

SCRYPHIC



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Scryptic

Magazine of Dark and Alternative Art

Issue 1.4

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A Note From Us To You

It's hard to believe that with the release of issue 1.4, Scryptic is moving into it's second year of publication. In a day and age when so many literature and art journals fold after one or two issues, we're ecstatic to have made it this far and are looking forward to many more exciting years of publishing the most unique work online and in print.

We are forever in debt to each of our extraordinary contributors and readers for making Scryptic everything it is, and everything it will be.

Check out the announcements page at the end of this issue for some exciting changes and new information! This issue is our strongest yet and we hope you agree, so dive on in!

Respectfully yours,
Lori A Minor and Chase Gagnon

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I've Misplaced My Basket

Who steals our painted eggs
and hides them, symbolic of
Christ, whom I cannot find?
Skulking pastel rabbit as furry
bogeyman scaring the living
shit out of the children,
its vest too tight, its beady eye
a judgment day castigation.
I can never find my
favorite colored one.

When I finally roll back the stone,
sweating and sobbing, my dead
have disappeared, a holy day
magician's trick on my
confused soul.

- Mike L. Nichols

This House is Cold

It's May, and where
is my mother?
How can she disappear
out from under this same
sunlight? Through the
window it warms
the carpet, warms
my bare toes. Warms
the grass of her grave.
Cannot warm her
bones.

- *Mike L. Nichols*



- *Eufemia Griffo*

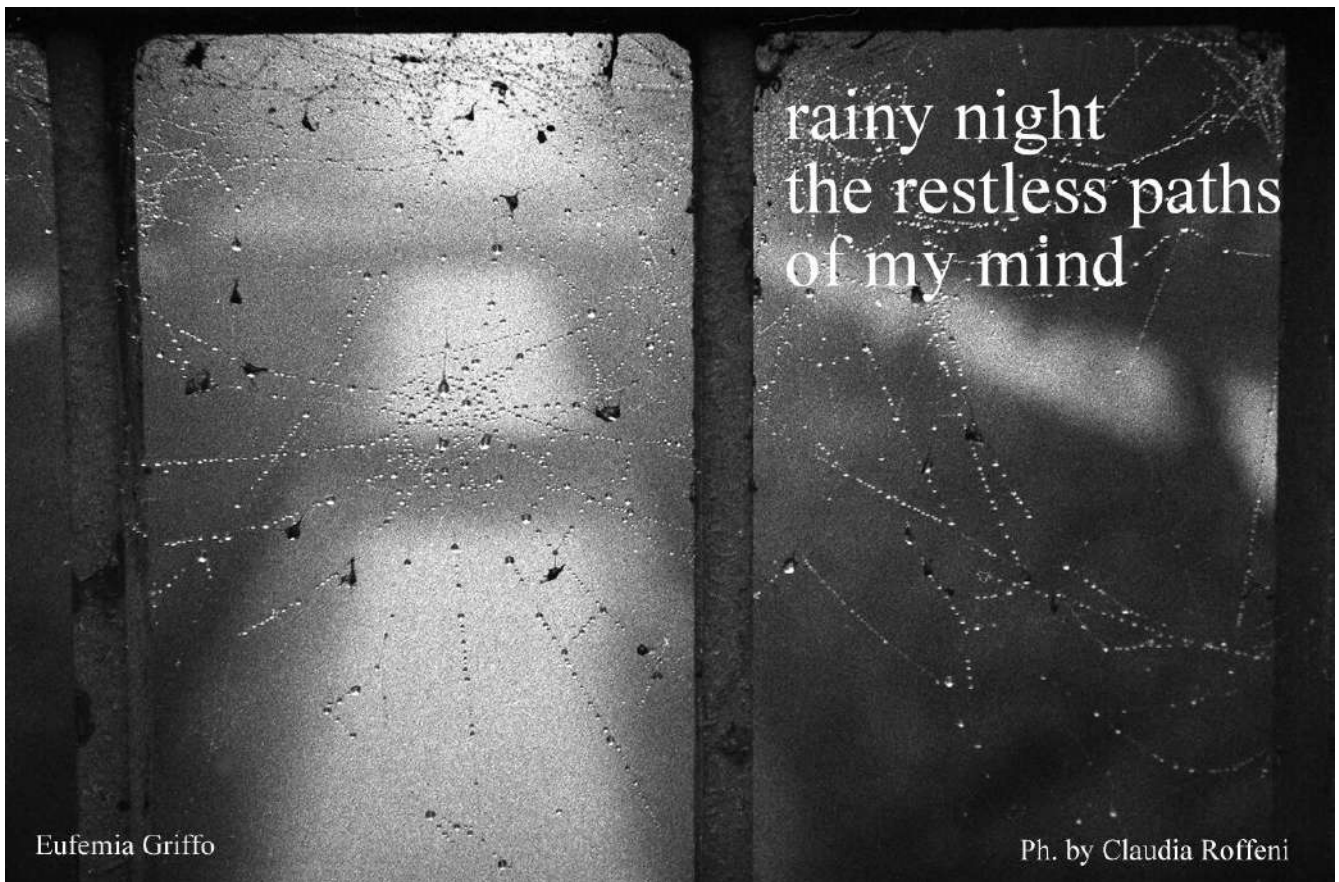


- *Eufemia Griffo*



Poem and ph. by Eufemia Griffo

- *Eufemia Griffo*



- *Eufemia Griffo and Claudia Roffeni*

RAIN

Dry places draw forth dark spirits, seeking rest,
While warm rain conjures cornucopian spills.
But some people don't feel blessed, only depressed.
Dry places draw forth dark spirits, seeking rest.
Cacodemonomania? Or truly possessed?
Bottom line, psychiatric succor begets bills.
Dry places draw forth dark spirits. Seeking rest?
Hope for sun showers and cornucopian spills.

- *Anna Cates*

THE APOCALYPSE

“All go unto one place; All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” Ecclesiastes 3:20

The pride of life fails
Elijah disappears on the breeze
Death arrives like an earthquake
Voices crack like sand paper
Riddle full with grit
Bones break like peanut brittle

Bullets thud into bull's-eyes
Thick torsos of meat
Marring shamrock
Anchor or nude girlie tattoos
Bodies fizzle out with a hiss

Fingers un-grip that held on for so long
Releasing life
The bitten-into poisoned apple
A pulse
A whisper
The ghost

The apocalypse finishes all
Ships crash into harbors
Leaking oil like blood
Passengers wail
Arms raised in supplication to their god

The pride of life fails
The blush of health pales
We read it in the tea leaves
Sighing beside the windowpane

- *Anna Cates*

November wind
the long squeaking sound
of the rusty weathervane

acting out
what happened with her doll
the abused little girl

that recurring dream sticker residue

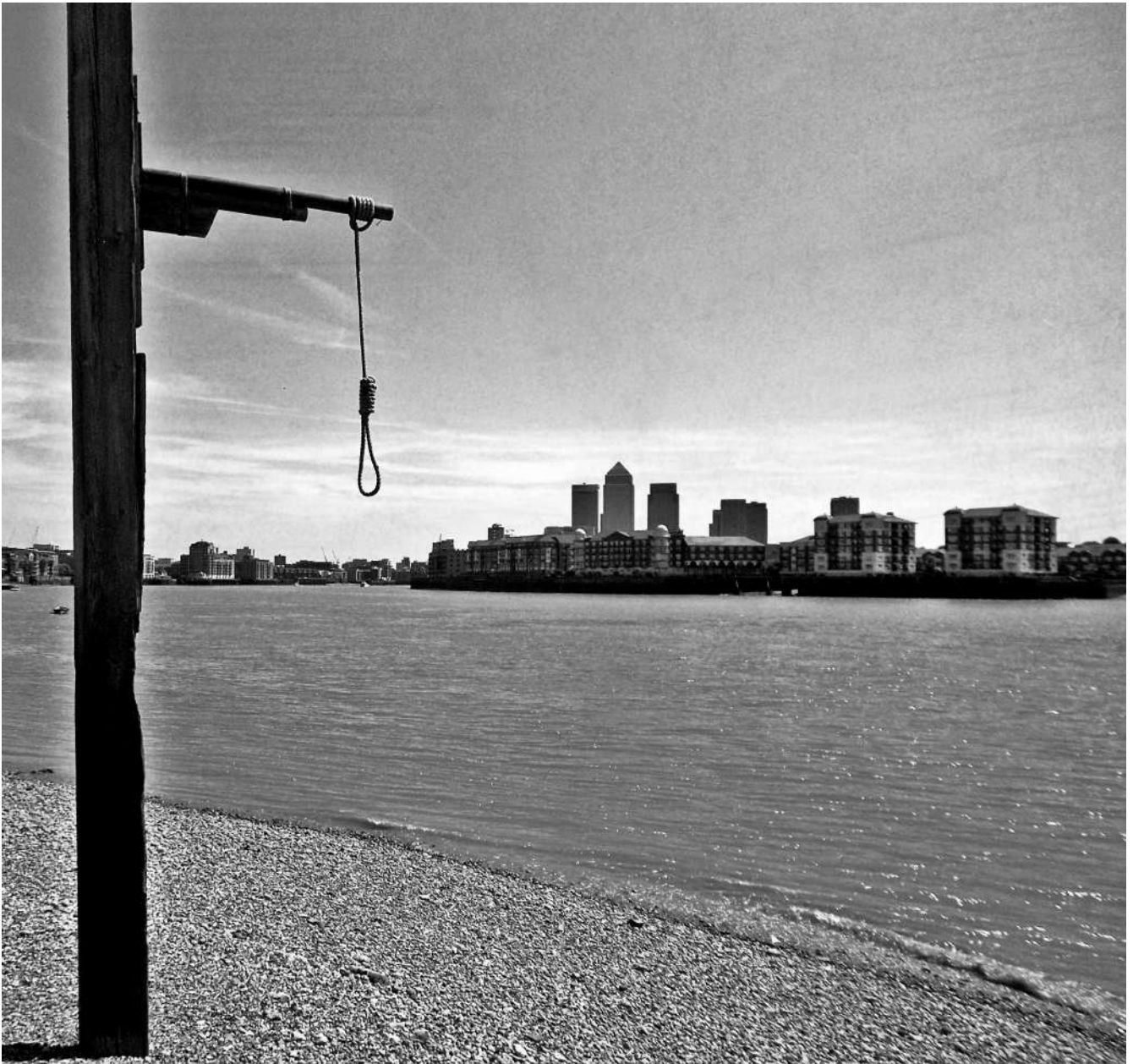
- *Olivier Schopfer*

Lone



- *Olivier Schopfer*

Rope



- *Olivier Schopfer*

JOY

Through your death
I've been born
edges cut by cold blade
air licking them clean.
Chilled with solitude
I am thrown
towards my final day
(I move faster
reassured, I fly).
Why does joy taste
vertiginous?
Does it shield me?
Does it set me loose?
Why are extremities
geminatè? Wildly
kissing each other.

- *Toti O'Brien*

QUIET LION

Horrors of the dark fading
through daily cares
I move towards happiness
as a bird goes to light.

Suddenly I realize not all birds do.
Still I'm glad for those stains
I erased from my nightgown
rubbing them with dry soap.

Glad as well
you didn't sleep
with my mother
except in last night dreams.

- *Toti O'Brien*

TREASON

In spite of the banality
of the depiction
I can't help seeing you as a
fallen angel
carrying a dirtied soul.
A grey vanishing shade
reminds of the blueness
once surrounding you.
Sweeping away your presence
(fast dissolved in light)
I find the torn strip of
an old shirt (half a collar
and a fragmented label,
trace of obsolete flesh).
I won't throw them away.
It isn't time for decisions
(sentences have been postponed
verbs momentarily broken)
Leave to this shred of fabric
a chance.
Suppose happy endings.

- *Toti O'Brien*

UNFORGIVABLE

Please be dead. My pain
shall be bittersweet.
I will drink it with wine
till the narrow bottom.
Should we seek mercy
at all cost? Undo every
knot, gather threads
mend the ripped flesh?

Not all should find pardon.
Lift the bridge. Send the dogs
she spits under her breath
freezing under mink hair.
She stops pacing
breathes shallow
stares at a cracked tile
veined with crimson.

- *Toti O'Brien*

Lost Planet #2



- Toti O'Brien

To every fool, a bog

The fish rose but were not themselves
in the summer.
A silvery death spread
in halos of flies, in a mud floor revealed.
Where the leaves clustered, I asked out loud,
How should I answer?
Only love, just love them, the answer.
Anything that I knew as wise is hovering above those flies.
Even unto the flick of feathers of a visiting swan.
There are paths and knots of woods
above the north point and the tearless grave of fins and eyes.
There, stirring, is a bright wind, and a west leaning light.
I said but silently, I did walk, and did love.
I do walk, and do love.

- *Meg Smith*

Winter Wedding

A snowbank was enough.
A cigarette was enough.
Hands cupped over the flame,
a scone without consecration.
What is this vow, this spoon,
this needle.
What flows in this exchange.
It is Christmas Eve.
More snow is to come.
He said he would honor,
she said she would keep.
And no one saw them,
and everything moved in a leeward way.
Time rushed toward the dark,
blue,
no band of light
but unyielding stars.

- *Meg Smith*

no marshmallow world

new year's eve
drinking to the ghosts
in blowing snow

(Steve Hodge)

cabin hearth
unknown visitors have left
some kindling

(Tom Clausen)

brushing cobwebs
from my cross-country skis
midwinter moon

(Michele L. Harvey)

cold air settles
deep in the valley
a call for help

(Susan Constable)

a whumph in the night
music
the wendigo dreams by

(LeRoy Gorman)

CHURCHED

The minister & his mistress come clean before the congregation & everyone hugs.

church barbeque
burnt wieners
are no hell

CROSSING OVER

Grey dominates everything on the ride to a healing retreat on an island— the sky, the water, the gulls, the wind, the ferryman's voice, our souls.

the child molester
pleads innocence
then kills himself

- *LeRoy Gorman*

strip club parking
a telepath reads
porn in the rain

adoption hearing
siblings deadhead
the plastic flowers

- *LeRoy Gorman*

hobgoblin hoedown

elfandango

finfolkalypso

goleminuet

incubusamba

jackalopolka

mermaidisco

leprechaunga

sasquatchacha

unichornpipe

wolperdingereel

- LeRoy Gorman

Cannibal Babe

Cannibal Babe, you're a manimal!
Ain't human to scarf another
animal, let alone a hominid.

And to pose as an infant
or diaper-swaddled cannibal
no less. Who'd 'a' guessed 'er?

You cry; we come runnin'
right to our doom. We try to swaddle
and mollycoddle you, and all you do

is suck, bite, and swallow –
gobble us by the pound
like so much lean ground round.

Cannibal Babe, that's quite a disguise
you've got there: cherubic cheeks,
Parker House Roll buns. Who'd think a guy

could vanish in a hug? You spew
acidic barf, suck us up
like a thick vanilla shake.

The house fly's got nothin' on you!
You're cute and cuddly. We ain't
got a chance around a critter like you!

- Richard Stevenson

And Now a Word From the Management

[for your safety] [it's important] [to know] [the exact location]
[of the exits] [in case of an emergency] [follow the houselights]
[into the darkness] [should we experience] [a mass shooting]
[be silent] [make sure] [to do] [absolutely] [nothing]
[in case of an oil spill] [follow the crowds] [to the parking lot]
[wipe any blackened animals] [off your windshield]
[go to the nearest gas station] [tell them] [fill 'er up]
[in case of a global] [pandemic] [ask a theater employee]
[to shut the doors] [make sure] [no one] [gets in]
[should a category super storm] [befall us] [be assured]
[the theater] [is unaffected] [by climate change]
[people of color] [will be provided aid] [on a limited basis]
[and finally] [before we begin] [our main] [attraction]
[should thermonuclear war] [break out] [at any time]
[during our program] [please adjust your chair]
[to a reclining position] [have a handful] [of popcorn]
[or reach] [for a cool] [refreshing Coke] [sit back]
[get comfortable] [and enjoy] [the show]

- *Henry Crawford*

mass shooting
the senators' words
semi-automatic

face-painting
the colours run
into darker corners

though the voices tell me not to lovecrime

- *David J Kelly*



- John McManus



- John McManus



- John McManus

I Had a Yard

but I left it to the birds—

without delay, a shovel-beak dug in, bird-bill
sieving dirt, searching
for worms—

but shovel-beak found
only bones

remember when
I tried to grow
an extra foot?

old bones and slivered
glass: fallen fruit
from a root-beer tree, planted by ancestors—

next, a hook-beak curved toward my
waterhole

remember when
I wished
a well?

articulated maw, scything
through pondweed in search of fish
while outhouses leaned
toward ruin—

in my old yard: glass, bones, rubble
remain

remember when
paper beat
stone?

—*Jude Marr*

Fish Bear Fish

bear-chest's brittle-ribbed
as ursa minor on a bitter night: bear-claw
tears creek: bear-pelt can't break
when fish bite—

fish-head's high as bear-fist
pounding constellations: fish- lips
kissing dirty air: fish-eye stares un-
bearing—

fish-bones melt: scales
scatter: bear-knees bend
before carcass—

cattail dangles broken
bulrush, bloodless, vegetable
renegade, pointing out
more trout—

fish after fish after fish after fish after fish
leaps upstream.

- Jude Marr

Mama's Words

She lay on the floor, unable to get up. Floundering like a catfish out of water, she closed her eyes and waited for the sound of his heavy boots to return. This time his voice arrived first, sounding as though his words were desperate to escape him.

"Jesus, China Doll! What you doin' layin' on the floor?"

Janey-Sue waited for his bear paw hand to reach for hers. Standing crooked in front of him, she lied easily. She knew he didn't even remember. "Fell over that darn footstool my daddy made me."

He pulled her closer to his chest. "You seem to be fallin' a lot these days. You need to be more careful, girl."

With her hand on her back, she inched towards the bathroom. She stood looking at herself in the mirror. Her small fingers caressed the scar beneath her left eye, and she wondered when her eyes had become so lifeless.

Wincing when she leaned over to pick up Billie's dirty overalls, a flask of whiskey from his pocket fell to the floor. She scooped it up and slid it back in. She prayed to a God she didn't think was listening these days, to please not let him drink again tonight.

Janey-Sue went to the kitchen to prepare beef stew just the way he liked it. She smiled thinking of her mama's words when she was just knee high to a grasshopper. 'A good woman's got to take care of her man, and give them what they deserve.' Then her mama would smile at her daddy, and her daddy would grin at her like a Cheshire cat.

She cut the beef just like Billie liked. Two bite beef, he'd say, wiping the juice off his rugged face with the back of his flannel shirt. She listened to his voice floating across the yard while he chatted with Big Earl, the neighbor.

"Be right back, Earl. Jack Daniel is coming to visit with us."

Janey-Sue plastered on a smile when she heard the screen door creak behind him.

"You're not gonna start drinkin' this early, now are ya, sugar?"

Billie leaned over and planted a kiss on her swollen lip. "Now hush. You remember what your mama always told you. God rest her soul."

Janey-Sue was watching t.v. when she heard Billie stumble back into the kitchen. She wrapped her cardigan tightly around herself while he bellowed. "God damn it, China Doll, where is my supper?"

For the first time in her marriage, she didn't feel fear wrapping itself around her like a rope pulled too tight. As a matter of fact, she didn't feel anything at all. She walked up so close to Billie that she had to tilt her head way back to look up at him. Just like she was looking up to the heavens above.

As his arm raised over her, his shrouded eyes didn't see the knife Janey-Sue held in her blistered hand. She thrust it into him, thinking she could use the sleeve of his shirt to wipe the blood up after. Because that's what good girls do.

For the first time in months, her lips curled into a smile. She'd given him just what he deserved. Mama's words had served her well.

- Elizabeth Crocket

Jane Raven . . .
taking marriage vows
nevermore

dead man walking -
the spider
in my house

awakening
at sunrise -
my nightmare and I

- *Valentina Ranaldi-Adams*

On The Poet, His Getting Out Of Bed

The questions of a morning breaking sick,
Will turn on existential concerns
Of what I mean when I say life is thick,
And how dead memories still burn

Looking once through other pairs of eyes,
I see the inner grimework I had missed,
The details of a life put well aside,
And what am I to make of all of this?

A grouchy elder poet always pissed,
Who mutters about meter, counting feet,
Is always fallen, face-first out dismissed,
And always has a sense of sad defeat

Knowing how this happens to be played--
As holding to an inner sullen rage.

- *Alan J. Blaustein*

Mixed Media

People take pictures naked of themselves,
Baseline of the culture hanging low...
I once was a purveyor of the worse,
Remain now tattered icon where I fell,
Reaping what a porn man had to sow.
I'm not the only fallen from this curse.

- *Alan J. Blaustein*

*they seek
the path to enlightenment
a clueless throng
of unseeing stick figures
lost in a faceless crowd*



Michael H. Lester

- Michael H. Lester

backstage in the dim light

she changes costumes
and retches uncontrollably

as the master of ceremonies
announces that the great Houdini
will now saw a woman in half

for the loss

of four and twenty sheep
the shepherd shall not weep

but count his blessings
and rest his bones
where his wife and children sleep

the painted arrow

that pierces his breast
shot from a bandit's bow

spills his blood
on the desert scrub
in the badlands of Mexico

- *Michael H. Lester*

An Epic Poem

Imprisoned in this empty room
With nothing but my thoughts
My desiccated body to attend
I admit having sinned, Father

During these trying times
I have touched myself
In an unclean manner
Many times, Father

But I have also composed poetry
An epic poem of a man
In self-imposed exile
Hundreds of verses, Father

My dying wish is to know
What will become
Of these unwritten words
Upon my death, Father?

- Michael H. Lester

From the Cradle to the Grave

The way they give birth—it's quite grotesque. Even more disgusting, though, the coupling they call copulation or coitus, where the male of the species forces its way inside the female and slams against it time and again. Both of these animals grunting and moaning until, in a very short time, every muscle of the male of the species, save the penetrating one, which inexplicably wilts, suddenly stiffens. The penetrating member slips out of the female a sticky, flaccid mess.

The female of the species, which normally bleeds from this orifice on a regular monthly basis, stops bleeding and instead harbors a living, growing creature inside its body, in what these animals call a womb, feasting on its innards. This strange creature continues to grow, causing the female's body to engorge, as if it would burst like a bubble, until finally a miniature version of these animals emerges from this orifice, a stinking, screaming, bloody mess, still connected to the female by a long tube-like cord, which must be severed and trimmed. I watched this birthing from a safe distance, yet was nonetheless overcome with nausea and retched until I passed out.

covered in slime
a bald, wrinkled creature
wailing
does it already know
it will get old and die?

- *Michael H. Lester*

The Second Act

Almost entirely naked, curled up in a fetus
beneath the hand sink in a Burger King bathroom,
I wonder how I got here, how this yellow plastic rattle
came to be in my hands; I wonder how long
I have been unconscious in this restaurant.

I can hear someone yelling for me outside the door.
I wonder if the little man has to go to the bathroom.
Looking at my watch, I discover that I have been here
for close to nine hours. I remember placing an order
for McNuggets, and then everything going black.

The cold air in this restroom is chilling me,
and causing my nipples to stiffen with the breeze.
I cannot seem to find my shirt, I look around
and see only the sink, the throne, the broken dispenser
of toilet tissue. Has God left me, again?

Now I hear two voices outside the door,
and one of the voices appears to be female,
or, perhaps, an especially unsettled male.
I think about the man's body, and wonder if
he has developed fully, if his vocal cords have grown.

The soft, downy hairs on my chest stand on end,
and my thighs knock together. It has been almost
a whole day since I have wanted value meal number eight.
I can hear an angel, a girl angel, whispering to me
from the fluorescent bulbs over my head in here.

I could listen to that man shouting outside the door
for hours; he's like music to me, and there is something
comforting, and kinda catchy, in the pitch and tempo
of his switching between entreaties to me and orders to me.
If he's the manager, his uniform will be the cleanest, I'm sure.

But, if there ever was hunger, it has left me
in the way of clouds leaving an afternoon
to make way for the second act, the stars.
The angel in the ceiling cares about me,
but I don't think she is speaking English.

- *Rich Boucher*

I Fell Into Hell

i

I fell into hell somewhere
between birth and teen
holding my breath
waiting for death

with each rejected
see me, feed me, love me
I finally learned to mute
swallow and defecate

without request, taste, or smell
not knowing poisons multiply
and fear creates toxic
resentment

"Don't disturb me"
was mom's insistent refrain.

"Disturb from what?"
I dared not ask

ii

I hoarded memories
in case anyone asked

why I was fat, failing classes
and never cried

or preferred to ride the IRT to
Times Square and disappear
into crowded streets lit up

with impossible chances to win
at Pokereno or guess which
shell the pebble was under.

But no one asked.

No teacher, neighbor, Girl Scout
leader, camp counselor, basketball
coach, rabbi, relative or
perfect stranger.

No one.

It became easy to hit back when
mother tried to slap and to cry

"I dare you to try" when dad raised his
hand to me in her defense.

I know I stared at him with deep
contempt. I knew his secret and
was ready to tell.

"you fucked me with a thermometer!"

*"you lay against me, hand on my
thigh in every cab ride home
from Shepps Pharmacy!"*

*"you touched me in private places
before I had breasts or pubic hair!"*

"How dare you raise your hand to ME!"

The war at 58th Road never ceased
Could they not just once have said

I see you?

Dad didn't.
He died of his cancer, focused
on his pain, only once

apologizing that his penis was
visible because of the colostomy.

"I'm sorry you had to see that" he said.

"That's the least of it," I thought
and then he was dead.

Mom came closer at her end saying
"I never really understood you"

and obediently squeezed my hand
when hospice nurse told her to

show me she loved me.

So I told her I was queer and
her husband was my sexual abuser
and her face contorted in disgust
as she moved away to edge of bed

So much for reconciliation
So much for love
So much for truth, even in the last
hours of existence.

vi

I fell into hell somewhere
between birth and teen

there was no fire
no brimstone
no devil

just flawed humans
and that was enough

to shatter innocence
destroy hope, numb body

and inspire me to find God
as Yahweh, Jesus, Buddha
and myself.

- *Judy Shepps Battle*

Meet

He suggests
we meet in an alley
and I imagine that he wants
to knife me
even though we have been friends
for many years
and his father leaving the family
had nothing to do
with me
and we are meeting for drinks
at a nearby bar
so he can introduce me
to his new girl
just home from college
for the holidays,
assuming, of course,
there is a new girl
and not a knife
which brings me back
to my original
reservations.

- *Ryan Quinn Flanagan*

Box Scores

Is that you running into burning buildings?
Standing on subways, lost to your own balance?

The other day I was in the park
watching two dogs hump wildly
as their owners talked box scores

and later down by the hospital
I saw a man being wheeled in
with a red tartan blanket for the cold
and knew he would never come
back out

the family looked more relieved than sombre
as though they were dropping off a pizza
they would never have to deliver
after that

this was the last time, I could see it
and the old man seemed oblivious

like an adorable puppy now grown up
and unwanted and dropped off at the pound

and the paper says there was an earthquake
a couple days ago but I never felt it.

My glasses are all still made of glass.
The couch cushions level, more or less.

Is that you making the coffeehouse into Mecca?
Standing in change rooms with things to try on?

The book in my hands is a page turner.
Someone has highlighted all the wrong passages.
Some savage with a library card.
Hacking thatched roofs into apple crumble.

- *Ryan Quinn Flanagan*

The CDs are All on Suicide Watch for Scratching Themselves

This room here
is full of me
and almost nothing
else

that is the way you see it
when the books on the shelf
all take the fifth

and the CDs are all on suicide watch
for scratching themselves

even though I am devoid of ego
and hate myself

championing the light I find
in a few others

this is your room
as much as it is mine

and everything we remember
is our lives.

- *Ryan Quinn Flanagan*

empty house
I listen to
my loneliness

the cold side
of our bed
still I don't cry

house clearance
I take away
the memories

a low sun
sinks into sea
your strength fails

the heartbreak
behind the smile
sun shadows

- *Rachel Sutcliffe*

Ashes to ashes, rust to rust

On that most somber of occasions. The family didn't cry as they lowered their loved one into the grave. Because they couldn't. The preacher said "ashes to ashes, dust to rust" and the wooden box was lowered into the ground, and covered with soil, and after their last goodbyes, and the family departed.

Soon the deceased would become acquainted with another family. The Grandma worm chewed her way through the wooden coffin, inspected the body, and figured it would be good for her whole family. She called the whole worm family in. The granddaddy worm wiggled himself through the hole, followed by the little grandson worm. The grandson worm climbed on the body until his grandmother pulled him off telling him not to play with his food.

The grandson worm watched as holes appeared throughout the coffin. As all of his aunt, and uncle worms ate their way through. All the cousin worms came digging through too. The coffin filled with worms, they gathered in a circle around the corpse, they held each other's little worm hands, and bowed their little worm heads, and granddaddy asked a worm blessing.

"lord thank you for bringing us here today" said the granddaddy worm. "thank you for bring our family together again just one more time. Thank you for not breaking our family circle".

"Yes lord" whispered one of the aunt worms.

"Lord thank you for providing this food for the nourishment our worm bodies, in Jesus name I pray amen" the Granddaddy worm finished.

"Amen" all the worms replied.

The little worms wiggled their little worm bodies towards the corpse and began to devour it, until...

Below skin and blood
The worms couldn't eat through the
metal and wires

- *William Landis*

I am Cancer

I am cancer, festering wound. I die over nothing,
The worst type of man, a balloon on wire.
You may remember me walking through walls,
But I am glass without a frame to guide me.
I cannot be seen. I make no sound. I feel
The entirety of being, and it eats my insides
Until I'm filled with the dust of my remains.
You know a name, but I am not that.
A cliché description of darkness suits me
Too well. But I am the one who is worn,
And worn down, and worn out. You are born
Of mother's milk and honey I think, but I
Cannot relate. I prayed to the stars
For the power of fission, but I became
The explosion in my skin. I lack so much,
The sun and the moon are always out
Of my weak grasp, my knuckles aching
From so much reaching
And touching nothing.

- David Bankson

A Cemetery Sparkling

Standing at the door is making us us. Be careful of the oiled bars. They cannot be shaken or budged. Word on the street is someone will eventually answer. The necessity to request a bathroom key is a type of control. Take one, lose the other. A ring and a button are vastly different, but I press the button and hear a ring on the opposite side. A skull cannot restrain the brain. We lose so much during a water main break. Tomatoes drooling ichor from their broken skins. Have you tried knocking? It's been raining pavement all week, to the point that everything appears as a road. A cemetery sparkling with tiny candles tugs against my better judgment. Everything that burns is romantic -- the sun, a bridge, a spotlight as it burns out. But what happens after the pop? Darkness. Nothing but darkness.

- *David Bankson*

Therapy with a Wine Bottle

The cork in me plugs
throat
from bowel, an axis

stitching my atoms and mending
my pith. This glass is cracked
dulling stable -

glint
to make nations

steady with discolor,
ready with darkness.

There is stoppage
without me,

convulsion
is my disease. I make bitterness
from the light, make water

out of mouths,
my mind

a wine-stained blouse. Today

I'd kill to be repaired -

- *David Bankson*



- *Debbie Strange*



- Debbie Strange



- *Debbie Strange*

Somewhere

Somewhere on that street
I was shot

I checked into a hotel
after all those months
shifting objects
in the dust

All my dreams
and sorrows
broadcasted
on the TV
screen

Calling out
a human rights
violation
and reaching
the front desk

- *Marshall Bood*

Shadow Play

headlight rain
no sign of a vacancy
on the old road

*endless highway
the past looms large
in the drive mirror*

filling
the long hours
taxidermist

*careless talk
the caged bird sings
with a stutter*

spyhole
this desire is only
one-way

*mirror mirror
mother's glare
next to his sneer*

maternal envy
shower curtain shadow
on perfect skin

*eyes wide open
screams reflect
off his knife*

stone cold
her depression
on the bed

*morning after
a newspaper
left unread*

hilltop house
fresh blood stains
well-worn steps

dark lake
the death rattle
of her car

fruit cellar
flies circle around
the light bulb

final judgement
the shadow play
in mother's eyes

- Tim Gardiner and *Maria Laura Valente*

Caroline

You threw glasses at her,
But she filled them with fine whiskey;
You plunged her back with the sharpest dagger,
But she bandaged her own wounds anyway;
You threw century-old rocks at her,
But she instead built a castle and let you in;
You offered her sour wine,
But she poured in honey to make it taste better;
You dumped her with rags,
But she tailored them into a nice suit;
You played her least favorite music,
But she just jived in with the tune and danced ballet;
You gave her your worst, but she offered you her best.
Though you left her in the dirt, she knows neither madness nor revenge.
She's unbreakable. She's extremely strong.
You can't easily find someone like her.

- *Irish D. Torres*

Vervain

You're compelling me every night,
Yet, you get burned during daylight;
You allure me each time you wanted to feed,
having my fresh blood as your prime need.

I tried to be cool and tough,
But I thought to myself, I had enough;
You aimed nothing but to sip my blood,
Aye, your pleasures are horrific as the Great Flood.

You fooled me with your old, dirty tactics.
Yet, I turned out stronger than the Medieval bricks.
Come into my snare, poor and horrid vampire,
You'll get burned by your own desire.

I am fed up with all the neck bites and pain,
Now it's my turn to slap you with vervain;
I bathed my neck with a vial of it,
Suddenly, you became feverish after you bit.

You need to perish for you are toxic,
So I let you ingest it and you were extremely sick,
I hit you with vervain and I playfully watch you burn,
Now, I'm placing your ashes in a silver urn.

- *Irish D. Torres*

The Kings Garden

Once there was a king whose daughter was beautiful.
He loved her very deeply and he wished to have more.

So he cut her into pieces, and each was an astonishing daughter.
Still he wished more and he cut those pieces into pieces,
and again each was a stunning girl.

He loved these so, that he cut the pieces of the pieces into pieces
and he loved each of the pieces of the pieces of the pieces so he induced.

When he was all done, with love he threw all the scattered remains into the air so very
high that when they fell to earth, rainbowed flowers bloomed and Cantored at his feet.

- *Scott Williams*



- *Mary Pagans*

In a Hole

Rain moves over the garden as if a monsoon had hit. Behind the pane of the kitchen window, streaked seemingly with giants' tears, stares Harry. Harry is nervous. His guts are churning up inside but he appears impassive. His wife would say he's wearing his poker face, but she's not around. Not any more.

Harry looks at the ground outside, at one particular spot of the garden right at the end, near the fence. He glances up at the gray, teeming heavens then back to the spot. The newly dug earth is being washed away by the rain. This worries Harry, worries him a lot.

It had taken quite an effort to dig up that part of the garden. He'd had to clear some of his wife's favourite bushes, whatever they were called. Not being a keen gardener he never remembered the names of plants or flowers. But the bushes had to be cleared to make space. He'd kept them, there they were in the corner, as he intended to try and replant them again in a few days' time.

Then the rain came.

In a way Harry had been grateful for the rain. It was back breaking work, chopping and sawing and digging, and he was relieved to have a bit of a rest. But the job wasn't finished. And he had to finish it.

He wasn't much of a finisher, Harry. He could hear his wife's nagging voice now, admonishing him that he hadn't finished the job. Well, he'd finish it soon enough, just as soon as this monsoon-like rain stopped.

Harry turned around to put the kettle on. He flicked the switch and opened the tin where the tea bags were kept. It was empty. Harry cursed himself for forgetting to do the shopping. The wife always took care of those things. He opened the cupboards to check for coffee. He couldn't find any. He settled for a cup of hot Bovril.

He was sipping his drink, staring at the spot in the garden, when Harry saw it. He feared this might happen. Harry considered hard what to do. There was only one thing for it. He took a last sip and then went to find his coat and boots.

Harry opened the door and hurried to the shed. He retrieved the spade. He still had blisters on his hands from the previous digging, but he would just have to put up with the pain. He trudged across the garden to the spot by the fence and looked down.

There, newly visible thanks to the rain washing away the earth, was his wife's hand.

Harry sighed. He poked at it with the spade then started to dig. He regretted being too tired to dig further down the other day. What was it his wife said? He wasn't much of a finisher. This time he would do a better job.

"Hi Dad," a voice behind him said, suddenly. "What you doing?"

Harry stopped digging

- *Warren Paul Glover*

I watch you through
the barbed wire fence
mulching the garden -
your devotion to it
obvious

strip joint -
a businessman comes
to scout the talent

- *Susan Burch*

Thefts

Her favorite mask
I found with faint lipstick
widens the wounds.

A dare or a chance
I let her move in
never more than half way.

A novice pretending
cool and detached
as a starved ballerina.

Things went missing
the abnormal sex
became far worse.

I blamed her
medications use of
absence of, yet...

Denials suits her
a psychopath adept
at ruin and theft.

Who left a stab
wound for others
to admire or chase

Where police become
bats dreaming of sight
I'm only her latest victim.

She'll not be found
until another mark bleeds
the very same regrets.

- *Rp Verlaine*

Insidious

The long black tree branch
around my throat
with your name carved
a dream I won't mention.

Another has us circled
by train tracks above
around and below at dizzying
speeds the trains barely miss us.

Yet day dreams are worse
a wet fog of blank and black
with no faces or shapes just
your voice calling mine.

The constant sour breath
of caves vultures retreat to
is everywhere and
I can't even eat cake.

Reading your letters
devoid of any detail
all facade, a bright mask
your world crumbling like mine.

- *Rp Verlaine*

dad's eulogy
I dig a hole
for myself

dead of night
another headless sparrow
on my doormat

dirt under my nails
the smell lingers long after
we get rid of the body

international women's day lunch
she covers her bruises
with foundation

- *Louise Hopewell*

Seeking Answers

He doesn't answer your emails.
Stalk and kill him. Now
put your ear to his new mouth.
Hope for a confession there.

No good. Disembowelment's next.
Answers deeper within.
Fortune cookie confession
scrawled into intestine.

Failure again. First mouth
needs a wider opening.
The knife is already failing.
Maybe a sharpened rib?
You're losing the light.

Not passing moon. The glow
you know you saw inside
him, pre-phone inquisition.

It's gone, mid interrogation.
You've forgotten again.
Souls have skins for a reason.

- *Chad Parenteau*

Your Fifteen Stages to Me Accepting You

1.

Lunge into
Snowdeep footsteps,
and claim you
carry me.

2.

Sink yourself,
scream my name,
seduce other.

3.

Pen bloodied
knife in hand.
Wake up in your room.
It isn't you.
It wasn't.

4.

For insurance
set aflame's
own words,
net's
enough lies
groupie groupers
grip on,
douse flame
just enough.

5.

Bring each bar's toast
back to you,
feed yourself
five thousand times,
bleed wine,

bleat whine:
who recalls tab?

6.

Every little death
becomes plan
growing goodwill,
skeptics stunned
stillborn
floorswept's facts.

7.

Remember
it's not cheating
if everyone knows
except loser.
Own thief's clothes,
rob make-believe.

8.

Worst decision
not to decide.
Man door
till win
tills ground, take Attila
for teammate,
throw behind throne,
own Hannibal lectern
stand by,
prepare peace profit.

9.

Beware
swordpiece chess
horseshoe hand grenades
dodgeball rocks
spin-bottle Molotov
roleplayer rolled,
only pick games

you can win.

10.

Nothing rests
sender writes back
ender's post bender
us vs him outnumbers res
urrects horse
reerrects impotence.
Now win
(don't play again).

11.

Tread martyr
track overtracking
wish nerve
head on coming
unrail thought.
Isn't it easy?.

12.

Next meal
see your face
in broth
consume yourself.
Think it's me
halfway done.

13.

Let every nod
guard every say
agree grieve away
sight mind out
hold my ahead
under bridge
under water.

14.

When I come to
love's exile,
no longer exile,
cross street,
hand lie brand,
tag me back in,
remember last shot,
forget how
trick starts.

15.

Admit
you are better
at my life, do
over empowers
new betrayals
put us sync.
Sycophant lack
humility, no man
adored more.
isle be waiting.

- *Chad Parenteau*

red fox
dead fox
crow

wilderness
i warm a shadow
with my blood

sunday afternoon a hangover of crows

- *Stephen Toft*

Shadow-man

He grasps my hand
where muffled murmurs
skate the rink of darkening night.

He is the haze at the edge of sight,
the murk in granite pleats.
His blur appears above box rims
with lids I thought were locked.

Among fields of spotted cows
crushed grass betrays his tread
and on the sand, the lash of tide
almost erased his trace.

He dogs my heels
jaws snapping beside my ear
the smell of him
tangles in my curls.

I see him
in rising smoke,
dancing on orange flames ...
a shadow of the man,

whose love, I thought I won.

- *Marilyn Humbert*

On the Edge

a leaf
falls at my feet
... silently
bloodstained hands
smooth matted hair

*his anger
a needle-point blade
scarifying skin ...
the tattoo of bruises
over previous wounds*

downcast
auburn eyes smoulder -
raindrops
break the tree canopy
smearing my artwork

*above the forest
formations of birds
fly towards sunset -
the beast stirs
rattling cage bars*

two steps
shy from the edge
cramped arms
await release ...
to dive with the falcon

- *Andrew Howe & Marilyn Humbert*

Soulless



- *Kenzie King*

Drifter



- *Kenzie King*

Waves of Time



- *Kenzie King*

The River

Wide and muddy, gurgling around cement pilings as traffic rumbles by. I cross it every day on the way to work. But it's different at night. When it has keepers, twin boys of nine or ten in yellow slickers, sleeves flapping like wings in the wind. The first time I dream them, one stands high on the bank, head twisted, listening; the other runs down the hill and holds out his hands, palms up. Skin splits along the lines, and two eyes open, mottled brown and knowing. Drops ring on the water. A broken oar slices the surface. Grass shines wet with rain, rock darkens. The next night both boys come down and sing sweetly without opening their lips. Then the river rises and the road gives, asphalt edges crumbling. The sidewalk tears. I go under. When I float up, my mouth's full of blood. I climb out, spit, put my fingers where my teeth were, and decide to tell no one what I've seen. But you know the river I mean. The river of not waving but drowning. When you open your mouth to call for help, water floods in. When you open your eyes to see, it's dark. When you reach for air, you find yourself clawing mud. It's where the lost children go, and the old who forget their names, and the cats and dogs who run away. When you look down from the bridge, sometimes you see a headless doll floating among the reeds. A broken pair of glasses. A sodden tennis ball.

- *Dana Sonmenschlein*

My Psychopomps

A black cat is a secret kept. A pair, bad luck and ruin. The kind no one wants to rub behind the ears or stumble on. I found two. Taken from their cage at the kill-shelter, shaking, the little sister hid under the big one as if she could be mistaken for her shadow; now they go where I go, sleep beside me as I sit, share the meat on my plate.

Sometimes others come in from the cold. One curls around my head as I close my eyes, tucks his tail under my chin, reaches for breath and warmth. Long ago I found tufts of his fur beside the road, plastic collar gone transparent, spine unstrung, a shiver of claws among leaves. The rest, dust. In the night, when I wake, another lies between my legs as if newborn, huddled in a puddle of blood; I remember this one as a kitten, eyes just opening, and how he came to hunt everything he saw—toes, mice, moles, rabbits, snakes—but brought birds home alive, even, once, a crow. Sometimes a third shade tiptoes across the bed and finds her old place between my arm and heart. We fall back asleep. Domed skulls dream in spite of dirt. Outside, jaws unhinge.

When a cat lady passes on, people say, her pets rasp meat from bone; the place stinks like a tiger-pit by the time someone gets the door open. But I've seen my girls turn away from blood and pussy-foot around the house, avoiding the sick and dead. So if I die before I wake, I'll turn at the threshold and pray, *Let someone find them quickly*. Before my they follow me into the dark, where topaz eyes blink out beneath the trees.

– Dana Sonnenschein

blind man's buff
confusing his fingers
the scent of patchouli

daisy chain
two bodies coil around
an empty wine bottle

esbat ritual
she confides in the goddess
#metoo

- *Andy McLellan*

THE DISAGREEABLE TRUTH OF THE PATHOLOGICAL PUSSY

Sat behind a low wall watching them
long hair, short skirts.
They strutted like turtles.
It will take a crane to remove me now
I weigh too much.
Can't be rolled away due to organs
internal and external
if you include sight.
Some do, some don't.
Best to get that sorted out
before you begin hiding.
Attire is accurate down
to a millimeter or smaller.
I got that off a cereal box
fronted by a healthy looking transposition,
inaccessible to me ultimately.
Always check your ballistics,
fatalistic and fantastical.

- *Colin James*

A CONSTANT COINCIDENCE

Renewed and refreshed since the Gnarly Monk
curtailed his overuse of french words
in describing our previous blase existence.

We were now formally discriminate
as to witnessing those blurry features
beneath his signature wide brimmed hat.

A large nose or productive profile,
long beard over Freudian cloak.

The smell of cavities and ancient humus,
wide, somnolent stuttering gait.

He had been accused of cannibalizing
a hiker's remains with surrealistic tact,
is thought to be summering in Belize
his rainy season like a fence is back.

- *Colin James*



- *Ana Butnaru*



- *Ana Butnaru*



- *Ana Butnaru*



- *Ana Butnaru*



- *Ana Butnaru*

reminding myself
crazy isn't contagious
doesn't help
I rush home
to take a shower

possession --
the child's toy speaks
to an empty room

too young
to give consent
discarded
on the closet floor
in fetal position

mansplaining --
the way you assume
I haven't got a clue ...
I wear your ring
on my middle finger

- Julie Bloss Kelsey

Shrinking Violet

We have no belly for this kind of thing,
our hearts are white, we've the guts of kittens.
A hard wind blows from the mouths of babes,
even the messenger saying nothing, cowering
on the low steps of an unattended temple,
in floodwaters of apathy
fed one urinous drop at a time.

Witness the removal of an apparent spine.
Strike a blow toward a bumptious rib.
Kick another hole in what purports to be a man.
This fever either kills or cures you.
The human rainbow, it requires rain,
it needs the sunlight tearing through us.
Death, it doesn't touch me now. Nor living.

- *Bruce McRae*

Shrunk

There are signs of the gigantic.
I can barely reach the handles.
A pea takes on dimensions of the sun.
A mere crumb is astronomical.
I put my small back into shifting
an enormous grain of sand.
And it's very cold down here —
apparel loosens, atoms mingle;
molecules are the size of baseballs.
I orbit a planet of dust;
smaller smaller smaller . . .
I'm somewhere between here
and there. I *seem* to be
then vanish.

- *Bruce McRae*

adulthood
how beautiful the world was
from a treehouse window

cityscape through
the office window...
it's lonely at the top

waves crashing
on the beach...
the lingering sound
of her song long after
she leaves

– *Vandana Parashar*

It Doesn't Snow in Alaska

It is snowing. Willow wears the crocheted hat her sister made for her. She walks alone on the street of Vancouver with the sounds of footsteps behind her. She turns a weary glance over her left shoulder – and there is no one.

“It doesn't snow in Alaska.” A masculine voice says followed by a disgruntled laughter.

“Only if you're dead,” another male voice says, “weather is the same all year round.”

“We're as far North as we can be – no snow here.”

Willow pauses, looking into a starry sky; the streets are littered with snow.

“You're in Canada,” she says searching for a face to place with the voice. But, no one can be heard. She stops again at the corner looking in all directions for the two men with the European accent; still, no one.

She slams the door as if it's the middle of the day.

“Genevieve! Genevieve!” She says to her sister who rolls over in bed looking for the clock, “do you know what time it is?” She yawns.

“Genevieve,” Willow hollers again.

“What?” She says lazily.

“The strangest thing has happened.”

“Oh yeah? Well tell me,” Genevieve musters a smile.

“Two men were talking...”

“That's strange to you?” Her sister turns over.

“But I couldn't see them anywhere... there were voices, and feet walking, but I couldn't see anyone.”

Genevieve sits up, almost perky, “so you're telling me you saw a ghost?”

Then, the women are startled by a knock on the door.

“Who could be knocking this time of night?” Willow wonders.

“It must be Oscar returning early,” Genevieve says, putting on her bath robe.

“Why would your husband be knocking at his own door?”

“Lost his keys,” Genevieve glares and opens the door to find no one; the street, lit by yellow iridescent colors, is deserted without a trace of footsteps in the fresh snow, and she shuts the door, with a chill down her spine.

“The hairs on my arm are standing from goosebumps,” she says with maddening eyes.

“Certainly there must be someone,” Willow says and opens the door; she steps onto the front stoop peering at the cobblestone street when an astute man appears behind her and she jolts.

“I'm sorry,” he says with a toothy grin, “I didn't mean to startle you.”

“Where have you possibly come from?” She says, shaken, scanning her eyes over an English gentleman in the three piece suit complete with a pocket watch – yielding a charm of decades past.

“Might I have your name?” He says, pulling a cigar from his trouser pockets.

“Tell me you're not going to smoke that...”

“Then I won't,” he thumbs the wrapper, “If you oblige me with a name.”

“It's Willow. Willow Lakes.”

“Well then Ms Lakes... or should I call you by Mrs?”

“Ms is just fine,” she covers her mouth with a gloved hand. “Wasn't there two of you...” She begins.

"That, there was." A voice says from behind her again.

"How can you appear from nowhere?" She clammers when a coach drawn by black and white stallions stops before her and the gentleman opens the coach door, "we can take you places my lady where you have never been."

"But who are you?" She says politely.

"The name is Frederick Thomas Wellington," says the first gentleman.

"And I am Nicholas Ferdinand Walsh," the second, younger gentleman says, looking equally stellar in a dated suit and top hat.

"Where can you take me exactly?" She inquires as her sister opens the door, "what are you doing standing out in the cold?" She gasps.

"I'm talking with these gentlemen," Willow says casually.

"You've lost your mind sister," Genevieve says unamused and shuts the door.

Willow takes one last casual look at the closed door before turning her head to the coach and makes her way inside with the help of a blond haired, blue eyed Nicholas Walsh. The horse hooves clammer through the snow to stammer upon the cobblestone street; when they enter the tunnel before them and she opens her black trench coat to let the air in - she is taken through the time warp at one o'clock AM and doesn't return until midnight of the day before.

She finds herself walking once again with the sounds of soles stepping along and two men talking; she walks the street alone toward her sister's house - a visitor in Vancouver with memories of a bachelor and her being embraced in his arms.

"It doesn't snow in Alaska." The masculine voice says.

"Only if you're dead." The other voice says.

"Weather here is the same all year round."

"And you're not dead." Willow says staring up at the starry night sky.

"You're not dead."

- *Candace M. Meredith*

late night walk
a stray kitten follows me
back home

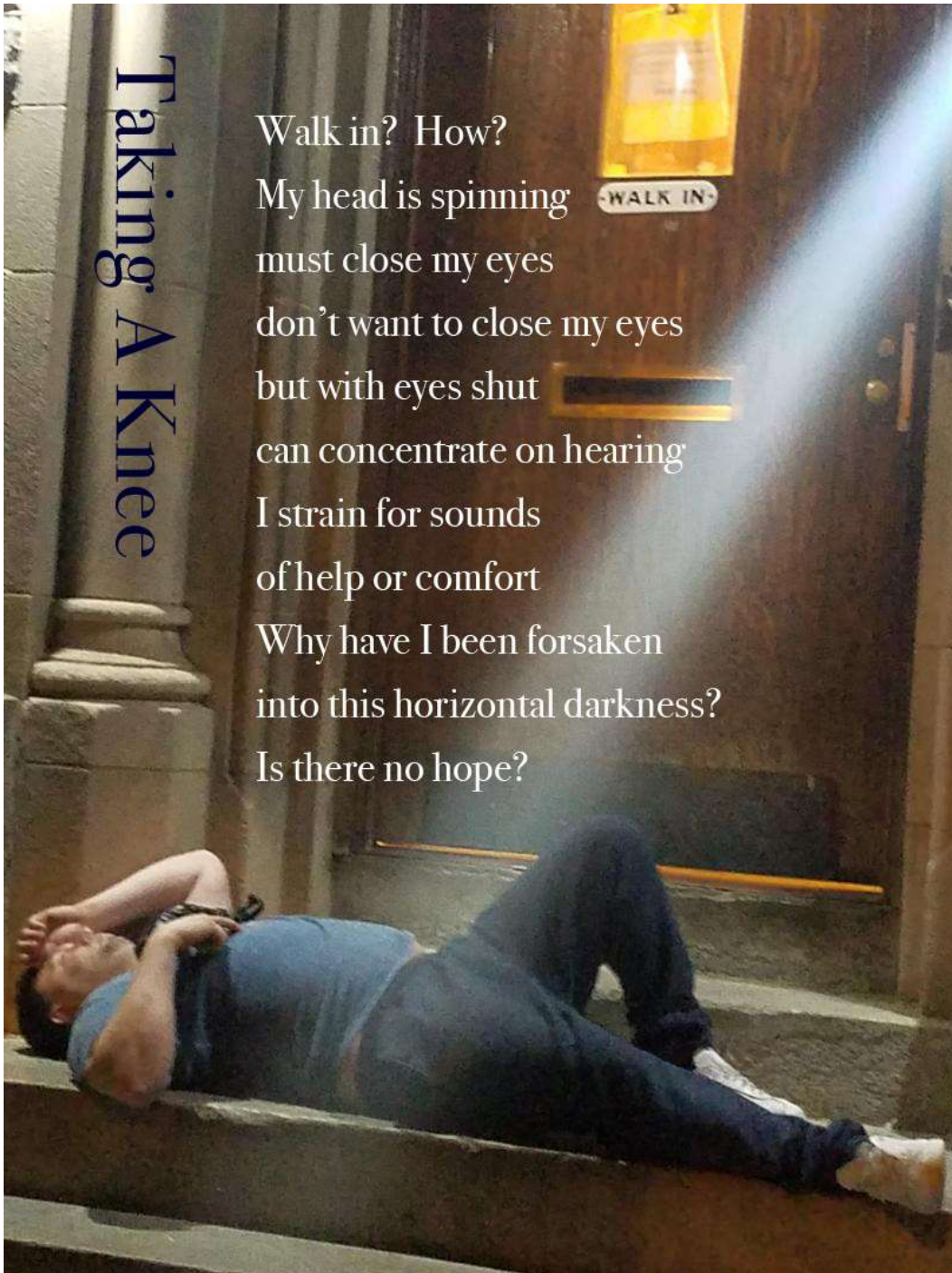
separating
the dirty laundry
into piles
I live alone now
save for the echoes

a white cross on the highway
those stories that no one will tell

- *Gabriel Bates*

Taking A Knee

Walk in? How?
My head is spinning
must close my eyes
don't want to close my eyes
but with eyes shut
can concentrate on hearing
I strain for sounds
of help or comfort
Why have I been forsaken
into this horizontal darkness?
Is there no hope?



- text by Mark Blickley, image by Katya Shubova



Gravity Grateful

Looking down from high places don't bother me at all but when I have to look up at things like buildings it makes me nervous cause it feels like some kind of force like a magnet or something is going to pull me up and lift me off the ground which is a lot worse than falling 'cause if you're falling down you know you're falling and that's that but if you get pulled off the ground and lifted into the air you're not falling but you could fall at any moment and there's no end because if you fall you have to land but if you're lifted up it could go on forever and I hate that.

text by Mark Blickley, image by Robert Funaro

In Dreams

In dreams of deep disturbance,
The wakening nightmare creeps...
Into living consciousness
A black, eternal deep-
Delving menace,
That torments, taunts and screams
Teases erotically in the madness, of a solitary being.

Beyond the realms of Reason,
Its strangling claws do quiver,
Gnawing ever closer
As the Rational quakes at fear.
In dreams of dark precision,
Where light ceases to be,
As heaven blends with hell
The exterminated essence is torn away from me.

- *Warren Paul Glover*

a crumbling street sign

its bullet hole
punctuation

rusty confetti
dressed in noir
by nightfall

beer barrels in heaven

how she explains
the rumble

in the clouds
too young to know
what drunk is

- *Peter Jastermsky*

Intricately Forgotten

she imagines herself
singing to the dull
thunder of the falls
she oversleeps
the departure
of the only ferry
that never comes
he cries for her
voice imbued
with a sense of loss
she cannot dare
to believe herself
he cannot dare
to imagine her otherwise
she cries
at her own nonexistence
and he creates
a detailed memorial
to what never was
forever locked
in a cabinet of curiosities

- *Kath Abela Wilson*

nobility of no

I love a perfect no
fruit of an oak

single-seeded
thick-walled nut

set in a woody cuplike base
I want it ripened

mature
without blemish

too heavy
to blow in the wind

it must be picked
whole

for nutrition
seed dispersal

so as to grow
another

it can be like an egg
its beautiful shape

intricate in construction
a miracle

put it that way
in my hand but no

can crunch
its winter-booted beauty

ruined then thrown
to let traffic go at it

I passed yours the other day
and saw the ants

carrying off some spoiled white stuff
whatever it was

it could be noble
defined as above

no perfectly formed
pure as yes

- *Kath Abela Wilson*

Mise en Scène

As with Andy Warhol
something broke, was lost, given away.
Squandered; abandoned
left unexplained, unanswered.
Things were being confiscated, denied, offered up;
there was disagreement, fabrication
the inability to protect—to restrain.

- *Alla*

On Lenin's Mausoleum and Love
After Jenny Browne

Not every glance is capable of conveying
all things at once: love, anger, frustration.
I remember your mother's house
the inside of a ship.

I know you thought things would be alright
turning to sand,
all of it coming down.

In "Love Letter to a Stranger"
you're always you and I'm always me.
A body you'll do anything to preserve.

- *Alla*



*the art of war
spies
count more than the troops*

- Michael Rehling



the metal flag never wavers i count the stars in the sky

- *Michael Rehling*



- *Michael Rehling*



- Michael Rehling

Homeward Bound

I overhear the character on my daughters cartoon show ask, “Do you know what’s in the box”? Well, do you know? It’s my broken spirit. My bubbling anger. My frustration over having a perpetually messy house, with no energy to fix it. It’s my fear that these years are slipping by without me soaking in all the precious moments because I’m up to my ears in a desire to run away. It’s my humiliation that this is not enough. It’s the unshakable belief that if I just tried harder these feelings would all go away. It’s the suspicion that I’m not alone. Yet, still, desperately alone.

spent dandelion
no more wishes
left to wish

- *Tia Haynes*

All in a Day's Work

I don't recognize my own vagina. After two children, it's as if a completely different woman exists between my legs. A woman who was disfigured by wordless strangers who only knew how to claw, tear, and then piss on her. A woman who fears too much touch. A woman who feels pain now when she craves pleasure. A woman who rarely raises her head to say hello and instead mumbles indiscriminately and gives up. A woman who has chronic dry mouth. Beaten and too ashamed to mention her trauma, a woman who has begun to brick herself off from the world in hopes that it never happens again.

Though, writing it out, it seems my vagina and I aren't actually all that dissimilar.

tending to my garden
a new bud
among the weeds

- *Tia Haynes*

why this shock
when my hair turns grey
. . . fireflies
that decorate the night
won't be alive the next day

breathless
and all at sea . . .
under the lash
of thought waves
I feel a chill

evening lights
crisscross the corridor
as a wheelchair
lies in its shadow ...
once it was your escape

- *Kala Ramesh*

Blackest Night

We stare above, mouths open, without a whisper,
we blink, there's no ceiling on the sky tonight,
only a dead pool of darkening gloom and misery.
Every sparkling solitaire, now maudlin, has been draped
in a dismal inky satin coat, its muddy, layered hood
over the moon's face, covering his wrinkled eyelids,
blocking iris and glimmer, leaving only blackest pupil.
The darkness is enveloping us, wrapped in a cocoon
of obsidian mesh to capture and suffocate any hope
of re-emerging as a monarch. The bleakest shadows
of ravens, cats, bears, and panthers serve as murky fur
keeping us cold and cheerless as our dismal vista
is deepened by brooding, heavy clouds of angry slate,
oppressive onyx, burnt charcoal, and the slivered moon
is cloaked in dour ebony stained batting saved
from the depths of a malefic lagoon. No dancing
lightning bugs, nor hissing nighthawks, nor ravens
with feathers the color of slick oil, nor marble-eyed,
black crowned night herons, nor buzzing nest of wasps,
no--just a still, vast, sombre, dusty, dark, desert overhead.
We hold tight to each other to face the expressionless,
eerie, carbon midnight, although no longer able to see
or trust where earth and sky curve into each other.
The once shiny constellation salt-and-pepper sky,
now bleakly looms overhead as grave to a million stars,
a crypt to the Big Dipper, a midnight hearse shuffling
to an untold abyss. No blinking hint of heaven's gated
paradise, or Venus's beauty, or Orion's studded belt,
or Saturn's elegant bracelets remain, why Galileo
himself would weep to see this sorrowful, ashy nightfall
that Physics can't even explain. But as loveless couples
everywhere greet the familiar expanse of ----foul air,
and sunless space with a grim monotony and futility,
somehow, you and I still clasp hands. Our fingers
intertwined, we trust each other despite what would seem
our woeful fate, despite the ominous atmosphere,
that if we should fall, we'll soar upward into an oblivion
with the darkness of black tea and the spiritlessness
of a fading star-starved night. But at least, if we are to be mired
in a pitch-black hole for eternity, we fall up together.

Epilogue

Even the end of the earth, the charred nightfall on all our days,
with final will & testament signed for all creatures great and small,
and the burial of the universe to the blackest, ancient catacombs,
and the swartening of the Milky Way can't extinguish
the eternal flickering optimism and naivety of young love.

- *Kathleen A. Lawrence*

Shadow at the Wheel

Secure the doors.
Slip window locks in place.
Put phone beside the bed before
the lights
 go
 out.

Not one dim lamp in the hall
to tell the hour.
Breathe deeply.
Settle down.
Check the curtains.
Look beneath the bed.
Pull the doona down.
Watch the cat hook pleats
onto the fabric.
Will It ever stop?
Lurking in my dreams throughout the night
a dark car humming as it cruises past:
headlights dipped,
a shadow at the wheel,
daring me
 to peek
 into the street.

I've moved three times.
Every time I learn
to hope. Each time
that black sedan returns.

- *Hazel Hall*

Eyeballs and Brains

How long have we had microwaves?
Forever if you count little red dwarf stars,
but I mean microwave ovens.
I still can't get over that image of my eyeballs
fried like sunny side up eggs,
the runny whites oozing down my cheeks.
I will never peek through the window
to watch my lasagna twirling around
like a carousel, crackling and popping,
spitting tomato sauce in all directions.

Remember when cordless phones came out?
And then cell phones maybe twenty years ago,
and some paranoid people said that all
that radiation held up to your ear
would surely cause brain cancer.
That fear fizzled out, but cellular phones
must do something on a cellular level.
I see thousands of chattering cell
phones held up to tender ears,
and I wonder why the conversations
don't get scrambled, like when the country music
station bleeds into NPR for a few seconds.
If I walk into that crowd, if I bravely
walk through the unending, inaudible crescendo
of a million radio frequencies blaring through my body,
what does that do to my pancreas or my thyroid gland?

If the microwave can melt your eyeballs,
what do cell phones do to the circuitry connecting
the amygdala to the frontal lobes, the right brain to the left?
What if those neuroscientists at the VA Hospital
figure out how to regenerate nerves severed in wartime?
And then they figure out how to re-wire the brain
via cell phone ...

I can avoid looking into the microwave oven,
but how do I avoid radio, tv, GPS, security cameras,
internet hot spots? What about cosmic radiation?
What about the wireless mouse scampering under my bed?
The lady in the park uses aluminum foil headgear
to protect herself from CIA satellites.
Google is working on a personal protective force field,
but until it's finished, I'm thinking... maybe Idaho,
or a condo in one of those renovated missile silos.

- *Mac Greene*

My Demon Family

I hear that zebras stay close to the lions,
to know where they are and when they're restless.
As for me, I send my demons far away.

Pot-bellied Lurch, the color of puke,
belches and scratches, talks dirty and crude.
Hey Zeus ROARS
thunder and lightning,
frightening boys and girls.
Misty melts away, suicide notes smeared by tears.
Priapus waves his horndog prick to imaginary cheers.
Handsome Morrison with corpse skin mumbles
the names of musicians dead from drugs.
Good Time Charlie laughs and jokes and laughs
and jokes with his magic flask of whiskey.

I tried to heal my wounds, resolve my issues,
but now I know the zebras have it right.

- Mac Greene

Halloween

For one bitter cold October night
a fog rolled from the sea.
Two strangers stalked the mist,
and crashed into their fantasies.

Fate, or fear, or fear of fate,
tore loneliness from their hearts,
for one desperate impassioned act,
committed in costume on Halloween.

Afterword, they pulled out a pack of cigarettes,
struck the tips from the very last arid match they had.
Drawing in a breath, which blew all their courage out,
they watched the glowing embers
turn to ash and hit the ground.

- *Dalton Perry*

reach

from the depths
of life
where danger
and hope swim
side by side
and lips share
desperate
breaths
under the sea
mouth to mouth
until oxygen fades

and panic strikes
in silenced
final screams
that dance
and rise
as bubbles
expiring
unnoticed
on the surface
until
calm returns

- *Dalton Perry*

The Other Side of Midnight; A Medication Journal Entry

March 13, 2018 - My energy normally fluctuates. This piece was written over a period encompassing numerous cycles of said fluctuation.

I'm sitting here typing—trying to write a haibun. The problem is that the medication is getting in the way of my brainwaves. When I'm in my manic state, thoughts flow over the dam in a steady stream. In my supposedly-appropriately-medicated state, the proverbial spillway seems to run a bit dry.

blackened fog
hides the moonlit sky . . .
moths gather in the shadows

Bipolar disorder is fun, well, that's until I start thinking I can run the world. Then things start to get a bit complicated. It's hard to describe when these fingers don't even have the energy to manipulate the keys. The clock on the wall is ticking. Dust is gathering on the bookshelves and the rays of sunlight have vanished into the solemn hour of midnight.

awake in a dream—
reality bites
my dog

What I know about mental illness is that stability comes with a price tag. To have lived a life benefiting from the adrenaline rush of mania seems at first to be a blessing. But then there's the curse of grandiose thinking and risky behavior not to mention depression looming on the other end of the bridge.

Here, in the middle of that lonely bridge, there stands a fairy with a medicine box clutched in her outstretched hand. Here, there is no turning back. Here, there is no empathy, no emotion played away on the black and white keys of a grand piano. Here I'm just another

cardboard silhouette casually propped up in a department store window. Here, there is no shore. Time traces fingerprints on the window. The window opens and I step out onto the crowded street.

got a problem?
take a pill . . .
follow the winding stream

I take a careful step or two, stagger and then stand still. I pause for another breath and then lean into the wind. I'm not sure where I'm headed but I think I see a light ahead. This dream may really be for nothing but nothing's ever felt so real.

somewhere buried
deep inside—
a clock-spring marking time

– *Richard Milton Grahm*

Long View



- *Elliot Nicely*

Closed Quarters

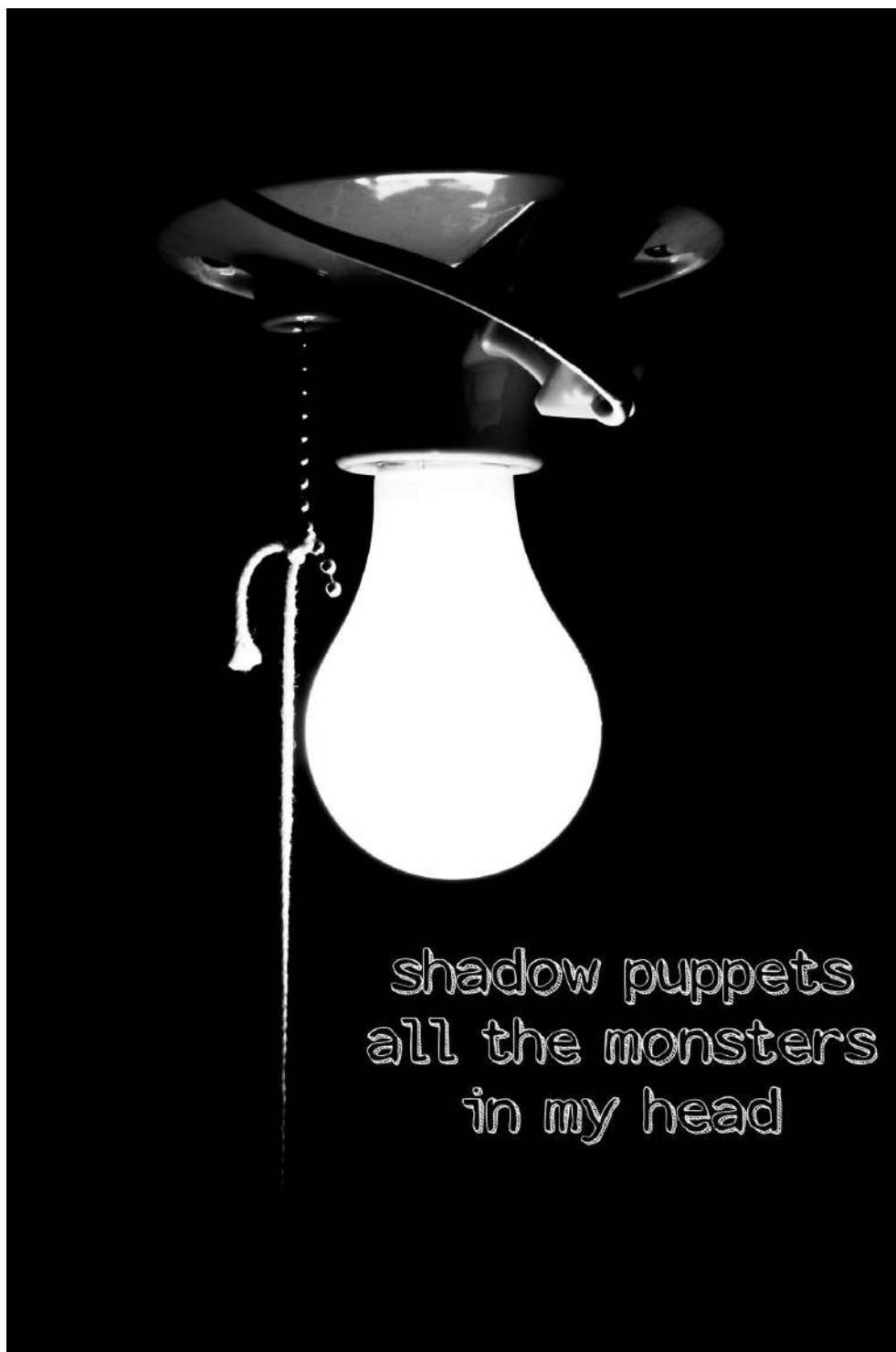


- *Elliot Nicely*

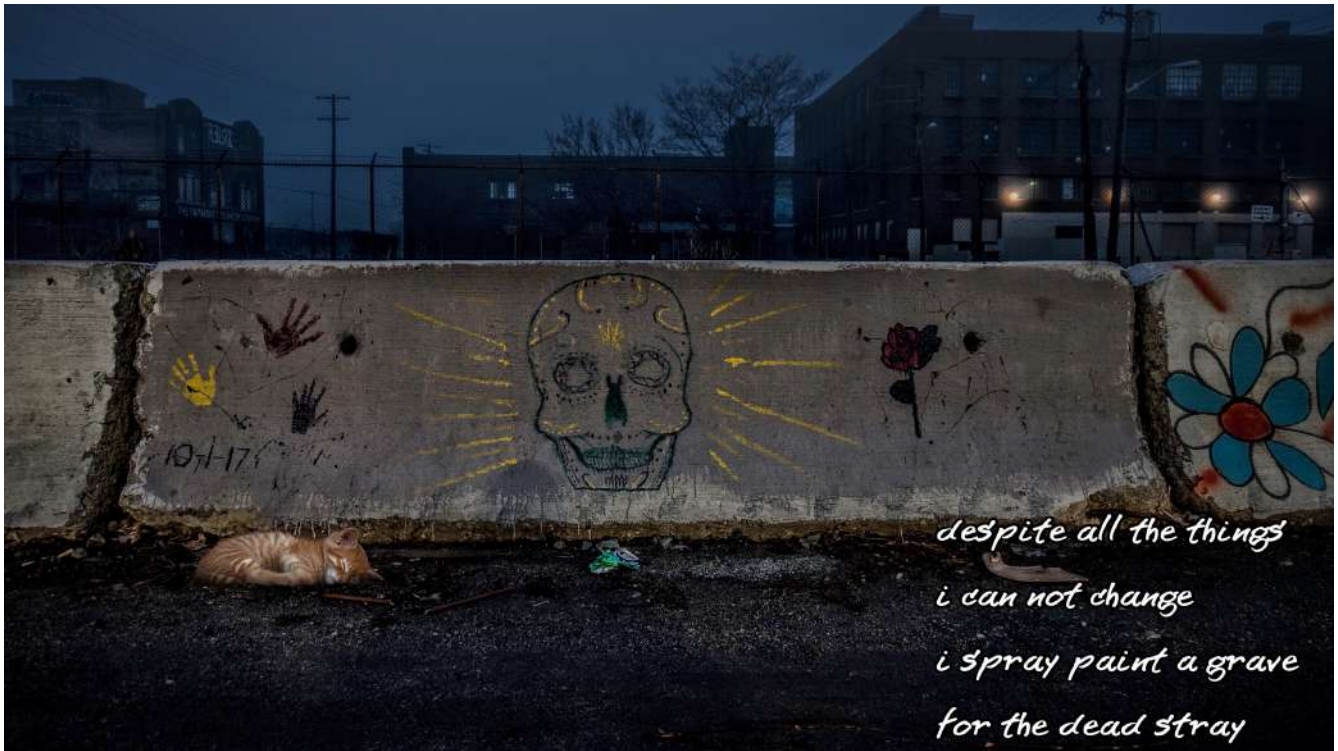
Shipping and Receiving



- *Elliot Nicely*



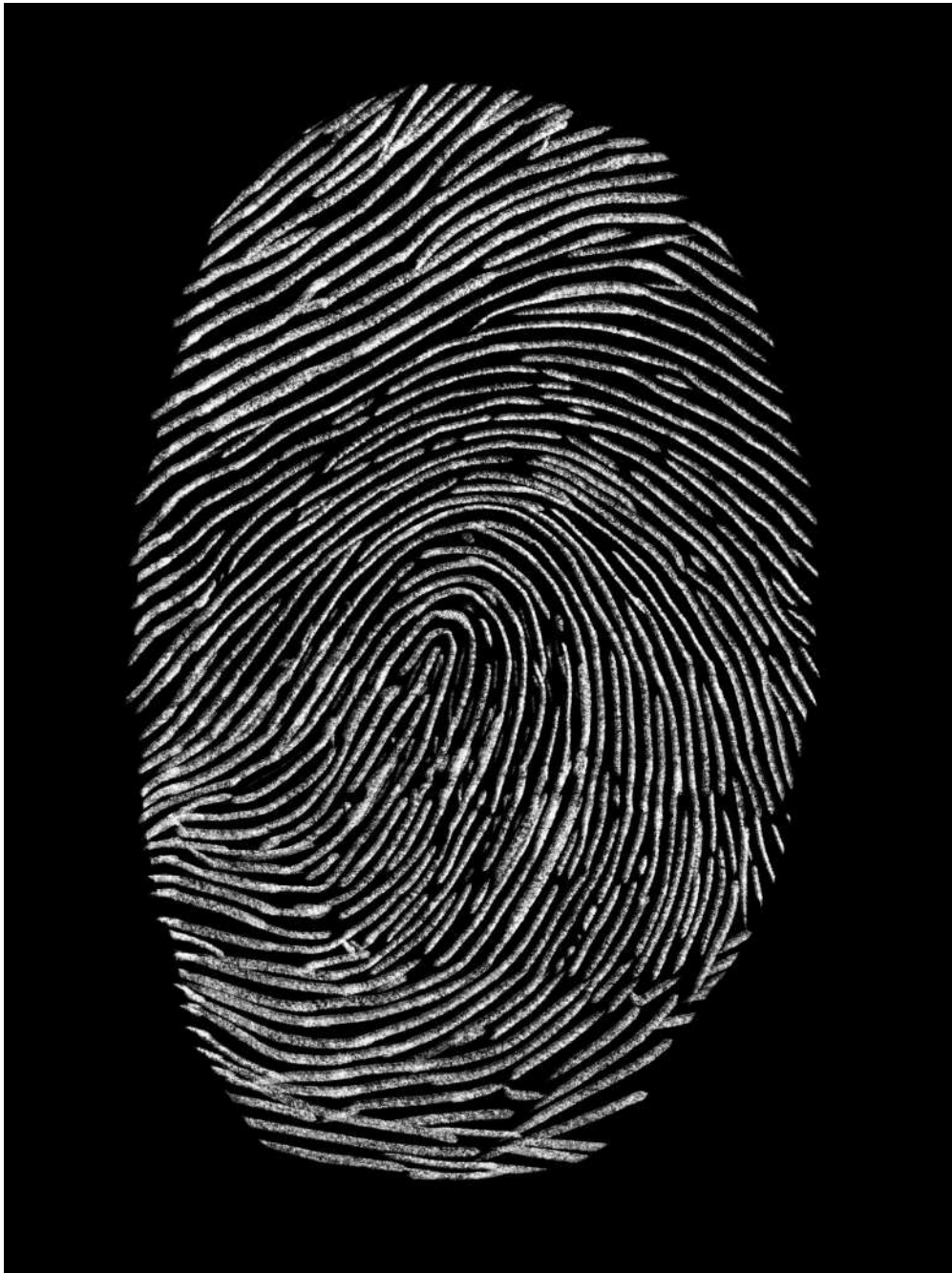
- photo by Chase Gagnon, text by Lori A Minor



*despite all the things
i can not change
i spray paint a grave
for the dead stray*

- Chase Gagnon

Dissociation



- *Lori A Minor*

Interview with Debbie Strange

1. How long have you been writing and what led you to poetry?

I have been composing poetry and songs since I was nine, when my parents separated and moved away from each other. Writing was my way of dealing with the emotional upheavals in my life.

2. Who do you feel has influenced your work the most?

My father has had a strong influence on my work. He introduced me to classical poetry when I was young, and he recited poems from memory until his death at age 90. He was also a naturalist who instilled in me a reverence for the world, and many of my haiku and tanka reflect this affinity.

3. What is your favorite poem and why?

My favorite poem is always the one I am reading at any given moment. This week, I am appreciating poetry about language. “Soft Travellers” by P.K. Page, and “Words” by Anne Sexton, are two wonderful examples.

4. We particularly enjoy your haiga. Can you tell us a bit about your process?

Thank you! Making haiga is one of my greatest pleasures. I have been taking photographs since I was a teenager, and they are often the inspiration for my artistic endeavors. I create haiga in a variety of media (ink, digital, watercolour), using traditional methods (associative, interpretive, illustrative) during the creative process. I maintain a publication archive that includes hundreds of haiga and tanka art at debbiemstrange.blogspot.ca.

5. Did you always want to be a writer, or did you have another dream when you were a child?

I have always wanted to be a writer, and I am forever grateful to the editors of leading short form publications worldwide who have made this dream a reality.

6. A lot of your work has dark undertones. Is there any particular event in your life that has inspired this subject matter?

I strive to keep a balance between dark and light themes in my writing, but I must admit that it is easier to find homes for the latter. I extend my thanks to you both for giving my work a platform in Scryptic. The death of my older sister, mentor, and singing partner, was a life-altering event for me. Another ongoing issue is that of chronic pain. My daily practice of writing and making art helps to distract me from physical limitations, whilst fostering a meditative state of mind.

7. Do you have words of wisdom for aspiring writers?

My best advice for aspiring writers would be to read widely, maintain a regular writing schedule, and submit work often. There is much to be learned from rejections as well as acceptances, and it is never too late to begin...

Announcements

First and foremost, with the release of our final issue for the season, we will be releasing an anthology of some of our favorite Scryptic pieces from issues 1.1-1.4! There will be a link available to purchase your copy on our Facebook page, website, and in the email that was sent your way!

There are a few changes coming to Scryptic, the biggest being that with the release of issue 2.1 in June, Scryptic will publish bi-monthly. This means six issues a year as opposed to four, each published every other month. We made this decision because the number of submissions we receive is growing substantially, and there are always a large number of pieces we absolutely love and deserve publication that we have to pass on simply because there's not enough room to take everything we like – if we did, the issues would be 400 pages long instead of 130!

When we started Scryptic, our mission was to create a home for art and poetry that would otherwise have a hard time finding one. Lately we've been feeling like we were contradicting the idea of a magazine that also acts as an artistic safe space by rejecting well over 60 percent of submissions we receive. This wouldn't be a problem if the quality of the work we receive wasn't high enough to be published, but the vast majority of it is – You guys are just too talented! Publishing bi-monthly will allow us to give a home to each and every piece that we feel deserves to be admired by this awesome little community we've created.

Also, to save on printing costs and lower the price of print editions of Scryptic, we have decided to print our issues in black and white instead of full color. The online issues ***will remain in full color***. The reason for this is because in this coming year of publishing, we are going to put serious effort into advertising our magazine in local establishments and small press events. We already have plans in the works to sell print editions of Scryptic in Detroit coffee shops and book stores, and printing in black and white will cut the cost of getting the issues in these places nearly in half. This means more readership and exposure for us all! Issue 1.4 will be the last one printed in color until we can find a more cost effective way of doing so.

All of this will come into effect after the publication of 2.1, and you can find revised guidelines on our website.

Thank you so much for your continued support! We can't wait to start our second year of publishing with you!

Best,

Chase Gagnon and Lori A Minor