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Cover Art by Virginia Mallon.
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Alexa Findlay spends most of her time writing fiction and poetry. She is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *The Mystic Blue Review*, *Cadaverous Magazine* and *Drabblez Magazine*. Her work has appeared in El Camino College’s Literary Arts Journal: *Myriad*, *See Beyond Magazine*, *Pomona Valley Review*, *Better than Starbucks Magazine*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Halcyon Days*, *Halcyon Days Founder Favourites*, *Oddball Magazine* and forthcoming in *The Quail Bell Magazine*, *Grotesque Magazine*, *Blood Moon Rising Magazine*, and *Scarlet Leaf Review*.

POETRY READERS:

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FICTION READERS:

Cheyenne Current is a fourth year creative writing major at UCR. She has been writing ever since she can remember. She’s written everything from poetry and short stories to novels and screenplays. She’s a script reader in her spare time as well as practiced literary critique. She is a fiction and nonfiction reader here at *The Mystic Blue Review*.

Elizabeth Ruth Deyro is a 20-year-old BA Communication Arts student from the University of the Philippines Los Banos. She majors in Writing, with a minor in Speech Communication and Theater Arts. She is a prose editor for *Minute Magazine* and *Culaccino Magazine*, and a prose reader and staff writer for *The Cerurove*. She advocates for mental health awareness, HIV awareness, gender equality, and human rights. She volunteers for organizations that fight for these causes. At present, she is a copywriter and social media team deputy head for the Youth for Mental Health Coalition, and a social media associate and...
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Your love disappeared into the fog.
by Srishti Uppal

What would I do
if the things I seek
bring more pain
than they take away?
If the regret and hatred
make my heart sink
too low
to be able to wake up and get through the day?

Will my passion then,
become compulsion?
and turn my hobbies
into forgotten old habits?

Will I resent everything
as far as the eye can see
will I love anything
except those that used to be?

Will I love my present, then,
as much as I now desire my future?
Will I find each day
as beautiful
as I now find rain in all its sweet nature?

Will I be happy for
the sake of
satisfaction
or will I simply watch life pass me by
without any sense of direction?

Am I and
will I be
stuck in the labyrinth of suffering forever?
Will I be able to
find a great perhaps?
will I be successful in all my endeavours
yet still be unhappy?
maybe I should find a hobby
to pass the time until I die
or I'll wonder of my future
i'll worry, pace and stress till i'm wry.
Aqueous Unconsciousness
by Lauren DiEdwardo

I met you and we
broke the ice
but I fell through.
icy glass burning it's
way down my throat.
I know I'm drowning but
I can't seem to move.
“don't resist”
they say
so I bite the bullet
chew is slow
all I taste is regrets.
My love is a river
in which you refuse to float
so I guess we'll drown
together
not that you want to
drown with me.
They say you
can't compare apples
and oranges
but I'm a pine cone
so what are we?
What were we?
Every time I let
down my hair
you cut it off.
All I wanted was
a little bit of love
but you turned me away.
So—
Broken Teapot
by Lauren DiEdwardo

Where is the tea?
Splashed on the floor
Burning our feet through our socks
oh, Earth
you beautiful
broken teapot
the tea—
Where did it go?
it has fallen through our fingers
and we can’t get it back
we can’t pick up tea
so broken teapot—
oh, Earth—
we’ll glue you together again
super glue, not Superman
saved the day once again
again
tea spilled—
Where did it go?
out of the teapot
running away.
I Wonder, Alice
by Lauren DiEdwardo

I wonder if
The sky is red, Alice
In the rabbit hole world.
Jump down, land up
Right-side-inside-out, Alice.
Do I ride the glowing dragon across the red sky
In the rabbit hole world, Alice?
It’s better down here
Up here
Where everything is opposite
All is good and good is bad
And people are perfect and
Finally, we’ve won, Alice
The war against gravity, we’ve won.
We can fly now
Wings? not yet, Alice
But we can fly now, Alice
In the rabbit hole world.
Fly away from the troubles
we don’t have
opposite in the rabbit hole world
remember, Alice?
I wonder if this land is good
since bad is good, but good is bad
So what are you, Alice?
What are any of us anymore?
I’d like to say I’m good
But if I’m good then I’m bad
In the rabbit hole world, Alice.
Siren
by Nikhita Dodla

Her eyes were like galaxies laced in shades of the ocean, ever changing and infinite. Much like the ocean, they shimmered in waves of sunlight, Yet held the power to darken with intensity of hurricanes. Her eyes lure you. They drag you with the beat of the tides, Out far enough to hear the roar of the sea fade into an uneasy peace. Her eyes capture you. The bait of a thousand stories sown together with a single curious stare lay in them. Like a fisherman’s prize, We lay in her midst. Like the mighty sharks of the ocean, She rises. Triumphant.
Nature Girl
by Nikhita Dodla

The trees sway with my hips,
Who do you think you are?
The birds chirp to the rhythm of my songs,
The rivers flow to the beat of my heart,
Do you think you stand a chance?
Hurricanes formed my bones,
Ivory bleeds from my teeth,
How dare you break my heart?
The wolves growl to the sound of my tears,
Clouds part at my laugh,
What makes you think I need a second chance?
by Virginia Mallon
Won't Be Chained
by Linda M. Crate

your hands were folded
like a broken prayer
take me to the place the water knows
because the dark against your halo
provided no light

i need to bury myself in the creek
let the sunlight fall upon
me like a jewel of the water and be
washed clean again
because there's no peace in your name

i do not need your broken halo
there's no light in you
only dark feathers splintering my skin
with the telemetry of your
nightmares again and again

i cannot carry both you and me
too long i have tried to
you're just a ghost haunting past his point of expiry
so i burned down all the haunted houses of my mind
i will not be chained to your need anymore.
Won't Stop Me
by Linda M. Crate

everyone thinks
phoenixes
are sweet,
but they do not ask
of their knowledge or their pain;
i know both
as i am immortal of the flame

daughter of the moon and sun
i command both fire
and waters
wolves show me their respect
as they're howling
you can tame a dragon but there's
no taming me—

wild as the ocean who is my sister
untamed as the angriest wind
fierce as the thorns that are on the
cutting hands of roses
sharp as the dense hand of earth quakes
in all their majesty
made of the highest metal and mettle
one would ever know

i am elemental
there's nothing you can do
to trap and chain me
because in all my broken places
i find sources of beauty
every sadness brings forth my prettiest joy,
and so you can try to stop me
but it's a futile effort.
The Deepest and Highest Joy
by Linda M. Crate

these tears
are no sanctuary

this wall of grief
hangs heavy on my bones

everyone tells me to forget the past,
but without it i can have no future;

what happened before matters
life can wound you but it is important

to learn how not to wound ourselves
in the same way different times—

tapestries of stars quilted into the sky
show us that even darkness there can be light

i will watch the battlefield
for arrows of light against the bruised heart

of my pain
because i'm searching for the deepest and highest joy

i wouldn't expect them to understand
they walk a different path, with a different journey to know.
the deepest arrow
of my pain
would negate all my joy
so leave it where
it is
so long as i am not bleeding
it won't kill me
only functions to cause tears
to fall from my eyes
like rain
no worry, no worry!

one day
i will find a life boat
so i don't need to be anchored
to all this sorrow
dragging me beneath the powerful
arms of the sea
where the light sometimes bends
most beautifully
kissing the sea more gently
on the forehead than the moon
but who am to judge?

some families
break and erode another down
with words and fists
others don't speak at all
some seem perfect on the outside,
but we all have our imperfections and breaks
where the light pours in and restores
to us some beauty.
Ascension

by Carl Scharwath
Amongst All of the Confusion
by Mark Burrow

Alarm clock
Destroyed in the explosion:
I waited a snooze-length
Of Time. Index fingers
In each ear, eyes asquint,
Persistent ringing
In my head like
An urgency
Of an intruder alarm –
It continues to taunt me.

Vault door
Opens a smoking jar:
Unwanted somethingness peers
Through. I'm inside a safe
Secured by combination
Or key-operated lock?
Same difference for me
As I hide inside
In safe solitude –
In dumbfounded darkness.

Inside. Safe.
Not moving anytime soon:
I will wait for anyone
To unlikely guess
The combination.
Or, if key-operated,
I've already changed
The locks several
Minutes ago –
Amongst all of the confusion.
Sanctuary
by Shannon Frost Greenstein

Prologue

Philadelphia has some beautiful churches. Trust me on this one. I’ve seen most of them. I’ve also seen my fair share of synagogues, mosques, and meeting houses in this city…even a Christian Science Reading Room. But it’s the churches that catch my breath. There’s a feeling you get in your chest when you stand in a church and look up slowly, look at the candles and the stained glass and the rafters, up to the ceiling, where God is listening.

My favorite thing used to be walking through old graveyards, the ones that go back to our forefathers and their forefathers. You can’t even read some of the headstones, they’re that old. The grave markers tell their stories, and that’s what I spend my afternoons thinking about now, over and over and over again: When God calls us home, what do we leave behind?

I used to think my wife and I would be one of those couples called home together, passing away within hours of each other in one another’s embrace, sharing a headstone and eternity.

That was a long time ago, though. You know, in Medieval England, a criminal could run into a church if he was being chased and no one could follow him in. They called it “sanctuary.” The guy just had to reach the church’s boundaries before whoever was chasing him and they couldn’t follow him in. It didn’t matter what he had done, he was protected in God’s house. He was untouchable.

I used to walk through graveyards with my wife. We used to do a lot of things together. She was my sanctuary.

I think about that a lot now, too.

Part One

“…pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.”
“Hey!”
“Our Father, who art in Heaven…”
“You!”
“…hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come…”
“Hey, Buddy! I’m talking to you!”

I pause, look over my shoulder. The cop, one of Philly’s finest, is obviously trying to get my attention. But he’s interrupted my rosary, and that’s unacceptable. I lower my eyes and start over.

“Our Father, who art in Heaven…"
I’m at 4th and New, it’s eight in the morning on a Tuesday, and I’m trying to pray. I’ve prayed every single day of my life since I was seven. I haven’t missed a single day, not even the day I lost my job, not even the day I lost my house. Not even the day she left.

“Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us…”

*Like I would ever forgive her.*

I used to live in a four bedroom colonial. Now I have a sleeping bag that leaks feathers wherever I bring it. I used to have an address. Now I have a cart and a cardboard sign.

Behind me, the cop has caught up. I feel a rough hand on my shoulder.

“Didn’t I throw you out of here last week? Are you deaf?”

I stand slowly, waiting for the dizziness which accompanies chronic hunger.

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,” I inform him calmly. “Luke, Chapter Six, Verse Twenty.”

“I don’t care what the Bible says, buddy. I said it last week and I’ll say it again. YOU’RE NOT ALLOWED TO SQUAT IN THIS CHURCH. Why are you trying to make trouble?”

Squatting! I’m offended. I used to live in God’s flock, and this church is God’s pasture.

“Officer, I’m not making trouble. I just don’t have anywhere else to pray. I’m not hurting anyone, I’m not stealing from the collection plate, and I’m not seducing altar boys. Can’t I just finish the rosary?”

You pig. Cops are fascist pigs.

“Get out, I said, and the next time I have to kick you out of here, I’ll bring you to the station and book you for trespassing.”

He escorts me outside with a swagger and a tight grip on my upper arm, dirty though it is with the weeks of accumulated grime on my jacket. He deposits me unceremoniously on the steps and watches me trudge away.

**Part Two**

*Philadelphia (CNN) – The mystery deepens in Philadelphia with the discovery of another body on Tuesday. The victim, who will not be publicly identified until family members have been notified, is a woman thought to be in her late twenties. She was found under the Vine Street Expressway by a passing officer in the early-morning hours. Disturbingly, this victim, like the others, was found missing both hands. Early reports that the woman worked as a high-end escort are not yet substantiated. Mayor Kenney has called a press conference later this afternoon with the Chief of Police and the Chief Medical Examiner to discuss the case in more detail. Little is known about the assailant, as not a single witness has come forward with any information on the crimes. Philadelphia, of course, has been living in a state of alert since the first body was located behind 30th Street Station several months ago. City officials have insisted so far that the city is not at the mercy of a serial murderer, but residents feel otherwise.*

“There’s some nutjob out there cuttin’ up women, and we’re supposed to listen to the police when they say everything’s fine?” asked North Philadelphia resident Tamara Johnson. “All I’m sayin’ is that I’m not walking around alone until he’s locked up.”
This is a sentiment shared by many, ever since the first body, that of escort Crystal Meringue, turned up last winter with hands and clothing missing…

Part Three

The shelter run by St. John’s isn’t much. It’s only open during the winter months, it’s run by a world-weary group of white-haired volunteers, and I had the last of my valuable possessions stolen there one night while I slept. But the best part is the sanctuary, easily accessible from the shelter and often empty enough to excuse one down-on-his-luck vagrant.

I kneel in front of the flickering bank of candles, tiny infernos carrying the weight of people’s prayers. Following a ritual that needs no thought, I dump a handful of panhandling profits into the donation box and grab a few votives.

The first one I light for my children, wherever they might be.
Do they still think about me?
The second I light for myself.
I wonder if He forgives me?
The third, I light for her.

Why do I do this, she doesn’t care, I hate her, she’ll never know, she left and now she’ll never know. She’ll never come back. We’ll never be together again.

That done, I settle onto the hard wood of the first pew with my devotional. I found it in the gutter, actually, but it’s one of my favorite belongings. It’s the sort of pamphlet with a reading for every day, and I haven’t missed a passage since Day One. I begin to read and hear the pervasive static noise in my head fade away.

This is why I come to church. Even after I lost my home, I still had one in my heart. The custom, the repetition, the ceremony…it calms me to be here. I feel safe here. It is my asylum from a cruel world that has forgotten me. It is my refuge from the memories of her.

I finish the passage, having committed the verse at the end to memory, and take a quick look around at my surroundings. I am, for the moment, blessedly alone.

It is nearly time for me to leave, before someone enters to find me roaming around the cathedral. Today is special, though, so I quickly stand and begin scanning the walls. First Reformed does not have a large cathedral, so my options are limited.

Finally spying a small cabinet hidden in the corner behind the organ, I walk over and trace lines through the surface dust with my fingertips. No one has poked around in here for quite some time. I am reaching for the newspaper in the shopping bags which are my constant companions when I hear a voice.

“Can I help you, my son?”

A priest, soft-spoken and yet incredibly imposing in height, is approaching me down the aisle. I subtly drop the bags on the floor and turn around slowly, offering my empty hands as proof that I’m not misbehaving.

“I’m sorry, Father, I didn’t mean to intrude.”

The embodiment of Christian charity, the priest responds, “You’re not intruding, my son. Is there something I can help you with?”
I’m starting to sweat a little, as my consecrated routine has now been interrupted. I search for the best response to reassure him and, more importantly, to get him out of my hair.

“I’m just a man down on his luck, Father. Would you pray with me?”

He leads me to the altar, where I kneel in front of him. He places his hand on my head and says softly, “O loving and kind God, have mercy. Have pity upon this man and take away the awful stains of his transgressions. Restore to him again the joy of your salvation, and make him willing to obey you. Amen.”

I raise my head and meet his eyes.

What made him pick that one?

“Psalm 51.”

He smiles serenely.

“Very good. Is there anything else you need?”

You have no idea.

“No, thank you, Father. I just needed that.”

He places his hand on my shoulder briefly, then turns and walks back down the aisle. I am flabbergasted by this apparent show of trust, to leave me all alone in the chapel with no supervision.

Without warning, I am instantly aware of God’s presence. I can feel His eyes on me. I suddenly want very much to be out of this building, back on the street, so I shove the bulging newspapers into the bottom drawer of the cabinet, take a hurried moment to arrange the contents, pick my bags back up, and powerwalk to the door as fast as my legs can carry me.

Part Four

Her eyes are so wide with fear that her pupils obscure her irises. She is screaming – he can tell as much by the constrictions of the muscles in her throat – but her voice is inaudible behind the gag.

He had followed her home from her last appointment. She left around midnight, tight red dress wrinkled and frizzy hair escaping from her hairclips. He stayed close to the shadows, tailing her slow progress down Race Street. She never once saw him until he leapt at her from behind, forcing her into a darkened alley between two residences.

She had tried to shout, even as he was explaining that he wasn’t going to hurt her. She bit his hand, kneed him in the groin, stomped on his instep with her stilettos even as he whispered in her ear that he was going to give her paradise.

Now, he kneels to the rough asphalt where she lays immobile, having bound her wrist and ankles with rope. He looks gravely at the woman, whose face is beginning to morph into that of his wife before his eyes. Just like it does every time.

“You have to understand,” he tells her gently. “You don’t know what’s for the best. You’re just going to end up hurting some poor dope and leaving him in ruins. I should know.”

He stares at the face of his wife, so beautiful even soaked with sweat and tears. No matter how many times he does this, she always looks back at him. When he dreams about it, she suddenly relaxes, looks at him like a lover, and tells him she loves him with her eyes. He lets her go and she presses her palm to his face and kisses his forehead. They walk away together into the lightening dawn.
But he knows this woman is not his wife. It fills him with a sense of impotent rage, and the static noise in his head increases to a nearly intolerable level.

In one swift motion, he clamps his hands around her throat and squeezes with all of the force he can muster. She bucks and thrashes beneath his weight, and he thinks about the wonders that await her now that God is calling her home.

She finally quiets, and he looks down at what she has done. Her eyes are rolled up in her head; a line of saliva is leaking behind the gag. She is limp.

The man knows God has seen. God sees everything. But He is a forgiving God, and the man knows how to repent. Within the sanctuary, all is forgiven. The man has helped to deliver her home, and what she leaves behind will glorify God for all eternity. The man reaches into his omnipresent shopping bag for the hacksaw.

Part Five

I look around carefully to confirm that the sanctuary is still empty at St. Peter the Apostle. I’ve been basking in a sense of peace after finishing the rosary. Here, nothing can touch me. Here, it’s just me and God. The rest of the city does not exist, including the public servants who are so determined to keep me out of the only haven I’ve ever found. I feel comfortable here, in the presence of Him, now that I’m about to make my offering.


The hands have soaked through the newspapers in which I wrapped them, leaving smears of blood on the inside of the plastic bag. I reach for the bundle, careful to keep the severed wrists from dripping on the pristine holy floor.

Give me sanctuary. Protect me. Forgive me. Come back.

I have been to this church before, in my former life when I wore proudly worn suits on Sunday mornings, in my former life when I was part of a pair. Here, there is a confessional with a hollow space beneath the bench. I don’t remember when I discovered this, but it’s the first thing I thought of when the work of the hacksaw was done last night.

This process is sacred to me, a sacred act in a sacred refuge where I could not possibly be doing anything wrong in God’s eyes. I have done this many times, done God’s work. I’m sending these sinning women home, giving them the chance to repent and receive His love.

I repent, I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

I kneel in the confessional and lift the seat of the bench. There is an empty hole lined with cedar, the perfect size for my contribution. I lift out the right hand, ornamented with rings, and place it in the space. Then I add the left hand, arranging them so the fingers are threaded as if in prayer. I look at the clasped hands carefully, ensuring that they are serenely positioned in that universal shape any Christian would recognize.

Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

I am doing her a favor. I am leaving her earthly remains in a setting of quiet repose, closer to God than she’s ever been and in an eternal request for forgiveness. Peace settles over me. I am cloistered here, in this sanctuary for God’s children, and nothing evil can touch me.
No one has found any of them yet. It’s only a matter of time. I hope when the story makes the news, my wife thinks of me for some reason.

The End
Reflections on Moth and Gaslight

by Jennifer Boyd

I am watching a moth fly from its perch to the gaslight on Summer Street. Suddenly the moth remembers what it means to have a home and what it means to live and to die and to be born again in the form of loneliness. Trapped. Clinging to the golden orb of perhaps. When I tell you there is no good way to lose a friend, you say, *soft rain, choir hymns, the little ways we unbloom*. The truth is, these days loneliness cuts me like a knife, like a billion moths cast from their home, dispersed throughout a goldless sky. You felt it too, but it was fleshless like a far off sea. It seeped into the spine of your thoughts while you waited for the train, never carving bone deep. The feeling was kinder, not as raw. Sometimes I think I can taste freedom but then I remember seeing your name on the screen at 1 AM and the peculiar weight of breathlessness. I think the same kind of freedom is what draws moths to a street lamp, bodies to war, bodies to each other. This is how summer tastes—wayward girls, broken promises, no new messages from Gabriella. Moths—sleepless and dreaming and distant and still waiting.
Not Our Kingdom
by Jennifer Boyd

I’ve been thinking about how flora and fauna are as distant as the heavens and together as landscape. There are so many lessons I’ve forgotten from Ecology 101 but the way you look at me reminds me of the things that matter. Our ecosystem—your mother’s Honda Accord—and my forever need for love stories and happy endings, the gifts the earth offers to us as softness bared. I am busy mapping the distance between kingdom and domain when I begin to understand how good it is to belong to someone. This is not our kingdom. You leave me in a dream I cannot keep but when I flower into the shape of your name I am so close to remembrance. How do we un-know? I can’t help but hope that the mapleswamp of my heart will someday bloom into meadow and delicate will be a language I can speak. In our kingdom I am less fauna and more flora and we are alone in our reign. In our kingdom I am less furious rhythm and more kind angelsong, less lion of prey and more bird of paradise. How beautiful you are when unflinching. How beautiful you are when rapturous. The textbooks forgot to give a name to how the fauna in me unravels when your hands flare like wings and I blossom in your palms, locked into honeysuckle sweetness and wondering if there is more than one species of familiarity, one other than the kind we know when the windows are down just enough to hear God. I imagine that in this landscape I taste less like harvest
moon, shadow whisper, more like morning
dew, beads of citrus. We are alone in our
say it somehow’s, our kingdoms and angels.
The still in your breathing ties me in
forget-me-knots and I realize that this
is not ecology but a lesson on how to
be gentle. This is not our kingdom,
but it’s heaven or this.
To Decompose
by Shannon Cuthbert

Unlatch the door and set me free:
into a night alive with sin,
with creatures winged and humming.

A thousand faces in these woods
watch me shed my silk skin,
leave loose threads ensnared in briars.

Let me lie, untethered bone:
my scent plumes honeyed smoke
over the tongues of sleeping boars,

that dream up ways to gut and gore.
Too late: already my ribs stretch wide,
reveal soft sponges of morels,

already ancient sap turns me to stone.
Pigeon Tunnel
by David Hanlon

Most days in winter
I leave the house at 5.20am and walk to work,
the air is crisp, cold and black,
pierced by a low-hanging,
omniscient moon.
The lanes are eerie,
visible only through the amber glow
of street lights;
where they don’t shine
darkness resides,
circles me like vultures,
recoils at every lamp-lit post
along the way,
unfurls in-between.

I hear nothing,
but the occasional rustle of leaves
whispering
beneath my loud, pacing footsteps
*click-clack*
on the stone pavement.
There is no one
else, only the odd sleepwalker
in the far distance—
soundless,
intentions unknown.

Car windows covered in frost and ice,
hiding what's inside,
trees—towering black skeletons
stripped of life
rooted in the ground,
twigs like witches hands
reaching out—
weaving, bony, spindly;
they could grab you at any moment
toss you in their cauldrons—
boil you alive.
Pigeon Tunnel looms ahead,
I look up,
and half-see them
hiding in the shadows—
headless,
still and in flock,
like troops on the front line—
stout bodies
armoured
with dark grey plumage;
they coo in unison,
an unnerving throaty call,
like the sound of an old man’s wheezing chest
caught in a howling wind.

I walk under,
they ruffle,
flutter about—
I anticipate an ambush.

At the same time,
(much further along my path)
gulls begin to line the rooftops of a small church.
My thoughts are scattered—
like ibexes dotted on rocky steeps,
any one of them could slip at any moment,
    horns piercing the ground—
my mind, full of holes.
Last Light
by David Hanlon

As I walk
what we were
clutches at my heels;
I arrive home late,
tired from the added weight.

Now in bed,
I blow out the flame
from a nearby candle,
turn my back to it,
pull the covers over

my shoulders. The wick burns
for a few seconds after
before crumbling;
& my eye lids lower
rest until morning.
What Is My Name?
by Lauren Walsburg

There once was a small stunted man who possessed a gift - if that is what you would call it - of dark magic. He sought out desperate souls and granted their wishes. Do not confuse him with a fairy though, that would be a solemn mistake on your part. He fed off their misery and despair to fulfill his own vile yearnings. I will tell you about a handful of his dealings. Listen closely and heed my warning, for all the evil in the world there is thrice as much good.

* * *

A man of average means was disappointed with all he had and all he did not have. One day he sat in his rocking chair with his cat on his lap. He scratched it behind its ear and said, "I wish you cost less to keep and gave more than you are worth."

A little man, who was collecting loose straw that had been dropped from carts along the road, heard his wish and approached him.

"What a smart looking cat you have there," said the stranger to the man.

"Ha! Smart looking, what use is that to me?" asked the man.

"What would you give for your cat to have the intellect of the most renowned scholar, the life span of the oldest tortoise, the voice of a reasonable man and finally, the shrewdness of the richest merchant?"

"Why, sir, I would give anything for that to be true!"

And so, it was. The man and the stranger made a deal. The man died a pauper soon after, though not before producing three sons called Dusolino, Tesifone, and Constantino Fortunato.

* * *

There was once a hunchback whom the townsfolk called Simple Hans as he was not overly clever. He was upset for he was incredibly ugly, so ugly that the other townsfolk would cross the street so as not to see him in close proximity. As Simple Hans let out a long audible sigh, a little man appeared in front of him.

"What troubles you so?" asked the stranger.

"I will always be alone for I am ugly and dumb," said Simple Hans.
"What if I could grant you an unlimited number of wishes? Would you do something for me in return?"

Simple Hans was thrilled at hearing this and agreed to the stranger's terms right away for he knew no better.

"I will give you this and in return your first wish must be for the King's daughter to have a child."

"Why would you want me to wish such a thing?" asked Simple Hans.

"I have my reasons," answered the stranger and because Hans was simple he did not press the little man further.

***

A widow and her two wicked daughters sat on a bale of straw shrieking out insults at the world. A little man heard their spiteful speech from the other side of the land and came at once.

"Oh my! Fair ladies, what horrible thing has happened to ones so beautiful?" exclaimed the stranger.

"We have no food, no money, and no place to go," cried out the window.

"Oh, how shocking! That will not do!" said the stranger in mock outrage, "what can I do to help, dear beauties?"

"You could point us in the direction of a rich man. One that will shower us in gifts and adoration," said the widow.

"I believe I can help you with that. Though first, you must promise that you will not forget my generosity and one day will repay me as I see fit."

"Of course, sir," said the widow greedily, "whatever you would desire."

So, the little man went about the country, seeking out the most suitable candidate. He found such a man that filled the requirements, but before he could arrange a meeting with the widow he had to arrange a death for the man's still living wife. So, he cursed her to die of a hideous illness, and that she did. The man also had a daughter who was kind and gentle of heart. A girl who would be easily pliable for her future stepmother's demands, or so the little man thought.

***
One day, the little man met another man who was as dreadful as he was full of hatred. His name was Bluebeard. Bluebeard had long sought out the perfect wife, but had been widely unsuccessful in his ventures. He had heard of an evil little man, whose name was known to none, that made deals of a magical nature. At once, he searched the world over to find this man. After many a day and night looking, he found the one he sought.

"I am here to make a deal," said Bluebeard.

"Well, it seems you have come to the right place as deals are my specialty," said the little man.

"I want to find a wife. She must be beautiful, virtuous, and most of all, obedient."

"Ah, the great dilemma of life; love," said the little man with a hint of mirth.

Bluebeard bristled at this and said rather abruptly, "can you help?"

"Indeed, I can, but of course, I will need something in return."

Once the two equally evil men had worked out the finer details of their arrangement, the little man gave Bluebeard a golden key that would help him find his perfect wife.

***

A Queen held her child close as her kingdom was moments away from its destruction. The Queen, in her desperation, cried out for someone to save her child. To her surprise a little man popped up in front of her, seeming to come out of thin air.

"Who are you? Where did you come from?" demanded the Queen as she clung to her child.

"That hardly seems the most pertinent matter at this very moment, would you not agree?" said the man.

The Queen looked at him and said hopelessly, "My child."

"I have a way for her to leave this kingdom and end up safely on an island," said the man. The Queen astonished by her good luck, thanked the man and told him she would give him anything he desired if he could do this.

The man shook his head, "I do not require anything from you."

Though unbelieving that this stranger would do this out of the kindness of his heart, the Queen nodded. The man conjured a golden cradle and told the Queen to put her child in the cradle and float the
cradle out to sea. He assured her the child would be safe and the cradle would take her to an island far away from the conflict of her kingdom. Though the Queen was worried she could see no other option and thus, put her child in the cradle and let her float away.

* * *

There was once a father who made a deal with the little man and did not live up to his end of the deal. The father had promised the little man his goose in return for great riches for his two daughters, Lilla and Lolla. The little man held up his end of the bargain, but when he went to collect his payment from the father, he found that the father had cooked the goose and fed it to his daughters. Furious at being deceived, the little man put a curse on the father's two daughters that they should live in poverty and spin from sunrise until sunset to make what little money they could. He also cursed the father, who dropped dead the very next day. The girls lived in poverty for a good long while until they came across a goose of their own.

* * *

The little man rubbed his hands together in glee. He looked at the woman and gave her a nauseatingly sweet smile.

"What is my name, your highness?" he asked the miller's daughter.

"Is it...Rumpelstiltskin?"

* * *

Of course, you have heard how the rest of the tale goes. Old Rumpelstiltskin was thwarted by the miller's daughter and tore himself in two, embarrassed and ashamed at being outsmarted. Did you learn something from this? I sure hope you did. If you did not, well, your time will come too, just as it did for Rumpelstiltskin.
by Seigar
The Laptop of God
by KG Newman

You'd expect the power button to be a rare diamond fueling a holographic desktop, folders overflowing in bitcoin. Or that answers just appear, thoughts as search engines. But in fact there's limited memory, every app open at all times, no trash bin because—no trash. Space bar cracked, key labels long worn. You enter an address and love pops up, coding done by children builds a screen saver, you are six again, trying to replace typewriter ribbon smoldering in your hands. It's not that you don't know shortcuts—there aren't any—it's because God wants you to stop copy-pasting and clear the field in Minesweeper.
First Memory Of Everything That Happened Before
by KG Newman

In a town where all blue laws still apply
and the bone-setter retains his place
on Main, we found pickles canned
in blood in Grandma’s cellar.
Then we came across
all the other things she’d hidden—
resinated vases, brocade corsets—
and even the creaks of uneven stairs
didn’t give us enough lead time
to get everything back in boxes and
atop the shelves where our hands
made holes through spider webs.
Don’t open those jars, Mom said.
I did. Obviously. I had.
Perdition In C Minor
by KG Newman

They left me for dead
down in the ravine
where ironweed stood firm
amid butterfly carcasses.
After the wolves came,
a silence: crushing,
wider than the prairie
where singular cattlemen
rocked and puffed
their pipes and beyond
the manure composts
a garbage man walked,
covered in grime,
dragging a corn stalk.
by Elisabeth Horan

Lobster
home azure
peace - kill
zone.
by Elisabeth Horan

Coral
reverie
shoals neap,
swoon -
blonding
by Elisabeth Horan

Met you sea-side,
already sure
Young Eyes
by Kristin Garth

My heart’s marshmallow tinged with smoke
to gray
that multiplies and throttles turquoise skies.
I cloud your eyes. Silver surprise that stays
a season, surer than my smile so shy
and juvenile. I’m not your sun. No star
refracts the blackest baby blanket night
that swaddles, soothes a sobbing world so far
from sleep. I rain you tears. A taste twilight,
your tongue a torture to your brain — each
drop
you drink of me, I see your blue become
more gray. I wash away. Too sad to stop,
my flood, forbidden feast, you succumb.
Torment you with your taste for freshest tears,
young eyes belie a pain bottled for years.
by Virginia Mallon


Elemental
by Megan Denese Mealor

She has made peace with taxicabs
in every mist-capped state star,
keeping her bones trivial and tropical
to accommodate their bristling conceit,
shoestring egos pumped full of stale animus.

She has adopted well-disposed photos
of amenable orphans, fleeting highways,
symbolic spinner dolphins scattered
throughout waxy Maui waters.
She refrains from kicking ant hills
bustling in backyards, beside the
gnarled stepping stones spilling
five-star clovers.

She owns an unlucky star rushing
into waterfalls, offering itself
to steampunk crescents grinning
across riverbanks like moonstruck
rainbows fifteen blues high.

She has plenty of pretty preludes,
shivering seashells varnishing sand.
She twists language like a silver wire,
bending it at wayward angles,
tarnishing tenets, slaughtering similes,
untangling couplets bound by scribble,
shocks of sestet seizing in her veins.

She has more moxie than the moon,
that doe-eyed prodigal damsel
with a choker of reticent rhinestones
at her velveteen throat.
She prays to windowpanes
lazy with the long days,
prays for breezes filled with
spices and sonnets and sainthood.
She has her saviors and saloons,
her bayonets and barrages and banshees.
She has her fish ponds and fanfare,
her deepening deceleration,
her mainstream magnolias,
her paperweight panoramas.

Stunted by nature,
she has trouble
keeping her clouds in check,
her staples in a row.
A Winter’s Wail
by Megan Denese Mealor

And I am the wanton wastrel
blessing broken branches
spurting cherries in the descant
with hawthornes in my hair.

I invoke illicit intonations
to recast the given order
with the finesse of lilacs
bowing in the tempest,
quills melting quicksand,
the servitude of light.

You are the lissome empath
leaning on matrix mortar,
the enigmatic embryo elation
idling with inadequate intentions.

We are December’s teetering bones,
its torrential gasp lacerating windshields,
wallets, walnuts, waterfronts, whitetails.
Yard Sale
by Yuan Changming

A whole box of human hearts, each
Still beating fresh like skinned toads

Two rows of shiny skeletons of unknown gods
All fingers longer than legs, toes bigger than skulls

Three sets of knives, blades extremely blunt
With evil spirits and devilish impulses

Four giant alarm clocks, making thunderous noises
Waking up all dead from as many directions

Five bottles of wine filled with soaked souls
As colourful as the rainbow above the styx

Can I just have the reddest heart please?
Sure, it’s free
Rioting

by Yuan Changming

As giant ants march ahead in nightly arrays
Demonstrating against the ruling humans
Along the main street of every major city
Hordes of hordes of vampires flood in, screaming
Aloud, riding on hyenas and
Octopuses, waving skeletons
In their hairy hands, whipping at old werewolves
Or all-eyed aliens standing by
With their blood-dripping tails

Gathering behind the masses are ghosts and spirits
Of all the dead, victims of fatal diseases
Murders, rapes, tortures, wars, starvation, plagues
Led by deformed devils and demons
As if in an uprising, to seek revenge
On every living victor in the human shape
Some smashing walls and fences, others
Barbecuing human hearts like inflated frogs
Still others biting at each other’s soul around black fires
All in a universal storm of ashes and blood

Up above in the sky is a red dragon flying by
Blue Epiphany
by Carl Scharwath
Some Dawns

by Tim Fagan

Some dawns I’m the red fox
and the woods
are mine
Some dawns
the woodchuck
hunted gatherer
whistler of sharp warning
Some dawns
the apple on our tree
teasing with honey juice
or the fallen apple
burst and cool
or the low mud
that claims it

Some dawns I’m the silence
or when fall blows
the chuckle of leaves
crabbing sideways down our street
or maybe I’m all of those
in sequence
what they call
a lifetime.
On Leaving My House
by Benjamin Daniel Lukey

The fires are out; the lamps are snuffed.
The door is locked; I’ve done enough.
I give my house and all my pelf
To God Almighty, who Himself
Will keep it safe or let it go.
The future is not mine to know.
And as ‘twas said by God’s own Son,
“Lord, not my will, but Thine be done.”
Ominous Cotton
by Ray Ball

cotton
once soothing
now ominous
a white sheet
500-thread
count them
breathe in
and out
waiting, hoping
to smell
fabric softener
instead
of the tangy
iron
of blood
Talismans
by Ray Ball

vials
on the dresser
poison or perfume

woman
in the mirror
which do you choose
as your anointing oil

lock of hair
in amber
clippings
in a velvet bag

harlot or witch
why choose
when the alchemist
need not pick
between silver and gold
by Seigar
The Keyhole
by Maureen Daniels

You tell me
there is no door to open
onto the lawn of your love
as you croquet beside me,

but I am certain you would change your mind
if only you would open that Bible of Dreams.

Sun-mugged shadows
remember a path to the bedroom
where you once took a match
to your own blond empire.

Your hands, delicious, scattering ballast.

If you will not come to me now,
come to me in a fever,
so that I can drink from that
famous potion and Alice my way back
to your counterfeit garden.
Scorpio
by Maureen Daniels

The features of your face are everywhere, branded onto the wall of my mind. You with full, silent lips and that gorgeous hair that you keep roped in a twist out of view,
as long as a scorpion’s fiery tail. I have watched your venomous barb sting the syllables of my finery, your words half inside me like a sharp sword aflame I want to swallow. Across the continent, I still can’t escape you, even on this granite island embossed by the multitudes of women who flew into and out of my arms, my desire doomed to submit to your fierce fire.
he loved her, he said
‘because of your hands’
he was so used
to slipping delicate,
fragile fingers
mirrors of his own upbringing

but these hands
strong and calloused
stained with paltry smiles
and unrelenting begging
palms stung from
years of hardship

the shoe fit,
the gloves did not
nail beds soiled in agony
bleeding cuticles
shallow waters
of love not granted

he loved her, he said
‘because of your hands,
rough against mine
made of life
gripped in grit
i long to know’
Ghosts
by Keshia McClantoc

sometimes she convinced herself
that slated sludge between the stones
whispered to her

after eighteen years in a tower
you can convince yourself of anything
of spirits that dance between your toes
crawl like vines under satin sheets
breaking into your veins
drinking on the water of your spirit

when the young prince came calling
she couldn't bring herself to answer
convinced he was there only to haunt her
Permission to Kill
by Crzthlv E. Bisa

The atmosphere levies the scene
Permeating remorse, to a movie akin.
Dickinson's bygone air, “Afterwards – a day!”
A superfluous blank knocks great walls,
 Fuels the thirst to celebrate a wake
 Too soon from this warrant –
 Death marries life today.

Leather was found in thin air,
When merchants barter gold for a bun.
Way back home,
Thorns prickle from a quicksand, and the moon gazed –
When it goes, it goes: when it grows, it grows.
Permission is for a kernel's rein, a creed.

So be it, a shoal's criminal.
Henceforth, bequested with
A license,
Crime will set you free.
Hover

by David Rodriguez
Marking the Witch
by Stephanie V. Sears

Up high on the wind blown ledge
foliage hisses and the beast appraises.

The common eye looks up
to the almighty sky for relief

but she will lift her blue sulphur gaze
to the edge of blasphemy, there,

like a crooked corner window
it grins coy and lawless

a crouched imp with spiked wings
wretched in baleful stillness

given the slightest breath
and movement by spinning crows.

The least of her confusions
lends him seduction.

He wants her milk skin sleep
to immure her in his will

of the luscious dark hour,
of night's blackest fur

in the hidden coves of sin
a jet stone in a sea of tar.

And when the improbable
no longer bides its time

she calls him from his perch
to carry her off to the far.
Merlin’s Spell
by Stephanie V. Sears

He grew out of the pale arms of a winter forest
proclaimed solitary by a lava bird
burned into the snow, crystal voice
shattering on the ice wing of darkness.

Brother to a young stream running ferruginous
red between the wild faces of flowers
where something begs to stop and love.

Heir to May’s cupid gnats and effervescent
mustelids rank with musk and leafage,
to their quicksilver smarts.

From lowered eyelids he staged
hot afternoons of heavy greens,
bundled yellow rugs that summer
rolls up to make way for sleep or battle.

He recited devices
of illusion and strategy.
He expanded beyond himself
beating the future to its present.

His prodigious force cradled
in a great tree kept him
whole but mad with loneliness.
The weight of fate sat on his chest
like a mountain
rooting him to the earth
where men scavenge their hope.

Then in evening’s grief she appeared
wearing for him the four seasons
of the vaulted forest
now a nuptial room,
for the smelting of their flesh,
the bitter uniqueness banished.
The Last Morning
by Stephanie V. Sears

Nearly all is still offered him by a vigilant kindness. To watch him pass, a bald tree patched with moss jumped over the brick wall behind which dozes an orchard. A bird roused by dawn melts the night frost. A moment hovers in place, sovereign, articulates memories from the headlines of his past. Boldly, fresh air holds out a hand to him to run for it. Even the billowing grey sky shapes a talisman and his eyes gleam back at the forest’s appeal. Invisible peripheries hint to escape and beauty. The man prays for the jingle of a bit in the eager mouth of a horse and the rivered neck of equine strength.

No one knows anymore how to love his flesh poised on the edge of abstraction. He is the bottom of the well, already his reflection blurred by a dripping toll. Darkness clangs shut, silence knots with steel. Horror is a solo performance. He parts from his distant scream. The smoking pyre has nothing to show for it.
“Goats?”

“Yeah,” Chris replied. “They brought in goats to eat the weeds and overgrowth.”

“Huh,” I said. “Did a pretty good job.”

“Yeah,” Chris said again. He was dressed like a giant banana. Gravel crunched underfoot as we left the parking lot.

The blast furnaces rose up in front of us, the day’s dying light glinting red off their rusted domes. Once part of the greater city steel works, the location had been abandoned for decades. Hints of recent redevelopment efforts could be seen; new fencing, fresh paint on the outer buildings, and several art installations welded from scrap metal collected onsite.

A historical landmark plaque marked the entrance. We handed our tickets to a volunteer in a vampire cape. “Thanks for attending our Halloween fundraiser,” he said. “Right through there.”

Strings of lights zigzagged over the open area outside the pump house. A large crowd was already gathered, socializing near a makeshift bar.

I hesitated, anxiety tightening my throat. “Come on,” Chris encouraged, pushing me forward.

“Chris!” a familiar voice called. Mandy ran up to greet us, hair flashing shades of bonfire embers. She gave Chris a loud, smacking kiss and adjusted her witch’s hat.

She turned to me. “Jon, I’m so glad you came!”


Mandy laughed. “Thanks, but yours is the best I’ve seen so far.”

I stepped back and opened my jacket, revealing smudged coveralls underneath. “Found it in my dad’s attic. We think it was my grandfather’s.”

“Oh, it’s fantastic!” she exclaimed. “Does the headlamp work?”
“Didn’t test it out.” I tapped the carbide lamp on the miner’s hat I wore.

“That’s okay.” She lifted her camera. “Mind if I take a few shots? I’d like to add the photos from tonight to an exhibit in our museum.”

I posed awkwardly while she adjusted the camera’s settings and clicked away.

“Mandy, why don’t you show me around,” Chris interjected, “while Jon grabs a drink?”

Chris earned my appreciative look as he guided Mandy away.

I was next in line at the bar when a hand gripped my shoulder. Turning, I met the hopeful face of a girl my age. As she took in my features, her own shattered with disappointment.

“I’m sorry,” she told me. “I thought you were someone else.”

Her beauty momentarily diminished my ability to speak. I stared into her gray eyes, wide set on a pale face surrounded by dark curls. The collar of her lace dress, like something out of the late 19th century, clasped high around the neck and transitioned into intricate beading. The design on the bodice was fashioned in the shape of a large butterfly.

“That’s okay,” I replied. “Can I get you a drink?”

“Oh, no thank you.” Her gray eyes clouded with concern. “I'm waiting for someone.”

The bartender handed me a beer. I took a large swallow from the plastic cup.

“I can wait with you, if you want,” I said. My usual shyness was offset by smitten interest. “I’m Jon, what’s your name?”

“Celia,” she said, offering a petite hand.

The DJ’s mic crackled to life. “How’s everyone doing tonight?” he asked. The crowd shouted heartily in response. The Monster Mash poured through speakers, reverberating through the once abandoned blast furnaces.

Celia tensed at my side.

“Do you want to go somewhere more quiet?” I asked.
“I know a place,” she said. “Follow me.”

The girl in the lace dress led me through a maze of pipes and twisted metal. We emerged behind the towering furnaces, near railroad tracks. The music and noise of the crowd sounded far away, but the darkness here deepened, possessing a sound of its own.

“Where to now?” I asked.

Celia pointed up.

We climbed the elevated railway onto the gantry crane, with only the October stars to light our way. Once on top, we sat down, swinging our legs over the side. The platform groaned, but any vertigo I felt was diminished by Celia’s presence.

“How did you know about this spot?” I asked.

“My Father works here,” she said.

“Oh, for the heritage society? Do you know Mandy Cooper?”

“No.” She studied the night sky. “That name is not familiar.”

We sat in silence, suspended above the furnaces. Scanning the decaying metal skyline, I admitted a secret to Celia.

“Sometimes I don’t feel like I belong anywhere.”

Celia looked at me, startled. “I feel that way, also.”

I smiled.

“I’m happy you brought me here. Should we go back down? Aren’t you waiting for someone?”

“I don’t think he’s coming.” She watched her feet swing.

“Jon!” Chris shouted, interrupting our conversation. “Is that you up here?”

“Yes,” I called down.

“Jon, you’re not supposed to be up there. It’s not safe!” Mandy yelled.
“Okay, we’re coming down,” I called.

“Those are my friends. Let’s go.”

Carefully, we descended the metal ladder. Chris and Mandy looked relieved once I was back on the ground.

“Who was up there with you?” Mandy asked. “You said, ‘We’re coming down.’”

“This is Celia,” I started. When I turned to introduce her, she wasn’t there. “That’s strange,” I said. “She’s gone.”

“What did she look like?” Chris asked.

I described Celia, and at the mention of the butterfly on her dress, Mandy grabbed my wrist. Without a word, she pulled me into one of the outer buildings and flicked on a light.

“Is this her?” she asked, pointing to a tintype photograph in a glass case.

Even in black and silver tones, it was unmistakable. The same wide set eyes, dark curls, and lace dress.

A small placard under the photo read:

_Celia Wilson, circa 1898. Oldest daughter of blast furnace worker Ernest Wilson. Threw herself from the top of the gantry crane following the death of her fiancé, Robert Brown, in the Scofield Mine accident of 1900._
by Mark Burrow
Squalling
by Ayaz Daryl Nielsen
/nsqualling from a shelf in
the library’s fantasy section,
a miniature ogre frantically
seeks the story he was
pulled from while trying
to bite a reader’s finger,
a reader who happens to be
the local sorcerer (that’s me)
with my own agenda for
small, misplaced monsters
Us
by Ayaz Daryl Nielsen

Vultures croaking from above us
‘come on, come on, it’s time to eat,
we’ve plenty of rotting meat!’

awakened, my whole family,
stretching our pinions wide

rising from the graveyard,
yelping, away we all glide.
Eve
by Ayaz Daryl Nielsen

First among
time and history,
yet banished to
terrestrial and
mental fogginess
A gentle shield of
too-often missing
warmth and protection,
sought in early
morning dreams
No matter how far
our wandering
footsteps, one who
always awaits us,
Beloved Eve.
Grandma
by Ayaz Daryl Nielsen

grandma and I follow
wolf prints around the barn. . .
walking in circles
by Mark Burrow
Summertime Sadness Séance
by Charika Swanepoel

I
Grave Digger

Slinging old bones into candle lit air,
I’m pleading with that goddamned deck to speak,
calling up ghosts of love no longer there.

But the chalk on the carpet’s a losing streak,
it’s worse than gambling, communing with the dead,
worse than any debaucher’s guilt this holy doublespeak.

A sunlit séance might summon you from the seabed,
maybe the heat will conjure what I cannot,
maybe the summer can hear what you left unsaid.

II
Dead Ringer

It must be hard, walking in a dead man’s skin,
when you’re a dead ringer, an impeccable counterfeit.
I took you for your brother, you conjured twin.

You have his face, his heart, but not that twisted bit,
that stupendous, most enigmatic thing,
that pale blue pharaoh eyed light of it.

You never know what steps into your ancient ring
as the summer swells with the earth’s secrets.
I was only thinking of the smell of Jasmine in Spring.
At the End
by Charika Swanepoel

At the end of silence is an open mouth,
at the break of dawn, a ray of pitch black night
and at the start, the loving seed of nothingness.
How do we forgive ourselves for all this?
For Dear Life

by *Ayşe Tekşen

She came to me
in a dream.
Hair aglow in red
painting my soul
with her gentle caresses.
She touched my cheek,
said she wanted me
to hold her hands
in daring throwbacks
of wisdom.
This is a small world,
and we will meet one day
I said to her.
She only smiled.
She kissed me wet
and left me there.
Then I woke up
in sweat
under quilts,
despising the burden,
the heaviness
on my body.
I then knew
I wanted her,
only her.
Life.
Angels
by *Ayşe Tekşen

When I ponder angels,
I don’t fancy
beautiful women
with golden wings
and crowns of feather.
I imagine gods instead,
muscular, strong,
and if necessary
armored in black
and silver.
If I must think
of wings,
then wings of black ravens,
only in bigger measures.
They might look scary,
yet they are also caring,
as it is expected
from angels.
Don’t be surprised
if I say
I don’t call them angels.
I call them
my friends, my family,
my many husbands,
and many lovers.
Dark, beautiful, holy
they are.
They are mine,
and I am grateful.
Space
by *Ayşe Tekşen

Space might be no space at all, but a venue of mirrors only. We are being reflected back to ourselves, seeing ourselves— we have to. We halt, and look at our own reflections, the things we are afraid to see voluntarily. Those who know what space connotes say it is something more and bigger than we would and could know. Space may not be just space at all, but something else—a road, a map, a way, a bridge to be polished and cherished in our own chests.
by Elizabeth Moura
Walking on the Lake Michigan shoreline on a Sunday morning
I met a young man dressed in black
with a pale white face like a mask
a mime either pretending sorrow, or unable to pretend joy anymore.
He looked away, shrugged to the side, cast his glance downward.
Taking a piece of driftwood, he scratched words into the sand
And disappeared where forest met beach.
Approaching his words, I read
“No one cares about me” and
“I’m all alone.”
As the waves at my feet licked his words away
And swallowed them into quiet eternity,
I desperately scanned the edge of forest
But I was alone
and powerless to salvage his shipwrecked words.
Falling Under
by Margaret King

Sometimes it's too cold
I drive to end of the road
And I walk to the end of the land
Where the land falls under the water

Brilliant blue ice and eyes
when he appears and I ask,
"What brings you here?"

Aren't you afraid that you've run into a strange man out here?
I never fear my own people.
Are you the queen of this land, then?
Why, yes. And as queen, I know what you're seeking. I can take you to it. As long as you agree to do no harm.

Come on, let me show you these parts.
So I showed him where the deer sleep and the birds wait out the winter
I showed him how they survived and when they would go to the stream
Until he'd forgotten what he was looking for, and his intentions

As his lips turned blue to match the ice and eyes
He realized he felt the fear inside no longer
The land and water would keep him
We had time to walk in the land that falls under the water
And I showed him those parts too
And there I left him, knowing he could find his way home.
Dragons Instead
by Margaret King

I returned to that spot again and again
Thousands of times, I came
Day after day, year after year,
I climbed an arduous hill

There you were, atop
Lofty heights, wearing a crown
Stretched in repose but not at ease,
And always, you were gazing off
Into the distance, far away from me

But you listened.
Patiently, or at least most of the time
And so, like an acolyte,
I agreed to your terms
And I mistook talking for
Discussion
Engagement as mutual

But I just helped you pass the time,
Didn’t I?
As you looked towards a horizon
You’d never meet.

I tried harder, ever harder.
I collected stones on the beach for you,
Like a crow gathers shiny gifts
For its chosen one
I scourged earth and sky
Ocean and cosmos
For treasure, small gems
To drop into your hand and
Wake you from your joyless reverie
But you'd shake your head sadly
And say they failed to move you

And so, one day, I shouted
I screamed and cried
And I begged you to acknowledge me
And still, you never looked at me at all.

But still, I visited you
I came to keep you company,
An altruistic act becomes hubris only
When mocked by cynicism.
And so you finally turned to me, and looking past me, you said to some imaginary person,
“There is no magic here. There is no magic in all the world.”

And eventually,
I decided
It was time to search for dragons
But unlike you,
I would not slay them
I’d soar on their backs
I’d befriend them
Live amongst them

For real dragons are less monstrous
Than the monsters who walk about
In the skins of handsome men
And destroy dreams and innocence alike.
Rue, Herb of Grace
by Margaret King

I live underwater, it's where I meet you
I dive down, waiting for you
Amongst the weeds and sand and gray fish
That swim by
My hair floats around my face, my eyes open
But they never see you.

I say you drown me, but that's not true
I voluntarily drown myself
Only sporadically
Coming up for air.

My life--is frozen time--
Above water, time continues
Here, I am the pendulum
Swinging back and forth with the waves
But never going anywhere.

Here forever, until I choose
To get up out of this abyss
And walk.
But that would mean--
Moving ahead with the world.
by Seigar
"To the One, Who Completes Me."
by Isabella Piper

There comes a day where you decide to slowly move on. You let the people of the past whom you've loved, reconcile in your dreams. They slowly disappear from your life, leaving you with not a single soul but yourself. You soon venture out into the universe, in search of somebody that makes your life light up the way you have never discovered before.

This timeline for me, was months upon months. I was in desperate of somebody to pay me the love I thought I deserved. Of course as stubborn as I come off, that person never seemed to appear in the moments that I was most desperate. I was in need of somebody that would explore my soul, not my body. I wanted to be loved. Truly, loved. I wanted somebody that found the night sky in my eyes. Somebody that would take their personal time, to figure out my quirks that make up me as a person. Somebody to discuss my abstract thoughts as I lay awake at 3 a.m. I craved somebody that was adventurous, and would coincide with me across the world if I had asked.

The higher your standards become the harder it becomes to fill the deep void in your heart as the thought of it still lingers. The longer I waited, the longer I realized the person that I was seeking out to find; would take time and patience.

The person whom you are seeking- will come with time. I know, because I found that person.

You will find the one who will stay up until 3 a.m, just to make sure your smile is not lost within your dismantled thoughts and wonders. You will start to realize that upon the arrival of your significant other- was the time that you took to fix your bullet wounds that were shot into your heart. This is not done by any lover, but within your own mind, body, and soul.

This person wont have to fix you, but instead complement your beautiful mess of a human being. They will accept your flaws and love you for the personality and exterior traits that make up the most gorgeous version of yourself. You will start to see that all of the built up mistakes of your past that lead you straight down your path, happened in such delicate way so they could find you at the right time. They would drive hours to just bring that sparkle into your eyes that could light up the night sky.

They will learn that you only drink your coffee with two creamers and two sugars. They will adorably sing all of your cherished favorite songs. They will take all of your flaws into consideration. Trust me, they will put them all aside just to be with you. Suddenly, all of the movies you spent watching alone, will be joined with somebody who cares deeply about the things that makes you happy. They will cherish everything that makes you the person you are.

This person only comes once in a lifetime. Don't lose them. You see, many people face the consequence of starting over with love many different times in their life. But, this one wont be like any other person you
have ever encountered. They will grace your life with such a presence that it will send the flames in your heart racing; as they fix up all the bullet wounds that destroyed your former self.

That's what he did for me.

The storms that surpassed me in memories, were now beautiful turquoise sky's. I didn't hurt anymore. The roses that embellished my heart and soul, dead and diminished; were now the most gorgeous garden I have ever seen. Bright and alluring, surrounding every aspect in my life. He gave me life again. A life that I want to live forever.

Now, I want to cherish every passing second with him. Even though we live completely separate lives, with different realities, we have found time to collide within our passing hours. I find myself getting lost every time we are together. Lost in the thought of what we are. Lost in the thought, of what we will be.

Will we always be together?

Only time can tell. But, I wouldn't want it to be any other way then discovering life with him.

You see, I have never enjoyed somebody's company so much. We talk as if we haven't run out of subjects. He makes me laugh. He makes me forget about every wondering thought that keeps me up in the dark hours of the night. We now share coffee every Saturday and ponder about deep thoughts: our thoughts on politics, religion, and much more. The more I picked apart his brain, the more I realized he was one of a kind.

Even the most innocent activities, have a special importance to them. Our souls matched up as if they were made to collide at the exact moment that did. The moment we both needed each other the most. I never want this feeling to end. A void in my heart is filled with such love, a love that is real. I will continue to get lost in the galaxies I found in his eyes.

I will, because he completes me.
Horror Writer to Wife
by John Grey

I spend my days
turning brainwaves into monsters
like some Frankenstein
of neural oscillations.
And you wonder where
the romance has gone.

You come home
when I’m in the middle
of a demon infestation
and an outbreak of the plague
and you expect me to
take you in my arms,
splatter kisses up and down your face.

Don’t you get it.
In my head,
beasts prey,
ghouls and ghosts terrify,
no one and no place is safe.
Besides, we’ve been married thirty years.

You’d better get used to it.
These days,
it’s the dead that rise from the grave,
not the living.
The Lobby of the Silver Creek Hotel
by John Grey

In the shadow of a sign
that advertises “clean rooms available”,
a man asks the desk clerk,
“Do you have anything unclean available?”
Spirit Witch
by Leah Baker

It was a new piece I
shaped, colored in
brilliant patience
and sounds,
one step yes one step yes one more step yes

I led the first journey,
walked as a female stag
through the green marsh,
saw an ocean railing purple
in your eyes

became at night
a spirit witch
knowing, kneeling before
the flames I struck
from the pages of
everything I learned before:
singing those low,
bright tones,
chanting the sparks
to warm your wooden
frame
before I read to you
the story of a boy grown wild
and fell asleep crying
my womanhood
into your bones

I washed in the stream,
laid in the morning naked on the moss of a fallen tree,
brushed myself with
lichen and combs of
parted branches,
to armor myself
from telling you so soon
my love

This, I tore down
with my fear,
the recognition of my own
inadequacy,
wrecked with my knowledge of how long
it would take to become

Something.
Gleaming Ones
by Leah Baker

The steep hard plummet of
a mountain descent
puts fear in me, makes me
slam on the brakes
but not this, somehow not this.

I saunter
toward the inked
and glittering lake,
glide across, bold nightswan
ballerina birdstepping

jump
without first gulping

swim at exactly the depth I aim to,
let my toes only barely sweep
the mud of the murky floor

impassive, sober, sleek otter
turning herself slinkily
in lustrous black water

without emerging wetcat drenched
and panting
but poised, steady, darkly poised
with a crown of hard crystals
smoky quartz
baptized in her own boldness

I do it
to unlearn the myth
that if I walk through fire
I will be irreparably burned,

that if I look darkness
in its eye,
its gleaming teeth will
shut themselves on me
Bowsprit
by Leah Baker

Violated only by my own lack of
courage, my hesitation
to melt the corners of my separation,
I stand rocky and unmoving,
skin crusted with the rough salt of old seawater
blocked from its cursive flow.
My mouth becomes rusty,
a sailor's, the gristle of my arms
prompting him
to thump his fist into mine and say,
"Hey, thanks, man."
Man.
I don't intend to be as
slippery and scintillating as a mermaid,
as soft as the underbelly of
the spineless octopus,
but I'd like to shear at least
the most calloused barnacles
from the base of my strong vessel, glide through green waters
with grace and femininity,
the stately figurehead carved from
sensuously hard wood
at the prow of my ship,
not menacing, but holy,
balanced on the bowsprit to guard and guide,
having seen the extraordinary lengths of many channels
and hovered fearlessly over the depths of the ocean's trenches
No Escape
by Marc Carver

I stared into the Pissaro painting
as I sat there
I thought if I looked for long enough
I might be able to walk past those pink flowers
touch my hand lightly along their tips
walk past the people on the path
then walk around the corner
and disappear into those woods.

After awhile I could even smell the flowers
as people kept walking in front of the painting
and taking pictures of it.

But I knew the painting would not let me in
it could not be that easy
there was no escape.
EVERYTHING

Welcome
to the cleverest idiot who ever lived
I am clever
because I know what you want
and an idiot because I give it to you
so come on
tell me what you want
and I will tell you
what you really want
altogether
everything
The Hansel and Gretel Poems
by Carol Barrett

i. Crow

What writer would invent so cunning
a child, he drops his precious crumbs,
then foil the plot you thought to trust
with pointed beak? Why my crusty
self appears: the ultimate existential
probe. Fate, bad luck, or natural potential
of things, they disagree. Truth is, I hop
in and out of classics, savior, fop.
Take your pick. But count on this:
In every tale well done, the unexpected
flutters up. Hate me if you will,
but know I’m here, and hungry still.

Let down your guard, and folly cheat –
then face the crudest act: have bird, will eat.

ii. Sugar

Enter through my crystalline door.
My chamber so vast, can slumber restore.
Lollipops spin the light of day.
Gumdrops glint, where snickerdoodles lay.
One taste, a child is hooked for sure,
especially so when two are lured.
Temptation multiplies when we can share
the blame for pleasures one wouldn’t dare.
Some things are not as taste implies.
What’s sweet may cover bitter lies.
I run pure as beet or cane
but one who bakes may plot to claim
a child’s innocence naturally born
and give his father cause to mourn.

iii. Stepmother
Hunger breeds hunger, cravings of a darker sort. I became someone else, sugared the roof, gave up suppers to sauerkraut from last summer’s towhead cabbage yield. They didn’t miss me, amber evenings as I stole away to ready the pastoral scene. It was a ruse. What I wanted: to lift her petticoats, pet her ripening plum. Ah! Restore her ruffles, eyelet peekholes. And Hansel, my design: unbutton those lederhausen, leather smooth as kid gloves, flick his baby spout in my palms.

It was worth the fire.
I went out satisfied.

iv. Gretel

I was the fortunate one, free to act, vulnerability tempered, not trapped. Rage heated up like iron and drove the body to the flame. Done. I tend father’s unnatural grief at how she abandoned us -- fiery secret honeycombed in silence shared with Hansel. He could not move, stares out the gray cottage imagining a fist of leaves, a trap of twigs, and still he cannot make the shift. Jump! I say as he walks the porch at dawn.

I want some spark to catch his breath, send him arcing over that smoking death.

v. Hansel

Caught. A cage that rocked but would not break. Well stocked with angel food. No room to unbend knees, assume a crouch beyond tucked hen.
Our Gretel’s strong as then
while father sighs and I
no sooner ask the why
of things, than he falls still.
Oh, for an ounce of will
to tell him he misjudged
his queen of marbled fudge!
Sweet sickness, no coffee black
can trump it, bring us back.

vi. Woodcutter

My only son afraid of the long
dark, I toil like Job. Two wives gone.
Dear Gretel looking out for all
of us, her skin like ash, her hands
rough as muslin. So many months
I cut the oak and yet the stack’s undone,
cord short by daybreak. I garnered less
the more I felled, sun blaring its blessing
to chide me. I wipe the brow of an old man
blinded by some licorice twist of fate
I cannot fathom. Children, come sit with me
tonight as embers stir, wait for timber’s legacy
to offer some measure of harmony,
love pitch its fragrance about us three.

vii. Jewels

We are the hallelujah chorus closing
the story, the bagged ending born of hope.
The stone recasts the dark. Beware
the facile gem, the glistening fairy
in any tale. The fiery oven
spit us out, from clay to molten
metaphor: wisdom glazed to hone
a forest green, azure mirror of the soul,
that rare rock, courage, crimson
sun setting over smoky air. The witch’s kiln
brewed jeweled gifts at lofty price.
So when sapphire gems in Gretel’s eyes
beget love, then wealth, know the yield was earned,
no secret stash from gingerbread turned.

viii. Duck

I am wind-borne cloud, the back that bends,
that will not break, the snowy wings
that fold themselves beneath
your need. I am the rippling grief,
the pale vision over swaying
pond. Let cinders fall away,
let memory dip as sandaled toes
flutter the wake, feel coolness like home
before the ache. This ride is all you have
between the terror of truth, and life
beyond. Remember this silken passage,
revive the breeze, its easing message.

Return to bathe in this forever place
where past is past, and future’s what you make.
by Virginia Mallon
The television has gone static, but the voices have not. They keep going, speaking the same words over and over, piercing through the silence of the night. The hum of the lampshade, slow tick of the clock on the wall—they were not loud enough to drown the sound of my heartbeat.

Another teenage boy died, according to the prime time news. The boy lived in the squalors of Manila, an out-of-school youth who gathered plastic bottles and sold them to junk shops so he could earn enough money to buy his family dinner.

Every time I try to close my eyes, I see the face of his mother, eyes red and swollen, still grieving her son’s death. She called him Vincent. Vincent was a good kid, she said, almost sounding as if she was convincing the media to bring her son back. He just turned eighteen last month, the eldest of six. Did nothing but work hard to help her feed the rest of his siblings. For someone who did not have much, he had such big dreams. She said he once promised her that he would take the entire family to the States when he’s finally made enough money to afford a getaway overseas.

His body was found in a dump site, his head covered with masking tape, his chest full of stab wounds. On top of his corpse was a piece of cardboard, with a note written with black marker that says: “Pusher ako, ‘wag tularan.” (I am a [drug] pusher. Don’t be like me.)

Vincent’s was the fifth case of vigilante killings in a span of two months. Regardless of whether he was innocent or guilty, he died in the most inhumane way.

The circumstances of his death were same as of the others, much like what can be expected from the murders of a serial killer. But serial killers are supposed to be hunted just as much as they hunt, not applauded and praised.

I lie on my bed, eyes fixed at the ceiling, feeling fear crawl up to my body, trying to focus on the the hum of the lampshade, the tick of the clock on the wall, anything to distract me from the sound of my heart beating faster now, the voices getting louder. I wonder how many more young boys will die in the hands of people who think they are helping this nation by fighting fire with fire.
Ancestors
by Laura Potts

From the sour breath of quarry towns we came,
to our scars the firelight a mother. In another land
our broken chord stretched far on the moors,
the flint of our tongue, the tinder, the coal,
hung in their black sacks our lungs sang
to the dead dark night of the child, too young
in her grave. We wore the eyes of the damned.

Our biblical chant we took to the wars,
candled the lanterns to hopes of our home,
when Madame in her manor, high summer,
forgot. In our hallway of night, watched lights
in distant houses dream up their happinesses-
all the bells of Notre Dame - and mourned
in our trench, in our filth, in our lice,
for our spouses - their corpses - when our dead
stank the ground. Hometown was lonely that year.
Here, us, we never danced down promenades,
our arms like silver chimes. Our drip was slow
through time, gritted and gnarled, no child
never aspired to living to three. We got a VC.
And still died on the slump of our knees.

And in the candle of our last hour’s sleep, across
the moors and the mines, sit the ghosts
of our shanties long-crippled in time. The moon,
with his holy eye of light, still sits on his swing,
smoking his pipe. Here, at night, tell them we saw
the chasms and grey seascapes of fate, the cracks
in mankind, poverty’s shadows tall on the walls,
our dark graveside flowers all dead on the day
when our bones got up and, slowly, walked away.

Don’t say that our stars are forgotten today.

Don’t say I am nothing at all.
Me and Mrs. Fisher
by Laura Potts

The world lit its lights
and hung pearls in our eyes
like trembling moons
under darkling stars.

The night
saw the city asleep
and aslope
as the land fell away to the left and the right,
the sight of the globes in your eyes
nightjars in pale pools of light.

I remember you
walking the walls
the moon in your stride
the dizzy tomorrows
full in your smile,

a starlight for two,
the glowing darkness
and you,
all the days of my life.

After that,
the hills candled bright.

Fifty years away
and we are still in this place,
where a distant future, beautiful,
chimes.
The Past Slid Back
by Laura Potts

and our childhood stands
in a long-worn place:

the plush of our hands
by a stammering fire,
the sputtering tongue
of a candle then higher
than dark, brotherly hills.

Still, I see the films of our eyes
now flicking with years:
warming our bones
on the doorstep of home;
the ropeswing,
the late light,
the searchlight
which groaned
in that long afternoon
when you didn't come home.

Alone,
the cracks in this ground
still hold twelve-year old feet.
The voice of the child that you were
curling the ceiling to meet
with the ghost of your long-lost
past.

And last,
I think of the distant
chime of your voice
that split
at my skull;

my dull dumb thumb
on the telephone which rung
out the world
for your words,
screaming:

wherever you were
you were gone.
The Night That Robin Died
by Laura Potts

I remember it best as burnt lips and black
that night when the mouth of the house spat
you and your terminal news out to the stars
and back. Before the last evening hours
had passed, flame yielding life to the ember,
the crack of your ash called a dusky dark September
too soon to its spring. It was the summer to never

remember. Robin, that radio screamed all the night
like your ambulance light living on and tight
was my wren-clenched flesh, was the glut
in my throat for you, lost-light bird never cut
from the cage. The age that was yours was the loudest
and long, but that old August day blew its dust
far on past those bones growing epigraph-grey:
a memento that death is just one storm away.

These days, one more last-light life blown out,
the heart in my body beats that much more loud.
Oh gallows-bound you with the ballroom grin,
for each crowd at your feet another rose out in
a mutual call, a language too dark for the masses
at all. That fall from the world, as springtime passes
its breath to the last, was the black blacker blackest

that my past has carried. After that passage, dusk folded
and wearied away, I stood at the gate summer-coated
to wait, watching your far-flaming ghostlight fade.
You never doubted the fire that flared, that made
you a light living on in that night. While bone-body dies
and we look to the stars bygone-bright in your eyes,
know only your laughter lit hearthstone and home.
Know yours is the name never lost from the stone.
The Night Country
by Laura Potts

‘The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns’ – Hamlet.

Old winter hour, gloam and the glow
of this last evening fire, after the time
of the cold and away from my last-gasp
hourglass and this passing grey; after
the far-cast dust of my day when the half-light fields breathe dark in the dusk,

from this terminal night and the drums
of Carthage rung in those my passing bells;
out in the darkland dells where the dead
lambs bleat, from the moorside wells
where the madmen sleep and the sun
does not tear into rooms anymore;
where no morning comes, and the lungs

of the hills rise black in the smoke. Oh,
glow of the land on the night’s far-side
where the lantern-light and the lightning
spine are the time of childhood alone,
yesterday’s echo in my broken-bell
throat, and the stardrop ponds where I
rocked and rolled and used to laugh
show a burnt and black-lipped Medusa.

Remember this last: that after the snap
of my hospital heart, that after the stars
in my eyes dim dark and the nightjars long
in my absence cry, I’ll take all of the feet
of the fields in my stride. Up and out
of the night country, with all of the valley’s
white rage at my back, I’ll tear up the forest,
the fire, the fog-fallen towers and flute-stem
flowers which rise through the cracks of these
churchyard bones. This home slows to black,

and I won’t look back.
Into the Void

by Jennifer Del Castillo
"Thank you, sweetheart. You’ve been such a big help." Dana’s grandmother handed her the last dish to dry and put away.

“It’s no problem, Meemaw. I’m so happy to be spending the holidays with you and Pawpop." Dana stood on tiptoe to place the plate in the cabinet. Meemaw smiled at her warmly.

“We’ve loved having you here. It’s been so wonderful to have family for Christmas. Christmas has been so quiet since we lost your mother.” Dana glanced at the picture of her mother hanging on the wall. The photograph had been taken over twenty years ago at her mother’s college graduation. Chestnut hair spilled in large curls beneath her cap. Her green eyes sparkled as she laughed at a long past moment of joy. Meemaw followed her gaze and sighed. “She was such a happy girl. Brought joy to everyone she met.” She smiled at some far away memory before turning back to Dana. “You look so much like her. And she loved you. Lord above, she loved you more then the moon.” She dabbed lightly at her eye before turning suddenly. “Tea, dear?”

“Yes, please,” Dana said, slightly startled. They rarely talked about Meemaw’s late daughter. Pawpop seemed completely unable to talk about her at all.

“Have you decided what cake you want?” Meemaw asked as she pulled out tea bags from the tin. Dana handed her three mugs.

“Red velvet!”

“What a surprise!” Meemaw laughed. Red velvet was Dana’s favorite. “Are you headed upstairs?”

“Yes, Meemaw. Alice should be calling soon.” Dana poured sugar and milk into her tea.

“Well then bring this in to your Pawpop on your way up.” Meemaw kissed Dana on her forehead and handed her the second mug. Dana walked out of the kitchen and into the sitting room where her grandfather sat reading his newspaper.

“Thank you, darlin.’” Pawpop carefully folded his paper into his lap and took his mug from Dana. His unruly eyebrows were the same white as his hair. Dana bent down to let him kiss her cheek. She wished him a goodnight before heading up the stairs into the guest room she had been occupying. She had just gotten herself properly wrapped in a warm blanket and taken a sip of her warm tea when her laptop chirped cheerfully. When she clicked, the grinning face of her best friend filled her screen.

“Happy birthday!” Alice sang. Dana smiled at her friend.
“It’s not my birthday until tomorrow. You know that.” Alice flipped a strand of wet hair out of her face.

“Yeah, but as your best friend I have the right to wish you a happy birthday before anyone else,” she sniffed. “If you have to have to turn 22 over break when you know I’m on vacation, then I have to call early.” She pitched her voice up into an exaggerated whine that made Dana giggle.

“Speaking of, how is Florida?”

“Warm!” Alice’s eyes flashed over Dana’s comfy nest. “Mom and Ma are having a nice romantic dinner while the rugrats are at the babysitter club. I just got back from the pool.”

“The pool! This late at night?”

“You didn’t see the life guard on duty.” The two girls broke into laughter.

“I wonder how Matt would feel about that.” Alice rolled her eyes.

“My darling boyfriend has nothing to worry about. I’m just window-shopping. Is he coming over tomorrow?”

“I think so. He was talking about heading over after he gets off work.” Alice fanned herself with her hand.

“Oh, he is too handsome in his uniform.” She picked up a towel from her bed and started drying her hair. “I’m so proud of him. He’s such a good cop.” Dana smiled.

“That he is. I think he’s taking me out for coffee after dinner.”

“Ah, family dinner. It’s kind of weird that your dad isn’t there this year.”

“Yeah. He still has an entire week of meetings before he gets home. He did promise to bring me back something from Germany, so that’s cool.”

“Have you figured out what you want me to bring you back for your birthday present?” Dana cast her eyes around her room in thought.

“How about that life guard?” Alice exploded into laughter.

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Dana pulled on her favorite sweater. It was so comfortable and her favorite shade of royal blue. She flopped back onto her bed and pick up her phone. It only had 8% battery.

“Shoot!” she cried. The phone charger dangled where it had come unplugged from the plug.

“Are you alright, dear?” Pawpop’s voice rang through the door.

“Yes,” Dana called back. “It’s nothing.”

“All righty then. Meemaw sent me up to tell you to put on some sneakers. She’s wanting to show you something up in the attic.” Dana blinked, surprised. Meemaw never let her go up into the attic before. She shook her head and pulled a pair of high tops from under her bed. This must be some sort of birthday surprise. She slid her dying phone into her pocket, reminding herself to charge it when she came back downstairs.

Meemaw was waiting for her at the base of the attic stairs.

“Good morning sweetie! Happy birthday.” Her round face crinkled warmly. Dana wrapped her arms around her in a hug.

“Good morning. What are we doing in the attic?” Meemaw’s eyes sparkled.

“I’ve got a special surprise up there for you.” Her smile widened. “A special birthday surprise.” Dana felt a thrill of excitement. She followed her grandmother down the hallway to the door leading to the attic. Meemaw slide the bolt lock and opened the door. Something about the dusty, narrow staircase seemed strange to Dana, like it didn’t belong in her grandparents’ neat house. There was another door at the top of the stairs. Meemaw unlocked this door too and stepped into the attic.

The attic consisted of a single, large room. Dusty boxes were piled nearly to the bare beams. Meemaw turned around; she was still smiling, but there was some sadness in her eyes.

“I’ve kept some of my greatest treasures up here for decades. When your mother was a girl, I gave her this trunk to keep her own treasures.” Dana turned to see a large wood trunk sitting in the middle of the floor. “After she went missing, we moved it up her. She would want you to have it, and I think the time is finally right.” Dana could feel the threat of tears. Meemaw pulled a key from her pocket and handed it to her. “Go ahead. Open it.” Dana lent over the trunk and turned the key in the large padlock. She struggled to lift the lid. She tried to imagine what would be in the trunk. Maybe there would be a diary or photo albums, her old letters, maybe even her wedding dress. Dana blow out her breath and finally lifted the lid.

It was empty. Dana stared down into the trunk. This had to be a mistake. Perhaps Meemaw meant a different trunk.
“Meemaw, are you sure this is Mom’s tru…” CRACK!

Dana’s vision went white as the world started to spin. She struggled to regain her senses. Something was very wrong, but Dana couldn’t figure out what that was. If only the ringing in her ears would stop, then maybe she could think. THUNK! Dana tried to lift her hands to her head and hit something hard. When she finally blinked the stars from her vision, they were replaced by complete darkness. Dana could feel her heart skip a beat.

“No,” Dana cried. “No, no, no!” She pushed her hands against the hard surface above her. It didn’t move at all. She was in the trunk. She pushed with all her might against the lid, but it didn’t move at all. Dana started to scream. “Meemaw! Meemaw! Help me, Meemaw!” She started to pound her fists against the lid. “Please! Meemaw! Let me out!” She shrieked as something clunked near her head.

“Be quiet!” Meemaw’s voice was harsh and cruel as she screamed at Dana. “You be quiet or I’ll make you wish you were dead.” Dana clasped her hands over her mouth. She had never heard her grandmother speak like that. She wheezed into her palms, trying not to hyperventilate. “Now,” her grandmother’s voice was softer and muffled, “you stay quiet now. If you keep quiet, this all will be a lot easier for you.” Dana’s ears strained as she listened to steps leading away from her. She jerked as she heard the door slam.

Dana tried to keep her sobs quiet. Her brain couldn’t comprehend what was happening. Was this some sort of joke? She really didn’t think so, but at the same time she couldn’t imagine that her loving Meemaw had just shoved her into a trunk. Her heart pounded hard in her chest. She had to get out of this thing. Her hands scrambled down her body to her pocket. She slid her phone out and pulled it up to her face. Dana had to swallow down the bile that rose up her throat as the dim light slightly illuminated the inside of the trunk. She hadn’t noticed when she had opened the lid, but, now that it was right above her, she could see that there were scratches on the lid. Dana pulled her eyes away from the marks and towards her phone screen. 5% battery left. Her hands shook badly. Fortunately, the number she wanted was right on top of her recently called log. She pressed the phone to her ear as she listened to the phone ring.

‘Please,’ she thought. ‘Pick up!’

“Hey, birthday girl. I’m still at work…”

“Matt!” Dana whispered into her phone. “Help. Please. I need you to help me.”


“Please. I’m in trouble. Meemaw…hurt me… in a trunk…she’s going to…” Dana tried to talk, but her voice cracked and broke.
“Where are you?” Matt’s voice dropped into his cop voice. His tone was calming and demanded respect. “Are you at your grandparents’ house?”

“Yes.” His tone of voice somehow made it easier to talk. “I’m locked in a trunk in the attic.” She could hear Matt calling out her address.

“Okay. We’re coming. Just keep calm. Are you hurt?”

“I don’t know. I think she hit m-my head. I-I’m not sure.” Dana squeezed her eyes shut. She was finding it hard to keep quiet. She swallowed dryly. It felt like her all the moisture had been sucked from her mouth.

“DANA!” She started suddenly at Matt’s sharp cry. “Dana? Can you hear me?”

“Yeah. I can hear you,” she whispered.

“You have to keep talking to me. We’re almost there.” Dana could hear her phone beeping.

“I can’t. My phone’s about to die.” The beeping was getting faster.

“Hold on. We’re coming. Jus…” Matt’s voice cut out as he lost phone turne‌d off, leaving Dana alone in the darkness.

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Dana jerked suddenly as she heard loud footsteps pound towards her. They were coming for her. Her grandparents were coming for her. What were they going to do? Dana’s mind spun, unable to grasp what was happening to her. Maybe this was all a dream or a mistake. But it was all too real. Her head pounded in time with her heartbeat. She could smell something metallic mixed in with the cedar. Everything seemed so far away.

“Dana!” A pair of male voices called her name. She recognized one of them. It was Matt.

“Here!” she screamed, pounding her fists against the heavy lid. “I’m here!” She heard boots hurry across the floor.
“Hold on!” the voices called. She screamed as something cracked loudly near her head, but then the lid flew open. The flashlights blinded her, but she threw her arms up to where Matt should be. She felt herself being lifted out of the trunk.

“Can you walk?” Matt asked her. Dana shook her head. Her legs wobbled beneath her. She sobbed into his shoulder as he lifted off the ground.

“She needs to go to the hospital. That head wound looks bad.” The other cop led them down the stairs. “Bus should be here by now.” Dana was carried out of her house into a sea of police cars. The lights flashed through Dana’s closed eyelids. She felt Matt place her gently on a stretcher. An EMT wrapped a blanket around her. She hadn’t realized she’d been shivering.

“Dana?” Matt was still using his cop voice. Dana opened her eyes. “They’re going to take you to the hospital now. I’m pretty sure you’ve got a concussion.” Dana nodded slowly. She could see more cops pulling up to the house. Some were running inside. Others were searching the around the house. Matt put his hands on her shoulders. “We’re going to search the house.” Matt looked serious. “I know you told me there were places you weren’t allowed in before. Can you tell me again?” Dana nodded slowly and struggled to get her tongue to move.

“T-the attic, I’d never been up there before today, and the basement. Pawpop said there’s asbestos down there.” The small group of officers who had gathered behind Matt nodded and started muttering to each other. Dana turned her head to look at the car a few feet behind them that was pulling away. Her grandparents were in the back. Dana could tell they had been handcuffed. They were looking at her. They both had such looks of utter loathing on their faces. It twisted their features into grotesque shapes, like the gargoyles on a cathedral. Their face twisted more as Dana’s vision swam and her head spun. She could feel herself falling into darkness.

Dana’s heart raced as she opened her eyes. At first she wasn’t sure where she was. Everything was a bright white. But then her vision focused. She was in a hospital bed. She raised the hand that didn’t have an I.V. up to her head. It was bandaged.

“Hey!” A soft voice cried. Matt was sitting by her bed. He must have come straight from work as he was still in uniform. He looked pale and had deep circles under his eyes. “Boy, am I glad to see you.” He smiled. “Do you know what Alice would have done to me if I let something happened to her best friend?” Dana smiled too. Everything felt fuzzy and floaty. “How are you feeling?”

“Thirsty,” she rasped. Her mouth was very dry indeed. “What happened?” Dana’s memories felt like they had been jumbled. Had her grandmother really attacked her? Her stomach sank as she looked at Matt’s face.
“We’re not totally sure yet. Your grandmother admitted to knocking you out and locking you in the trunk, but she won’t tell us why she attacked you.” Dana touched the bandage on her head. “Yeah. The doctor said you had a laceration and concussion. You needed ten stitches.” Dana shivered.

“Dad?”

“I called him. He should be on his flight by now. And Alice is about an hour away. She got on the first flight back after I called her.” Dana sighed. She was happy that Alice was on her way, but something was niggling at the back of her mind. Matt couldn’t quite look her in the eyes.

“What is it?” she asked softly. “What aren’t you telling me?” Matt blew out his breath and scrubbed his face with his hands. Dana could see the stubble growing on his face. How long had he been here? He looked at her and Dana shivered. His eyes looked haunted.

“We went in the basement,” he said. His voice sounded flat.

“There wasn’t any asbestos, was there.” He shook his head. Somehow he looked paler than before.

“Dana…” He hesitated. “Maybe I should go get the doctor first.” Dana shook her head.

“No. I need to know. What the hell is going on Matt!” Matt dropped his face into his hands and then ran his fingers through his hair.

“We found corpses,” he said softly. “Dozens of them. Most of them are skeletons.” He stared at Dana. “They must have been killing for decades.” Dana swallowed hard. “The M.E.’s already identified three women who went missing in the surrounding area.” Dana felt like she was going to be sick. Her grandparents were killers. She knew they were loners and kept to themselves, but she had always thought they were just shy. She and her father never stayed more than a week with them. She just thought they were strict.

“Dana?” Matt’s voice pulled her from her reverie. “I need to ask you something.” Matt shifted in his chair. He couldn’t look at Dana again. “You see, the M.E. has called in a forensic anthropologist. And there appears to be a pattern with the remains.” Matt took a steadying breath. “They all appear to be young women around the same age,” he looked at his hands, “between twenty and twenty-five.” He looked up at Dana. “When your Mom went missing, how old was she?” Dana could hear her monitors start beeping. Nurses hurried into the room.

“Twenty-two. She had just turned twenty-two.”
by Virginia Mallon
We Still Survive in the End
by Kayla King

There are minds you cannot touch; thoughts fossilized before finding, and now they’re lost to shipwreck on shores. Poseidon poisoned Us long ago with godly lips which spoke of oceans. You want beach waves in your hair, salt on your skin. You want to be changed with footprints in sand, but you’ll walk too far.

He said he’d write a song about you. If your mouth could meet those angry cries before, you’d know the depths he’d take you. Drown you down in words. And the world is more than oysters slurped back on soft tongues. The brine. The bite. Sirens are singing your song with those tired lines. Now blood. You thought your mouth might be unreal. Your lips might belong to someone new. You’d sing because the song wasn’t yours. You’d kiss because it was someone else. He’d take you, and you wouldn’t care. You’d drown in a bathtub before you’d live in the dull sleep.

But Us? You are one with Us. We women will not deafen ourselves with beeswax in our ears like those men do in stories. We’re coral-bound to the turns of the tide, from one side of the bed to the other. And he sings. Oh he serenades you to be his little spoon, dip you in oyster wine to lips and brine bite between your legs no longer scaled with siren skin. He calls the things you say in sleep lunacy, because you were once born from the moon.

Still you listen to the honey, even when you hear sweet lie, but would you sacrifice yourself to the rocks? You wouldn’t give over without being promised. You bite his lips before you ever kiss them. Blood blooms between teeth. You eat without trying. Without meaning.
I Don’t Know What to Call This, but It Has to Do With Orpheus
by Kayla King

Who are these people she should meet? They are—
Bees cannot notice, will not smell that fear, the fear, her fear.
But I smell it salted in sweat. The days have turned to summer.
In my love, I have no protection. She hasn’t let syllables spill
from her in small sound, a whisper. She is silent.
These are the moments I won’t survive.

Why did no one tell me? She did not wear funerary veil,
would not give into the grief then, but bees. Cry tears of bees
to separate the living from the dead, and she flies between
them now. Watch as she pulls down sky with no moon,
covers her face to protect features from finding fault
in confession; she won’t tell the truth.

Memory smells sick with barren. Is it some inoculation to take
place routine? I cannot run—
I could not leave without always having to leave.
But her honey hum quiets in mind’s hive. Does she hide?
If I stand very still, will she think I don’t exist?
She must live another year; she must know.

She is the magician’s girl who only flinches
away from me. This game is exhausting, and
our hearts slow with boredom.
Woman god is Mother I will praise,
but neither of us will be filled. We will not birth
into Hell. I have no sweet sounding lyre.

And they hunt the queen, as always, as history
reveals. But she reigns over me now; dream
something she will wax into divination. The old queen
will not show herself. I am exhausted—
Why am I cold without her? Wing death disguises, but
to be forgotten now may be her lie.
Surely she must’ve sought life in the honeycomb, to dwell. Not die. She will remain a bee, a queen, but will she eat substance raw? Long after Apollo’s usurping of an ancient shrine, the old oracle, she’ll still be Here. She’ll still be her. She will give over the gift of Seeing.
A Woman Caught
by Kayla King

Palace of legend—
Or is it a castle?
There are stairs
and signs,
say Do Not Feed;
you are starving.

Kiss me, and taste salt.
Suck at the sea slipping down skin as
we wade. Ancient sand of broken shells left
to squish cold between toes;
you draw a circle with your foot.
And I can’t tell
if it’s to know yourself a knight
or to ward against
the woman beside you.

She is me,
but I am no longer Her.
Search the shore for my bones
from the story, washed up in a boat
with a name
and body.

Tirra lirra laments
from the sea; a siren’s shriek.
Seek a woman caught in man’s
net, which feels like calloused
fingers phantasmagoric for
none to see.
She exists between worlds,
and we are none
but earthen mourners
she’d love to eat.

I look over my shoulder
at you, and the curse
of loving leaves empty,
as always. But I’m not a conch
with a conscience choking
ocean sounds into your ear.
Tongues of the dead speak
in echo.

Tides claim our toe marks.
And do we walk as lovers?
Will we say I love you, or
shall we seagull scream
to the waves?
Will we fall to sand and wait
for abrasion to peel us
back to past people?

You finger my back,
tapping nervous the numbered lives
of men who might've lost their hearts
here.

We'll never know.
SONG OF THE ORACLE

No songs were sung and secrets were kept, as the world was young when the oracle slept.

Then fire came along and the oracle woke in the shaman’s song, in the dancing smoke.

The oracle will sing with nothing to hear, as the winds run out in the atmosphere.

Twelve lines on photo in digital blue filter
Anning, Yunnan, China, Colin W. Campbell.

by Colin Campbell
Neighbors
by Susannah Jordan

Pastel boxes, surrendered to the
shore: canary yellow, sky blue,
petal pink. Colors of optimism. We wait, kicked back, in abandoned recliners. The sea slides across the
driveway,
through the door, steeping the wallpaper. This was our neighborhood.
We are taking one last tour.
Two Years
by Susannah Jordan

I went shopping for china that looks nothing like your mother’s.
Two years, you said.
Two years.
It’s too early to register
or dress up like a cake topper
in some Main Street bridal shop.
So I’m waiting, all honeymooned in the head.
We’re a newborn galaxy,
just a smattering of stars
around a dinner plate,
but it’s too early for wedding bells
and we’re not done hitting the snooze.
Scrape
by Susannah Jordan

All your promises scrape
like hedgehog quills
on the underside
of my bedroom floor.
by Seigar
Osmosis
by Anna Kapungu

Beloved, you had me thinking
Love was like osmosis
Pictured in some dimension
We could be in unison
Mathematical count the days
In the land of expectations
Our ambition as our common denominator
Lose myself in your power
Common days to be endless
Midnight calls without tears
Crave to leave my world, my circumference
To reside in your radius
Hear the wind whistle in high spirits
Fragment the shape of time
To find our correlation
The probability of our hearts affair
Blossom into an indefinite proportion
A foundation of us
Believe tomorrow is always
Dream of us in four colour theorem
If that is your wish
Moon of Solace
by Anna Kapungu

But home to stay came love
Vocalise all night
Seconds are endless
I am breathless
Froze time in us
Muted the outside world
You entered my universe
My planets orbit around the sun
Love resembles a child
Innocent to think it will last
Comforted, soothed and besotted
Secrets of desire
I craved for you
My entity existed outside of self
I owned my bliss
Possessed me like a demon
All utterances are you
Your spirit fills my presence
Affections without shame
In love and my sentiments outpouring
Chance would not hold back
Spread my wings
And I am buoyant
Without self control
Immersed in the depth of love
Senses of Rhapsody
by Anna Kapungu

Aspects of flowers in the winds
Raindrops of rubies and pearls
Sunlight like gold on Gods path
A principality of fantasy
Rhapsody dwells in the comfort of the petals of a rose
Rivers of oranges, purples and stars
A flying beacon of the galaxies
Moving at the rays of moonlights
In its depth, height and width
A formula unknown
Senses of the ideal seventh heaven
Leaning without latitudes
Windfall, a haven where it touches
Like Mercury’s fire
A lantern in the midnight gleam
Tranquil like autumn in season
Euphony immunity to melancholy
Breathe easy, the universe moves softly
Orchestra of the Flutes
by Anna Kapungu

They wore white lace dresses
Braided hair and yellow toned skins
Beautiful with graceful features
Spoke a language of their own
Explicit intriguing it was mystifying
Lived by the lake of the Weeping willows
Where the water currents whispered into the nights
They spoke of the eyes of the lake
That watched over their days
Sing songs of Creole experiences
The travels in the Atlantic Oceans
Fasted for favour and lived on the love of sisterhood
Sustained chastity
Spoke of men as if they were strangers
Beings that they had to embrace
They were worthy good women
Refined, cultured in the art of being
Painted portraits of New Orleans
Lived in pleasance
In the truth of the world
The Universe Decodes
by Anna Kapungu

Pictured the world crystal clear
Marbled in a glass base stone
It was pure, authentic and filtered
It lacked blame
Exuded the spirit of nobility
Acquainted me with the love of self
Treasured like a Chiastolite
Understood the joy
Blew me kisses
And my world stood still
It was written in my stars
You were the keystone
Earth protected me like Hercules
Nights I do not fear
Darkness I do not cry
Occupy the land of the infallible sunshine
Bequeatethe me solace, support and gladdening
Understand my zenith
My light and the who I am
by Margaret King
Options
by Ken W. Simpson

A desert of solitude
empty of romance
where remorse repents
swamped by a past
plowed under the ground
yearning for better days
in the mountains
or on city streets
packed with people
with nothing to eat or drink.
The Promised Land
by Ken W. Simpson

A gated community
of intersecting avenues
shapes and spaces
protected by equivocations
where solitary servants
no longer needed
cook for apparitions
wash dirty dishes
mow the grass
and cherish plastic trees.
The Gray Remains of Yesterday’s Rain
by Ken W. Simpson

Brash cascading waves
caress the sand
as fear awakens
and happiness flees
from screams
when midnight chimes.
Merry and Bright

by Mark Myavec
Biographies

LEAH BAKER

Leah is a Language Arts teacher for high school students, and has had her writing featured in such publications as Mixtape Memoirs. She enjoys traveling, yoga, and gardening. Leah resides in Portland, Oregon.

RAY BALL

Ray Ball, Ph.D., is a writer and history professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage. When not in the classroom or the archives of Europe and Latin America, she enjoys running marathons, reading, and spending time with her spouse Mark and beagle Bailey. She is the author of a number of history books and articles. Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in Cirque, Foliate Oak, Moonchild Magazine, NatureWriting, and Visitant. She tweets @ProfessorBall

CAROL BARRETT

Carol Barrett holds doctorates in both clinical psychology and creative writing. She coordinates the Creative Writing Certificate Program at Union Institute & University. Her books include Calling in the Bones, which won the Snyder Prize from Ashland Poetry Press. Her poems have appeared in many magazines and anthologies including JAMA, Poetry International, Nimrod, Poetry Northwest,
and The Women’s Review of Books. A former NEA Fellow in Poetry, she lives in Bend, OR.

CRZTHLY E. BISA

Crzthlv E. Bisa is a Filipino indie poet, singer and songwriter from the beautiful land of Bauan, Batangas, Philippines. She graduated cum laude from the University of the Philippines, Los Baños with her degree, Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, and is currently taking up her Master’s Degree in Business Administration at Batangas State University, Main Campus. She also currently works as a paralegal in one prestigious private company based in Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila, Philippines. She was also a member of The International Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, Chapter 045; and an alumna of The Philosophical Society of UPLB and DAKILA UPLB.

She first fell in love with poetry and music when she entered a scholarship program in a culture and arts high school. Even if her specialization in such school is not creative writing, she continued writing indie poems and songs. In April 2014, one of her works entitled Fill the Void was published in fundraising anthology called VERSES TYPHOON YOLADA: A Storm of Filipino Poets, edited by poet and editor Eileen R. Tabios, and released by Meritage Press (San Francisco & St. Helena).

Now, with life’s eventful cycle, she continues her writing through her blog site called Verdict Painter.

JENNIFR BOYD

Jennifer Boyd is a high school student from Hull, Massachusetts. Her poetry and essays have appeared in several publications, including Poetry Quarterly, Alexandria Quarterly, Tower Journal, and The Critical Pass Review. Additionally, her work has been recognized by Smith College, Hollins University, Princeton
University, and the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Most recently, Jennifer published her first chapbook, Stretto (2017). Jennifer is the founder and editor-in-chief of The Onism Journal, a digital publication which features the creative projects of young artists around the world. She enjoys blogging for Voices of Youth and HuffPost in her free time.

**MARK BURROW**

Mark Burrow has had a variety of poetry (including art and photography) featured annually in the French Riviera-based Côte Poets. He has performed at various events and festivals in the UK and in Ireland. Wherever he travels he takes his portable edge-of-seat with him.

**COLIN CAMPBELL**

Colin escaped from the day job in Scotland and now writes very short fiction and poetry in Sarawak on the lovely green island of Borneo and faraway in Yunnan in southwest China. [www.campbell.my](http://www.campbell.my)

**MARC CARVER**

Marc Carver has published some ten collections of poetry and over two thousand on the net but the thing that gives him most pleasure is when someone he does not know sends him an email saying they enjoy his work.

**YUAN CHANGMING**

Yuan Changming published monographs on translation before leaving China. With a Canadian PhD in English, Yuan currently edits Poetry Pacific with Allen Yuan and hosts Happy Yangsheng in Vancouver; credits include nine Pushcart
nominations, Best of the Best Canadian Poetry (2008-17), BestNewPoemsOnline, Threepenny Review and 1,369 others worldwide.

**LINDA M. CRATE**

Linda M. Crate's works have been published in numerous anthologies and magazines both online and in print. She is a two time push cart nominee and the author of four published chapbooks. The latest of which is entitled: My Wings Were Made to Fly (Flutter Press, September 2017).

**SHANNON CUTHBERT**

Based in Brooklyn, Shannon Cuthbert Her poems have previously appeared in Three Drops Poetry, Enchanted Conversations, Red Booth Review, and Emerge Literary Journal among others.

**MAUREEN DANIELS**

Maureen Daniels teaches English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, where she is also a doctoral fellow in creative writing. She is an editorial assistant for Prairie Schooner and Western American Literature. Her work has recently been published in Sinister Wisdom, Neologism Poetry Journal, Gertrude Press, Third Wednesday and the South Florida Poetry Review.

**M. E. DENE**

Born and raised in Indiana, m. e. dene has recently rediscovered her adolescent love of writing. She has studied Criminology at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and when she is not writing enjoys spending time with her family and cats. Follow her on Twitter @medenegrant
JENNIFER DEL CASTILLO

Jennifer Del Castillo came into writing and photography, as a way to find meaning in life after becoming disabled and recovering from trauma. The intention she looks to create is not to be perfect with the work. Instead, it is up to observers to come up with their own interpretations.

You can find her at smallslowstep.com and on Twitter/Instagram (@smallslowstep).

ELIZABETH RUTH DEYRO

Elizabeth is a prose editor for Minute Magazine and Culaccino Magazine. She reads submissions for Monstering, The Mystic Review, and The Cerurove. She also writes for BioLiterary. She writes about mental health and identity politics, and often turns mundane things to morbid. You can find her at notjanedeyro.wordpress.com.

LAUREN DIEDWARDO

Lauren DiEdwardo is a fiction writer from the butt of Pennsylvania. She writes quirky, dismal poetry about bird crap and origami. Lauren spends her free time either writing, cross country running, making jewelry for local craft shows, or reading any book within reach.

NIKHITA DODLA

Nikhita Dodla is an Indian American writer and artist living in California, whose works have also appeared in the FOND zine and Deracine magazine. She
frequents in long walks on the beaches and a constant existential crisis. For business inquiries, she can be reached at ndodla@gmail.com

**TIM FAGAN**

Tim Fagan left a 20-year career in the corporate world to focus on writing. He recently finished his first novel and continues to write poetry and occasional song lyrics. Tim grew up in British Columbia, Canada and now live outside Boston, Massachusetts. His poems have appeared recently in The Avalon Literary Review and Wild Violet.

**KRISTIN GARTH**

Kristin Garth is a poet from Pensacola. In addition to the Mystic Blue Review, her sonnets have been featured in Faded Out, Anti-Heroin Chic, Occulum, Fourth & Sycamore, Quail Bell, Moonchild Magazine and many other publications. Follow her on Twitter: @lolaandjolie and her website kristingarth.wordpress.com.

**SHANNON FROST GREENSTEIN**

Shannon Frost Greenstein resides in Philadelphia with her son and soul-mate, who keep things from descending into cat-lady territory. A former Nietzschean Ph.D. scholar, she made all the feminists weep by dropping out of grad school to get married, and has been writing fiction ever since. Shannon is a current Pushcart Prize Nominee, and her work can be found on McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Scary Mommy, WHYY’s Speakeasy, Philadelphia stories, Vagabond City Lit, Spelk Fiction, and a variety of other publications.
JOHN GREY


DAVID HANLON

David Hanlon is from Cardiff, Wales, and currently living in Bristol, England. He has a BA in Film Studies & is training part-time as a counsellor/psychotherapist. You can find his work online at Ink, Sweat & Tears, Fourth & Sycamore, Eunoia Review, Amaryllis, Scarlet Leaf Review & forthcoming at One Sentence Poems, Anti-Heroin Chic & Déraciné Magazine.

ELISABETH HORAN

Elisabeth Horan is a poet mother student lover of kind people and animals, homesteading in Vermont with her tolerant partner and two young sons. She has recently been featured in The Feminist Wire, Anti-Heroin Chic, Quail Bell Magazine and Algebra of Owls. Elisabeth’s poetry aspires to give a voice to Mother Earth and all her creatures, as well those tender humans who may be suffering alone and in pain.

Elisabeth is a 2018 MFA Candidate at Lindenwood University and teaches at River Valley Community College in New Hampshire.

ejfhoran@weebly.com follow @ehoranpoet.
SUSANNAH JORDAN


ANNA KAPUNGU

The author is a poet, singer, songwriter and children’s book author who has published a poetry collection entitled ‘Water falling between words’ with Austin Macauley Publishers. Her second book to be published by Pegasus will be entitled ‘Feet on unstable waters’. And she is currently writing her third poetry book.

The author is a Canadian citizen currently residing in United Kingdom. She is a graduate of South bank University London with a BA (Hons) Degree in Hotel Management and a Diploma in Public Relations, Marketing and Sales Management from Commercial Careers College.


KAYLA KING

Kayla King is a graduate of Buffalo State College’s B.A. in Writing (2013), and the Mountainview MFA (2016). Her work has been published by or is forthcoming from One For One Thousand, Germ Magazine, Five 2 One

MARGARET KING

Margaret King is a Wisconsin writer who enjoys penning poetry, short stories, and young adult novels. In her spare time, she likes to haunt the shores of Lake Michigan, similar to many of her fictional characters. Her most recent work has appeared in Unlost Journal, Moonchild Magazine, Enclave, and The Ginger Collect.

BENJAMIN DANIEL LUKEY

Benjamin Daniel Lukey was born in 1986. He has lived all over the Eastern United States and currently resides near Charlotte, North Carolina. He held a long series of odd jobs before finally becoming a high school English teacher.

VIRGINA MALLON

Virginia Mallon is a photographer and painter whose work focuses on both human and environmental subjects including urban landscapes, nautical spaces, and personal histories, with a goal to reflect and comment on the current state of the world and the psychological undercurrents of contemporary society.

KESHIA MCCLANTOC

Keshia Mcclantoc is from Bayou La Batre, Alabama. Her work has previously appeared in The Tower. She has forthcoming publications in The Mantle and
#thesideshow. She is currently a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In her free time, she writes and has deep conversations with her cat.

**MEGAN DENESE MEALOR**

Megan Denese Mealor spins words into wiles in Jacksonville, Florida, where she lives with her partner and son. Her work has appeared most recently in Literally Stories, The Ekphrastic Review, Haikuniverse, Former People, Neologism Poetry Journal, Liquid Imagination, Outsider Poetry, Right Hand Pointing, Danse Macabre, Clockwise Cat, Degenerates: Voices for Peace, and Third Wednesday. Diagnosed with bipolar disorder in her teens, Megan’s main mission as a writer is to inspire others feeling stigmatized by mental illness.

**ELIZABETH MOURA**

Elizabeth Moura lives in a converted factory in a small city and works with elders in a small town. She has had poetry, flash fiction or photographs published in several publications including The Heron’s Nest, Chrysanthemum, Atlas Poetica, Ardea, Presence, Shamrock, Flash, Paragraph Planet and Flash Fiction Magazine.

**MARK MYAVEC**

Mark Myavec is a former math teacher who has worked at independent prep schools in Michigan, Delaware and Pennsylvania. As a teenager he learned essential photography skills on the Argus C3 passed down to him by his father, and he embraces the art form for its ability to evoke a connection with a transient, often solitary, moment. His photographs have appeared in several print and online literary journals including *Midwestern Gothic*, *Birch Gang Review*, and *The Broken City*. 
KG NEWMAN

KG Newman is a sports writer for The Denver Post. His first two poetry collections, While Dreaming of Diamonds in Wintertime and Selfish Never Get Their Own, are available on Amazon. He is on Twitter @KyleNewmanDP.

AYAZ DARYL NIELSEN

Ayaz Daryl Nielsen was born in Valentine, Nebraska, attended schools in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Monterrey, Mexico, has lived in Bonn, Germany, and now lives in Longmont, Colorado, with beloved wife Judith. A veteran, former hospice nurse, ex-roughneck (as on oil rigs), he has been editor of the print publication bear creek haiku for 30+ years and over 140 issues. ayaz can be found online at bear creek haiku - poetry, poems and info. His poetry, published worldwide, includes senryu chosen in 2010 and 2012 as "best of year" by the Irish Haiku Association, the poetry chapbook Window Left Open from Prolific Press, and, with other deeply appreciated honors, is especially delighted by the depth and quality of poets worldwide whose poems have found homes in bear creek haiku’s print and online presence.

ISABELLA PIPER

Isabella piper is a seventeen year old from Michigan. Her hobbies include writing frequently, photography, and traveling. She has dreams, of attending college in California. She wants to receive a degree in creative writing.

LAURA POTTS

Laura Potts is twenty-one years old and lives in West Yorkshire, England. She has twice been named a London Foyle Young Poet of the Year and Young
Writer. In 2013 she became an Arts Council Northern Voices poet and Lieder Poet at the University of Leeds. Her poems have appeared in Seamus Heaney’s *Agenda, Poetry Salzburg Review* and *The Interpreter’s House*. Having studied at The University of Cape Town and worked at The Dylan Thomas Birthplace in Swansea, Laura has recently become *Agenda’s* Young TS Eliot Poet and been shortlisted for a Charter-Oak Award for Best Historical Fiction in Colorado. This year she was shortlisted in The Oxford Brookes International Poetry Prize and nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She was also named one of The Poetry Business’ New Poets and became a BBC New Voice for 2017. Her first BBC radio drama *Sweet The Mourning Dew* will air at Christmas 2017. You can follow Laura on Twitter @thelauratheory__.

**DAVID RODRIGUEZ**

David Rodriguez is from Spain and considers himself a lover of photography. He loves surreal photography and fashion photography. His main influences are Man Ray, Erwin Blumenfeld and above all Guy Bourdin.

His last project is “Fresh II” (2017). In this series, he wants to explore the relationship between human and water as we are made of it too. There’s a material and spiritual relation between us and this element.

It is fascinating to observe this relationship, to see how they move, what they do, what they may be thinking or feeling.

**HEATHER SANTO**

Heather Santo is a research chemist living in Pittsburgh, Pa. Her professional education is in biochemistry, forensic science and law. Creative writing has been a lifelong passion, in addition to painting, photography and travel. Follow her on Twitter @Heather52384.
CARL SCHARWATH

Carl Scharwath, has appeared globally with 100+ journals selecting his poetry, short stories, essays or art photography. Two poetry books 'Journey To Become Forgotten' (Kind of a Hurricane Press). and 'Abandoned' (ScarsTv) have been published. Carl is the art editor for Minute Magazine, a dedicated runner and 2nd degree black-belt in Taekwondo.

STEPHANIE V SEARS

Stephanie V Sears is a French and American ethnologist, free-lance journalist, essayist, fiction writer and poet whose poetry appeared recently in The Comstock Review, The Legendary, The Rufous City, All roads will lead you home, Literary Orphans, Burning Word.

SEIGAR

Seigar is an English philologist, a highschool teacher, and a curious photographer. He is a fetishist for reflections, saturated colors, details and religious icons. He feels passion for pop culture that shows in his series. He considers himself a traveler and an urban street photographer. His aim as an artist is to tell tales with his camera, to capture moments but trying to give them a new frame and perspective. Travelling is his inspiration. However, he tries to show more than mere postcards from his visits, creating a continuous conceptual line story from his trips. The details and subject matters come to his camera once and once again, almost becoming an obsession. His three most ambitious projects so far are his “Plastic People", a study on anthropology and sociology that focuses on the humanization of the mannequins he finds in the shop windows all over the world, "Response to Ceal Floyer for the Summer Exhibition" a conceptual work that understands art as a form of communication, and his "Tales of a city", an ongoing series taken in London. He usually covers public events with his camera.
showing his interest for social documentary photography. He has participated in several exhibitions, and his works have also been featured in international publications.

**KEN SIMPSON**

An Australian poet whose collection, Patterns of Perception, was published in January 2015 by Augur Press. (UK). His chapbook, Waving at Strangers, was published by Fowlpox Press last August, and a collection accepted for publication in the March issue of Cholla Needles magazine.

**CHARIKA SWANEPOEL**

Charika Swanepoel is a South African poet, writer, and literary scholar. She is currently pursuing her MA. at the North-West University. Some of her poems have appeared in Kalahari Review, Itch Journal, Murmur Journal, Bridge: The Bluffton University Literary Journal, New Contrast, and is forthcoming in Aerodrome, The New Literati Press Journal, and a Medusa's Laugh Press anthology. Charika's poetry collection has been shortlisted for Platypus Press's 2017 Celestial Bodies poetry series. She is also a volunteer reader at Helen: A Literary Magazine and blog correspondent for Half Mystic Press.

**AYSE TEKSEN**

*Ayşe Tekşen lives in Ankara, Turkey where she works as a research assistant at the Department of Foreign Language Education, Middle East Technical University. Her short stories and poems have been included in Gravel, After the Pause, The Write Launch, Uut Poetry, The Fiction Pool, What Rough Beast, Scarlet Leaf Review, Seshat Literary Magazine, Neologism Poetry Journal,
Anapest, Red Weather, Ohio Edit, and SWWIM Every Day. Her work has also appeared or is forthcoming in Constellations, Jaffat El Aqlam, The Paragon Journal, the Same, Willow Literary Magazine, Arcturus, and Slink Chunk Press.

**SRISHTI UPPAL**

Srishti Uppal is a 16-year-old writer/reader/fangirl. Her passions include writing, volunteering, and raising awareness for mental health. She is born and brought-up in Delhi, India; where she can be found sniffing books, petting dogs, or surviving on coffee.

**LAUREN WALSBURG**

Lauren Walsburg is an Australian writer and editor. She has been published in Skive Magazine, Positive Words, and Cauldron Anthology. Her debut poetry collection Ink Stained Heart was released in April 2017. She is the Editor of Into The Well and Fiction Editor of Cauldron Anthology. For more information visit [https://laurenwalsburg.com](https://laurenwalsburg.com).
The Mystic Blue Review

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