule period before cell phones, where you waited on curbs on summer nights, for your parents in yawning vans to take you home, instead of idling on the street.

At the dance, though, my friends are ambling up while I’m dancing with him. Give me cheering looks, waving their hands to distract me.

I’ll break up with him in between 2nd & 3rd period. Yet, he’d just bought me a diamond necklace with his mother’s money.

The love swirling around the gym fans, as if it could distill us from moving. The balloons I still remember our teachers airing, as if we could hold onto them, never aging. Roses for 25 cents, the time before inflations, manifestations, filters. The kind of love that no one really captured but just existed. Glitter on my spaghetti straps. Or, boys whispering to you near lockers long sweating. Kisses coming in between the lyrics, the songs the DJ was playing only for us.

In hindsight, this boyfriend was my first love. Showing up and knocking politely at the door.

I dumped him quickly. That time of youth where you think someone will always pick you back up, pluck you off the floor, waltz you in tune to the song. Shower you with diamonds from their mother’s money, sing you a song of your own creation.

Didn’t know that love doesn’t come endlessly, like the way daisies scatter seeds.

In that school, at that dance, it felt like everyone could be swept off their feet, if only they just exhaled the other person’s name in the hush.

I used to know how to command a room just walking into it: head held high, smoky eye, sulky smile. Borrowing his books, not even thinking about life beyond the walls.

Childhood Tanka

Jerome Berglund

1

so many sirens
overlapping, old joke goes
my ride is here, but
it's not for a change and got
to say I'm truly thankful

2

all the buttons are pressed
but which way going
am I getting off
at the very top or absolute bottom
aloft coin spins silver

The Binder

E. M. Lark

In the house on Glenheather, in that back-corner room, it is one of the last true pieces of me I have left.

I put down my suitcase and crouch to the floor, knowing exactly where it is. I fiddle with the handle of the old drawer that never got replaced. It shakes and rattles and that is exactly how I know it is still in there. Weighing approximately four years or so of my life, the coveted Blue Binder sits atop a pile of loose-leaf papers, journals, and DVDs.

The cover is brandished with an old drawing of three Original Characters, penned for us by one of my best friends, another drawing with a googly-eyed face, and worn-out inscriptions from a lifetime or two ago. Inside lies a bounty of secrets from ye olden fandom days, precious and ridiculous and full of handwritten lyrics and playlists and stories never to be finished.

From late 2010 on, I carried it with me everywhere.

I brought it to every sleepover, snuck it in my backpack, made a point for everyone to add in their chip to the pot. Filling it to the brim with stories and ideas was my white whale, my Magnum Opus in the making. All for our love of somewhat obscure fandoms and the occasional center-of-attention series, we made worlds within those worlds to stretch far beyond our circumstances.

My heart still lives in the loose-leafs. My adolescent etchings of queerness, of want and fear, of everything I wanted are kept safe in this capsule away from the world. No matter how much I've lost, I have this. And as the world falls apart, I find myself leaning into its worn plastic for support.

I've earned an MFA. I've changed my name. I've changed my life more than I ever thought I could. But I have this, too, and it is enough.

I spend every late night in that room reading it over and find myself more grateful for it than ever. No longer just a centerpiece for nostalgic comedy, the butt of the joke, it means something far more profound now. I have outlived every version of myself that wanted it dead, and wanted it to burn.

On my last night home, I tuck it into my suitcase with the promise of taking it with me back to New York, and everywhere else I will go.



About the Authors

Izzy Astuto (they/he) is a writer currently majoring in Creative Writing at Emerson College, with minors in Journalism and Media Studies. His work has previously been published by *jfa* human rights journal and *Moonscape Press*, amongst others. Their Twitter is @adivine_tragedy

Jerome Berglund (he/him) graduated from USC's Cinema-Television Production program and spent a decade in the entertainment industry before returning to the Midwest. He has exhibited many tanka, haiku and haiga, most recently in the *Asahi Shimbun*, *Failed Haiku*, *Scarlet Dragonfly*, *Cold Moon Journal*, *Bear Creek Haiku*, *the Zen Space*, and *Daily Haiga*. Twitter: @BerglundJerome

Leslie Cairns (she/her) is a writer holding an MA degree in English Rhetoric from upstate New York. She has upcoming poetry in *Pink Plastic House*, *Cerasus Magazine*, and others. She is an upcoming honorable mention in *Exposition Review's* Inheritance Flash Fiction Competition (2022). She tweets @starbucksgirly

Kimaya Diggs (she/her) is a musician and writer based in rural Massachusetts. She is currently working on a hybrid memoir, and will be releasing her second album, *Quincy*, in 2023. Twitter: @kimayadiggs

E.M. Lark (they/them) is a writer/reviewer & reader/Twilight-series-critic, currently based in NYC. Book reviews for *Defunkt Magazine*, prose reader for *Cobra Milk Magazine*, words found in *Roi Faineant Press*, *oranges journal*, and more forthcoming! Twitter: @thelarkcalls

