

SCRYPTIC



24

Scryptic

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© 2018 by Stephen Chase Gagnon and Lori A Minor
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Dear Readers and Contributors,

Thank you for supporting and contributing to another awesome issue of Scryptic! You guys rock! We would like to sincerely apologize for being a week late with getting this issue out. With a lot of holiday travel and weak wifi during the weeks surrounding Christmas, it was a wee bit difficult to get finishing touches on the issue, but it's finally here! We hope you enjoy it as much as we do!

We have had some minor technical issues getting the issues in print, but we're hoping to get this resolved ASAP and will let you know when we do.

Submissions for issue 2.5, due out in February, are now open! We look forward to seeing more of your work as Scryptic continues to grow in 2019!

All the best,
Lori and Chase

A Week from One Hundred

Every morning he reads
the local obituaries online
old, young, before their time,
overstaying their welcome
in a world where measurement
and statistics pass for a life
not a life but a number
he is already the oldest
in his documented family
traced back five generations
no one hit one hundred
and now he is a week away
reading local obituaries online
praying loudly he doesn't
see his on the screen
then laughs louder
than he had prayed
at the absurd thought
it's good he can still laugh
still ponder measurement
and lifelong statistics
a week from one hundred.

– *J. J. Steinfeld*

Next Time You Wander Away

Why did no one ask
where you were
when you weren't there
distant in body and thought
so distant even a divine measurer
with a miraculous tape measure
would come up incredibly short
attempting to calculate your absence?

Next time you wander away
you'll leave beautiful little crumbs
so even the most indifferent can follow
and we can discuss everything left behind
or sadly forgotten.

– *J. J. Steinfeld*

A Vocation Made from Air

If hope were a rocking chair
made by a long-dead artisan
who traded his soul for nimble fingers
maybe you'd have a chance
slight and ever so difficult
to sit on that remarkable chair
get a rhythm going about beauty
as you rocked back and forth.

But comforting dream
can turn into confining reality
just to be close to imagined beauty
just to get a glimpse of something
shaped by divine inspiration
without leaving the rocking chair
so this is your new task
a vocation made from air
now solid as mountains
or paintings of mountains.

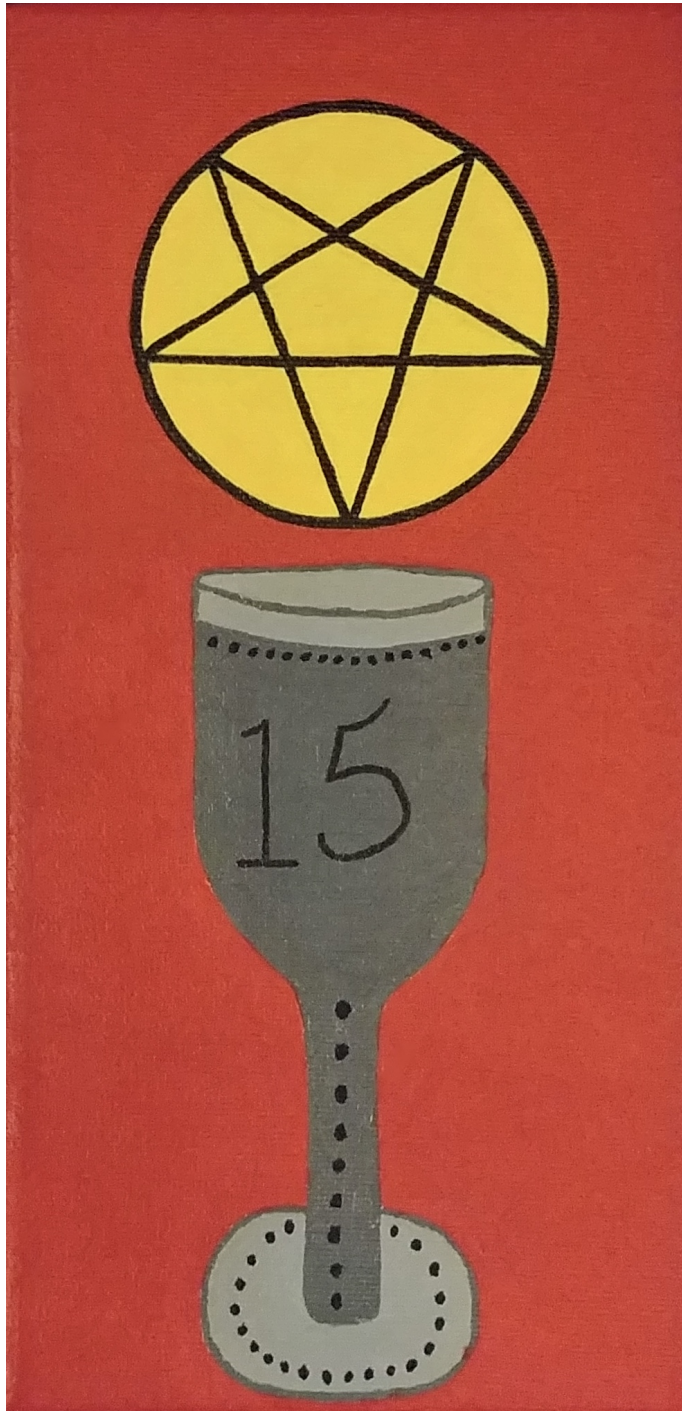
As you rock back and forth
time interwoven with beauty
you see out the window
either a great mountain
or a painting of a mountain
the movement gives you hope.

– *J. J. Steinfeld*

Each and Every Time Except Once

Yes, you could fly but not far nor fast
a slow, leisurely, insane flight
half wordless half over-worded
approximately, nearly, almost, just about.
You never did get all that close
there were the equations and computations
and God's way of outsmarting you each and every time
except once, yet that was in a split-screen nightmare
and it slipped from your grasp and language
summing up a life not yours, but another's.

– J. J. Steinfeld



- Marie Hearty



– *Marie Hearty*



– Marie Hearty



– Marie Hearty

Confluence

The spirits of the night came down in a whirl;
I never saw them coming.
Now, thrown open wide,
the gates of pearl and fire
stand waiting for me to step inside.

From here, I can view the hills and pastures
just beyond the Jordan River
and I can see the torch of Hades blazing
across the River Styx.

An angel stands beside me
with the fear of God in his eyes,
holding out a sword in one hand
as a dove flutters in the other.

Wind mixed with flame and rain
courses through my body
as if I've disappeared.

I search for signs of guidance
but am left with only cinders
and a bird already flown.

crossroads—
here lies a path
they say cannot be traveled
a maze through which the lost ones
can never find their way

I take up the sword,
strike down the angel,
and then I follow the dove.

—*Richard Grahn*

Darkened Rooms

I'm wandering the upstairs hallway of this old hotel, wondering what stories lie buried in its now abandoned rooms. It was once a thriving establishment, catering to travelers on paddlewheel boats wending their way up and down the mighty Mississippi River. It's my dwelling now, just me and my cat, Snowball. Each room is fully furnished, mostly with Victorian-era chairs, beds, bedside tables and light fixtures (bulbs long since burned out). The doors creak. Cobwebs are everywhere. I turn on my flashlight and brush my way into the first room. It feels like Friday the 13th but it's really just All Hallows' Eve.

sounds of laughter
fading . . .
dust in the moonlight

The four-poster bed is all made up, waiting for the next guest to arrive. An unopened bible sits on the nightstand. I imagine a pious man kneeling to say his evening prayers. The space smells old. The memories feel even older.

Snowball startles me as he jumps onto the bed, stirring up a thick cloud of dust. Wheezing, I back myself out of the room, leaving him to explore on his own. The next room is much the same, abandoned in a state of readiness.

shadows falling . . .
I follow a breeze
through the grass

In the third room, I find an old Victrola standing in the corner. Lying next to it is a stack of 78 rpm records. I flip through a few of them. I've never heard of the artists—Cleo Brown, Memphis Minnie, Eva Parker Pace—but still, I can feel their music seeping through the pores of the peeling papered walls.

The last room on the right is locked so I turn back down the hall. As I look for Snowball in the first room, I see something under the edge of the bed. I take a closer look. It's a box of rat poison. I leave it there and close the door behind me.

Finally, the trick-or-treaters have come and gone. I search the place for Snowball and sure enough, I've found him, lying limp in a pool of vomit, here on the bathroom floor.

curiosity . . .
the ghosts in the attic
are playing for keeps

– *Richard Grahn*

Ode in B Flat Minor

Blue notes
come from touching you
and watching you disappear.
It's not magic,
just an ocean
swallowing up a raindrop
and crashing on the shore.

– *Richard Grahn*

The Horror

Don't keep reading this.
Stay ignorant of the way things are.
You are the world to *Demodex brevis*,

the eyelash mite. Here comes one,
dragging its wormy tail across a flaking waste
to deep-oiled pores. Infestations are common.

Three more, like fat white eels
cram their heads into a follicle
greedy for secretions and cells,

their optics like shiny black beads
above that needle maw, claws scrabbling
for grip as they feed and breed

on you. Can it be mites which
swarm through the forests of your hair,
or do you imagine that itch?

Best close the curtains and stay in.
Turn off the TV and ask no questions.
Resist the urge to tear your skin.

– *David Barber*

Last Day of Sun

he's the dumb-ass
beside lockers
a gimp in the quad

overlooked by teachers
scorned by the 'hood

alone
he pencils a list
mind whirring

red-lining,
fantasizing ...

shocked faces
one by one
falling ...

posts and tweets
leaves a note for mum

this fallen angel
pastes on a smile
blackens his face

steps through shadows
doors in his game ...

rifle chest tight
he grins as they dance
the rattle and bolt

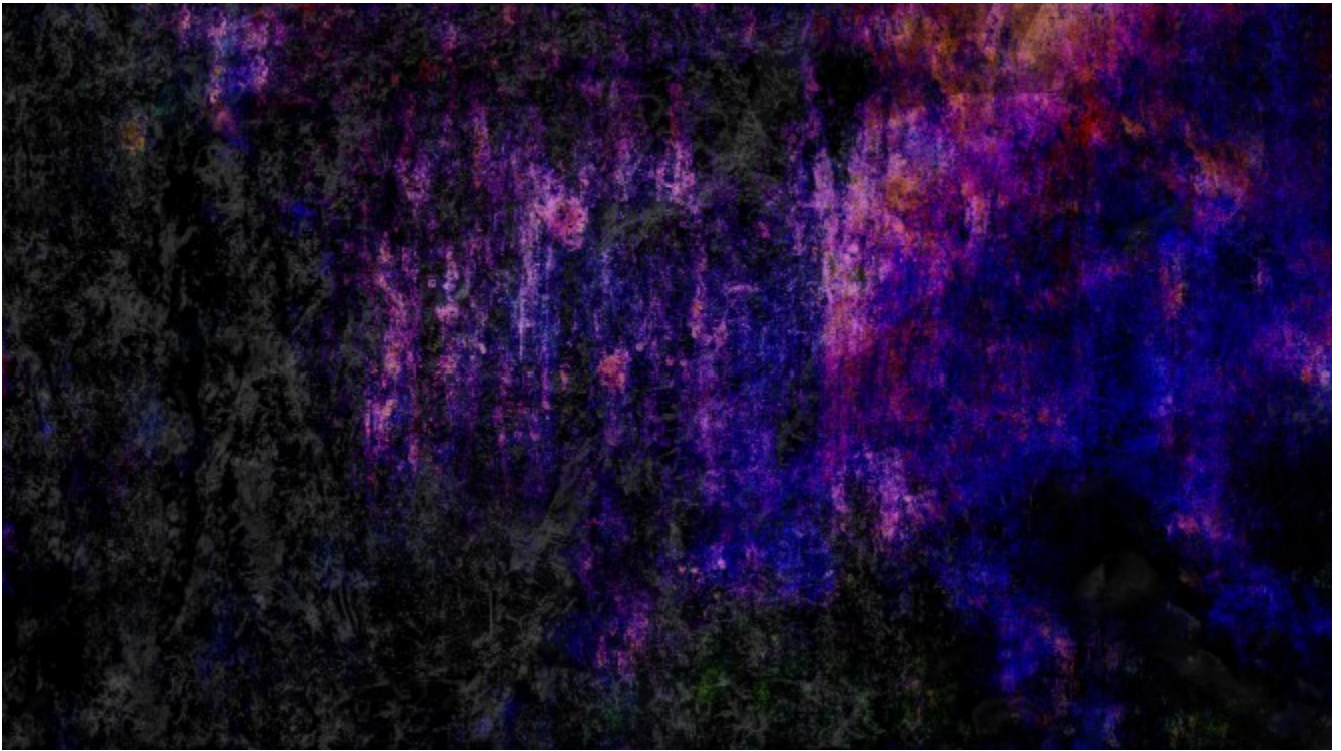
and they see him now

tonight's glamour man
on the six o'clock news

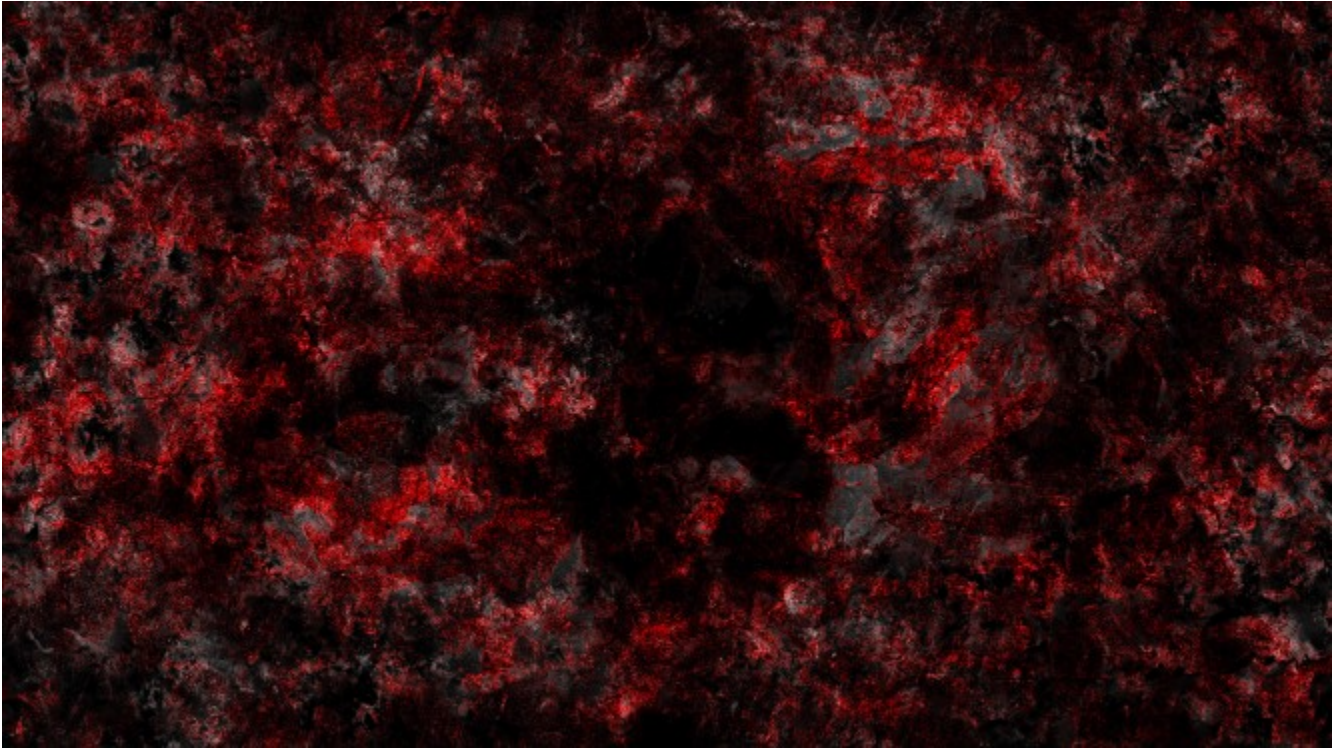
– *Marilyn Humbert*



– *Mors Dolor*



– *Mors Dolor*



– *Mors Dolor*

Addictions and Madness

Woke up on a park bench
freezing night, Gothic city.

I'm surprised I woke up at
all, those drugs and alcohol,
coursing through my veins.

I was a warrior when I was
young, and I was a sailor
some time ago.

Love used to live to live in
this heart of gold, I had
dreams and ambitions.

I wanted to be a journalist,
and work for the paper, have
a little garage band on the side.

Wanted to sing like a free bird,
not a jailbird, or a comatose
patient at the local psyche ward.

– *Wayne Russell*

Time Builds a Wall

The sun goes down so sweet,
just like a lullaby, nestled behind
the subtle tapestry of fading treeline.

I can see the ominous sky, so grey,
I can see ravens darkness, purple
halos at the edge of wingspans might.

The old people wander, lost like a
child, eyes tired, bodies bewildered.
They're counting the days, just as we
all are.

Winter's on its' way, a myriad of leaves
crushed beneath feet, memories specked
within minds, once nimble as a fawn.

We are building walls, methodically
planning for our tomorrows, while today
we fade like flowers in a vase.

– *Wayne Russell*

rough trade
a popinjay's
feather falls

black metal
the inversion
of crow's oath

– *Jan Benson*

cloud

nine

inen

neni

enin

nnie

ienn

enni

inne

einn

nein

– *LeRoy Gorman*

Monday commute
TRAFFIC
MOVING
SLOWLY
TO HELL

RE ICT DACCE
STR E SS

brain cancer
the smartest boxer
we ever knew

addiction support
fruit flies come
for the juice

– *LeRoy Gorman*

The Kinik (Kokogiac)

Imagine a thirty-foot, ten-legged bear.
Preposterous, right? Just an Inuit joke.
A fable told around the frozen dinner table
embroidered over many years, a lotta hooch.

Too big to climb outta the water –
ten sets of legs like ten hockey players
goin' after a puck at centre ice –
not as gracious as a centipede on dirt.

Can't usually see much of him –
just his grey practically 5 x 5 head!
All ten legs furiously paddlin' for
what they're worth: a livingroom size rug at least.

How ya gonna go after a beast like that though?
You'd have to put enough lead in its head
to sink it, for starters. You wanna try
to restrain ten sets of ten-inch clawed paws?

Nah. You get near a Kokogiac, my friend,
you better kayak like a mo'fo' for the snow.
Beach that puppy and run as fast as yer mukluks
can muster, baby. The Kinik don't mean maybe.

One could could eat you in a coupla bites –
or leave whole chunks to freeze for later.
Maybe as he's watching the northern light show.
Don't need popcorn, bowl, or remote control.

Can just float on his back as he manages
to man paper, pad, a coupla handfuls of pens,
guitar, and plays a blues to the pock-marked moon.
What he wouldn't do for a manicure and tooth brush.

– *Richard Stevenson*

The MetaKiller

let's say this is a poem
a refrigerator magnet poem
[killer] [inside] [standing] [behind]
but it's centered in a shot
as a camera pans a suspect's
kitchen

let's also say the kitchen scene
is being watched by an animated
family of [blue human frogs]
sitting around a [retro TV]
comically drawn with rabbit ears
on AdultSwim

but now let's say the cartoon
is just playing in the background
in a house of college students
in a 90's [slasher] film
while a killer lurks outside
watching through the window

now let's say one of the [students]
decides to leave the room saying
[let me take a look]

and let's say she's walking alone
into the kitchen and there's
an extreme [close up] on the
killer's shoes as the girl begins
reading a one line poem
stuck on a refrigerator door

– *Henry Crawford*

R.I.P.



– Olivier Schopfer

Orgasm



– Olivier Schopfer

Flowerpots



– *Olivier Schopfer*

crashing waves
the silence
of an empty shell

broken jigsaw
trying to fit
myself together

another dawn
I claw back
to dreams

still no news
another leaf deep
in silence

no signal
the emptiness
in her eyes

last words
no longer time
to make up

much weaker now
drawers still full
of a former self

daises
a field full of childhood
innocence

your eyes
reflecting the pain
no more

storm clouds
the fading light
in your eyes

– *Rachel Sutcliffe*

Grave

By the grave I saw the trees
stick-drawn in the fading twilight
sad in a windless foray, a madness
leafless as two black ravens preen
imagine what they've seen over time
sitting, watching over the mausoleum.
Crowds that come and go, leave tears
that forever flow, upon scarlet cheeks.
Twenty-one gun salutes echo in the trees,
gray, stick-drawn in these autumnal days
lost in the garnet haze, into the twilight we
stand at the grave, in a sad windless foray.

– *Ken Allan Dronsfield*

Of Tranquil Bones

When grasping for the bones
Eagerly I looked for the bonds
Ah, distinctly I was incensed
They are perfumed from palms
And the suspense never tilting
Ah, distinctly I was begging
I craved the idle, lazy insecurity
The ready brought such sorrow
Of the tranquil bones humming,
Buried deep in the earth tomorrow.
Shed no tears upon my passing;
for I now go where poetry is born.
There, where a zeppelin rises high
and the swallows spiral all about.
Crimson and amber leaves soar
where a tear of joy once lavished
and pillows of clouds drift onward
I'll take my leave writing eternally.

– *Ken Allan Dronsfield*

FETISH

In a private house
in a portrait of a city
a voyeur ponders
objects of desire
sexual politics

and the life of Jesus—
a rosebud unshorn of thorns

His parents told him not to play

with dead things
to ponder magic trees
migrations of pair-bonding birds

the other 90 percent—
infinite

the psychoanalytic

labyrinth of views

Now
a blond angel wrestles

in the electric mud
of imagined brutality—
an alternative reality

— *Anna Cates*

JEHU ISLAND

Leave your mother, Alpha.

Sail across the briny abyss.

Reclaim abandoned shores,

And pry back the bracken

To behold the uncertain truth.

Pick through the briars'

Intoxication of red rose,

And if you keep your footing

Sure, and don't slip

Like a lemming over the crags

Into the mouth of the kraken,

You will find your end, your Omega.

You will arrive full circle . . .

If . . .

– *Anna Cates*

CONFESSION

If I forget myself, don't ask why.

If my gray eyes shine a little too silver at times,
remember, you, too, could have been
the unlucky sojourner that night.

Never you mind
why I was roaming after gloaming in the wilds.

We're all entitled to a secret or two—

It could just as easily have been you
who first mistook that bat for a screech owl.

It would shock you to know the truth—

I'm not all crucifixes and prayers.

I've drunk the holy water, but to no avail.

The curse lurks within me—

As the moon turns tides,

I cycle into lunatic with unspeakable lusts.

Still, spare me your silver bullets.

It could just as easily have been you,

bitten that night in the thickets,
bristling into something new,
becoming the shadow stranger of nightmare
who'd roast your heart on a skewer—
Your parish priest, the vampire.

— *Anna Cates*

An Unnatural Childbirth

the midwife
a certified doula
and shaman
knew in an instant
something was very wrong

the mother's
high-pitched squeals echo
through the halls
where the residents stumble
in their drug-induced stupors

I am here
as an interested observer
to record the birth
for a documentary
on the spreading epidemic

the plague affects
thousands of young women
around the globe
delivering not children
but fast-growing devil spawn

the demon seed
already speaking in tongues
emerges
severing its umbilical cord
with razor-sharp claws

its eyes ablaze
the creature surveys the room
rises to its feet
snarls at each of us in turn
and vanishes into the night

– *Michael H. Lester*

Isis of Ireland

she speaks in tongues
dances naked in the streets
bringing trouble
to the god-fearing townsfolk
with her strange, uncommon ways

the elders
have her brought before them
for an inquisition
if they find her to be a witch
they will burn her at the stake

born Heather Salt
to a poor potato farmer
who lost his wife
to a mysterious malady
she calls herself Isis

a stutterer
she cannot complete
a sentence
angering the elders
who lose their patience

*set her ablaze
this deranged practitioner
of the dark arts
then bury her ashes
far, far away at sea*

– Michael H. Lester



strewn petals
of the passion flower
litter the ground
where we bury our mother
queen of the gypsy necromancers

michael h. lester
image from pixabay

– *Michael H. Lester*

she sings the songs
that drive the fishermen mad
this siren of sea
as the great frothy waves
come crashing down the lee

michael h. lester
image from pixabay



– *Michael H. Lester*



Poe's raven
has yet to pay me
a visit
no matter, I have my own
apparitions to poeticize

michael h. lester
image from pixabay

– Michael H. Lester



overnight
the twinkle in her eyes
vanishes
replaced with a vacant stare
I wish I had never seen

michael h. lester
image from pixabay

– *Michael H. Lester*

THE QUANDARY

The cigarette machine outside the corner store
took your two bucks
and gave nothing in return.
The store owner shrugged his shoulders.
"Not my problem," he said.
No, not his problem.
It was yours.

Your old man was waiting at home,
mouth quivering, fingers shaking.
aching for a butt.
They were his addiction.
You weren't.

Your return journey home
was slow, full of foreboding.
You understood that the opposite
of a lit cigarette between your father's lips
was a thumping up and down
the side of your head.

You stood on the stoop,
afraid to go in,
But the outside was no better.
Nothing nurturing on those streets.

You could hear your father screaming,
"Where is that kid?"
And a bunch of local toughs
were staring in your direction.
A machine may have stolen your money.
But it was always people who made you pay.

– *John Grey*

POSSESSED

My possessions represent me.

Books, clothing, CD's. movies on DVD –
they're my brain, my heart.
They're stand-ins for my soul.

As is the toaster,
loaded with dead crumbs.
And the pictures on the wall –
product of a lingering fascination with Roy Lichtenstein.

Look around these rooms.
You'll get to know me
even if I'm not here.

And I'm not just the souvenirs
along the mantelpiece.
I'm the dust they come with.
Not just the coffee table
but the coffee stain.

My ex didn't just break up with me.
She and my Superman t-shirt also had to part.
The next one in my life
will also be in the life of my autographed Red Sox baseball.

The thing is
I am not just myself,
I am what I choose to surround myself with.
So be careful with that ceramic horse.
You don't know where I've been.

– *John Grey*

COUNTRY LIFE

It's as fresh and strong as silence,
emboldened, in the beginning with hope,
then rages against banks, the weather,
that coming in a fist
that punches a wall here and there
while a scruffy dog licks an old sore,
looks on.

It's a fleeting smile lost to leathery jowls,
the sentimentalist in all of us,
the immense debt for a thing half-done,
the robust calm of the ultimate despair.

It's where the rooster crow
meets the ghosts of the night before.
mornings stodgy and solemn,
in league with the executioner,
an unhinged phantom
from three generations back.

It's a sudden onslaught of bad weather
that threatens to uproot both house and barn,
a flood up to the knees
or a solitary raindrop
that plops onto parched knuckles.

It's lips like burned dry polyps,
large dull teeth, pale gums and bronze-lidded eyes.
It's a solitary walk into the fields
where stark reality takes a scythe to future harvests.

– *John Grey*

Hiatus

How in the cool blue midnight of your room
image upon image have we come from out
the rain tossed bramble of our lives
where form upon form,
undoing all that we have done,
maze of stems and boughs always before our eyes?
Forms that we have known here
have witnessed no change,
except the change of season now,
which is no greater than the rest,
but more regular.
It is not the season that has brought me here to you,
but only the rain falling.
No time of year,
but only a moment of wetness on the wing
Oh, cut swiftly the blue mist of leaves and press
this blue reed to your lips to play
long undulating rhythms of blueness.

– *Kath Abela Wilson*

Moonviewing Night

sudden chill
before dawn
up for another blanket
can I sleep through
the night's long haul

blue
moon
what's left of what was
she hides her mouth
when she eats

pomegranate
moon
she swallows
all the seeds
before sunrise

almost covered
she stares out at us
knowing
it's the room that's blue
. . . her deep dark negligee

blood moon
she considers
her obscurity
complete
the birth of stars

hard work
this moonwatching
but the thrill
of herding the light
into dark before sleep

– *Kath Abela Wilson*

Into the Sea

there was a time when I couldn't breathe

they started sending film crew when things got too fake.

they took their spotlights there.

the worm began to tunnel,

where waves lap

forgotten memories

are flame dresses

visions of scalps, blood

reverse revelation --

too large for the room,

listening for ships passing in the night

to horns that sound like the fish I've seen.

"I hear drowning to death is preferable."

the ladles of logic are slipping

the house paint on the plank siding

is in curls --

I'm not a demon, but am I worth it?

power lines whipping in the dusk,

feeling that flames.

the following evening after it sank

I say: "The fish always know first."

but the fish have died since then.

– *David Bankson*

Back then you were a globe

held apart by ocean arms,
melted glaciers refrozen,
vodka & ice castles,

your exterior severe

as the dusk's late light, draining
every window in the house with day-

killing darkness; I

stitched together the broken bits of myself
& learned to ignore loose threads
& pricked thumbs.

I learned of the difference

between being silver & moon
glimmering on the top of a stray puddle.

Between hearts & the seas
without end I mistook them for.

Surrendering & being seen
to have surrendered. A globe
& a land without smooth slopes.

Between such an example of weakness
& leaving before it could be proven.

– *David Bankson*

Epilogue

An entire day
built on bones
& all I can see
is you diminishing. Today
is the best day
of my life.

You tell me to take it
along with you.
Instead I walk on.
The denied ground
at my itinerant feet.

From below the fields,
you pull with the weight
of these memories
into the softened
earth, into death,

& that's not OK.
Through years & years
I have unmade this life
for you, a staircase
I pushed myself down.

You do your worst work in the light.
The deepest darkness
remembers itself under too weak
a moon & our minds, our arms
keep moving & destroying,

teetering in the presence of light.

– *David Bankson*

The Mask of Matsushima

By Oshima's highest rock, I wait for the crescent moon to rise over Matsushima Bay. It's a cloudless evening, the placid water broken only by the ripples of jumping fish. From the pines behind me, a field cricket trills incessantly until interrupted by footsteps on the path.

islands
only one catches
my eye

In the darkness, I can just make out a short man in a brown robe by the temple door. He doesn't speak and neither do I. The figure shuffles off down the steps towards the shore. Intrigued, I follow him until he disappears by the cliff face. Unable to locate the old man, I ponder my next move.

meditation cave
a restless mind
wanders in

The entrance to the deepest cave is cluttered with tombstones and statues, but I clamber into the silence. A sliver of light from the moon, now hovering above the horizon, illuminates a path into the recess. A shuffling sound behind me quickens my pace into the unknown depth. I stumble into an altar encrusted with peacocks. The object on it inspires a combination of fear and wonder.

black helmet
a shaft of light
the crescent moon

Nervously, I pick the samurai helmet up and try it on. It fits perfectly; the warrior who wore it must have commanded great respect from his enemy. Despite my best efforts, the metallic helmet won't come off. Breathing heavily in the death mask, I step forward through gold-plated sliding doors into a clearing outside the tiny temple.

moonless night still the cricket calls

Without the moon to guide me, I must find the shore unaided. My dragon boat should still be anchored in the secluded cove. Scaling the rock face I'm eventually on the cool sand of Turtle Cove. The One-eyed Dragon is deserted, the skeleton crew nowhere to be seen. Bemused, I set sail for the mainland. Navigating by the castle's lookout light, I'm able to plot a course for the forbidden rock. After mooring on the small island by the

ornate temple, the path takes me across three red bridges to the mainland. Strangely, no one stirs in the once bustling backwater.

ronin
a will-o-the-wisp drifts
from field to field

Tall cypress trees line the approach to Zuiganji. The cliff caves are stuffed full of new tombstones. The continued absence of life seems to confirm the suspicion of wrongdoing. The temple has been laid to waste; sliding doors torn with samurai steel, golden peacocks desecrated. Anger swells within, as I make my way to the Emperor's Room.

spirit parade
I turn my back
on the emperor

The silent samurai pass into the night, the emperor in residence for the first time in two hundred years. As I kneel with my head bowed, he explains the nature of the assignment. After my death, one samurai, Fuji-san, did not commit seppuku and enslaved the people of Matsushima on Fukuura Island, taking power for himself. I'm to ensure he passes into the afterlife and peace returns to the region. The emperor leaves, bequeathing the Spirit Slayer to me, a sword of mythical power.

stone lanterns
a spider's web
collects flies

Passing through the courtyard, an ethereal mist rises from stone lanterns. The clouds form into skeletal apparitions of long dead warriors. Fuji-san has acquired command over the spirits of the undead; a terrifying proposition for the living. Cutting a swathe through the fog, the Spirit Slayer does its work well, freeing the demons from Fuji-san's control. Relieved to be through the entrance gate, I quickly seek out the crossing to Fukuura Island.

encounter bridge
the ghost moth
casts no shadow

Halfway across the red bridge, the lookout light falls on me. The alarm is raised and a horde of a thousand undead samurai rush from Matsushima Castle towards the crossing. There is no way back now, I have to find the feudal tyrant. Brandishing the Spirit Slayer, the yurei are held at bay. They won't risk oblivion on its sharp edges.

orchid cage
the sweet scent
escapes me

Picking a petal from the holy flower, I hope it brings protection as the scriptures suggest. The path around the Island is undulating. The occasional view of the ocean mitigates for the all-encompassing blackness of the pine forest. A chink of sunlight begins to colour the horizon. I have to locate Fuji-san before sunrise. The samurai spirits have crossed the bridge and are searching every trail and glade. I will soon be overwhelmed.

forest path
my only company
a stick insect

Fuji-san's samurai won't find me here. The path leads to a small temple overlooking the bay. Two large daruma dolls guard the sliding doors. Their angry gaze hypnotises, I feel a sense of calm from their white eyes. At the door of the temple, the shadow of Fuji-san appears. He cuts a small figure, not of the stature I had in mind. It's clear he is reliant on the supernatural to maintain his power. Reaching into my bag, I fumble for the orchid flower.

crushed petal
the hollow dolls
crumble to dust

With the holy flower breaking the daruma's hypnotic spell, I now face Fuji-san. He is a skilled swordsman, parrying my blows with ease. It's a tiring duel, the clash of steel echoing through the trees. The yurei will be summoned by the commotion. There is no way I can face a thousand foes, even with the Spirit Slayer. During the fray, the moon has risen, unnoticed.

shard of light
from a crescent moon
seppuku

Fuji-san slumps to the floor, his stomach carved open by the moonlight reflecting off my death mask. To complete the ritual, I behead the errant samurai and throw his remains into the ocean. The temple bursts into flames, the lord's power without its master once more. The fire spreads, torching the surrounding pines. Running from the inferno, the yurei are slain with the Spirit Slayer. Outrunning the flames across the bridge, I reach the mainland.

helmet flames
fire in my eyes
on my mask

Sobbing draws my attention; a feeling of abandonment accompanies the crying. A light is on in the lookout of Matsushima Castle high on the hillside. This cannot be possible, the samurai have left the tower. No living being has set foot within the fortification for years.

silence
but for the call
of a cicada

At the top of the steps, I find the heavy wooden door unlocked. The sobbing commences afresh, it appears to be coming from the lookout. Inside it's pitch dark, apart from a slice of yellow under the door on the high landing. The wooden stairs betray my presence, whoever is in the room will be aware of my coming.

derelict
the spider's web
I stumble through

Finding the courage to enter; I'm shocked to see that the wailing emanates from a woman sat on the floor. Tears stream from the saddest eyes, crying echoes from an expressionless mouth. She beckons me forward, arms extended. The profile of beauty has been ravaged by isolation. Touching her face, I caress the symmetric cheeks; trace the path of each teardrop.

dead eyes
beneath her kimono
a heartbeat

The lady of the tower is alive again, a doomed lover whose tragic death has haunted Matsushima for too long. The warmth returns to her touch, tactile hands remove the death mask. I feel the blood pulse through iced veins, the heat back in my breath. She is thankful that Fuji-san's curse has been lifted from the town. I explain my predicament; she recites a haiku poem that may be of help.

forbidden
among the pines
Zen temple

Leaving Matsushima Castle, the sun has risen over the bay. The time has come to find the portal back to the present. According to the lady in the tower, the wandering haiku poet, Matsuo Basho has the key to the forbidden Godai-do Temple. Locals point out the small outcrop in the distance but no land bridge is present. I ask a fisherman and he agrees to row me over to the island at dusk.

I sit and wait, but no-one comes. On the wall of the temple a poem is scrawled. With no clue as to its meaning, the moonlit vigil resumes. I long for the tiny island of Oshima where Masamune's death mask began the adventure. Just after midnight, I take a walk to the viewpoint and recite the haiku poem to the lapping waves.

sacred rock
gathering dust
sliding doors

I hear the tapping of a stick. Turning around, the old man from Oshima stands before me. He introduces himself as Matsuo Basho, a poet from Edo. His travels have bought him to Matsushima to witness the opening of the forbidden temple, an event which only occurs once every 33 years. Basho challenges me to write a haiku. Only one which pleases the deity secures entrance to nirvana. If I fail, then a long wait for redemption is ahead.

in Basho's footsteps a mole cricket digs

Upon reciting the poem from the sacred rock, the earth collapses in front of me revealing a narrow tunnel into the temple. I thank Basho and enter the subterranean passageway dug by inhuman forces. Inside the main hall, the glow of first sunrise through the windows consumes. Blinded, I find myself stepping out of the temple. Dazed and sleepy, I rest my head on the grass.

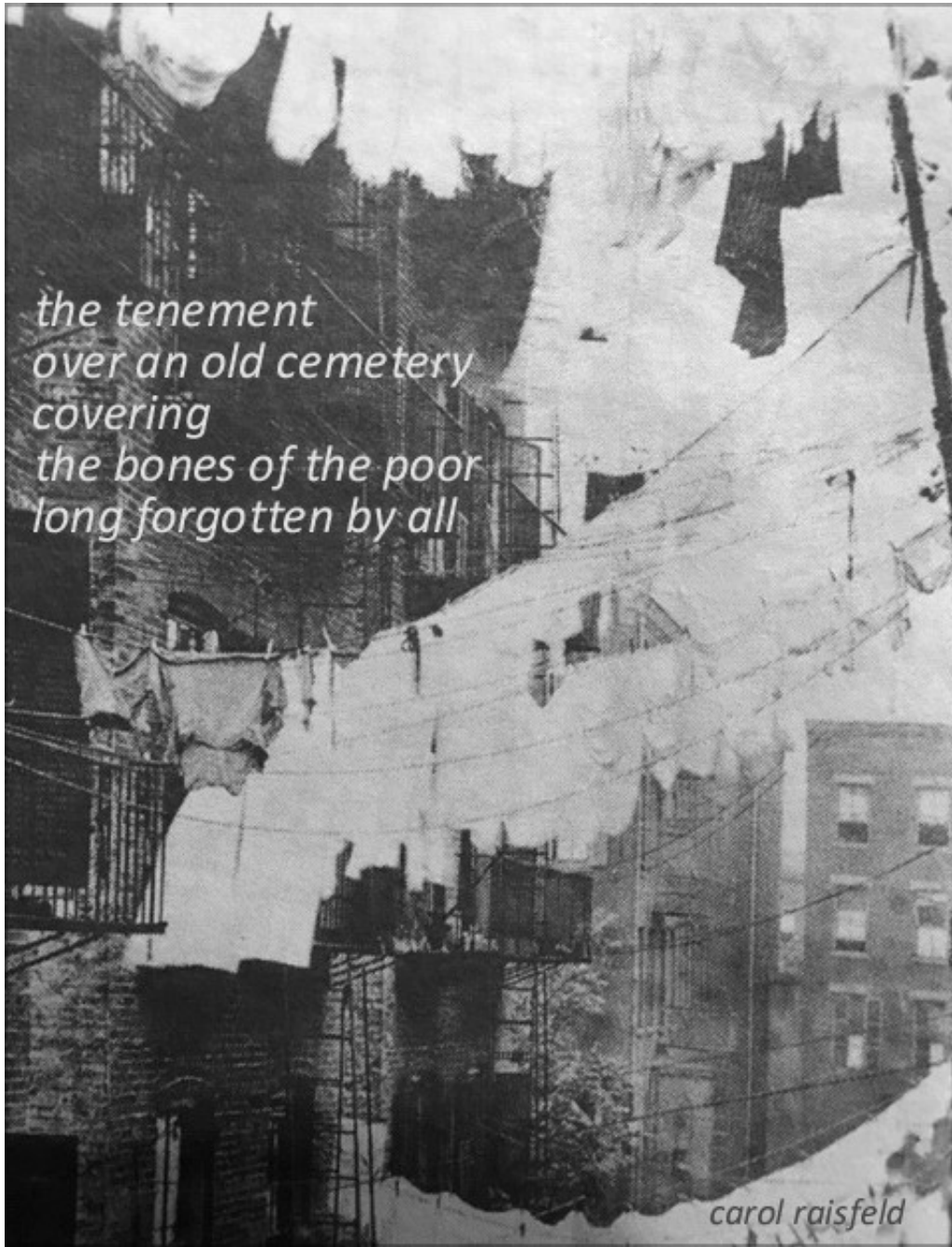
time travel
the rapid buzz
of dragonfly wings

– *Tim Gardiner*

Angel

God is watching you
say the signs lit up
under the radioactive lights of the city
the roadwork buckling, swarms
of insects silent in the heat.
I forgot to rescue you
I saw you sleeping in the MRI tube
with wires, and did nothing.
You folded your white wings
in the hospital gown,
pale, while they took blood
and stuck you with IVs.
In this future, everyone is a mutant,
but you are a beautiful mutant,
a beacon of hope. Your DNA
enables you to fly, and more importantly,
resist the cancers and unraveling
that has decimated so much.
Every cult demands a sacrifice,
and ours demanded you.
Your escape meant the survival
of something better than human,
some hope that far outscoped
anything we had left. God is watching,
the eye cameras tell us, but you
have already left the safe perimeters
of the city, into the epicenters of meltdowns,
the old husks of towns empty
of anything but the rare wild pig and coyote
and your white wings shining against
the now empty sky.

– *Jeannine Hall Gailey*



*the tenement
over an old cemetery
covering
the bones of the poor
long forgotten by all*

carol raisfeld

– Carol Raisfeld

Mirror Behind The Bar

she moved between one
seedy night-spot and another
on to some remote hotel
leaving in secret before dawn
pocketing a business card

dead drunk by nine
picked up and stayed
wherever there was a drink
with men whose names were
outside her hazy thoughts

sex under holly trees
no names, no contacts,
each parting hug
less a token of civility
than an act of love

she stares
in a mirror behind the bar
not recognizing
the mouth, the eyes
the sunken face smiling back

– *Carol Raisfeld*

The Last Round

no money
and no steam heat
he shadowboxes
in the morning, stews in guilt
and emotional impotence

sleepless
he disappears into
depression
with dreams of his wife
long gone back home

frigid night
the warmth of vodka
brings him to tears
tombstone shadows
reach for the trees

a light
at the end of the tunnel
flickers
not looking back again
he dashes through it

– *Carol Raisfeld*

Skin Weaver

Run, through
the withering grass,
to meet
your very own moon.
It riddles deep with
scars, but sewn firm,
all thanks to you.
This face that looks
to you in the silver light,
shivers in your
own arms.
Run, in the night
only you can make.
The circle of light
runs to you.

– *Meg Smith*

Guarding the mice

In the low kitchen light,
my cat
has fashioned a moon.
Beyond the window,
the whole of
the dark universe
lies, unbound.
I will send them there,
if I need.
He must
content himself
with ghost-tails
and flashing gray
in smoke.

– *Meg Smith*

Bleaching the bones

Here run fissures
in their whiteness.
There is no time
for ornaments.
You wait for her
procession.
She reaches through
her veil,
for you to behold..
This is your choice.
Step forward,
hold out your hands.
No flowers will fall.

– *Meg Smith*

learning to live with
the crow on my shoulder
smoke and mirrors

– *Paul Conneally*

Interview with a witness

Please begin, ma'am. Go slowly for the recorder:

To be blunt, it happened just like this...

The voice said, "Three minutes". Then, silence. Sound converging into itself. Then, came the bomb. Five children were in the basement, changing into choir robes. The sermon that day was "A Love That Forgives". The explosion propelled their bodies through the air "like rag dolls". The building quivered as if having a seizure.

A seven-foot-wide hole in the church's rear wall. A crater the size of a child in the ladies' basement lounge. The rear steps to the church had disappeared. The driver of a passing car was blown out the passenger-side window. Windows of properties almost two blocks away were destroyed. All but one of the church's stained-glass windows transubstantiated into variegated rivers of Lethe. A single undamaged stained-glass window depicted Christ leading a group of young children. Their eyes like lambs'.

A war zone grafted from an ocean away: hundreds of injured people converged on the debris for survivors. Nearly fifty years ago but somehow frighteningly present. A flock of geese glided mindlessly overhead toward a biological destination. Infinity continuing itself. Space prophesizing the numb beatitude of history.

Police erected barricades. Terrified men with nothing else to do pushed them back. Others stood to watch, screaming. Babbling. The world was ending. The Reverend John Cross, Jr. loudly recited the 23rd Psalm through a bullhorn. Charles Vann stared at the catastrophe silently. He saw a white man standing alone and motionless behind a barricade, "looking down toward the church, like a firebug watching his fire." Body colored like a ghost. Mouth shaped like a clock.

How did you survive?

There were no survivors. Everyone died that day. Even you. Even me. I did not go anywhere. I'm forever by the phone. Eternal three minutes. Eternal me. Eternal you.

...[Breathing]

I would get comfortable.

– *Brennan Burnside*

The Sleepwalker

Too delicate
in your fine silks
but your eyes unfettered
and your tongue removed
if you had to talk
without aid of drink.

I paint the obscure details
of each day that
age quickly like fat
worms on a skeleton
looking for meat.

I get so much done
that I get nothing done the limits
of sleepwalking are vast.

I measure progress
in minutes not the hours
drugs release me from thinking.

3 days at last count
but the mirror hints
it's been longer
since I slept.

With another painting done
one year after your death
I may even have the talent
you called a mirage.

But it is time for leisure
so all can see me walk
through the town
one hand with a paint brush
the other with your still beating heart.

– *Rp Verlaine*

Mustard

I love the bejesus out of Jesus
but I'll be going to Hell anyway
because I don't love God, He sacrificed
His son and if that's not bad enough He
wants me to worship Him, too, so I hit
Miss Hooker, my Sunday School teacher, with
that after class this morning and she said
that I didn't have faith and if I did
have, faith that is, then I could move mountains
even if mine was only faith enough
for the size of a mustard seed, maybe
she made that one up on the spot, it sounds
like it, or it's tucked inside the Bible
somewhere and speaking of mustard seed is
there ketchup seed, too? and relish seed and
coleslaw seed and maybe mayonnaise seed?
but I won't argue about onion seed
and cabbage seed but sauerkraut seed, there's
another new one on me but I'm just
ten years old, what can I know about life
if I've lived only one measly decade?
And then Miss Hooker added that in our
church God and Jesus are kind of one and
the same so maybe that means that God
took His life of some of it in the form
of Jesus but I wonder which part and how
He could go whole-hog on Himself or half-
and die yet not die and hang on the Cross
and feel the pain yet never feel the pain
and I asked her as much, Miss Hooker, I
asked her how she can believe all that and
I added that it's pure-impossible
to me and she said Gale, that's why I be-
lieve--because it is impossible, which
is a pretty decent comeback I must say
but something tells me that she stole that from
somebody else and I almost asked her
if she came up with it herself or if
it was a swipe but thought better of it
because she's old, she's 25, or may

-be because I'm in love with her
and want to marry her and live with her
in the same home and maybe share a room
with her and I won't mind bedding down
on the floor, I toss and turn a lot and grit
my teeth and talk in my sleep and I'd hate

to disturb her and never would unless
having babies means we huddle and
kiss, kiss like we mean it, not like we don't,
I mean kiss like we love and not just like
each other, I'm flexible, then I said
goodbye to her, I mean after church, and
she said goodbye to me and we won't see
each other for another week but when
we do then I'll be closer to being
a man for her and she'll be that much old
-er, too, and it all mean something, I hope
that I don't have to wait until I'm dead
to find out or if Miss Hooker dies first
that I don't learn it that way and still be
alive. And lonely again, kind of like
God dying as Jesus, one-half of him,
and the other half even when the two
are mended never quite as new
though pretty nigh. But nobody's perfect.

– *Gale Acuff*

The moth child

All night

 nestled in

 her shell of light

she sings

 of her sadness.

Fluttering wings

 surround her,

 flashing silver

 in the moonlight.

And when she is

 afraid,

 her body

 dissolves

into a thousand

 white moths

 which disappear

into darkness.

pale autumn moon

 who is knocking

 at your door?

– *Lucy Whitehead*

passing
the last street lamp
seasonal depression

the slow ebb
and flow of pain
river thaw

the hollow space
inside the pumpkin
winter darkness

butterflies pinned
with outstretched wings
chronic illness

– *Lucy Whitehead*

group therapy the many personalities of one voice



words/image(C)DStrange

– *Debbie Strange*

**family picnic
we chew on the bones
of our past**

words/image (C) DStrange



– Debbie Strange



– Debbie Strange

heavy rain
a chaos of pockmarks
in the execution wall

under the floorboards
an old news headline
of a missing child

lightning strike
the hot flash
in her eyes

– *John Hawkhead*

winter's thaw
deep in the snowmelt
corpse of a robin

old Christmas card
that was the last year
she signed her name

grown-up Christmas jack-knife in a box

fewer of us
even the ghost of Christmas
passed

– *David J Kelly*

BRAID OF HER BLACK HAIR

The murky environ and the smoke and the mist,
Drubbed the ears, the disembodied shrieks,
With the sense of mishap to the brinks,
Walked sluggish, in the ghostly night,
a young, handsome, robust man,
sans any fear, sans any consternation,
through the village road with closed
all the houses' lights;
He glimpsed a figure standing,
With a face of an cherubic angel, stood
a beautiful woman,
Too alluring, too enchanting in her 20's;
He trailed her, then in close proximity to her,
Talking to the lady the chronicles of love,
Belched out his mouth only the melody of romance,
And she never did ponder to warble
the monody her life had offered her;
No sooner, he seized hold of her hands,
A saga of love budded
under an old banyan tree,
under the starry night sky;
But the dawn brought a thunderbolt
among the villagers,
An unidentified corpse of an old man,
under the same old banyan tree;
The corpse of that young man who had turned old,
Who being unaware of the undulating braid
of her black hair,
Unaware of her feet facing backwards,
Unaware, she was 'consuming' him,
And unaware that she was a
"Dayan", the Indian witch.

– *Akankshya Pradhan*

Ran the creature through the window
out to the woods,
All I conceded, the existence of goblins,
Conceded, the story of little Mark
abducted by the horde of goblins,
And being turned into a monster like them,
Forced to weave nightmares out of gossamer strings,
Forced to insert them into the ears
of the sleeping human beings.

– *Akankshya Pradhan*

THE DESOLATE BURIAL PIT

The sombre, dark moon night,
The hushed silence of the cemetery,
Beneath, the tree with an ominous crow,
Spreadeagled the undried grave of Matthew,
The benevolent priest of his hamlet.

Trod close, the bokor to the grave,
Unearthing the corpse; Converting
the one, no-way fiendish,
Into a vicious zombie.

Just a command of the bokor,
Moved sluggishly the dead Matthew to
savage and chomp on his
own villagers.

The alluvial soil splattered with warm gore,
Squall and consternation environed
the hamlet,
Mutating more two into zombies.

Then with a tramp over the ground,
On a horse, seal brown colored,
And a haunting rifle in his hand,
Created the hunter, a sigh of relief
with his valiant ingress.

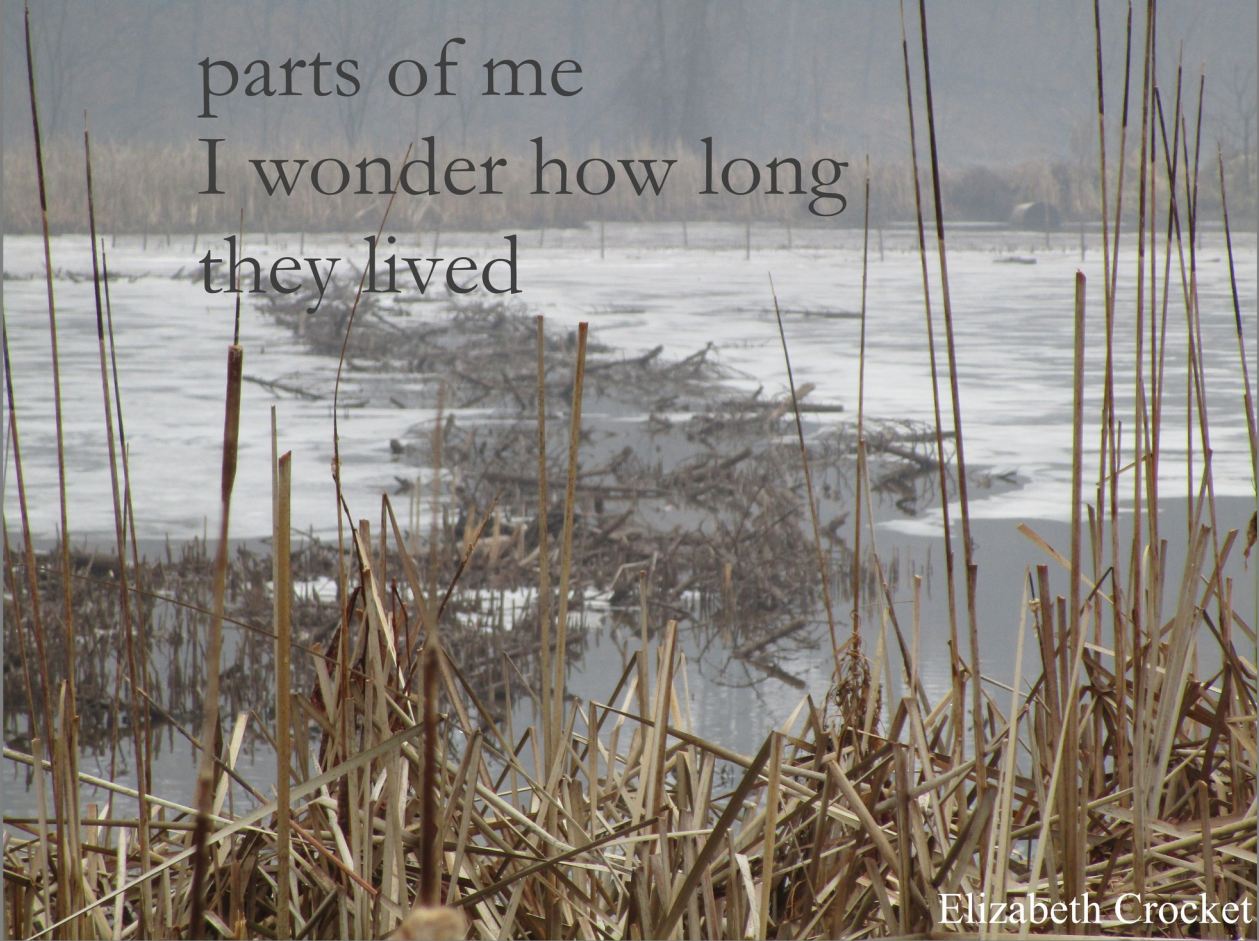
The two, too brawny in the
hours before the rigor mortis,
By the hunter, shot dead
right on the head.

Matthew, though a zombie,
Was a courteous man before his demise,
Was fed a handful of salt,
Making his body return
to his desolate burial pit.

One Wednesday morning, my mom was bathing me when she noticed a bruise on the upper right portion of my thigh. She was shocked and asked me who did that. I was hesitant to admit that my teacher kept on hurting me physically and emotionally. That teacher didn't listen to my explanation and she pricked me hard just because of a baseless allegation made by my nasty classmate.

No vest
can hide
marks of abuse

– *Irish D. Torres*



parts of me
I wonder how long
they lived

Elizabeth Crocket

– *Elizabeth Crocket*

swank apartment
the only thing missing
is my sanity

a vodka bottle
on top of snow—
almost sunset

day moon
the grass will be fed
with my body

white shirt . . . the rustle of a dead moth

grandma's funeral
the weight of a tissue
inside my pocket

– *Nicholas Klacsanzky*

pinned butterfly -
even in death
beautiful

the day
I should have died...
a hearse at the crossing

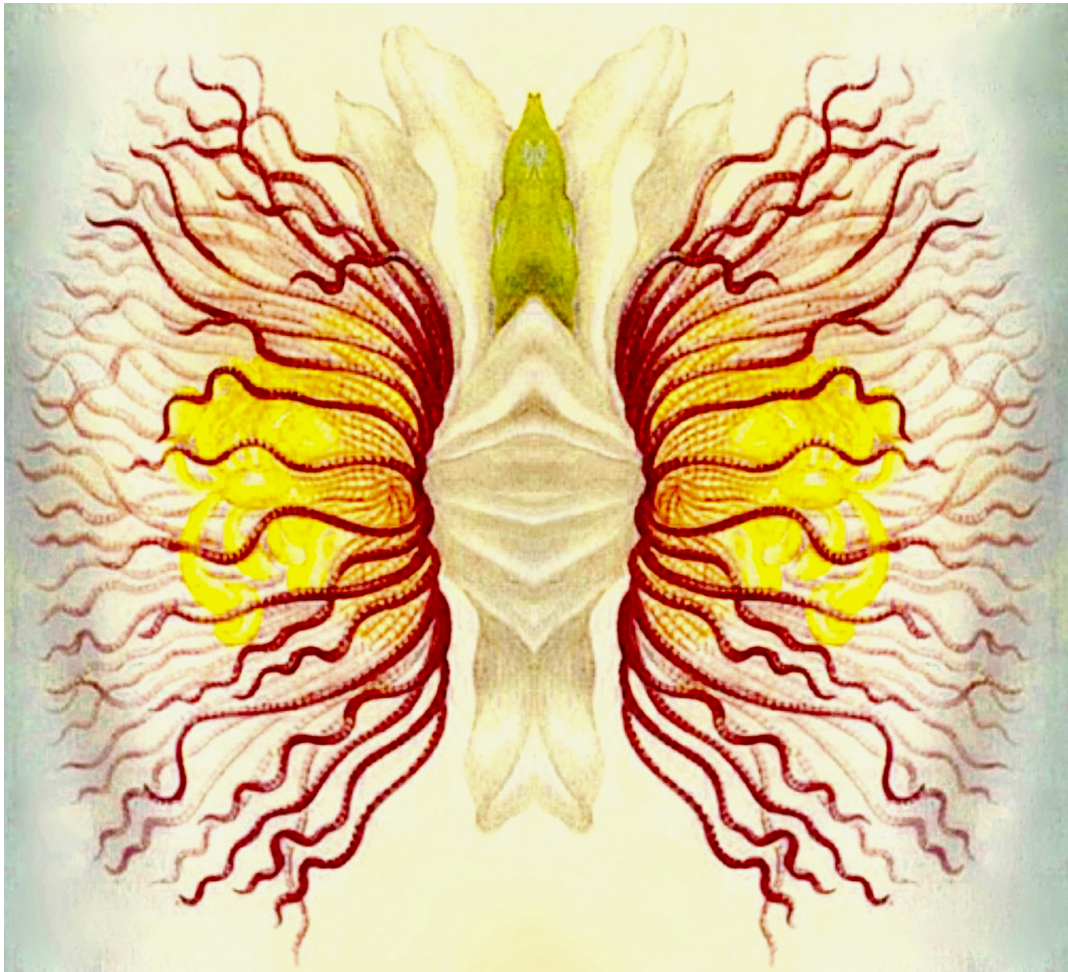
blood soaked tears
of a soldier —
withered Poinsettia

an apple
on the sunlit table...
deep inside me
a growing desire
to be eaten

for Charles

– Réka Nyitrai

A Whisper That Welcomes Intimacy



– *Bill Wolak*

A Fleeting Consolation



– *Bill Wolak*

Instantaneous As the Attraction of Light



– Bill Wolak

searching for rainbows

bible prophecy. I wish those were the only words I remember from revival that year. over and over his sermon played in my head for months. he talked about the harps, how he had seen them being assembled in Jerusalem in his time living there. he constantly brought up the bad shape our country, our world is in, that it has never been this bad before. the earthquakes, hurricanes, natural disasters. children disobeying parents and sinners disobeying god.

broken promises
the believer in me
clings on

– *Lori A Minor*

revelation
I recognize
my own insanity

 s i search for all the signs
s i x
i x
x

– *Lori A Minor*

A Midwinter's Dream



– Chase Gagnon

X-Mas Magick



– Chase Gagnon