

THE LOOKOUT



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THE LOOKOUT

A Journal of Literature and the Arts

by the students of
Texas A&M University-Central Texas

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Editor's Note

In collaboration with the Department of Humanities and the College of Arts and Sciences, I am thrilled to present Volume 7 of *The Lookout*, the literary and arts journal of Texas A&M University-Central Texas, featuring creative writing, photography, and original artworks by the students of TAMUCT.

While the COVID-19 pandemic caused an abrupt shutdown of campus and many student activities this spring, it could not put the brakes on the creative output of our students as represented by this unique issue of *The Lookout*. While the vast majority of works chosen for this volume were all created and submitted before the coronavirus outbreak took hold, it is remarkable just how many of these pieces speak to the ongoing crisis and new reality we all currently find ourselves in. Indeed, the succeeding poetry, fiction, and artistic images here seem to spring forth with novel reactions and perspectives to the emotional and physical hardships we now face together, highlighting just how important art is in moments of crisis and chaos. As you'll surely discover within these pages, when the world seems to turn upside down, it is art that often helps us find interpretive ways to right it.

I hope that this volume of *The Lookout* will help to provide a sense of connection and solace in these difficult days, and many thanks once again to everyone who has continued to support and embrace the arts and artists at Texas A&M University-Central Texas.

Ryan Bayless

Editor, *The Lookout: A Journal of Literature and the Arts*

Adjunct Professor of English and Fine Arts

Texas A&M University-Central Texas

THE LOOKOUT

Volume 7

GISELLE WHYTE

Babylon

A Church,
A Sanctuary.
Chime in, Cherubim,
Make yourself announced.
Far too long I've knelt.
Awaken these praises within me,
For here I stand at beckoning doors.
So long awaited, so far gone.
So sudden the pluck
That pulled me from reality.
That experience with you...
Seemed too profound to be real.

JOSEPHINE DAVIS

Blue

I am a thread in a pocket.
We are stitched to a great blue shirt.
So you see I was doomed to be blue,
For a blue pocket has only blue lining.
Accent colors do not suit those like me.
Yes, I am doomed to be blue,
But there are holes in our cloth.
Our pocket holds no coins now,
No sweets or little trinkets.
Our hearts flow out between the woven linen
Like the white sand we thought was salt.
Royalty is unkind to such a light blue;
Our color is shrouded with mist.
No warmth lives here and never are we mended.
The little watches we once held
Have fallen out of fashion,
And we have torn ourselves before.
Pieces are gone, ripped away.
We miss them, but they are free from us.
Surely they applaud their place,
Stuck on barbed wire but gleefully free.
Our thread would be fine in any other garment,
But we are worn and rough,
Stained with our own lament.
Washed again and again when we let on
That after all this time
We might be some other shade now.

JORDAN EMILSON

Whatever Happens, Happens

The stars. We all will face the stars again one day. Fade back into the cosmos that birthed us and become reborn as starlight. Separate we are this starlight, but together, the cosmos.

Only the infinite can judge our worth,
and we are all uniquely worthless.
Black or white, it feeds all the same,
gnaws upon bleached bones, broken thoughts.

The shifting souls,
the rising tides.
All but complexities in a space with no judgment,
with no ability to judge.

A burning star
with no care for those below.
A rotating mass
with no brain to consider.

And what consumes you?
Do you gnaw?
Or let a moment become a lifetime
till it's no longer you?

It is not sad
knowing that we are the same.
In fact,
loneliness is just an idea.

In the end,
the world still spins,
and that's ok.

STEVIE ZYCHA-ESTRADA

Mind

Valuable Device

Rich in symposium
but somehow operates
parallel
to the universe.

If I could reach out
towards the curtain
floating on the edge
of this vast area
known as space

I'd only see
a reflection
of myself.

Interpretation

That is only reasonable
for the human capacity
has many limitations.

NICOLE M. METTS

When Nature Wins

An ocean swallows the piano
as its notes crash in the wind.

Clouds in my kitchen
rain on my cutlery
as an egret makes tea.

I shed my human in autumn
to hide in dreams
behind ears and whiskers.

Stairwells dribble laughter
between sprouted railings.

The seagulls dig skillfully
in crevasses of the couch

while the window smiles
and the TV unplugs itself.

PAOLA LLOMPART BERRIOS

On the Last Day of the World

I would want to smile
for those breezes that made no sound
and the leaves which were not swept.

For the lonesome tree that carries no fruit,
 nor leaves
like a casket
 with no corpse,
I mean
 crops.

Rotting.

Dawn creeps by with a heavy mallet
and the sky senses light
while the whole world
 drags.

The clouds are puffs of cigars
and have the smell of an old factory.

There are cries nearby
from the soon-to-be-dead cattle

and I see my bloody neighbor pass by.

I smile.

I think of Darwin,

The Pope,

and Jesus.

About

the pig,

hen,

or calf.

Reciprocate.

Domesticate.

And wait for the damn butcher

to slaughter me alive.



NICOLE M. METTS

Birdwing

NICOLE M. METTS

The Peculiar Passenger

I am sorry.

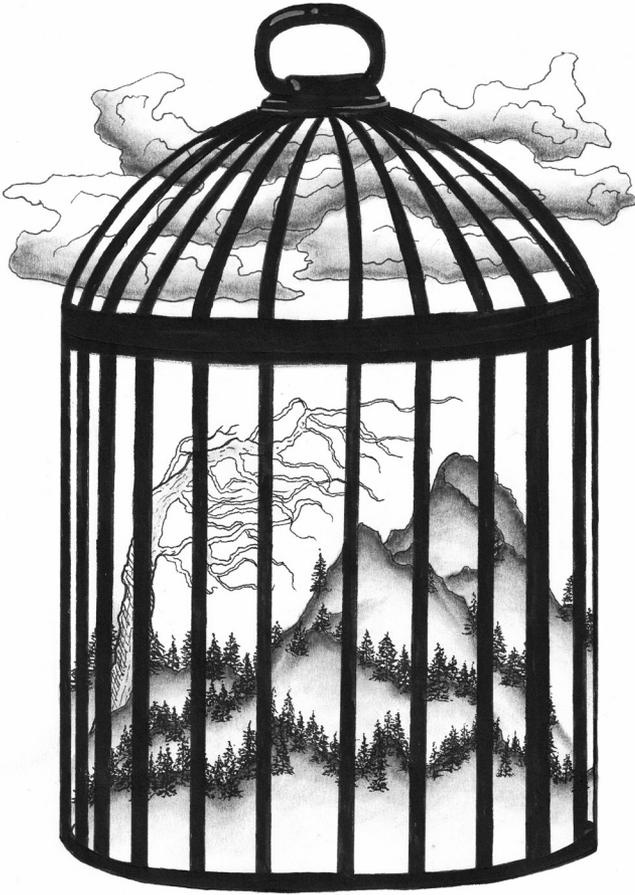
I can only imagine
what it was like to see
a cloud of silver plumage,
a storm of droppings
thick as snowfall

as your assembly settles
into tree branches that collapse
against the weight of your biological masses.

The people, horror stricken enough to burn the base of their own trees,
to catch their trunks on fire in hopes that the blaze will kill the darkness,
save their home, or their salvation. You wild things, “birds of a feather” that
darkened the sky for days and caused people to drop to their knees and pray
that you were not the apocalypse.

A slender red breasted locust bird, kin of the forest, as the forest thrived in
your visits, as you fertilized those deciduous forests and swamps that are
missing now too. A scientist wants to bring you back from the dead and
swears the native forests are returning as well but need your support;
I say let you rest. Save the whooping crane, California condor,
or the spotted owl. Let you, the proud pigeon, stand only in monument
as we never learn from our mistakes
and are doomed to live in regret but not remorse.

Dear passenger pigeon
I pray we can save the
others in your
name. AMEN.



JOSEPHINE DAVIS

Enjoy the View

JORDAN EMILSON

The Windbreak

Trees formed a thick circle around the house that made seein' anything beyond impossible. Momma would tell stories of Pa and how he used to come and go from beyond the thicket outside, until one day he never did return. Thankfully, little Lill was too young back then to know where he'd gone.

Growin' up I'd often ask, "Momma what's beyond the trees?" And she'd always reply the same, "You'll find out some-day hun." Well Momma grew sick in the winter and passed soon after, yet the trees remained, holdin' the house just within. Few days after ma went up to the bright sky above I figured maybe it was time I saw what waited for me beyond the trees, but every time I tried Lill would say with a voice sweet as jam, "Momma said not to go past the trees", and well, she was just so much like Momma I just couldn't disagree.

So me and Aunty took care of little sis, and we stayed put like ole' Momma said, but that itch in my brain just kept buildin'. One day I couldn't help myself no more. Somethin' had to be beyond them trees, somethin' worth seeing. Pa saw it, and Momma must've seen it too to know enough to tell me what I should and shouldn't be seein'.

Now I trusted Momma, live or dead, but I reckon' living in shadows of nature wasn't much living at all, so I set out to go beyond the trees.

And as I went sis said what she so reliably did: “Momma said not to go past them trees.” ’Cept this time was different. This time I couldn’t listen. So instead I knelt in close and brushed the stray streaks of brown hair from her precious face and said, “Of course you shouldn’t, Lill, but I’m big and strong like Pa was. Ill be right back ok? I promise. And if I ain’t soon then listen to Momma for me. Take care of Aunty until I’m back,” and she nodded her little head and stayed put, then watched as I traveled beyond the windbreak.

But just like Pa I went...and went...and never came back from beyond the trees.



STEVIE ZYCHA-ESTRADA

True Menace



JOSEPHINE DAVIS

House of Fame

PAT SONTI

Unintended

Thousand ghosts populate the plain,
Unhindered.
Forgotten recklessly in their time,
Unheard.
Chariots flying through cocoon clouds,
Unabated.
Broken tan contoured in disparate brown,
Unfound.
Treetops dance in designed unison,
Unhurried.
Throats parched within stilled chests,
Unbreathing.
Distant din and dismal distance,
Undefined.
Secret stare and guarded glare,
Unblinking.
Restrained power in granite hands,
Unrelenting.
Reticle trained from burrowed hollows,
Unformed.
Red roses bloomed upon furrowed brows,
Unconcerned.
Shapeless forms slip in forests strewn,
Unexplained.
Incinerated future wrapped in certain desperation,
Unintended.

JOSEPHINE DAVIS

The Gravedigger's Child

What say you of the gravedigger's child?
A pallbearer when no strong shoulders are found,
A wailer when too few beloved faces surround;
Twisted in pain and shrill in protest
At the sight of a mother who died like the rest.
They begged and they pleaded with me and my kin
To bring back the fallen, to right the world's sin.
But we could not supply, could not give what they sought.
All we could do: Lay dear mothers to rot.
"Did they not fill their place? Did they not do as asked?
For there are laws in life." Still we set to the task
Of comforting, cooing the children of death.
But I know very soon only I will be left,
By all warmth abandoned, of all hope bereft.
Tending countless dead men until finally I
Am laid now to rest. All this, by the by.



SHELBY CLARIDGE

Courage

KASEE PARKER

International Cloth

As the sunshine breaks through the windowpane
A flapping cloth appears
A sight that tends to fade and wane
A sight I've seen for years

But today I see it differently
The yellows, orange, and greens
A subtle change to identity
And I know what friendship means

The thought of distance is much to bear
A hasty rift appears
The end of times is most unfair
Departure met by tears

The flag is all that's left of it
And while sentiment feels misplaced
The green and stars well compliment
The room in which it graced

The flag is all I see of it
The flag is all I know
The flag remains the constant piece
When the other one must go

The sovereign, emerald piece of cloth
Is more than words and stars
For as they say: "it came and went"
We mourn what is not ours

When the sunshine breaks through the windowpane
The flapping cloth denotes
The frequent attempts in which we feign
To overcome vast moats

So, today, I see it differently
The yellows, orange, and greens
A subtle change to identity
And I know what friendship means



FELICIA JULIANO

Tracks

FELICIA JULIANO

Tracks

Some tracks lay forgotten,
beneath looking back,
and crawling forward on hands and knees,
reaching for the eye
in the center of a storm.

—Where will the tracks converge?

Though I can no longer remember
where the tracks went
and where they arrived,
too many tracks now cross the path,
looking over my shoulder—

My tracks begin.

STEVIE ZYCHA-ESTRADA

River Moss

Branches pull
towards night's sky
away
from earth into heaven
apart from stars
planted hand gracefully
warm inside
warm outside
bursting yellows
and slumping greens
flawless fellows
laughter bellows
lifts up
in swim floating rocks
lightning stocks
in wool bent socks
hours lost
with river's moss
here we lay
with day
on way.



NICOLE M. METTS

River Moss

GISELLE WHYTE

She Is

She's beautiful, a wine to drink dry.

She's a ripened fruit.

She's a book you'd never put down.

She's a phrase you'd like to start saying.

She's comfort in unsettling places.

She's the accuracy out of chaos.

She's a flower in full bloom.

She's a rainstorm in drought.

She's a crier,

but you love that.

Mostly she's sloppy,

but in a very human way.

CHERESE NEMBHARD

Enough

As she walked past the mirror,
she double backed and stared.
Finally, she can see the strength that everyone exclaims she possess.
Finally, she saw the unique beauty that she was created to exude.
Finally, she realized she was enough.

As she stood and saw through herself,
she exclaimed affirmations that reciprocate the positives she saw.
Soon enough not a negative will be in sight.
Soon enough not a flaw will shine bright.
Soon enough she will believe she is enough.

As she stared at herself,
she saw curves that spelled beauty,
a glow that shines brighter than her smile,
ambition that resonates her whole being,
beauty that defines her stature,
wisdom that exemplifies her pose,
a shell that holds her together so that she is now. Enough.

Sleepless Nights

“Are you alright?”

Naomi turns over in the dark and feels the bed shift with her weight as Mia does the same. She can see part of her face because the light from the closet spills into the room. There are lines from the pillow pressed into her cheek, and Naomi shakes her head.

“I’m fine,” she whispers.

“No, you’re not,” Mia rolls her eyes. She shuffles a little closer until her head is nearly halfway on Naomi’s pillow.

With Mia this close to her face, she can see the tiny mole next to her left eye and how swollen her top lip is from biting it so much. She wants to reach over and connect all the moles on her face, but she can’t.

Instead, she curls her hands into fists underneath her pillow.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong.”

“Why do you lie to me? Don’t you know by now that I can tell when you’re lying through your teeth.”

Naomi wants to tell her that she’s not lying, that nothing really is wrong with her, but Mia is right. She’s incapable of lying to her because she only ever knows how to tell this girl the truth.

She opens her mouth to say something, but she shuts it just

as quickly. Mia only blinks at her, her eyes slowly following her face and her hand reaching out to smooth the space between her eyebrows.

“You can always tell me what’s on your mind. You know that.”

Naomi does know that. In theory, yes, she’s told Mia just about everything there is to tell another individual. She was the first person that she told when she got her period. She was the first person that she told when she got into university, and she was the first person that she told when Naomi realized that she was a lesbian.

“I know that,” she murmurs.

It’s supposed to be easier to talk in the dark. When it’s hard to see someone else, Naomi thought that it would make her more confident, that it would help her be able to better express herself. But as she lies on the bed, feeling the warmth of Mia’s leg pressed up against her own and the smell of her body wash across the sheets, all she wants to do is walk back to her house.

“So, talk to me,” Mia says, combing her fingers through Naomi’s hair.

The motion is so tender that Naomi closes her eyes. She’s never had a problem talking to Mia. The older girl is her best friend, the only person that deserves to know everything that is on Naomi’s mind. But it’s hard to talk to someone when the one thing that you want to tell them is something that you’re not sure they even want to hear.

“I can’t,” Naomi says.

She hates the way her voice cracks when she speaks. In the dark, it feels like everything is compounded. Although she can't see Mia that well, Naomi can almost feel her breath on her face and the sound of her heart as it thrashes around in her chest.

They've never not told each other everything.

That's just the way their friendship has always worked.

When the guy in their psychology class asked Mia out, Naomi told her to go for it. When Mia asked her what she thought about kissing, Naomi told her to do whatever she was comfortable with. When Mia wanted to go to the winter formal with him, Naomi told her that she should because they were in high school and she should enjoy it.

Mia didn't know how to keep something from Naomi. She was always an open book, something that Naomi didn't need to search for answers to. She was so expressive that it was easy to see how enamored she was with the idea of being in a relationship.

Naomi can remember every time she smiled when Mia received a note in her locker on Valentine's Day. She remembers how loud she laughed in the cafeteria when she was asked out to prom with a ridiculous light up display. She remembers how bright Mia's eyes were when she whispered in her ear that someone had told her that he loved her.

Maybe that's why Naomi is uncomfortable with sharing how she feels. Because deep down, she knows that it won't matter either way.

Mia's already had firsts and it doesn't matter that Naomi

is hopelessly in love with the way she smiles or the way she holds onto her hand when they watch *IT* in the basement.

Mia's already had these feelings with someone else. She got to have those tentative first kisses. She got to have those hesitant touches that made you want to grab the other person's hand. She got to experience every single emotion and action that came with being with someone for the very first time.

It shouldn't bother Naomi as much as it does, but she can't help it. She could never help her feelings when it came to Mia.

It just sucks that it has to be her.

She had tried for so long to get rid of this nagging voice inside of her head that told her she was in love with her best friend.

She had dated other girls, had the opportunity to kiss someone that didn't have the same lips as Mia, or who smelled the same way she did after running laps in gym class. No matter how many other people she looked at, it was never enough for her. She found herself picking out little details that didn't fit. She found herself criticizing features of every other person that she fooled around with because it could never measure up to the idea that she had in her head—the idea of Mia.

When Mia licks her lips again, she stares at Naomi for a long minute before leaning over her body to switch on her bedside lamp. The room is flooded with soft yellow light, the kind that makes Naomi squint her eyes as Mia settles back down beside her.

While she thought lying in the dark was worse, with the light on, everything is suddenly magnified tenfold. She can make out the posters on the wall that she had helped Mia hang up because she was too short. She can see the pile of books that Mia had read aloud to her one-by-one as she watched from the computer chair. She can see the camera on her desk that Mia had surprised her with on her birthday and the photos that they had taken of each other all over the room.

Every single part of their childhood was decorated along the walls of her room, and it was almost an exact mirror image of Naomi's room.

It was insane how much of their lives intersected with other. Maybe that's why Naomi felt that it was only natural that her heart would want to find its way towards Mia too.

"Are you afraid that I'll be mad at you?" Mia whispers.

"Worse..." Naomi murmurs.

She's afraid that she'll lose the one person in her life that she cares about more than anything. She's afraid that she'll ruin the only friendship that was worth having. She's afraid that telling her this will ruin every part of her.

Mia reaches out and traces the slope of her nose with her finger. She's always gentle with Naomi, always mindful of her body like she's afraid of breaking her.

"You have nothing to be afraid of. Whatever it is, just tell me. I could never be mad at you, you know that."

Naomi swallows audibly and turns on her back. When she's not facing Mia, it feels slightly easier to say what's on her

mind. All she has to do is stare at the paint on the wall and watch the way the blades spin on the fan.

She can feel the way that Mia stares at her, and she can feel the way her hand rests on her arm. She wants to shake her off because it would hurt less that way. It would hurt less if Mia didn't touch her like she was fragile, or if she didn't look at her like she meant the world to her.

"When I was twelve," Naomi says, "do you remember when we were playing outside for recess and that girl pushed me off the swing? You punched her right in the mouth, and even though you knew that you were going to get suspended and have your Nintendo Switch taken away, you still did it."

"I wasn't going to let some girl just push you off like that. You scraped your knee pretty badly."

"I know," Naomi says quietly.

She pauses, her stomach twisting itself into knots as she feels her heart thump wildly against her chest. It feels like she's standing on the edge of a cliff, and instead of taking a leap, she feels like she's being pushed.

"Why are you—"

"I'm in love with you," Naomi says suddenly.

The silence that falls between them is nearly deafening. Naomi actually bites down so hard on her bottom lip that she tastes blood in her mouth. She moves to sit up, the sheet pooling at her waist as she stares down at her pajamas.

It would be silly to walk all the way home in the middle

of the night, but she's fully prepared to do that right now.

Before she can toss the blanket off of her legs, Mia sits up too and reaches forward to grab her arm.

"What did you say to me?"

Naomi shakes her head, but Mia tugs on her wrist, forcing her to say it again, and Naomi squeezes her eyes shut.

She can already see how this is going to end. It was always going to be this way because things like this never work out for girls like her. It was always going to be a problem because girls like Naomi don't get to have these kind of happy endings. They don't get to see things work out the way that they want it to.

"No—"

"Tell me," Mia insists, and she doesn't wait for Naomi to answer before she's tugging her hard enough for her back to collide with the bed.

"Why?" she frowns. "Why do you want to hear me say this so bad? Why do you want me to tell you something that doesn't even matter?"

"Because it does matter to me, Naomi!"

Mia pulls her hand away, and Naomi stares at her as she pushes the blanket away and crosses her legs. The neckline of her sleep shirt is so big that part of it hangs off her shoulder. The t-shirt is ratty and dirty, but Naomi had won it for her at the school fair and she's never seen Mia not sleep with it since.

"Why would it matter to you, huh?"

"Because I deserve to know how you feel about me, and I

deserve the chance to tell you how I feel.”

Naomi shakes her head. “You don’t feel the same.” If she did, Mia would have told her by now. She would have whispered it in her ear just like she tells her everything else.

She would have pulled her to the side during gym and told her before the coach found out that they were missing.

She would have told her when they sat in the movie theatre last week and played Tetris on her phone while they waited for the movie trailers to finish.

“You don’t know how I feel because you never asked me. You always assumed.”

“Am I wrong? Are you saying that I am—because if you’re not, then this is a really messed up thing to do—”

Naomi doesn’t even get the chance to finish her sentence before Mia is crawling into her lap and kissing her. Her head can’t even comprehend that there’s a body on top of her because she’s frozen in shock. She can register the lips that move against her own, and she can feel Mia’s weight on top of her, but between the moment that she was sitting across from her and now, she has absolutely no idea what to do.

When Mia pulls back, her eyes unsure like she had miscalculated the extent of her action, Naomi swallows audibly and finally wraps her arms around Mia’s waist. Her fingers press into the small of her back and she has to take a deep breath because she feels like she might pass out.

“What...what was that?”

“That was a kiss,” Mia whispered.

“Why did you kiss me?”

“Why do you think that I kissed you?”

Mia tucks her hair behind her ear, and she doesn't hesitate to lean down and do it again. Her lips are so soft and smooth that Naomi feels self-conscious because she knows that her own are chapped.

She's only lightly pressing their lips together, but it's enough to make Naomi sit up straight and pull her closer. She runs her hand up her back, feeling the notch of spine and the skin of her hip as her shirt rides up. When Mia pulls back, her eyes lidded, she stares at Naomi until finally leaning forward and pecking her on the edge of her mouth.

“I love you,” she murmurs.

“Say it again,” Naomi whispers because she almost can't believe it.

Mia smiles and cradles Naomi's face between her hands, her thumbs stroking the skin underneath her eyes.

“I love you, Naomi.”

“Again.”

“I love you,” she breathes against her cheek, her lips dragging across her skin.

Naomi turns her head to catch her lips, and she can taste the toothpaste in the back of her mouth. She can taste a hint of the lemon cookies that they had shared downstairs and the mouthwash that they had gargled just before climbing into Mia's bed.

“I love you so much,” Naomi says, and she feels tears

sting the back of her eyes, but she doesn't want to cry.

She pushes her face into Mia's chest, who holds her tight. Her fingers trace patterns on the skin of her neck, and when she kisses the top of her head, Naomi feels like the pressure that had been sitting on her chest finally dissolves.

She takes a deep breath, and for some reason, it doesn't feel like her head is underwater anymore.

It feels like she can finally breathe with both of her lungs again.



SHELBY CLARIDGE

Calm

CHARITY BOYD

New Day

The day is here,
the day is new.
The sky is blue like the sea.
The flowers are blooming.
The smell of rose
as the wind blows,
as the sun is shining.

While the flock of birds are flying,
leaves and petals touch the ground.
As I meditate to Mother Nature's sound,
this peaceful sight is what I found.
And when I take a look around,
Nature is what keeps me calm, yet astound,
as I surround myself within its background.

The day is here,
the day is new.

STEVIE ZYCHA-ESTRADA

Honest Spring

Staring into space
while
earning a droplet of truth.

Eyes fixed towards
dots of shimmering blues
assorted in geometric certainty.

Trails from above
lead directly
to the familiar iris.

Seems there is a story untold
all placed in front
from moment to moment?

JASON MONKS

This Moment

This moment in time
Trapped like no other
Cannot make it
Cannot fake it
Cannot take it
There is no other
That will meet
That will repeat
That will defeat
This moment in time
Where it belongs
For so long
For ever and ever
This moment in time
Is mine and no one else's
This moment in time

CONTRIBUTORS

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