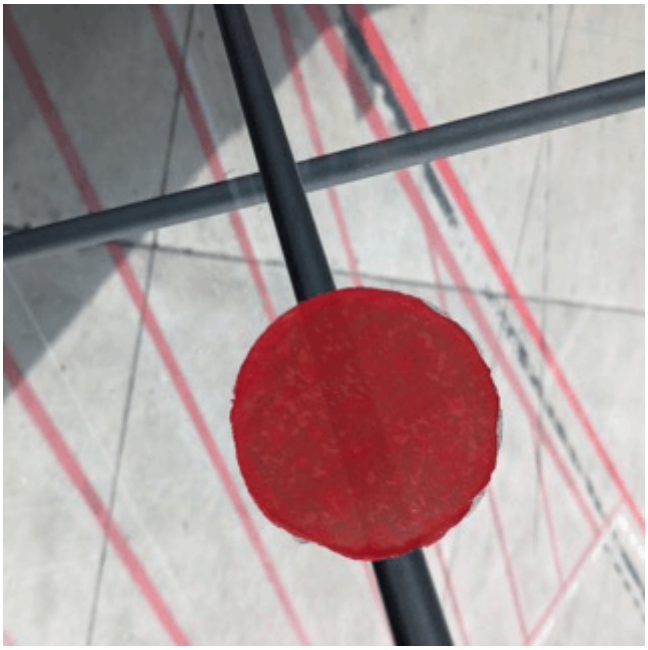
FLASH FICTION

Slack Water

by Mileva Anastasiadou



"Float II" by TJ Norris

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My friend texts before she gets on the plane and says, *how exciting*, because she's flying to see the love of her life, and I'm happy for her, but also I am sad because Mom's not doing well. I text back and say, *yeah.*

People running to places. Prisoners to freedom, dogs to food, raindrops to grass. Planes landing. Boats docking. Flood tide. Husband running to mistress. Running that hurts but makes sense. Music playing and playing and playing, like it will play forever, and I dance like I'm running.

Husband calls and asks, *how are you doing*, but I can't speak, words won't come out, as if they're stuck somewhere inside my throat and they're choking me. I clear my throat and say, *fine.*

People running from places. Prisoners from prisons, dogs from hunger, raindrops from the sky. Planes departing. Boats sailing. Ebb tide. Husband running from me and the pain I carry. The kind of running that hurts, but I don't mind. Music still playing but fading, same old scratched record, Mom's favorite, and I still dance like I'm running.

Dad walks in and asks, *is it over yet*, but I can't speak. I'm busy dancing before the song ends, and I can't know if Dad means the music or something worse, but that doesn't change much. I turn around and say, *not yet.*

Friend boarding a plane to a man she just met online to escape a miserable life. World running to growth, to escape, to collapse. Dad running into forgetfulness to escape loss. Mom running to the light to escape pain. People running because there's nothing else to do. Running, running, futile running, because nothing remains still and everything flows.

Mom stares at the void and asks, *when will it stop*, and I can't speak, because Mom doesn't speak of the music; she speaks of pain, like she's run out of patience and courage and life, and I can't answer, because I can't know what comes after the pain stops, after the music ends, after we stop running.

People running to hope, but not all of them arrive. Music playing but I can't hear it, and I dance like I'm running, because I'm stuck and I can't run, and I hit the pause button like it could work in life too. Like I could pause time for a while, and perhaps I could rest.

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