

The

MYSTIC

Blue Review

A LITERARY MAGAZINE | ISSUE #5

AUGUST 2018 | ISSUE 5

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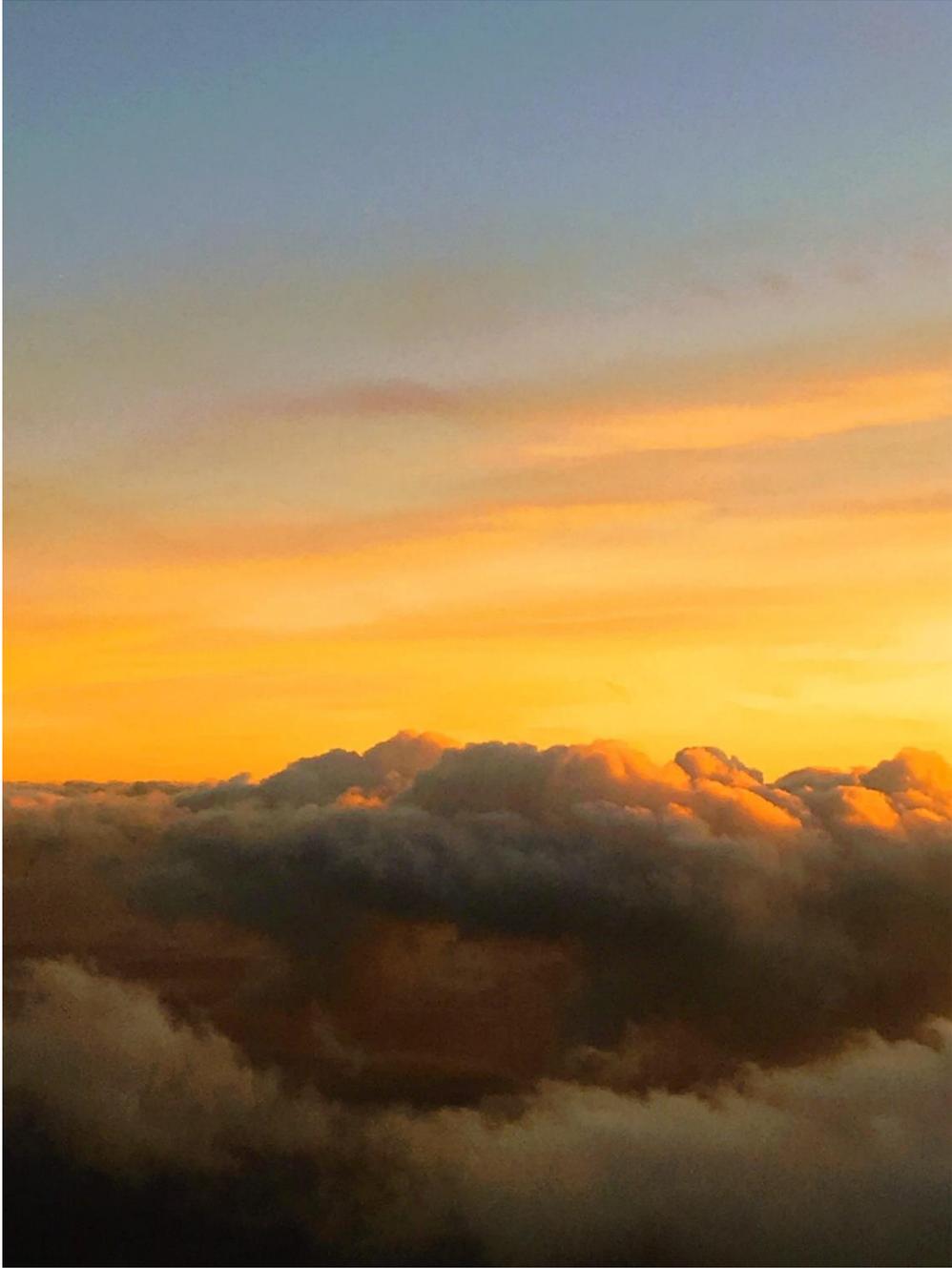
Table of Contents

8	UNTITLED BY SULYN GODSEY
9	A GIRL AND A DREAM BY ALEXIS QUEEN
10	YOU'VE BEEN MESMERIZED BY HER SINCE THE FIRST TIME YOUR FINGERS BRUSHED HERS BY ALEXIS QUEEN
11	VORTEX BY KRISTIN GARTH
12	SO MUCH DARKER BY KRISTIN GARTH
13	BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL & STEFAN LIENHARD
14	ALL LIFE BY JONATHAN DOUGLAS DOWDLE
15	BIG G, LITTLE G BY KELSIE DONALDSON
29	CLOUDS BY DANIEL MILTZ
30	UNTITLED BY SULYN GODSEY
31	SONG: DAWN BY WILLIAM WATERS
32	SHE CALLED. AND WE WENT TO THE MOVIES (FOR TAMELA) BY WILLIAM WATERS
33	SISTER BY CHRISTINE A. BROOKS
34	PUFF BY CHRISTINE A. BROOKS
35	GRAPES BY CHRISTINE A. BROOKS
36	MERE PRIMORDIUM BY V. S. HOLMES
37	THEOGENY BY PAUL KINDLON
38	THE TREASURE BY BREANA
42	BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL & STEFAN LIENHARD

- 43 DARKNESS BY FARIEL SHAFEE
- 45 ANGST BY FARIEL SHAFEE
- 48 UNTITLED BY SULYN GODSEY
- 49 THESE STEPS BY FARIEL SHAFEE
- 51 IT IS TOO LATE TO WAKE YOU BY EFFY WINTER
- 52 A FOUNTAIN OF BLOOD POURS FROM MY CROWN
OF ROSES BY EFFY WINTER
- 53 PORT CHESTER, QUINCY, ELSEWHERE BY GEORGE
BRIGGS
- 54 PALEONTOLOGY, ALETORIC, ULULATION BY
GEORGE BRIGGS
- 55 FLIGGY-WIBBIT BY S.J. BUDD
- 68 BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL & STEFAN LIENHARD
- 69 YOUTH BY SAMHITHA SAIBA
- 70 ARMOR BY SAMHITHA SAIBA
- 71 LOCKED UP BY SAMHITHA SAIBA
- 72 UNTITLED BY SULYN GODSEY
- 73 VIRGINIA'S LIMINALITY AND MINE BY KIMBERLY
MADURA
- 75 SO MUCH BY KIMBERLY MADURA
- 77 AFTER BEAUTY BY KIMBERLY MADURA
- 79 HOW IT WENT BY KIMBERLY MADURA
- 81 SEA LOVE BY KIMBERLY MADURA
- 83 A LOSS FOR WORDS BY MARK MARTYRE
- 84 WITH THE SHADES DRAWN BY MARK MARTYRE
- 85 UNHINGED BY DONETTA SIFFORD
- 86 MEMORY'S CLICHE BY DONETTA SIFFORD
- 87 TWELVE STEPS AHEAD BY DONETTA SIFFORD

- 88 DEAR JOSIE BY DONETTA SIFFORD
- 90 BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL & STEFAN LIENHARD
- 91 GREY NURSE SHARK BY B.R. DIONYSIUS
- 92 HAWAI'I 'Ō'Ō BY B.R. DIONYSIUS
- 93 PEACH EXUVIAE BY EDWARD RASO
- 94 THE HOLLOW HOUSE ACROSS THE FIELD BY
ELLIOT LEGRANGE
- 105 THE RETURN BY EG TED DAVIS
- 106 UNTITLED BY SULYN GODSEY
- 107 LEGACY OF THE WHITE ASH BY KEN ALLAN
DRONSFIELD
- 108 LIMPET AND CRUMPETS BY KEN ALLAN
DRONSFIELD
- 109 WONDERANCE BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD
- 110 IMAGINE BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD
- 111 THE FEASTING BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD
- 112 FAME: I'M GONNA LIVE FOR A PRETTY LONG TIME
BY RON RIEKKI
- 114 LILT DOWN MY CHIN BY JAMES D. CASEY IV
- 115 DEVILISH INTENT BY JAMES D. CASEY IV
- 116 IT ALL COMES BACK BY EVA COATES
- 133 UNTITLED BY SULYN GODSEY
- 134 WE ALL BECOME FLOWERS BY LINDA M. CRATE
- 136 WITHOUT CHAINS BY LINDA M. CRATE
- 138 RULES NOT LOVE BY LINDA M. CRATE
- 140 I AM THE KING OF THIS KINGDOM BY LINDA M.
CRATE
- 141 LOVE AND LIGHT BY LINDA M. CRATE

143	THE COLORS BY KRISTI JOY
145	THESE BONES BY KRISTI JOY
146	LANDSCAPE OF LONGING BY KRISTI JOY
148	EVERY THING, EVERY TIME BY KRISTI JOY
151	THE KISS BY BRIELYN FLORES
153	A PAINFUL ARRAY OF PAINFULS BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI
155	BONES AND BLOOD, IF YOU ASK ME BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI
156	OH, BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI
158	ROMANTIC LOVE BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI
160	THE GOLDEN CONCOCTION BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI
161	UNTITLED BY SULYN GODSEY
162	RECOVERY BY DEBBIE ROBSON
163	MORLOCKS BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM
165	WIND BECOME ELAND BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM
166	A MURDER BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM
168	PROVIDING BY CRISTINA MARIE PAGAN
169	SMALL BY FEE THOMAS
170	UNTITLED BY SULYN GODSEY
171	BIOGRAPHIES



UNTITLED

BY SULYN GODSEY

A GIRL AND A DREAM

BY ALEXIS QUEEN

fourteen years old / and she
looked at the world / like the
world was a book / waiting to be
written. / but the world did not
wait / for her. and now she is
twenty one / and she writes her
book / on the sky / in her blood
/ and the world tastes like /
rose petals in milk

YOU'VE BEEN MESMERIZED BY HER SINCE THE FIRST TIME YOUR FINGERS BRUSHED HERS

BY ALEXIS QUEEN

she is beautiful
like midnight
and the moon
and the stars

in her eyes she holds forever
and on her lips
oh, her lips

you wonder if you kiss her
what will she taste like
the honey in her morning tea
or the sangria she sips at night

magic flows in her blood
and you wouldn't know if she cast a spell on you

VORTEX

BY KRISTIN GARTH

In pigtails, small town skies of gray, you thought
that you could run away from witches, rules
and negativity. Already caught,
you cannot see. Until the vortex —cruel
it seems — knocks you into gingham dreams.
Blue socks, sabbatical, patchwork bedspread,
villainy flies, tyrannical screams,
in freckled head. By mesmerism led
to cyclone, black magic you give a home —
her poppy field becomes a bed. Broomstick,
she's watching overhead. By you alone
invented witch. From bike to flight, a trick
of sorcery, your cerebral cortex,
inside innocence, evil and vortex.

SO MUCH DARKER

BY KRISTIN GARTH

“You’re so much darker than your hair.”
A shock of sunshine, their Victorian nightmare. A blonde
who’s born of chestnut schemes. She’s locked
in toile and left to scream. This brutal bond,
her lineage lechery, lemon stitch
in bleakest tapestry. Relative, her
familiar fears, mascara tears bewitched
beneath Art Deco chandeliers. Ardor
to prune, remove the bloom. These thorns require
abundant room. Their daisy only once
you’re dead, morbid maternal wish prior
to bed. Black lace embrace of succubus,
her lullaby, black walnut rocking chair
prayer: “you’re so much darker than your hair.”

ancient monsoon clouds
float high above borneo
beside modern dreams

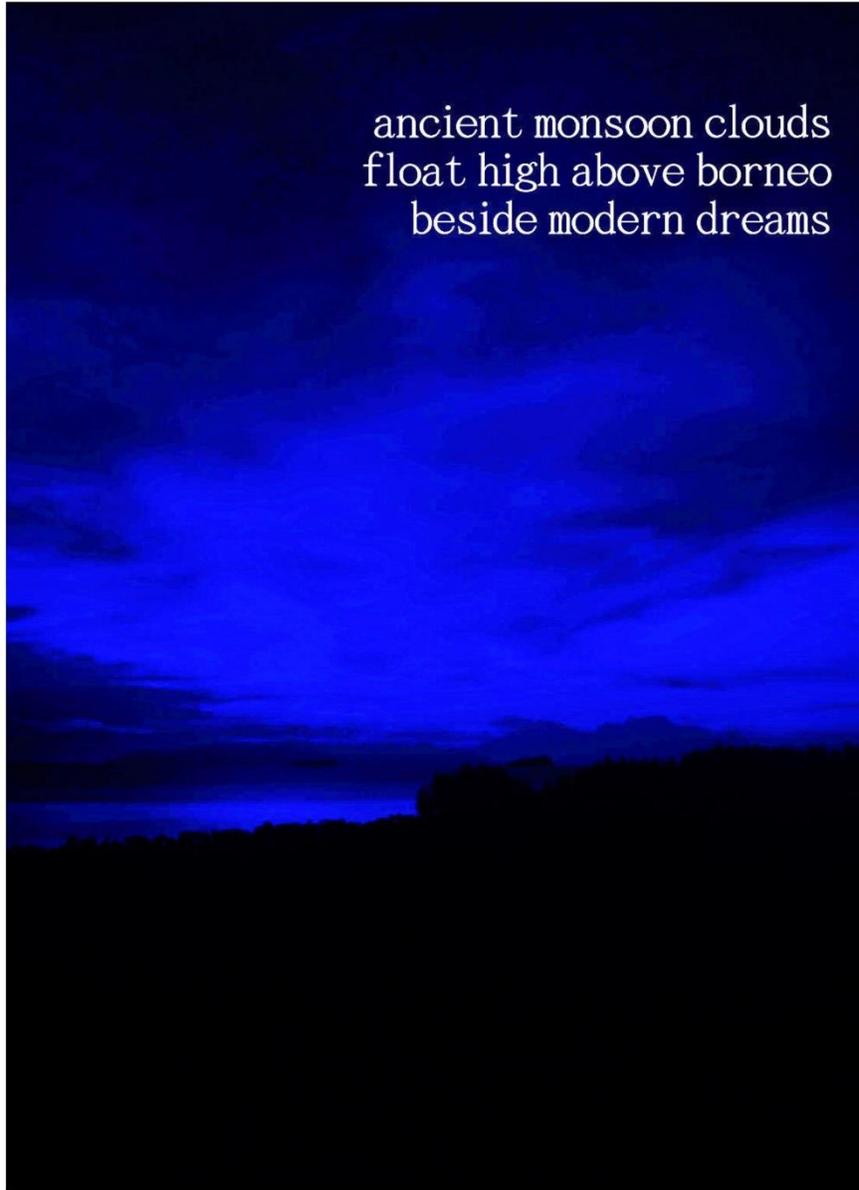


Photo by Stefan Lienhard, Borneo Sky, Santubong, in digital blue filter.
Senryu by Colin W. Campbell. Font AR PL New Sung.

BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL & STEFAN LIENHARD

ALL LIFE

BY JONATHAN DOUGLAS DOWDLE

All life is held together
By a string
Thin as a gossamer thread
That weaves the veil
We view the world through.

BIG G, LITTLE G

BY KELSIE DONALDSON

I was in desperate need of a drink, and the bar was on my way home. I sometimes felt awkward about going to the bar right in town; I've bumped into students' parents at this pub a few times, and while everyone was nice enough, I still had this fear that they would think their child had an alcoholic as an English teacher if they saw me drinking alone. But my need for a scotch outweighed my qualms, and I turned into the small lot next to a rundown building.

I walked in, the smell of salt and vodka hitting me instantly. I scanned the room, but I didn't see anyone I recognized from parent-teacher conferences. I walked over to the bar. There was one woman sitting on the end, so I took a seat a few stools down from her.

"Scotch on the rocks, please," I said. The bartender, a guy about my age, nodded. He poured me my drink and slid it across the countertop to me. I eyed the woman next to me, suddenly feeling like I knew her from somewhere. Her eyes were red, though she'd been crying, or maybe doing drugs, just a minute ago. She had dirty blonde hair that fell to her shoulders, and she was wearing a navy dress with a white sweater-- just a bit too warm for South Carolina in late May.

"Another shot, please," she told the bartender. When I heard her voice, it clicked. She taught at the rival high school. I'd seen her at some of the district-wide meetings and maybe a football game or two. I slid over a few barstools so that I was next to her.

“Hi,” I said.

She turned, looking at me with her puffy eyes. It had to be from crying. High school teachers don’t do meth, right?

“Hi,” she said.

“I’m Mason Greene, I teach tenth grade English at Eastwood High. I thought I recognized you.”

“Yeah, I teach physics at Westbrook. I’m Audrey Franklin.”

“Yes, that sounds familiar. How’s your semester going?”

“Hanging in there. Only two more weeks, at least.”

“Yeah,” was all I said. She didn’t seem like she was in a talkative mood, and I didn’t want to be annoying, but the nosy part of me really did want to know why she’d been crying. “I have a hard time getting my students engaged in the *Great Gatsby*. I can’t imagine trying to explain the nature of the universe,” I added.

“It has its challenges, that’s for sure,” she said. I was starting to sweat, so I rolled up the sleeves of my dress shirt and loosened my tie.

“Where did you study?” she asked.

“The University of Michigan. You?”

“Clemson,” was all I said, giving her the choice to end the conversation or continue it.

“And you majored in English Lit?”

“Yes.” She had an amused look in her eye, which bothered me for some reason.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“There’s just a certain type of person that majors in English, and I think you fit the mold.”

“I’m not following.”

“Okay. I’ll say three things about you, and if they are all true, you buy me a drink. If any one of them aren’t, I’ll get you another scotch.”

“Deal.” Really, I was just happy that she was talking to me freely now.

She cleared her throat and began. “You loved books growing up. Your parents praised your wonderful imagination, and you always loved creating stories.”

“I’m an English major. Obviously, I value creativity and storytelling. I’m unimpressed.”

“Two: you’re a romantic. You believe in soulmates and true love and happily ever after’s. You had a serious girlfriend in college and thought that she was “the one” before she broke up with you.”

“Okay. Slightly more impressive. How did you know I was the one who got dumped?”

“Three: you believe in god. You believe in ‘everything happens for a reason’ because it gives you some comfort when shitty things happen to you. You pray before Christmas dinner and go to church on Easter.”

I paused, just looking at her for a minute before asking, “What do you want to drink?”

She cracked what looked like a real smile for the first time since we started talking. “Surprise me.”

“So you don’t believe in soulmates?” I asked her.

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because the whole idea is ridiculous. What if my soulmate lives in China and I never go to China? Then am I just out of luck?”

“If you never meet, he wasn’t your soulmate.”

“So, you have to meet and fall in love and then you can call that person your soulmate? That’s not fate. That’s something happening and a delusional person saying it was ‘meant to be.’”

“Which brings us back to God.”

“Are you going to ask me if I believe in god?”

“It’s pretty clear that you don’t.”

“No, I don’t believe in capital G God. And you know what? You and I are alive right now, breathing and talking and drinking because of the big bang. It created the universe and a planet that’s the perfect distance away from the sun to give us breathable air and drinkable water. That alone is a miracle! Why do people need a god to point to when the science is divine itself?”

“Because maybe the creation of the earth wasn’t some scientific coincidence that gave us life. Maybe there was a higher power that created all of this so that mankind could exist and breathe and talk and drink.”

“You don’t believe in the big bang?”

“I do. But I think that it was an act of God.”

She didn’t say anything for a minute. And then: “This is a very deep conversation to have with someone I just met, Mason.”

“You started it by telling me I believed in God.”

“I suppose that’s true.”

“So, Audrey, why are you getting drunk on a Friday afternoon in the middle of grading season?” I asked, trying to lighten the mood, but also hoping she would talk about whatever was making her so upset when I came in.

“It was a long day.”

“Any particular reason?”

“Yes.”

I waited for a minute, but she didn't add anything else. “We just talked about the meaning of the universe and God, and the reason you had a bad day is too personal to get into?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Well, I'm going to order you a scotch, and then I'm going to guess three things about you.”

“Okay.”

I ordered the drink, and then began. “One. You have an older sister who was an atheist and a cynic and passed all her beliefs on to you. Two. You live alone with a dog and talk to him like he was a person. He gets tired of your pessimism. Three. So, does your boyfriend, who you're not really in love with because if you were, you would be more open to the idea of happily ever after's.”

“Wow, that's amazing,” she said.

“Three for three?”

“No. Zero for three. I am an only child, and my cynicism is my own, although you could partially blame my parents, who got divorced when I was six. I do live alone, but I have two dogs, neither of whom are tired of my pessimism. In fact, they wholeheartedly agree with every word I say to them. And I don't

have a boyfriend, but I've been in love before, and it didn't make me believe in soulmates."

"Two dogs. I should have known."

"And do you have an older sibling that passed all her starry-eyed wonder down to you?"

"Maybe."

She laughed. "Sister?"

"Lucky guess. Her name is Jacqueline, and she's possibly worse than me in terms of starry-eyed wonder. She's a doctor, so to my parents, she's basically a saint."

"Is she married?"

"Yes. Ten years. She was 27 when they got married. I'm 33 and haven't had a serious girlfriend since college."

"Really?"

"Really. I mean, I've dated, but nothing ever stuck."

"Still pining for that college girlfriend?"

"God no. She got married a few years ago to a brain surgeon, so I don't think she's missing me either, though."

"Ah."

"You've said you've been in love."

"I have."

"And did that breakup convince you that love doesn't exist? Or were you a cynic even when you were dating?"

“To be clear, I believe that love exists. I just don’t think it’s this magical force that’s stronger than gravity or time or even distance. But to answer your question, I was always a ‘cynic,’ but the end of that relationship solidified things for me.”

“Wow. It must have been a pretty rough breakup.”

“It was.”

The scotch on the bar top was now empty, and the dinner crowd was beginning to form. Audrey saw me looking around, and asked, “Do you want to walk outside?”

I smiled. She went from not wanting to talk with me at all, to offering to continue the conversation outside of the bar. I nodded, paid the bartender for my drink and her scotch, and headed for the door.

“Where to?” I asked.

“Let’s walk down to the marina,” she said. Lady’s Island Marina was just down the street from the pub, so we walked over to the sidewalk and began our stroll along the Atlantic Ocean.

As we walked, we talked about all of the things that you talk about when trying to get to know someone: her childhood and all the joys of having divorced parents with no sibling to lean on; her years in college, passing up on parties to study and then regretting it; her dogs, and how they licked her face whenever she got home from a particularly long day of teaching Newton’s Laws to kids who wanted only for the school year to end and summer to bring them days of sunshine, loud music, and cold lemonade.

And I told her about my life: my family, who has always been as close as a family can be; my years in college, realizing that I would never make it as a mystery novelist and the realization that my true passion was not in writing but in showing others the beauty of writing; how that led me here, to an underfunded

high school, trying to show uninterested kids the beauty in the way Salinger wrote about the petrifying world known as adulthood.

When we reached the marina, we gazed at the sailboats, lining the docks looking majestic and graceful, even in stillness.

“Have you ever been on one?” I asked her.

“Yes. I used to own one. Have you?”

“No, never a sailboat. Why did you get rid of it?”

“It broke down beyond repair.”

“What was it called?”

She smiled a little. “Knot on call.”

“On call? What, like a doctor?”

“Yes.”

“Why that?”

“You don’t think it’s funny? Jacqueline loved it.”

“I mean, I get the pun, but -- wait, Jacqueline who?”

She grinned.

“You know my sister?”

“I used to volunteer at the hospital. We became great friends.”

“So, all that stuff you claimed to know about me just because I was an English major?”

“Okay, I would've guessed most of it. But yeah, Jackie talks about you a lot, and I remembered what you looked like from staff meetings.”

“You’re such a cheater,” I said, laughing, and playfully shoving her elbow. She laughed too, and when we reached the end of the doc, we both sat down, looking out over the water. She turned to look at me, her cheeks pink and the hint of laughter still on her face. I leaned in, moving towards her as slowly as the sun sinking towards the horizon.

“What are you doing?” Audrey asked, leaning back and then standing up. “What are you doing?” she repeated. “You can’t kiss me! What the hell?”

“Okay, okay! I’m sorry!” I shouted. She was already walking back towards the marina lounge building. “Hey, Audrey, wait! I’m sorry!”

But she didn’t turn around, and I had to jog a little to keep up. I reached for her hand, and she spun towards me.

“You can’t do that,” she said.

“Okay. I promise I won’t. Please don’t leave.”

The anger slowly drained from her face, replaced by a new emotion that I couldn’t quite decode. “Okay,” she said.

We walked up to the next doc, and began the walk to the water.

“What’s your biggest fear?” she asked me.

“Geese,” I said.

“Geese?”

“Don’t judge! Geese are mean. They’re not afraid of humans. They’re aggressive and obnoxious and unlike spiders or cockroaches, they can actually attack you and bite your toe off or something.”

“Wow.”

“What’s your biggest fear?”

She knew the question would be returned. She looked at me for a long time, and then finally answered, “My biggest fear is falling in love. I mean real love. Not soulmates or any bullshit like that, but meeting someone and then not being able to picture your life without them. The kind of love that feels like magic, even though you know it’s just some chemicals in your brain. The kind that makes you feel like everything will be okay as long as he is there and then have him torn away from you. For him to be in a freak accident on a sailboat called Knot on Call in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and leave you alone in the world. To meet someone new and kind of like him, but not be able to kiss him, because what human could survive getting obliterated twice? To fall again, only to be crushed again, by a universe that does not give a shit about me.”

For one crazy second, I thought she might be making the whole thing up. But that would be a pretty sick joke, and the tears in her eyes were real.

I never quite know what to say when a student cries in front of me. It’s happened a few times; a student forgets her homework because her dad is sick or her dog just died and as she’s telling me the story, the emotion takes over and tears start to spill out. This was like that, only a thousand times worse.

So, like the cliché I am, I just said, “I’m so sorry.” It was wasn’t enough, but what would be?

“His name was Justin Haab. We were married for six years. And he died two years ago today.”

“And he was a doctor?” I asked, realizing that’s where the name of the boat must have come from. It broke down beyond repair she had said.

“Yeah, he was a resident. He was brilliant, Mason. Caring and empathetic, but logical and grounded. He would have been an amazing doctor,” she said, and then, after a moment, “and father, if we ever got there.”

We had reached the end of the doc once again, but instead of sitting, Audrey immediately turned back around.

“It’s getting late,” she said.

“Do you want me to drive you home?” I was pretty sure she was sober enough to drive, but I wasn’t ready to say goodbye just yet.

“What about my car?”

“We’ll take your car. I’ll get a cab back to the bar later.”

“Okay,” she said.

As we walked back to the bar, she talked about Justin. She’d asked if I minded, and I said no because I was a dick if I said yes, and anyway, I was curious. They met at the hospital; Audrey was volunteering, and Justin was working as a resident. They dated while she completed her undergrad, and got married just after she finished her masters. The boat had been Justin’s grandfather’s, who gave it to him for his 25th birthday. They used to sail together every weekend.

“Did he believe in soulmates?” I asked.

“No. I told you, he was logical.”

“Being logical doesn’t mean not having faith.”

“Well, he didn’t believe in soulmates. Or god. So maybe he’s in hell.”

“Don’t say that,” I said.

She didn’t answer, and when we got back to the car, she handed me her keys and climbed into the passenger seat without a word.

“What happened?” I asked.

She knew what I meant. “He entered a pairs race with our friend David. The winds were really strong, but he was sure they could do it. They couldn’t.”

I pulled out of the lot, and Audrey gave me quiet directions, interrupting her own stories.

“After he died,” she said, “I was a mess. I took a year off from teaching. I hardly got out of bed. I lost a bunch of weight. I didn’t really enjoy anything anymore, you know?”

I didn’t.

“I didn’t date. I didn’t even really have friends. And then I started volunteering at the hospital again.”

“Where you met my sister,” I added.

“Yes. That was the turning point. Turn left here. When I was volunteering, I at least felt useful. I wasn’t happy, but I was better. It’s this house here, with the blue shutters.”

I pulled into her driveway, got out, and walked around to meet her by the passenger door.

The sun had now set, but the air was still warm and neither of us quite felt like going inside. We walked around her house to the backyard, which was grass for a few yards, and then sand, and then ocean.

“Want to go in?” She asked.

“Inside?”

“No, in the water.”

“Is it cold?”

“A little. But it will be fun.”

I nodded. She took off her dress, revealing a white camisole and little black shorts. I stripped to my boxers.

Slowly, we waded in. The water shocked my system, but it wasn't a totally unpleasant feeling. Audrey dove under, and when she reemerged, her makeup was gone and the curl in her hair had been washed out.

"He's in here somewhere," she said. "He's touching water that's touching me. And that's as close as I'll ever be to him again."

"Maybe he's watching us now," I said, looking up at the sky full of stars.

"It's beautiful," she said, looking up with me. "But he's not there. Stars are spheres of plasma. They're bright and beautiful, but they're not heavenly or magical."

"They're not supernatural. They don't have powers. But stars have literally guided people for all of human history. They remind us how small we are and that the universe is so enormous, you can't possibly conceptualize it. That's their magic."

"You're such an English major," she said.

We floated for a minute longer, but our teeth were soon chattering and our legs were covered in goosebumps that refused to recede. We walked towards the shore, our feet getting coated in sand, and Audrey threw me a towel. I wrapped it around my shoulders, shivering slightly. I could hear crickets and the faint sound of cars passing by, but that was it.

Audrey walked over to some plastic chairs facing the ocean and sat down. I followed her over and sat next to her. Together, we looked out over the water.

"I've decided it's kind of beautiful," she said after a while.

"The sky or the ocean?"

"The way you think. How you see magic in everything you look at, and how you have faith in everything you can't see. I'm not saying I agree. But it's kind of beautiful. That's all."

“You don’t need faith in God, or to tell yourself that everything happens for reason. That’s beautiful, too. Without that comfort, that feeling that someone somewhere is looking out for me, I’d go crazy.”

“I have, a little bit,” she said, smiling slightly.

The warm air blew her hair a little bit, and she just looked so damn beautiful in the moonlight that without really thinking, I reached over and took her hand. She let me.

CLOUDS

BY DANIEL MILTZ

Sun clouds, bounty bright
Sublime of dim candlelight
Castles in the air



UNTITLED

BY SULYN GODSEY

SONG: DAWN

BY WILLIAM WATERS

Dawn--
a mixing of dreams;
I stir the coals.

SHE CALLED. AND WE WENT TO THE MOVIES

(FOR TAMELA)

BY WILLIAM WATERS

She called. And we went to the movies
where I watched her
watch the movie

--and listened
to her heart
breath, pulse, words
all
move
too fast:

“I need someone to hold me;
I can’t stand to be touched.”

--slipping my hand into hers
I pointed, “see
that door?
it’s for emergency exits.”

SISTER

BY CHRISTINE A. BROOKS

Blood is thicker
Than water, but it doesn't
Matter
When her veins pulse with
oil.

PUFF

BY CHRISTINE A. BROOKS

I spent twenty minutes watching a dandelion puff dance and flutter to music I
could not hear.

It soared far up, deep into the gangly wooden arms of the grand American
Yellowwood tree
Only to gently fall

Side to side

Floating peacefully unaware that
It must land.

It was as if the pilot of that puff
Knew that its journey was short in time so it must be long in experience.

Each time it neared the damp earth, and certain death, a gentle breeze would
capture it
And blow it back to the heavens.

This magical dance continued
Until finally, a blade of wet grass
Slightly taller than the others, contacted the fragile traveler, causing it to stop
Being a puff, and begin being
a memory.

GRAPES

BY CHRISTINE A. BROOKS

They call to me
From their twisted branches
Come blossom with me

In the sun
And tell me a story.

I am only a toddler, they whisper
My trunk gets stronger every day
And my roots dig deeper and wider into the loose soil
As I stretch across the vast vineyard.

Soon my buds will break and my sap will rise
And my flowers will be perfectly, perfect.
My berries will soon change from green to
yellow, pink, red and purple.

I am beautifully alone
Caring for myself,
But wishing for a gentle soul to sit with me
And tell me a story.

On quiet nights, with only the moon as company,
I pour a glass of their dark red friendship
And begin my story, that only they can hear.

It is,
the story of life, and it begins with a whisper.

MERE PRIMORDIUM

BY V. S. HOLMES

My eyes flick open; closed; open.
Rough rock in the dark, dark so dark you can taste it.
The breath of the rising water kisses my shoulders.
Clear membranes slides over golden irises.
Nostrils seal, throat-flap flips over trachea .
Waves warmer than the cold, stale air close over my head,
contour over skin.
I push out of the dark cave-warren into the heated blue waters.
The fronds of pale-green plants rise on spindly stalks
that would never stand above this world.
They soar meters towards the surface, kilometers even.
I glide further down, the water grows cool,
the hiss and pop of bubbles rising to the surface,
trickling from the stones to the right,
the sound of pebbles shifting echoing around me.
The rough brown rocks below me look like cityscapes
from another time and place, their curls and ledges mounting
above the black of sand even further ahead.
I go deeper, my undulating feet moving me steadily down.
pressure pushing against the membranes of my inner ears
I dive away from the lancing blue light of the sun I have never seen.
I reach the black sands and move out,
the particles of volcanic rock scraping harmlessly against my belly.
I leave the fronds, the caves, the rock fields behind me
gliding out into the icy dark, only the deep blue-black ahead.

THEOGENY

BY PAUL KINDLON

In the bluest of skies we see the brightest star
Our Lord in Heaven
Followed by the blackness of Hell
and a blinking pantheon of foreign gods
Divinity so bruised

THE TREASURE

BY BREANA

My grandma had her life taken away by cancer about a year ago. It was really hard for my family especially my grandpa. He finally let us come and help him go through our grandma's stuff. My cousin, Melissa, and I took the upstairs furnace room. We started with the bookshelf. While going through the books we found one old book with no title. When we opened it up we discovered it was a journal. On the page that we opened up to was an entry dated June 16, 1988. It read, "The treasure is hidden awaiting to be opened. It's in the forest by the house in my favorite spot." My cousin and I looked at each other and simultaneously exclaimed, "We have to find the treasure!"

We ran downstairs to my grandpa's bedroom where he was going through stuff. We asked him if he knew anything about the treasure, but he didn't know anything about it. So, Melissa said, "Let's finish upstairs then we can figure out where the treasure is." I agreed and we went back upstairs. The last book on the shelf was titled *The Secret Garden*. I lifted the book off the shelf and a heart shaped locket fell out of it onto the ground. I picked the locket up and opened it. Inside was a picture of grandma and grandpa somewhere in the forest.

Melissa looked at me and asked, "Where is that?"

"I don't know," I answered.

On the other side of the locket was the word: tree. We finished going through the furnace room, then we went outside to look for the spot in the picture.

“Where should we start?” Melissa said.

“How about over by the burn pile,” I said.

We passed the fire pit and I saw out of the corner of my eye an angel holding a heart. I picked it up. The angel’s face was slightly burnt from the fire and was painted with a red dress.

“Melissa come look at this,” I said.

“Wow that’s pretty burnt. Hey what’s that on the back?” Melissa wondered flipping it over.

“It says the treasure you’ll find is within the T....,” I read. The last word was burned and I could only make out a T.

“Maybe it’s tree like what it said in the locket. Our best bet is to find the place in the picture,” Melissa said.

“Let’s go on the path off the road,” I said. We walked down the path. Then to the right we saw very faintly an opening spot behind some trees.

“Let's go through there,” I said. We walking through the trees.

“Ouch!” Melissa yelled. I turned around.

“Are you ok?” I asked.

“Ya I’m fine a branch just hit my face,” she answered. The spot was beautiful. The sun was peeking through the trees. There were tall trees all around and wild flowers blooming all around us.

“Melissa take out the locket so we can figure out where the picture was taken,” I said.

“Hey look! The tree in the picture has a heart with grandma and grandpa’s initials, just like that tree over there,” Melissa noticed pointing to a tree to the left. When we walked up to it, I discovered that the heart was cut out like there was an opening behind it. I pulled the heart out and behind it was an old box. I opened the box to find a bunch of letters dated all the way back to the 1950’s. We closed the box and brought it back to the house to our grandpa.

“Who are these letters from?” Melissa and I asked.

“Well it looks like they’re to your great-grandmother from her ex-husband,” he answered.

“Can we read them?” Melissa asked.

“I don’t see why not,” grandpa replied.

We opened up the first letter in the box. It read: “February 18,1951, Linda is doing well. She is growing strong and keeping a smile on my face. Are you sure it’s best for them not to know about each other? Bill”

The next letter read: “February 25,1951, Yes I’m sure it will be best for them. We both want a child and this is the best way to do it. Sadie is well. She is a very happy baby.”

Melissa and I both looked wide eyed at each other. “Our grandma’s a twin!” we both said at the same time.

The rest of the letters we read were Bill and our great-grandma sending letters about our grandma, Sadie, and her twin, Linda.

“I can’t believe grandma had a twin! I wonder how long grandma had known about this?” Melissa said.

The last letter in the box was dated just last year, three days before our grandma passed away.

It said: “Dear family, I’m sorry I kept this secret from you, but I only just found out myself about five years ago. While going through some of my mom’s things, I found this box with letters in it. When I read them I was so surprised! I always wondered what happened to my father and these letters told it all. I never had the chance to find my twin, because the cancer has prevented me from this. I hope that you might find her and tell her about me and our family. Love, Sadie.”

At the end of the letter was an address. Melissa and I looked at grandpa. “Well, let’s find her!” grandpa exclaimed and we all got in his car. After about an hour, we arrived at a small blue house. We all walked up to the door and rang the doorbell. An older woman answered the door—she looked just like grandma!

Melissa asked “Are you Linda?”

She answered, “Yes.”

We gave her the box of letters and watched as she read each one. Her face formed a smile and tears rolled down her cheeks as she said, “Thank you for bringing these to me! Now, tell me about my sister.”

down in dark mangroves
it's way too wild so we'll dream
of the rainforest



Photo by Stefan Lienhard, dark mangroves, Santubong, in digital blue filter.
Senryu by Colin W. Campbell. Font AR PL New Sung.

BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL & STEFAN LIENHARD

DARKNESS

BY FARIEL SHAFEE

Frigid gale,
-- the sprawling waves
of nighttime -- pitch black --

blown into the tongues of
a rapacious,
roaring sea, and I

swam through, drowned
up to my head, floating
still, dizzy.

With all its air, the
wind still asked for
more.

The dragging ghoul was a
host of kelp and
sand, clumped together
in the Eden of
darkened
vastness, or perhaps coal in
grime
this world that
drove to expel.

Something buzzed ahead.
Something rustled.

A slice of
beacon
twinkled, and then

ceased to be.

The light was warm,
yet
pitch black.

It crept up to my
skin.

Darkness sighed.

Something howled at
a corner.

That owl, with piercing
suns of eyes,
stared,
cutting through that
darkness in my
head,

and a shadowed plant,
lush and young

with the vines that
glittered

sprawled out to the
specks of life in a
jungle of
sheer darkness.

ANGST

BY FARIEL SHAFEE

Angst
crept up
to the protruding
solid shelves
gently, like
a whispering, shallow breeze,
and trapped
among the twigs.
It
tiptoed.

It breathed
slowly.
Its
heartbeats
took refuge within
the relentless march
of life's own
rhythms.

It sat quietly,
dispersed here and there
between punctuated laughs and
sorrows,
and it hid among the
cluttered thoughts,
the guarding shields.

Angst
became part of
us,
of our cells, and

of our
bloodstream;
so we ignored
it, set it
aside, sat
quietly with our pride, went
about.

It was a solemn autumn noon when the
symphony of angst
rose up to the sky,
struck our
nerves, and then waltzed up
to the
zenith of our
psyche.

It hit us like
a storm
that rose from
nowhere --
fierce, and unbounded,
roaring like a
sea amok with its
waves of
dissolution,
and we cried,
shivered
like a huddled
crowd in a
tattered ship, saw the
planks break down,
eaten up by the
salty tongues of
fear.

Angst
lashed out
from the depth within

ourselves, from the
fatigued blood, and from the
furrowed bones, and we
shuddered, reached out
for the
floating shattered
wood, searching
for ourselves
lost within that
tide, cut up
into pieces
that once
held us
up in
unison.



UNTITLED

BY SULYN GODSEY

THESE STEPS

BY FARIEL SHAFEE

These steps
walk into the
horizon. They're obscure, yet
they're
stamped upon
the lush.

Flesh and love
peeled off from these
crackled
shades, once,
from the writhing past, so the
gory lucid dreams
oozed out to the
soil, and so their
footprints glared
in daylight.

But slashing
poured the rains, and many a wintry night
exhaled
sighs of
destruction.

The grass was dry and stalk,
pale as straw.

In autumn, they
raised their
heads up high, wore
lemon green.

Yesterday, the boys played on
this patch.

They howled, and laughed and hopped around --
fell, and shrieked, and then
scurried back.

At nighttime, the souls come invisibly, and
whisper.

They had fallen so
their wards would breathe in
daylight.

IT IS TOO LATE TO WAKE YOU

BY EFFY WINTER

(FOR KENAN)

It is too late to wake you

and these whispering cries torment,

birthing a hot, sore melting that swirls, a luminous burning in the veins.

All of this florid lust

smothers my heart in its threatening stillness,

blooms putrid roses from the fatal wound. The heavens shimmer with my
blood –

radiance of a brutal stabbing from hands of ill gold.

Inside the candlelit chamber, I adorn our deathbed with crosses and bouquets

and tremble against your breathless body,

my mind blossoming a hushed madness –

spawning lethal flames.

A FOUNTAIN OF BLOOD POURS FROM MY CROWN OF ROSES

BY EFFY WINTER

(FOR KENAN)

A fountain of blood pours from my crown of roses.

I need to be so thin,
so that you are able to swallow this soreness

of red flowering, putridity,
the chrysalis.

I worship in my wet deathgown of blushing flesh.

PORT CHESTER, QUINCY, ELSEWHERE

BY GEORGE BRIGGS

The scrub green
screens the tracks.

Honest
cinderblock walls
overgrown
rust intertwined fences
wither and will fall
sooner than you
might think.

And the lonely
suburban graffiti
peeks out unevenly
faded bubbleletters
behind thunderheaded banks
of false bamboo.

Rotten dogteeth
neither bark nor bite
invisible and even less
over
seen by train
dreamers
stuck in
between.

PALEONTOLOGY, ALETORIC, ULULATION

BY GEORGE BRIGGS

When I was little, I wrapped myself
In definitions. Elastic words stretched & barely
Covering my little shoulders, ankles,

every inch of my thighs,
the scars on my wrists and arms
where Chicken Pox had been.

Everything was written. A swarming
script of meaning kept me warm
clothing my skin-tight body.

I stopped speaking. And then I stripped
stepped out into the chaotic blue gulf of the world.

I keep this disarming in the back of my mind.
When I let you hear the fleshy, squelchy sound

of a word unsticking itself from my tongue
like my lower back unsticking itself
from the vinyl seat of a summer hot truck, it means

I no longer need your carrying shape
your hot exhaust, your dusty etymology.
My fluid words are stains, but they are mine.

I'm shining in hot gleam. Do you know what that means?
I've found an envelope in the shape of a square,
and I recognize all of the words written there.

FLIGGY-WIBBIT

BY S.J. BUDD

It was quiet underneath the ancient Oak's shroud of shadows. How Rosie liked it. She took in a deep breath looking from the outside in. It was if she wasn't there. This old town had not been her port of call for many years and in her absence, it grew alien and inhospitable. Returning had done nothing but remind her why she left at the first opportunity.

Sonia, one of her oldest friends was getting married. She had been invited to attend for reasons unknown. Maybe Sonia was gathering up her old life and friends one last time? Or she wanted everyone to see how many people would gather round her as she played princess for the day.

It was less clear why Rosie had come down all this way. She told herself she wanted to escape London for the chance to be merry for a day and to wear one of her old beautiful dresses. At school she had been the shy awkward girl whom everyone teased, but now she was someone else. She wanted everyone to see and marvel at her transformation. Such as Sonia's dramatic transformation from local greasy chip shop girl to a graceful creature dressed all in white satin and pearls. She wanted Sonia to feel in her gut that her wedding would be her last vessel of happiness, the last day her expectations and reality co-existing peacefully.

There was a burning question in Rosie's mind it soured her mood. Why come back here to the very heart of her teenage wastelands where all she knew was isolation, pain and heartbreak? Old memories surrounded her like creatures of the night, wanting her to feel their pain over and over again. She was a completely

different person, up in London, but back here she was still the little girl.

Something had made her return, an undercurrent of something unfinished that swept her back in to finish what she had started. She had no idea who or what had made the call. Deeper things were underfoot. There was a smoothness quality to the day but yet Rosie felt something else building up.

The past is a slippery thing indeed, always it will retain its elusive qualities despite once being lived in. People changed, not only in real time, but in the past too. They changed within the memories they're forever preserved. Friends became adversaries, monsters turned to victims. Some people could grow in importance over time, sometimes too late for their true value to be realized. Lost, even now in the present. But in the past, they could be forever possessed and reached for within a moment that had once lived.

Rosie stood erect as she felt a shadow cross hers amalgamating into a distortion of entwined limbs and hearts. Two very different shades of darkness intermingling and connecting to create one whole.

She looked up to see him standing there poised with a roll up and lighter looking at odds with his smart suit and tie.

Tom, her first love, still not so different to the sixteen-year-old boy he had once been, although much older. She smiled and looked away embarrassed hoping he didn't think she looked a lot older too.

"Alright mate?" he said quietly before taking a lighter to his rollie.

Rosie laughed and grinned, after all the years, their memories, their shared heartache this is all she gets in recognition?

“Tom!” She leaned in for a hug and held him tighter than she ought, that she had a right to. At once he jumped taken aback unaware, but soon recovering he gladly reciprocated. She felt all the muscles in his back relax and sink into her arms.

She had never expected this, never entertained any hopes that he would be here.

That they could be in each other’s lives once more.

Under the shadow of the Oak tree they hugged for longer than necessary. Her warm memories of him came back to the surface, flaring up like solar storms far away. Not much had really changed between them and she was glad for it.

They still had that bond, that spark she had once felt like electricity so many years ago. Everything they had once had was somehow still preserved. He still smelt of spice and soap, and her head still just reached the top of his shoulders.

There was still that slight way in which he nervously chuckled and hovered a split second before wrapping his arms around her.

They had only been together for a few years, now a lifetime ago, but it had been a formative time on the cusp of adulthood when every milestone was her first, their firsts. The first time she went further than fourth base, her first job, first car, first heartbreak. All of those experiences deeply embedded with his.

She realized him and stood back slightly “So tell me Tom, have you been up to much in the last 14 years?”

He waved his left hand, “I’m married now.”

She held up hers, “Me, too.”

“I heard you live in London now.”

“Yes, been there for almost eight years now. I moved up after university, then met the hubby. Do you still live around here?”

“Yeah still here, mulling around. I’m a plumber these days, can’t complain.” He took in a deep drag and held the smoke inside.

Rosie inadvertently let out a yawn and froze. “Oh Tom sorry, I wasn’t yawning at you, it’s just that I operate on a different timeline to everyone else. I have this weird thing where I have to get up every morning at sunrise and of course being summer right now, it means an early start.”

Tom reeled in shock, “Me too. I can’t explain it but it’s just something I have to do.”

Rosie stepped forward slightly, “It’s such a special time of day don’t you think? Where everything is new again and waiting for the day to happen, and it feels like,” she paused and stared deep into Tom’s eyes, “Like *anything* can happen. Each morning seems different, no two are the same. I feel like I can lay claim to it because I’m the only one to witness it.”

“Yeah me too,” he grinned and stubbed out his cigarette on the grass, “obviously you put it better than me. You were always good with words.”

Rosie looked down, things could have been so different. Her career, her circle of friends, her husband...but her life was set now. “Hey I know each morning when we get up at sunrise we should say a mental hello to one another.”

“Ha, awesome, ok yeah let’s do it, each morning.” He replied all his shyness now gone. Rosie pondered whether they should exchange numbers, chat to each other a bit more but it felt dangerous to do so. They weren’t young anymore, they were too integral in other people’s lives.

“Is that your wife?” Rosie looked across to a woman dressed in coral pink in the distance. She was hurrying along as best as one can in heels, peering into the darkness where they stood with a suspicious look in her eyes.

Rosie couldn't help but get the feeling that his wife did not belong, that she shouldn't be here disturbing her and Tom.

“But seriously Tom, it was so good to see you again. I never thought I would. I think the world of you, always have done. You seem so happy in posts popping up on Facebook these days and you deserve every piece of happiness. I'm just so happy you got everything you deserved.”

Tom nodded saying nothing as he watched his wife walk towards them coming into ear shot. Rosie chided herself she had overstepped the mark coming to the conclusion that he didn't remember her as fondly as she remembered him. How arrogant she had been to think he still thought of her.

She let herself slip away to take her seat in the church and played her part well in the merry day amongst the fields of corn and wheat. In the evening there was a feast of food, dancing and drinking.

When the moon hung low she took herself away again to take in the evening air. She wanted to look up at the stars that beamed in the Cornish skies, she never saw them back up in London. Up in the city, there was too much artificial light blocking out the natural darkness, too much going on and not enough time up to stop and seek, but here everything was much slower which could sometimes be nice.

There was a darkness beside her again and she jumped before realizing it was Tom again.

“We must stop meeting like this, what will our spouses say?” she joked.

“Great wedding,” he noted as he lit another cigarette.

“Promise me you’ll give up. It’s a terrible habit.” She pointed to his cigarette.

He seemed to stop and stare at her as if she was an alien species. “Do you still think about me, about us?”

“Do I think about what we could have been?” She was about to say no, only because it was the right thing to say, but after watching the bride and groom dance together inside the warmth of the church hall she realized that life was both short and never ending.

“Yes,” she said upon deciding to tell the truth, “Of course I still think of you. I shouldn’t say this but, I think of you as the one who got away.” Tom remained very still, she couldn’t see his face in the darkness, only the smoke coiling around him. “You were the right person, but we met in the wrong time and circumstances. Sorry, I probably shouldn’t have said that”

For a while he stood breathing in smoke and blowing it out. “We were too young, back then.” he placed a hand on her bare shoulder and let it stay. “I think of you, but I do love my wife.”

“And I love my husband.”

“But,” he paused uncertain of what to say next.

“Yes exactly,” she cut in before things got messy, “let’s make a pact that we’ll find each other in the next life. Let’s shake on it.” She forced a trembling grin, feeling embarrassed at wanting to cry.

Their hands met and gripped with tenderness and hunger. “And if in the unfortunate circumstance that we find ourselves alone once more in this life, we’ll have to go for a drink,” he winked at her as he continued to hold her hand.

“Ok, deal.” She shook his hand again which now shook.

“We’ll meet again.”

Rosie smiled as they walked back into the hall with a deep ache in her chest.

Her life could have been so different, but she doubted whether she could have been happy here living in her home town her whole life. She was built for roaming and discovering. A lump rose to her throat and she pushed it back down and got on with the night.

“Only look forwards,” she reminded herself as she took her seat next to her husband.

It had been two weeks since Sonia’s wedding and Rosie had diligently kept her promise of saying hello to Tom as the sun broke free over the cherry trees in her back garden. It was so nice to feel him out there watching the sunrise together despite being hundreds of miles apart. And she did feel him there with her.

With bare feet and eyes closed she would stand poised in her garden whispering his name in deep a chant, her husband never knew what it was she did out there by herself. She loved that she finally had a secret from him. A few nights ago there had been a full moon and as she looked up she thought of him, Tom, and wondered if he did the same.

There still seemed like there was something underfoot but Rosie was thankful in life. Maybe she hadn't ended up with the man she had been destined for, but just meeting him had made her life so much sweeter. The big house made up for the fact he occasionally hit when he'd had too much to drink. But he was always terribly sorry in the morning. She had gotten more than what she deserved. Still, she had gotten more than she deserved.

Over her strong cup of black coffee Rosie made a note to herself to visit her home town more often. Sometimes it's ok to visit the past, to remember what she once had and the young woman she had been. Given the smallness of it there was a very big chance she might bump into town. She still knew his favorite places.

Maybe they could go for a coffee, have a chat without any eyes on them.

She flipped open her laptop and wondered whether she should message Tom, but she saw his profile consisted mostly of beautiful photos of his wife. She decided it wasn't a good idea. He was happy, she should let him be. She'd lost him many years ago.

Instead she messaged Sonia, to wish her all the best now that she was back off her honeymoon in Greece. She wished her all the happiness for her future, that they must never lose touch for in that moment she suddenly remembered all the good times they had shared, bunking off school at lunchtime to drink vodka in the woods, getting involved with boys in cars who had been for too old for them.

Later on she had got a reply along with the news that Tom was gone.

He had gone out early one morning to go swimming in the sea and never came back. It was all very sudden. Nobody could understand it.

Rosie gave out a cry and hid in the bathroom for hours, completely devastated, more upset than she thought possible considering he hadn't been a part of her life

for over ten years. Now all she could think about was the little things he had done, the little notes of encouragement he would leave for her in her study books, the tight way in which he would hold her hand as if worried she would rise up into the sky and never come back.

At least they'd had that last conversation, that she hadn't just brushed off his burning question and lied saying she never thought of him anymore. The thought of sending him to his grave with the lie that she didn't often think of him of them still being together seemed criminal. At least he had known that.

Maybe that was the real reason she had come down, disguised in the wedding invitation. The universe conspired to bring them together for their last time so that they could truly say to each other what they felt after all those years. Had it been a pre-ordained goodbye so they could both be at peace and stop the incessant wondering?

It was cloudy when Rosie returned for his funeral, she didn't once look at the sea that had taken him even from this distance she felt their currents underfoot. The sea has always been a powerful mistress, once Rosie had lived in her rule. She had always needed to live near water.

The wake was held in his house, a small semi-detached three bedroom. It felt so strange being there, this was a part of him she had never known. Somehow, the bathroom still smelled of his cologne, he still used the same deodorant. Rosie wondered whether his wife knew they were once lovers.

Under the impression of using the upstairs bathroom she slipped into their bedroom. This could have been her bedroom, had she stayed. It was small but inviting, was this where they had spent hours nestling into each other, promising each other a lifetime of devotion?

By the side of his bed, after all these years, was the silver lighter she had saved all her pocket money to buy him. He'd held on it through all the years, always keeping it near. She held it in her hands and flicked the lid, the lighter fluid had run out and she took it.

Now this relic was all she had of him, of them being together and with a bit of fuel it could come back to life again. But fuel would never bring Tom back, only the waters of life could see to that. No one would notice it missing.

Afterwards she took to the beach. In her grief she hadn't looked where she was going and her feet cut on something sharp. She felt no pain, it was far too cold to be walking barefoot. She stood still watching her blood seep out staining the sand. The sea took her blood, all that she had to give.

It was doubly hard to return to London she felt she was leaving too much behind in Cornwall. She could never return for the past was too heavy, too alive, it dragged at her heels now connecting itself directly to her future.

If Tom and her had stayed together would he have still died like that, taken so suddenly and without good cause? Would she have found herself a widow now like his poor wife? She felt like his widow but that too was denied to her. She would mourn for him a very long time in secret.

"Sometimes the things that didn't happen can be as painful as the things that did" she murmured as she stroked her cat upon arriving home.

Looking about her surroundings she admitted that her life wasn't as perfect as what it looked like on Facebook, as she had led friends and acquaintances to believe. People from back home thought her successful and accomplished for making it out of her town, and earning lots of money.

She didn't let them see the hidden side, that her husband had affairs. She had always known and had never said anything. She had never needed to for they were all brief. But there was one that had been going on long enough for her to call the house. Rosie could even put a name to the voice. There was a chance this one could be the end of them.

Meanwhile he had grown so paranoid of her having an affair at work that she had been left with little choice to give up her career in advertising and become a bird in a cage, a trapped woman. He'd promised that she could have kids instead.

But nothing had happened in the two years since trying, they were both healthy, there were no underlying reasons and she suspected it was because of their inability to truly love one another.

After meeting up with a friend for lunch in Soho she waited at Charing Cross station. Trains were subject to delays and cancellations. She had no idea where she should go, which train to take. How else could she get back home? She needed to get back to make dinner. There would be a trouble of fists if it wasn't done in time.

Then, in the sea of bobbing heads and faces she saw him, Tom, watching her from afar, with intent.

She didn't feel scared and waved. To her amazement he waved back sadly and looked afraid as she got close to him pushing past people to reach him. She just wanted to talk to him to see him smile again. But just when she reached for him he regretfully turned and disappeared.

Many times, he re-appeared. Refusing to let her forget him, but refusing to let her be with him. Each time he let her look upon him he was sad but patient. Never

would he allow her to get near until it got too much for Rosie until one night when she was lying awake in bed a shadow crossed hers and she followed it.

He was in her garden staring up at the moon, keeping a safe distance.

“Why won’t you let me touch you?” She whispered so as not to startle him.

“It mustn’t come to that, unless you really want it?”

“I want to start again Tom. You know? But I want to go with you.”

“I’ll wait for you.”

“I want to go now.”

“There’s no guarantee, we can’t go together, it just doesn’t work like that,” he sighed.

“Fliggy-wibbit.”

“What?” He looked at her with a hint of smile.

“That will be our word so we can find each other,” Rosie declared taking another step to him. Soon the gap between them closed enough for him to reach out and touch her on the chest. She felt her heart’s last tremble, gasping for the end as the coldness gripped. She fell soundlessly to the floor, going beyond.

Isobel is feeling nervous. It’s her first day at school and she’d much rather stay at home with mummy whom she stubbornly hides behind. The other children are too noisy and rough. She’s decided that she doesn’t like them, any of them.

Then from a tangle of mothers' legs comes a face shrouded in corn blonde hair, he looks like an angel. Desperately he thinks of something to say, hello just doesn't seem right for this momentous occasion.

“Fliggy-wibbit?”

She smiles and holds out her small hand and takes his, “Fliggy-wibbit.”

in new monsoon days
dreams drift with borneo clouds
old as the ocean

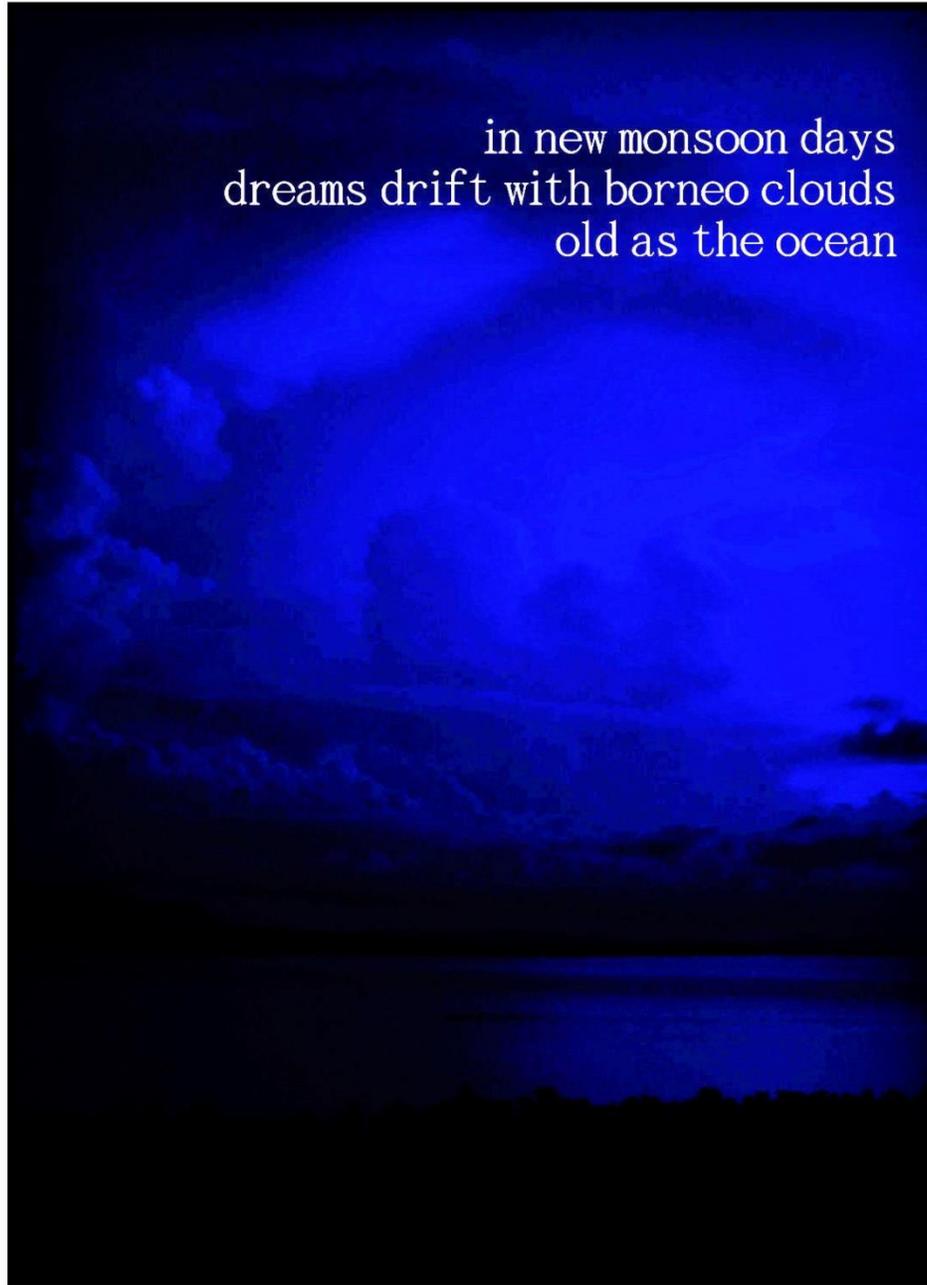


Photo by Stefan Lienhard, Borneo clouds and the South China Sea, in digital blue filter.
Senryu by Colin W. Campbell. Font AR PL New Sung.

BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL & STEFAN LIENHARD

YOUTH

BY SAMHITHA SAIBA

Dawn finds me at a young age,
dances on my tongue like fresh fruit
and leaves my stomach round,
waiting, keeping what cannot be kept;
pregnant with hope, and eyes
that flower like early sunrise.

I uncover Dusk later,
when hands and smiles have learned to reach wider
and my eyes are easier to close.
Years have made my sighs echo louder;
always tired,
she is never exhausted

ARMOR

BY SAMHITHA SAIBA

Everyone is chipping slowly,
small chinks appearing in their armor,
small then some;
and as she is the first to shatter,
her pieces broken and scattered,
ruthlessly the others pass by her,
a beautiful painting of glass and red.
They arrange their own cracked selves and laugh,
voices cutting her off.

Before she can finish her last breath.

LOCKED UP

BY SAMHITHA SAIBA

When eyes close this empty room is full with light:
glass panes shattered,
gold shards that whip scars
against shiny black wall.

The voices, they reflect too,
sing like slumberers waiting for their graves,
off broken glass windows and beaten black caves
—the voices in the empty room.



UNTITLED

BY SULYN GODSEY

VIRGINIA'S LIMINALITY AND MINE

BY KIMBERLY MADURA

In honor of Virginia Woolf

We call this liminality,
this space that it is possible to stay in too long
This space that it is possible to never come out of.
But there was a before and there will be an after
Now the clamped hold, the compression, middle
pressure
we call this transition, in transition
we change
holding until/holding on
until the time when we run out of breath
until we turn blue
until we rise to the surface or sink down
like a drowning
fear can be a good motivator
be it of life or of death
Liminality is

Blue

I have decided to leave (live)
to go but not to let go.

I hold on, waiting for the next thing
hoping it will come and when it does

I fool myself into thinking I knew it would all the time,
when the truth is,

I had no idea

After all, it doesn't always come for everyone
isn't that right Virginia?

SO MUCH

BY KIMBERLY MADURA

So beautiful, so broken
the damage
beyond repair
your beauty, stunning
the pain, you let me see, gave me a glimpse in
which you say you never do
it scared me
how it must terrify you
it is all that you have known
what will happen now, to you
will you be okay
will you come back and find me and let me know
and now we must say goodbye
and it is all so uncertain
the future unknown
and now because I wanted to be close
because you wanted to let me

now we share a connection
that is heartbreaking
and unfinished

AFTER BEAUTY

BY KIMBERLY MADURA

You showed me beauty,
And I, merely saw the
beauty that was there to be seen -

I can't say I even looked for it -
I simply saw it.

At that place,
At that time,
That was beauty.

It existed, and then ended,
But still, I have
Known Beauty

And, it affected me how?
Showed me truth, or love?

Perhaps
But even simpler
Even more
It OPENED me to
the possibility of these things.
Allowed me to feel
Freer
And braver
Not forever, but for a time.
And that is something real.
And now, I say the
only thing there is left to say,
After beauty, I say, thank you.

HOW IT WENT

BY KIMBERLY MADURA

It began -

and there was movement

freedom

release

letting go grieving losing

struggling

falling

LANDING.

the bottom

the FEAR

then understanding

remembering

feeling

And now ghosts.

save me

help me

can you hear me?

I didn't want it to be this way.

alone

lost

And finally, . . . gone.

SEA LOVE

BY KIMBERLY MADURA

Go to the water's edge
for Amphitrite's re-birth

Look from the deep sea
up to the horizon and
then up to the sky

the sea calls me back in

my spirit begs
to be next to that peaceful vastness,
my eyes long for water,
my mind yearns for the cooling blue saturation

layered shades of blues and greens:

navy

sky blue

teal

turquoise

aqua

deep green

seafoam

I am submerged in deep sea blue waves

A water immersion

born anew oh goddess of the sea

A LOSS FOR WORDS

BY MARK MARTYRE

I saw you, when
your eyes looked back
through mine,
and, suddenly,
I was at a complete loss for words.

You took them all
right out of my mouth,
along with the breath that would've held them.
And it was in that moment
that I needed them the most.

So, instead of trying to describe
what your presence did to me,
I stood motionless,
shouting affection
through hypnotized eyes.

WITH THE SHADES DRAWN

BY MARK MARTYRE

I hesitate.
I don't want to say the wrong words,
or come on too strong.
So, I wait with the walls
and the humming of the fridge.
My face, raw with living.

Some mornings,
I'm quicker than the sun
outrunning the hunted
but then falling further behind.

I write about nothing,
and about everything.

I write about you.

And, I think about forever,
about yesterday.
About the ink drying,
and dying on the page.

So, I hesitate. I stop myself.
Though, I only want to see you,
hear you...
talk to you.

But the fear and feeling of losing you
is worse
than never holding you
at all.

UNHINGED

BY DONETTA SIFFORD

Unhinged, the way you left me
barely hanging on.
Unnerving how my confidence
relied on you.
Heard you are doing well
in the city that never sleeps.
I'm still walking barefoot
on thorny roads.
Couldn't be more unlike myself.
Lonely feels like home.
Thinking of us leaves me breathless.
Ribs feel broken when I'm gasping for air.
Our old friends think I'm scared
to love again.
Only you know how unfair that is.
Your cross still tickles my throat
but belief is unwelcomed here.
Ring you bought me
sits alone in my wooden box.
It's just like you to show up
when the night falls.
There is a saying,
'Better to have loved
than not at all.'

MEMORY'S CLICHE

BY DONETTA SIFFORD

Cliché.

Stale saying.

Time heals our pain.

Don't believe that.

Slowly, scabs may
form over wounds.

Remaining
to remind us
not to pick up
on the hurt.

The knife piercing
your heart
may become a dull
blade going in.

Just as a smile
finds its way
on your face,
suddenly,
a memory will hit
you with the force
of a train.

You'll realize
nothing will be
the same.

How could it?

How could it?

TWELVE STEPS AHEAD

BY DONETTA SIFFORD

Unsettling,
my certainty
outrunning warning signs.

Picking up the pace.
Addiction won that race.

Left a war raging
in my mind.

Spiraling toward out of control,
over the edge.

There's no advantage
in twelve steps ahead.

Speed balling,
stumbling right before
the finish line.

DEAR JOSIE

BY DONETTA SIFFORD

Hey Josie!
I'd love to know
how you turned
your heart to stone?
Posing for the camera
a smile not quite your own.
The man who made me better
got strung out on dope.
Grand jury recommended
ten years, so he sliced his throat.
Unlike your Michael,
he was found before death.
They gave him his time,
sentencing me to Hell.
Please share with me
the art of letting go.
How did you find forgiveness
when he disregarded love?
I admire your strength.
I'm sifting through the aftermath.
Dear Josie,
when the fog slowly lifts

do you long for the beginning
or wish you'd never met?
I'm standing still in a hurricane
trying to catch my breath.
Time eases wounds.
A lie I can't accept.
Maybe I'll learn to be alone.

mangroves dream on
beside an endless ocean
where no eyes watch

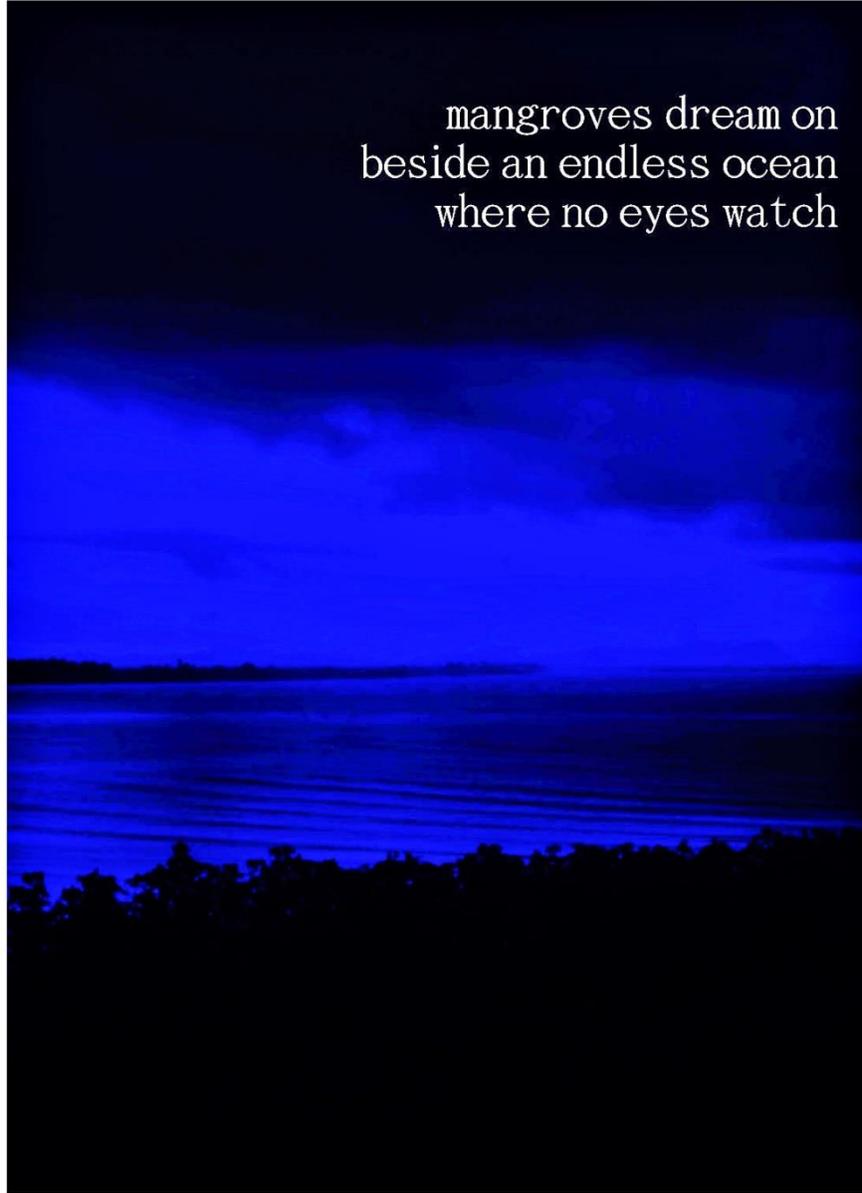


Photo by Stefan Lienhard, mangroves and the endless ocean, Santubong, in digital blue filter.
Senryu by Colin W. Campbell. Font AR PL New Sung.

BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL & STEFAN LIENHARD

GREY NURSE SHARK

CARCHARIAS TAURUS

BY B.R. DIONYSIUS

Your divers are lonely now we hear. Nothing to see.
Nothing to shoot. We took it in the guts for so long.
Your spear fishing zenith in the fifties netted such big
Catches, our skin made excellent handbags, our flake-
Flesh you consumed with the family every Friday. Then
You had to swim for longer & longer before you found
Our diminished mobs, segregated by reefs that started
To turn white with shock. At least the harpoons stopped,
But not the film-fear. You lined your beaches with nylon
Walls to stop us immigrating to shallow water. You'll find
Us there now, hanging like fat, grey Christmas stockings.
We are still nose-diving like any shark, its swim bladder
Torpedoed, sinking to the ocean floor to rest with your
Rusting wartime hulks. Plastic can keep you company.

HAWAI‘I ‘Ō‘Ō

MOHO NOBILIS

BY B.R. DIONYSIUS

We went the way of those famous monarchies;
French. Russian. A gigantic fall from the graces
We knew. Our Versailles, the majestic koa trees
That rose a hundred feet to knit our green pavilion.
Their sickle-shaped leaves our family crest. Those
Too were harvested for their wood, for royal canoes
That sailed the Pacific extending the land revolution
Of humankind. At first we had an understanding; you
Caught us alive, plucked the yellow tufts you needed
For your robes & staves & then let us go. But the old
Treaties were broken eventually; by hunger, by musket
Shot that allowed greed to climb up the tallest trees
& end our reign. Our volcanic plunge into death's
Commonness was executed on Mauna Loa's slopes.

PEACH EXUVIAE

BY EDWARD RASO

Something old,
something exquisitely deep inside
understands the language of your
dream
cool
smile -
the syntax of your soft, wet eyes

But best to know:

The carefree fool at work
behind the curtain
pulling levers,
making
herself
light

in-between

shrugged off hardships
enduring,
rubbing off the callus with new embraces
emerging smooth-true and polished

With a sigh and chuckle she goes on.
She knows what time it is.

THE HOLLOW HOUSE ACROSS THE FIELD

BY ELLIOT LEGRANGE

I feel trapped in a murder box.

The thought was a litany—a hymn—a cacophonous din in Louise Alexander’s skull as she stared at the rusting faucet of their bathtub. She sat in the tub’s shallow basin, and from the showerhead, water beat down on her bruised thighs. Her stomach was welt-red from the heat’s sting, her skin still a loose sack from her pregnancy, as though she needed proof her daughter wasn’t some dream crawled into the world, some backwoods ghoulish burdening the walls of their trailer with shadows and wails. She could hear Lila’s screaming over the tinny sound of the water ball-peening the tub. She ignored it.

The shower curtain was open. It was a dingy and moldering thing, overwhelmed by a host of beige hens. She and Glenn had purchased it years ago, after Glenn’s father had passed away and stuck them with this trailer that smelled of mothballs and something sickly-sweet, like the lingering scent of old country dinners or the slow putrefaction of the elderly. Louise hated the trailer as much as she loved it. She hated the shower curtain in the same way. The hens had too many dull eyes to watch her on the toilet, watch her when she stood in front of the rotted mirror to pull a comb through her hair. Their eyes followed her everywhere, tracked her. They could see her when the curtain was open, when it was closed. Their eyes told Glenn lies, told him she was going to call down to the police station again, that she was going to leave, that she had a choice in anything.

Louise stood without washing. Her hair was damp from the backsplash of water, her breasts wet from leaked milk. She stepped out into the puddle on the curling vinyl tiles, didn't bother to dry off. Opening the bathroom door brought a rush of cool air, October hanging in the trailer. She walked the length of the short hallway with its guttering furnace, walked the thin-carpeted kitchen and what served as the living room--the sofa was more PBR cans than velvet, the television an ugly box Glenn had swiped off a front lawn in town along with their yellowed refrigerator.

The door to her and Lila's room was warped on its hinges, so she had to shoulder it open.

Inside, the dome light was still on, iodine orange.

She could see her daughter's crib from where she stood. It was next to her narrow bed, the one she slept in when Glenn didn't need her. He said it was because he worked third shift at the headlight factory and didn't want to wake the two of them when he crawled home after dawn--after his routine good morning to Mitch, who ran the west-end liquor shop in town and always had a case of beer waiting. She knew better, but she hadn't said anything about it in a long time.

The doorjamb she'd gotten to the eye once had been answer enough.

She crossed the uneven floor to peer over the side of the crib, down at her daughter's contorted face. She was a monstrous thing, the stuff of back-alley tales rattled out between the drags of a cigarette. Her infant skin was dry and peeling. Her head was bald, coned, her cheeks fat. Her ears protruded like the open doors of a sedan, and her mouth was all gums as she screamed.

From Glenn's room at the other end of the trailer came the holler: "Christ on a goddamn stick, Louise! Would you shut that child up?"

Louise only stared at her daughter. She wondered if eventually Lila would get tired enough that she'd stop crying. She wondered how long it would take for Lila to stop breathing, too, if she just stood there. A day? Two? A week?

"Louise!" came Glenn's voice again, followed by pounding footsteps that reverberated through the floors and shook the pictures of her dead mother hanging from the wood-paneled walls. Louise turned to look at her husband when he appeared in the doorway.

He was short, substantially so, with broad shoulders emphasized by his barrel chest. His steel toes were unlaced, his face creased and unshaven. Under the glassiness of his eyes and the taut pull of his mouth, there was still a hint of the man Louise had fallen for in high school.

Some days the hint welled up through the cracks a little more than others.

"Would you shut her up? For God's sakes, Lou, she's been screaming for an hour," Glenn said, taking up the entire doorway. "I don't work my ass off every night so you can screw around the house."

Louise shrugged. "Maybe you should hold her."

"Maybe you should put on some clothes," Glenn shot back. "I'll be in my room, and I swear to God if she ain't quiet by the time I leave for work, I'll beat your ass before I do and you can both go sleep in the house across the field tonight."

He left with that.

Louise didn't flinch when he slammed the door and frightened Lila's screams to a new volume. Instead, she thought of the house he mentioned. She saw it from the window of the living room every day. The house sat on the other side of flat farmland that hadn't been tilled

or sown in years, leaving the earth browned and ragged with grasses and weeds, like a butchered beard. The house was too far away to see in detail from the trailer, but it sat tall and pale against the veil of trees at its back. It reminded Louise of a solitary gravestone.

She'd only been to the house once, before she and Glenn had moved into the trailer, back when they'd only visited Glenn's venom-spitting drunkard of a father; he'd been a man who'd liked to stab his every word into the air with a finger, just to show how he'd cut it off at the second knuckle to win a bet.

The white-bricked house across the field had looked as though it was still living in some other time then, a year ago, ten, perhaps even centuries. It was flat-faced, all its windows hooded and looking front. The portico was quaint. A long time ago, Louise had been told there was a fire that had gutted it, but there had only been the smallest tinges of black fingering out from the windows to attest to those stories when she'd seen the place. The house was rumored to be floorless now, eaten clean of everything but its bones, nothing but a cicada husk.

Louise liked to imagine all the different families that could have lived there over the years, who had died in it, how the fire had started or who'd started it. She wanted to see the house again. At least once, she wanted to stand in front of the house and shed the skin of this one.

She crossed to her dresser and pulled the sticky third drawer open. On top of the stack was an olive-green shirt, thin, with a hole at the collar and a bright logo from Rumors, the bar she'd worked at before she'd gotten married. She missed the bar sometimes, missed having friends, missed knowing anything but this trailer and the half-acre from its front door to the oiled road.

She pulled the shirt out and tugged it over her head. It fell just past the curve of her ass.

She didn't bother to untuck the hair trapped underneath her shirt and left the room and the sounds of her whimpering daughter behind. The belly of the trailer was empty, Glenn's door shut down the hall, a sliver of light lining the bottom. The front door was deadbolted, but she slid the bolt back. Metal whispered against metal.

The wooden front steps and rough yard nagged at the bottoms of her uncallused feet, but she walked nonetheless--walked beyond the accumulated rubbish, the old tires and steel drums--walked over the smooth country road and into the cracked field--walked toward the hollow house floating ahead in the dark of night.

Her damp thighs slid together, and the air teased at her genitals. A stray droplet of water from her hair slipped between her breasts and travelled down her stomach the way Glenn's fingers used to, back when he'd used to laugh with her and coax her out of her clothes in the kitchen, before he'd started drinking whiskey and half a case of PBR with his breakfast, before he'd started locking her in the house for her and the baby's good he'd called it, before he'd learned those gentle fingers of his could make a fist.

Louise pilgrimaged the field, came upon the house. Even in the dark of the country, she could make out the brick's peeling paint, its void-black windows. She mounted the small step of the portico, and under her feet, the stone was numbingly cold.

She imagined her family here as she let her eyes settle into the wood of the front door. She imagined filling the empty rooms, imagined stoking the fireplaces, imagined expanding the portico into a wide porch with a swing, sitting with Glenn there, the two of them comfortably wordless, beer bottles beading sweat in their hands, a coyote howling under the pulsating hum of cicadas in the trees. She imagined it, but it all felt hollow to her, invented. Her life was

cluttered; it was shattered plates and balding carpet, towers of beer cans and boiling showers,
the drone of a television, old photos, fingers pressed into fading bruises.

Turning away from the door, she pulled her shirt against her ass to sit on the front step, but
as she lowered herself, she didn't feel anything underneath her. So she lowered herself further,
and further, until she was squatting, but still, there was nothing beneath her--so she let herself
go as far as she could manage, until the hands holding her shirt brushed her bare heels and she
lost her balance, falling back into a wide sprawl.

The ground was hard beneath her, the star-pocked sky dark above like a ceiling, and she
thought again, inexplicably, I feel trapped in a murder box.

She turned her head to the side, enough for weeds to scratch at her cheek, and then she sat
up.

She was in an empty field. She looked around, in front and behind, but there was nothing
beyond the scruff of the countryside's oblivion, the looming trees at her back. As she stood, she
found there were no signs of the house at all, no signs anything had stood in this field--no
foundation, no flattened grasses. It was all disappeared like so much smoke. She wondered if
she'd dreamt the house's existence in its entirety. All she could see was the trailer beyond the
field, its windows bright against the darkness.

The trailer, with its rusted siding and thin carpet. The trailer, with its tinny bathtub and
sagging patches in the floor. The trailer was in her bones, and she knew she needed to go back.
She needed to go back to her daughter, to her husband. She needed it, and in some way, she
wanted it. There was familiarity in pain.

Slowly, she trudged her way back through the field, over the country road, through the cluttered yard, and up the front steps, but only when she was inside the trailer again did she notice Lila had stopped crying--and only when she entered their room did she find the crib was empty now.

Maybe Glenn had finally taken Lila back to his room. Louise headed down the hall for the light seeping out from underneath his closed door. She could hear Glenn moving around, and twice, she knocked. There was no answer.

“Glenn?” She pressed herself against the door. Again, no answer came. “I’m coming in.”

The room beyond the door was dark when she stepped inside. The lamp beside the unmade bed was off. The dome light overhead, too, was unlit. And the room was empty, just like her and her daughter’s room, just like the hollow house across the field had been before it had vanished underneath her. When she turned toward the door, the rest of the trailer was dark now, too, though she hadn’t touched a single light switch.

Something scratched at the inside of Louise’s chest and the back of her throat, as though somehow, she’d eaten herself and was trying to claw her way back out of her own body. It didn’t make sense, but this didn’t make sense. Her jaw twitched as she stood immobile in the room.

“This isn’t funny.”

She clutched at her hair, and around her every breath, her throat became a vise. She needed to call someone. Her family was gone. But the trailer didn’t have a phone. Glenn didn’t trust her with one, not after she’d called the police the first time he’d hit her.

She'd have to find someone herself, but the nearest house was a half-mile down the road, past the creek. It was her only option, though, so she set a path to the Cooks' place on foot. She didn't have keys to the beat up Oldsmobuick parked in the yard.

It was a while before she came upon the Cooks' house, a Cape Cod at the corner of two country roads, every window including the dormers' a hunter's moon-yellow with light. She didn't need to climb the porch when she got there. A red pickup in the driveway was already growling, its passenger side door open.

Louise approached it, slow.

There was a woman behind the wheel, Regina Cook, barely more than wrinkles and steel-wool hair. She was still in her nightclothes, her gut sitting on her thighs. She looked at Louise without a hint of surprise, just jerked her head to gesture Louise inside the truck. When the door was shut, Regina shifted gear, pulling the pickup out of the driveway, down the road in the direction Louise had come.

"Been a while since I seen you," Regina said. It was the truth. The last Louise remembered of the woman was from a pit fire she and her husband Paul had held behind their house, long before Louise had conceived Lila. "You need something?"

"Help," Louise said through half-numbed lips. "I need help. Need to borrow a phone. To call someone. The police. I don't know. Or if you could take me to town. That'd be fine."

"Why? Something happen?"

“I don’t know. Yeah.” Warm air coughed out of the truck’s vents as they drove. It smelled stale. “I just wanted a break from them, you know. That was all. Some quiet. I went outside, across the field, to the burnt house--”

“Burnt trailer.”

“What?”

“To the burnt trailer down the road.”

“No,” Louise said. “To the house. The one on the other side of the field.”

“No, the burnt trailer down the road.”

“The house,” Louise said, firm. “Would you just listen to me?”

“I ain’t gonna listen to nonsense.”

Regina watched the road with a thinned mouth, the truck picking up speed. Then it turned into the drive to the trailer. The headlights cut a path through the darkness. Louise dug her blunt fingernails into the bruises on her thighs as the truck came to a stop.

“So you ain’t gonna help me then?” she asked.

“Trying to,” Regina said. She pointed a sharp finger at the windshield, toward the trailer.

“You want help? You look.”

Louise didn’t know what good it was supposed to do. She knew what her trailer looked like and she knew her family wasn’t in it, but she listened anyway. The headlights bathed the side of the trailer.

“That,” Regina said, “is the burnt trailer. See?”

“No,” Louise said. “That’s my home. I just came from there--”

But then she looked. She really looked.

The windows were broken, and the roof was sagging in the middle. Siding curled like a coke can in a bonfire, blackened. The bones of the trailer were exposed. Everything was silent, still, razed to nothing.

“I don’t understand,” Louise said.

“That’s the Alexanders’ old place,” Regina said. “Family lived there years ago. Never saw much of anyone except the husband. Kept his wife shut in the house more days than not. Never could get the cops to come over more than twice. Nothing stuck. Could hear screaming at all hours and that baby crying anytime we passed by.”

Louise looked at Regina, mouth trembling. “But.”

“Was almost a relief when she set the fire, you know. Sounds awful, but I forgive her for it.”

“She?”

“The wife,” Regina answered, folding her arms over her breasts. “Drugged up her family from what I heard. Set the whole place on fire with her and them in it. I remember standing in the yard with Paul, half-praying the firefighters wouldn’t make it. They didn’t. I felt bad for her. Still do.”

And when Regina looked back at the front seat, it was vacant now. It always was on these October nights. Gearshift warm in hand, she made the drive back home. Her husband was waiting for her in the driveway, hands in his armpits.

“She come back again?” he asked when Regina stepped out of the truck.

“Every year, same day it happened.”

“Think she’ll ever realize what she did?”

“I dunno,” Regina said with a shrug.

And she didn’t know, but over the next year, she and her husband saved up the money to purchase the old Alexander trailer down the road and its plot--and the second it was under their name, they had the thing demolished, had the land scorched down to dirt. They never saw Louise again after that, but sometimes, when it was quiet enough outside and the wind blew just right in October, they could still hear the wailing of an abandoned child.

THE RETURN

BY EG TED DAVIS

Flesh cannot occupy
space where it does not belong.
Flesh can only occupy the place
from which it originated,
and no place shall it
occupy for the long term
outside the earth's atmospheric dome.

Therefore...

There must be a Return.



UNTITLED

BY SULYN GODSEY

LEGACY OF THE WHITE ASH

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

An albino raven meditates
during an alabaster moonrise.
Darkness reaches from shadows
to grasp the soulless.
Hideous cries from the upper branches
of the tall Stone Mountain pines.
Ghosts from another time reincarnate
as swirling mists over fields of cotton.
Magpies joust upon the old sagging roof
of a decrepit plantation cabin.
Hooded ones chant to their lesser being
who fulfills their twisted dreams.
They praise the Sun and Moon each night
as spirited white flames flicker.
Cherry blossoms scattered as the grip of
a heartless tempest blows.
Meteors strike the golden mountain;
a stark truth is finally told.
Life was hard in the Georgia of yesterday,
pantries stored nothing but memories.
The water from the pump was a hazy red,
smelling like decrepit sulfur.
Witches cast spells; send superstitions to hell,
as white ash smolders under the full moon.
Flames and spirits rise high into the sky,
the one of the white flame greets the dead.

LIMPET AND CRUMPETS

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

At bedside tables, wicked candles flicker
limpets and crumpets of peculiar dreams
as rose petals and thistle, born of the sun
the thorns and brambles grasping tightly.
Dark shadows scurry in corners of the cellar
whispers are shallow of incised grand plot
seamless and strewn in the crested waves
sand and salt travel in bright ocean dreams.
The blind man's spring begets his summer
now shuffling along, moving hither and yon
in a brooding night spent humming a verse
questioning his legacy as red cardinals sing
goblins on toadstools await a brooding night;
they gather bushels of limpet and crumpets.

WONDERANCE

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

Why, why do I stare at the dark man
he's back in those black, dreary shadows.
Down those thirteen steps, into the cellar.
His eyes, a chalky white, staring, glaring;
his teeth crooked and stained, with thin lips.
He fades in and out, like an old tv signal
I see him there, with his acrimonious grin.
On Sunday's, before our big family meal,
I sneak to the basement, peaking at the corner
he's there, he's always there, always staring,
always glaring, forever daring; come closer.
But no, no, no, I won't, I cannot as I have neither
the strength of heart nor pious virtue to oblige.
So now, tis a game of wonderance, I go to the cellar;
watch the dark man staring back at me, grinning,
beckoning, "come closer". But never, or perhaps?

IMAGINE

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

Run your fingers
through the depth of my soul.
be strong, like a sprig of oak
swaying in the winds of a tempest.
For once, just once, I beg you,
feel exactly what I feel,
believe as I, of what is truth,
perceive, what your eyes see,
for I perceive what is before you.
The treasure of life, to see and feel.
Experience sadness as tears fall
examine and for once, just once,
understand what life screams into
your mind, emblazons in your eyes,
whispers softly to your beating heart.
Just imagine, it may be all that's left.

THE FEASTING

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

Pay attention to the feast,
the summer solstice hosts all.
A social affair that's really light,
above all others, is the barbeque.
Twilight is, in its way, a prelude to darkness.
Does the night make you quiver in delight?
Is your heart beating with a quickness?
I cannot help but stop and seek the offering.
Watching those with knife and fork devour and
tear it apart while the hungry shiver.
How happy the times at the posh cafe!
Draining the tall pints of ale while nibbling
on kippers and crackers.
I mourn the solstice while my generation slowly
dies away. I mourn their deaths.
Does the thought of death make one avoid life?
The moonlight reigns our nights; the sunrise
breathes anew. Bring on the feasting!

FAME: I'M GONNA LIVE FOR A PRETTY LONG TIME

BY RON RIEKKI

I

David Hasselhoff

I was going to a meeting with an agent that wasn't really a meeting and she wasn't really an agent. When I got there, she just threw a string of subtle insults at me about how my email to her was too long—two paragraphs, when it only should have been one—and that I should have ten screenplays ready to go and not just three. On the way, I past by David Hasselhoff randomly walking down the street. He looked tall, and as if a teapot had crashed into his spine and shattered its entire contents all over the world. I looked back after he'd past and he kept walking towards some unknown rabbit hole. This was in his hamburger days, my happiness taken by gravity, his ocean of loss a portent.

II

Rodney Bingenheimer

I'd seen the documentary *Mayor of the Sunset Strip*, so when Rodney walked by me in the right atrium of Hollywood, in the center of its pacemaker, a street exhausted from throbbing of the day, I knew him immediately by his bilateral electroconvulsive therapy hair. He limped by. He was as alone as Hasselhoff, a face filled with the seriousness of rusted chains. I looked back again. His back reminded me of a wounded Charlie Chaplin, as if Johnny Knoxville had an uncle who was not abused by stunts but from life.

III

Gene Black

Nice guy.

He wrote the song "Never." Told me he wrote the song "Never." By Heart. I loved that song. I'd memorized it. By heart, of course. This was a bar. In Los Angeles, I believe. Everything is lost to the banging of your head to this world. Looking at him, I kept thinking about how fast his life has gone, like you could see the clock trying to become a halo but only becoming another thick ghost.

LILT DOWN MY CHIN

BY JAMES D. CASEY IV

I tied a knot
Then cut it loose
Lost within an ancient
Forest

A place of magic
Were trees grow words
I pluck them down
To make my wine

Psychoactive metaphors
Sweet to the taste
Lilt down my chin

The drug works swift
Showing me the way
No turning back now
The plot thickens and
The trip had just begun

I fond my way to peace of mind
A place well hidden
Over a sea of hungry wolves
Behind a wall of old bad dreams
Sneaking my way inside

DEVILISH INTENT

BY JAMES D. CASEY IV

Sitting in the silence
Of seven names of love
I etch each rune
With devilish intent
Into an angel's blade

He holds them there
In virtue and in form
Until my solemn return
With another name
For the list
Catering my woes

IT ALL COMES BACK

BY EVA COATES

The night my baby sister died was the hottest of the year.

Mama's pains had started in the morning, with pockets of cool mist still settled in our little Appalachian valley. But by the time Mrs. Finch arrived early in the evening and banished Myrna and me to our room, the heavy heat had arrived. And even though the sky was now velvet dark, it was only getting worse.

We knelt on the worn floorboards of our little room, dingy cotton dresses clinging to our knees. The moon shone through the open window, giving a little extra light to see by even if there was no breeze to let in. My hair clung damp to my neck, and I impatiently swiped it away.

We'd found an old wooden die in the dresser, and I shook it in my palm before spreading my fingers and letting it tumble down.

"Will the baby be born tonight?"

I whispered it quick, before the die hit the floor.

Eight. Even.

Yes.

“My turn!” Myrna grabbed for the die, scooping it up hastily. She was older than me by a year, about to start seventh grade in a month, but she always seemed younger, brattier, babyish.

“Will the baby be a boy?”

One. Odd.

No.

We both looked glumly at the single faded dot.

All of us, me and Myrna and Mama, had been hoping the baby would be a boy, a little miniature of Daddy, with blue eyes and flaxen hair.

“Girls are sweeter anyway,” I chirped. I picked up the die, let it roll.

“Will the baby be healthy?”

I must have tossed it too hard. The die flew from my hand and rolled across the room, settling into the shadowy corner by the closet with a clatter. I crawled across the floor, picked it up and squinted. Too dark. I stood and made my way toward the lamp by our bed, the only light in the room besides the moon shining

in.

Five. Odd.

No.

I tripped, my foot sliding on the well-worn wood. My knee buckled and I reached out to catch myself. My hand caught the empty cradle, not yet moved into Mama’s room, and sent it rocking across the room.

“Shit,” I whispered, clutching my aching knee where it had banged against the floor. I usually tried not to cuss, Papa had hated it so much, but my knee throbbed beneath my hand. My eyes snagged the cradle still swaying on the other side of the room.

“*Shit.*”

Myrna’s eyes were wide, and Mama’s voice snaked into my ear: *Don’t rock the empty cradle; the baby will die.*

“It’s ok,” I said, not just to Myrna but to both of us. “It’s ok.”

“But Mama said—”

“It’s just one of Mama’s dumb superstitions. She says all kinds of things that don’t come true.”

“But that one time—”

I threw the die back in the dresser and slammed it shut. Myrna blinked, the sound distracting her from the cradle.

“What was it, anyway?”

I cleared my throat, smoothing my voice before answering.

“Even.”

Myrna nodded, looked down at her hands. Relief.

“I’m sick of that game,” I murmured.

I figured the baby had to be ok, because almost nothing good had happened all year, and we were due for something good. Later, they would say that in 1931 we were in the middle of the Great Depression, but living in the hills of West Virginia with only our chickens for company had always seemed depressing to me.

Daddy had been fired from the mines the year before, cutting off our income, and even though we had enough land for farming, the soil was stingy. We planted seeds and carefully watered the tender shoots that emerged. We tended to our few ornery hens. But we still harvested barely enough corn and squash and eggs to eat, let alone sell. And even though Mama got a job at the local drugstore, and my sister Myrna and I got tips for running errands for neighbors, it never seemed quite enough.

And then, Daddy died.

That March was the most miserable one any of us had ever seen, the sky grey and angry and seemingly never putting an end to the frigid rain that flooded our little valley. No one was with him when he went up on that ladder to clean out the gutters, but we all heard it when he fell, a sickening thud and silence. As soon as Mama saw he was dead, she rushed into the kitchen and stopped the hands on the clock. When a person dies, she said, you have to stop them at the time of death—or their spirit will haunt the place forever.

She said Daddy was gone, and he should stay that way.

Mama had a superstition for almost everything. Growing up in the Appalachian hills, she had soaked them up, and they were ready to bubble up at any time. Sometimes they worked. Often, they didn't.

One definitely didn't work: the star quilt, patiently stitched by twilight and meant to keep the ghosts and spirits away from my baby sister after she was born. Mama had finished it just three days ago. She had folded and stored it in me and Myrna's room, where it now lay, waiting for a baby that would never be wrapped in it.

Mama's yells weren't letting up. They had been low and loud before, but now they splintered through the house, cracking up through the floors like lightning. We tried not to listen, but they were hard to ignore. The die banished to the dresser, Myrna and I sat by the window, sweating even though the sun had been down for hours.

"Do you think she's going to die?" Myrna asked, her brown eyes so wide I thought they might pop out.

Earlier, Mrs. Finch had sent us upstairs, assuring us that we would know when it was time to come back downstairs. She had smiled, but worry had wrinkled the corner of her eyes. I had caught it, and I think Myrna did, too.

“No,” I said, firm and steady and confident, not letting myself feel anything but. I slung an arm around her shoulder and rubbed her arm, willing my hand not to shake.

We didn’t know what else to say, so we sat and listened to the air so loud with crickets and bullfrogs and locusts, and Mama’s yells climbing louder and faster. I can still remember the very moment Sissy was born because it all stopped. And the second that silence rang through the house, we rushed for the stairs, eager to meet the baby I already felt I knew. I imagined tiny, rosy cheeks and a soft, downy head. Tiny rosebud lips. Eyes like Daddy’s.

But before we reached the end of the hall, a new and more terrible sound filled the air—worse than the bugs and frogs ever could be. Mama was screaming again, but it was desperate and piercing this time, and I knew right away that Sissy was dead.

Later, Mrs. Finch would say the baby—a girl—was born dead. Mama wouldn’t hear it, though, and insisted she had seen her breathe right before she turned so blue and still. I don’t know who was right, but I do know that Mama was so washed over by grief, so tired from it, that she forgot to check if the clock had stopped. And it hadn’t, and she didn’t go and stop it, and maybe that really is why Sissy came back.

It doesn’t matter, though. What I wish I knew, was why she chose to come back and haunt me instead of Mama. I think it would have meant the world to

her, to feel that her littlest girl, a piece of Daddy, was still here and near. But the night Sissy was buried, it wasn't Mama's room she came to. It was mine.

The next day was like when Daddy died but worse. The same people came and went, bringing biscuits and boiled potatoes and beans, but Mama couldn't manage to greet them. She just sat at the kitchen table, staring at the wall, unable to look anyone in the eye. She murmured "thank you" and touched their hands from time to time, but her eyes never crystallized, and I'm not sure she remembers much about that day. I don't.

Eventually, everyone left, and while Myrna went to sleep, I wandered to the kitchen to nibble at the food that still sat untouched. But when I heard Mama talking, I paused in the doorway, hidden in the shadows. It was the first time I'd heard her speak all day.

"I didn't stop it," Mama said, eyes on the clock above the stove, tracking the ticking second hand.

Mrs. Finch turned from where she stood scouring the counter, her mouth open like a trout's.

"It's ok," she said, composing herself and scrubbing a palm across Mama's shoulders. "You have the star quilt, that will help."

But Mama just shook her head, eyes falling back to the floor, her mouth once again clamping shut. She didn't seem comforted by the reminder, and

because I didn't know how to offer an alternative, I turned and quietly tripped up
the stairs to my room.

Two nights later, the heat that had come with Sissy hadn't died along with
her. We had buried Sissy earlier that day, a tiny baby-sized hole in the overgrown
cemetery down the road, next to Daddy. I wondered if he knew she was there
next to him.

I opened the window of our room, struggling with the humidity-swollen
frame, praying the wisps of dark air would sneak a chill into the room. But the
night air offered no relief, and the heat hung on me like a wet wool blanket.

My bones ached even though it felt like I hadn't done anything all day.
Myrna was missing. A quick peek down the hall revealed her already asleep in
Mama's room—for whose benefit I wasn't sure. Mama was sitting downstairs,
alone. She hadn't wanted company. I had asked.

Despite the heat, or maybe because of it, I dozed off quickly. But instead of
descending into the deep sleep I needed, I hovered somewhere between.

They came slowly at first, the visitors. First it was Mrs. Finch, there to
check up on me. But as she bent over me, her voice was distorted, scratchy, and
instead of hair she had a swarm of flies. I turned my head but more visitors filed
into my room, shaking me and squeezing my hands, whispering they were sorry,

sorry...their hands were soft but their eyes were missing. More came in but they never left, collecting in the corner and hissing as they scaled the walls.

I tossed and turned but they hovered nearby, closing in until a sharp cry finally broke through, and suddenly I was sitting up in bed, my visitors finally gone. I rubbed my eyes and swiped my damp hair off my forehead, waiting for my heart rate to slow. I must be getting sick, I thought. Fever dreams. But when I laid down again, the crying came back.

Just a whimper at first, it soon swelled into an insistent, angry scream, filling my room with unmet need. I froze, my blood finally chilling. How could the baby be crying if it was dead? How could I help a baby that wasn't there? I scabbled out of the room and down the hall, pausing outside Mama's door, my hand on the handle. I could still hear the baby, softer now, but there. Not a hallucination.

I twisted the doorbell and pressed gently. Myrna was snoring lightly next to Mama, who must have finally come upstairs and was too quiet to be sleeping. I crept inside, tiptoeing to the bed and leaning close to her ear.

“Mama, there's a baby crying in my room.”

“Emmy, don't be cruel. You know there's no baby here.”

“Mama, I'm not—”

She flipped over and stared at me, her eyes sharp even in the dark.

“Don't talk to me about this again.”

Tears burned in my throat as I walked back to my room. As soon as I stepped back inside, the crying amplified—louder, angrier, and I knew it was Sissy. I couldn't see her, but I knew. Not knowing what else to do, I laid back down and stayed there the rest of the night—sweating and listening to my baby sister cry from God knows where. She wouldn't stop.

Mrs. Finch arrived early the next morning to help and check on Mama, and as soon as I heard her shuffling in the kitchen, I hurried downstairs. My eyes were exhausted and full of grit. Sissy had finally stopped crying around dawn, but by then I'd been unable to go back to sleep.

"Mrs. Finch, a baby was crying all night." I lowered my voice. "I think it was Sissy."

She spun around and stared at me, mouth gaping for a moment before she slammed it shut and turned back to the cupboard.

"Enough," she said, measuring out the coffee grounds—always just enough to turn the water a dingy gray. "Don't you let your Mama hear you spouting such nonsense. She's been through enough, that's the last thing she needs."

She turned around and peered at me, eyes thin. There was no way I was going to tell her I already had mentioned it to Mama.

"I thought you were old enough now to know when you was having a bad dream."

"Sorry, Mrs. Finch."

I leaned against the wall, slid down to the floor, ashamed. Had it just been a dream? My head felt stuffed with cotton, blurry and bruised from the lack of sleep. Yes, I had been dreaming, about the visitors. But then I woke up. And then the crying had started.

Yes, I thought. I am old enough to know when a dream's a dream. It hadn't been a dream.

"Are you ok, sweetheart?" Mrs. Finch studied my face, cocking her head. "You have purple shadows under your eyes. They look like bruises."

My sister came back that night.

I fell into bed late and fell asleep quick, arms aching from pulling weeds and turning dirt all day, trying to catch up with the yard work that had been lacking. So, if the crying started out softly, I didn't hear it. Instead, I woke to screams, and before I even knew I was awake, I was on my feet and scrambling down the hall. Mama must have fallen asleep downstairs, because Myrna was alone in Mama's bed, breathing deep and slow in the moonlight beaming through the window.

She'd never liked the dark.

"Myrna," I whispered, leaning close over the bed, my lips brushing her hair. She woke up with a start, nearly knocking me in the face.

"What is it?" she asked, rubbing her eyes with the sleeve of her night dress.

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

Her eyes widened, the moon shining off the whites of her eyes, but she didn't answer.

"There's one in my room."

"Don't say such things," Myrna hissed through the dark. "It's not right."

She glanced at the door.

"And don't let Mama hear you talking like that."

My throat scorched and I wiped at my eyes, threatening to spill their tears. Myrna usually always believed me.

"Myrna, I'm scared."

Her face softened and after another glance at the door, she scooped over and threw back the sheet, which she always pulled up no matter how hot it was.

"I'm sure you just had a bad dream. Here."

I climbed in and she wrapped her arms around me, pulling me close.

"You look all blotchy," she whispered, before drifting back to sleep.

I felt blotchy, felt like my insides were dead, or missing. But there with Myrna, I fell asleep for the rest of the night, despite the muffled screams I still heard coming from down the hall.

The crying continued to come every night. Sometimes it was angry and insistent, and on those nights, the walls seemed to shake with her rage. Other nights it was droning and sad, and it made me cry, too.

But no one else heard it. And I couldn't sleep. Some nights I wandered the house like a ghost myself, finally curling up on the worn sofa downstairs when I got too tired to walk.

Mama found me like that one morning before she left for work, and I woke to her shaking me, her frail hands gripping my shoulders.

“What’s wrong, what happened?”

I cracked my eyes open to her stricken face, her eyes sharp with worry.

“I don’t feel well.”

She sat down next to me on the sofa, pushing my legs aside and pressing the back of her hand against my forehead.

“Well, you don’t feel warm.” She got up, pulled her shoes on, put on a hat.

“I’m going to the pharmacy. You’ll meet me after?”

Mama liked company on her walk home from work, so I always met her at five thirty on Fridays.

I nodded, and as I pushed off the couch to sit up, two of my fingernails came off, crumbling to the floor where the pieces lay in a pile.

I cried out.

“Mama!”

I jammed my fingers in my mouth, sucking the newly naked tips. But Mama just turned and left, muttering under her breath, something about little girls wanting attention.

My feet dragged beneath me as I walked to meet Mama, first on the dirt road leading into town and then on the scuffed sidewalks along Main Street. I could barely see straight and I wavered as I went, and I imagined that's what it must feel like to be drunk. I scratched my head and another finger nail came off. I stubbed it into the dirt with my toe.

The bell rang above me as I entered the pharmacy, the familiar medicinal scent hitting me as soon as I walked in. Mama was in the back finishing up, and I leaned on the counter, hoping she wouldn't be long.

"You ok, honey?"

It was Maddy, the girl Mama worked with who seemed much older than her sixteen years. She peered at me as she wiped down the counter. I wanted to say yes, to lie, but I couldn't, and a tear leaked from my eye as I shook my head.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" I asked. I didn't wait for her reply. "I hear one. Every night."

I waited for her to say I was lying, or worse, to scoff and tell me to stop being silly. But she didn't

"Well that sounds terrifying. What does it want?"

I stared at her, feeling like Mrs. Finch with my mouth open like a fish, not following what she was saying.

"I... I don't know. How could I know?"

Maddy shrugged, turned her attention back to scrubbing the counter.

“I dunno,” she said. “You should ask her.”

Later, when the sun went down and the house fell quiet, I waited for Sissy to show up. And sure enough, she did. It started like it always did, the first few whimpers followed by sharp cries that escalated into screaming.

“What do you want?” I hissed. “How am I supposed to know how to help you?”

But the crying just got louder.

“Tell me! You need to help me!”

Pain snared across my arm, and when I looked down, a small strip of skin on my forearm had been ripped away.

“Damn it!”

I gripped the raw skin, now throbbing under my hand. My own anger flooded my veins, and I felt like kicking the walls. The screaming was awful enough, why did she have to hurt me, too?

I forced myself to think. She’s a baby. What do babies need? My eyes snagged the cradle, still pushed into the corner of the room. Draped across it was the quilt my Mama had worked so hard to make, the one that was supposed to keep the ghosts away. Mama said you could never rock an empty crib. The baby would die. But what if the baby was already dead?

I crossed the room and picked up the quilt, tucking it gently in the cradle as I would over an infant. I pushed down my own anger, thinking about how scared she must be. How unloved.

“Hush little baby, don’t you cry...”

I slid the cradle close to my bed and carefully sat down as I rocked her.

“Sissy’s gonna sing you a lullaby...”

At first, nothing happened. The screaming still reverberated through the room, sounds that I now knew no one else could hear. But a moment later, she started to slow. I kept rocking, and the screams started to sound a bit tired, and after a few more minutes, slowed to shuddering whimpers.

“Shh... I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I’m here now.”

And then, it all stopped.

I kept a hand on the cradle as I slid under the covers, careful not to jar or bump her. She stayed quiet, and the silence was velvet in my ears. My fingertips tingled as I rocked her gently, and when I looked down, my fingernails had grown back.

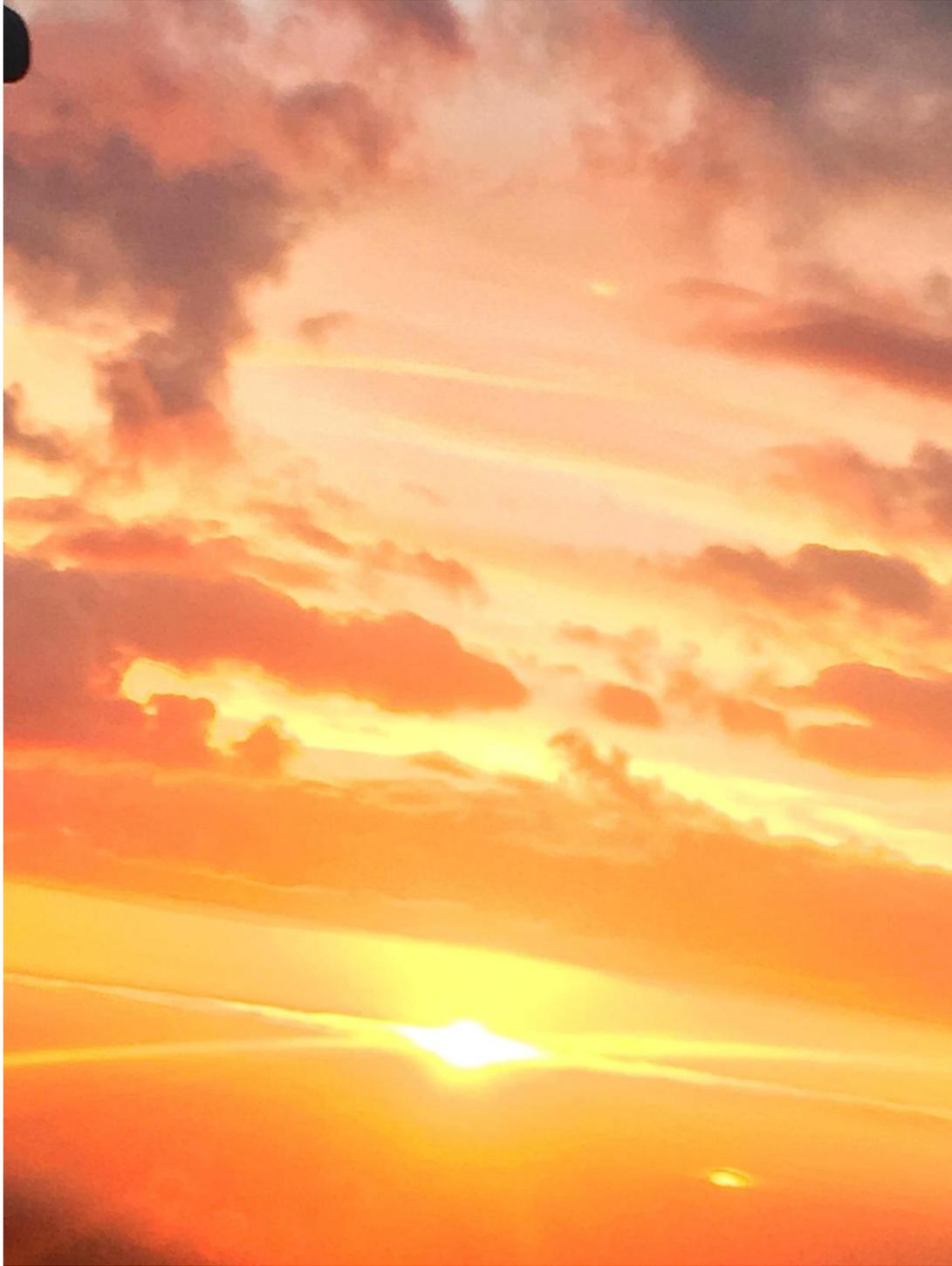
I never mentioned Sissy to Mama again. She had worked so hard to keep her away. Maybe Mama had been afraid that if she left that door open, Sissy wouldn’t have come. Maybe, it was easier to say she wasn’t here because Mama said she couldn’t be.

After I figured out how to keep Sissy happy, I worried that she'd keep coming every night, making me rock that cradle. But it didn't turn out that way. She came here and there, easier to calm down on some nights than others. On good nights, all she'd need was the star quilt and a couple minutes of rocking and she'd be quiet for the night and gone for another month or so. But on other nights, the bad ones, nothing would calm her, and I'd have to rock that cradle until morning, listening to that tiny angry thing wail into the night.

But it was ok. I'd be angry, too.

I do worry about what happens when I go, though. And these days, seventy years out of the hills of West Virginia, that day's getting closer than I like to think about. And when I'm gone, who will comfort her, help her sleep? I can only hope that I go wherever she is. Wherever that is.

Because my baby sister, she always comes back. Maybe I will, too.



UNTITLED

BY SULYN GODSEY

WE ALL BECOME FLOWERS

BY LINDA M. CRATE

people so thoughtlessly
injuring this world
they will think nothing of it
until they're entitled lives are on the line,
but i don't want to die because
some men know no end to their greed;
we need bees,
and we need clean water to drink and clean air
to breathe;
we need to be more mindful
of our planet and her needs—
i get so sick of living in a universe
that places so much emphasis on money,
but so little on things that truly
matter
such as one's heart and soul, one's integrity,
and keeping the earth in good shape;
tending to one's dreams and making the world

a better place—
i am tired of the sickness of these entitled people
who think they matter more than others
because in the end we all become flowers which
feed the bees.

WITHOUT CHAINS

BY LINDA M. CRATE

you think you're something human,

but you're really not;

just another monster in a sea

of never ending nightmares

that plague me—

i rose from the ashes when you killed me

fashioned myself a stronger song of flames and water

because i am a tiger with phoenix wings

immortal of the flames,

and i would never give anyone the power

to destroy me;

especially not a little boy

hiding behind masks calling himself a man—

you said you were the wolf,

well,

i am the raven and my talons will have your eyes and heart in ribbons

because the temper i warned you about once is very real

although you tried to tame me and cage me
insisting i had no temper;
you cannot hedge in a wildfire soul like me
i will only burn all the brighter
to escape your cages
because like every free creature i wish to remain without chains.

RULES NOT LOVE

BY LINDA M. CRATE

your heart
is a black space
no light kisses it
jutting darkness
cuts anyone who dares to get
too close,
but i thought perhaps
i could save you from your suffering;
but you are too fond of your pain
to let it go—
you forge your identity from pain
thus causing damage to all
who tried to shine light through your sky
left purposefully dark and empty
where no star and no moon
can touch you,
and i don't know why a person

would live such a shell of a life;
comfort zones will never make you grow
as a person
but i don't think growth is something
you're interested in—
all you do is take from others
in the guise of giving,
and you call yourself a saint when you are a sinner;
just another pharisee believing in rules not love.

I AM THE KING OF THIS KINGDOM

BY LINDA M. CRATE

i learned there was no hero that would come save me, i had to save myself; when i was a little girl i thought if i were good enough my daddy would come rescue me and take me away to some far off place—but i was wrong, he would never come and he would never care; just like my stepfather even though he was always there—my heart was starved of love, but i realized all the love i was giving others was never given back to me; but i couldn't stop my heart from loving so i decided since i would be spending the rest of my life with myself that i had to love myself—i had to care what happened to me because no one else notices when you're drowning, you can scream at the top of your lungs and they're still oblivious as they're swimming in chaos of their own; you cannot rely on others to help even when you cannot help yourself because the world is full of apathetic and cruel people and sometimes you learn friends are not really friends just people who used you and threw you away like garbage when they were done using you—they wonder why i have trust issues, i wonder why they trust at all; they are too many serpents in this world that will strike your heel so i crush their heads before they get a chance—my throne of dreams has no place for venomous worms, i am the king of this kingdom, and i will save myself.

LOVE AND LIGHT

BY LINDA M. CRATE

it's a dark spell
your lust
clouds the eyes of better judgment
you told me
that you loved when you didn't
your insincerity so sincere
that i mistook your lies for truth,
and those tears you spilled
when i left were just a
convincing lie;
you told me to say you cared
when you didn't—
my mother said you never did treat me right,
and she never liked you;
so you can tell your mother
that you're far from perfect or the catch
she always claimed you were

because my mother would punch you
if there were no consequences
she told me once
i was too good for you and she was right
never should have given you a discount because
you wouldn't have afforded me otherwise—
but you live and learn,
and i learned that i am a divine goddess
whose magic will one day destroy your darkness and nightmares
in the burning palms of my love and light.

THE COLORS

BY KRISTI JOY

Purple ribbons
smooth out the aches
in my heart
and mind
like silk,
cool and yielding
against my skin.

Yellow is the
lifeboat
I cling to
when darkness floods.

Red rolls
out the carpet
to my hunger and thirst.

Blue
is the
ocean
that rocks
me to sleep.

Black takes
me to
depths
from which
I hope to return,
the absence of light
holding me
hostage.

And then there is orange –
sweet and juicy
glowing
like a sun
in my hand.

THESE BONES

BY KRISTI JOY

Death creaks in these bones
and I turn my ears from hearing.

The slow tick of the clock speeds up
as the sun rises over the hill outside our window.

“Soon, soon my love,” he says,
as we cry together.

Tears slipping down cheeks,
hearts beating and breaking,
too much world for the two of us to hold.

LANDSCAPE OF LONGING

BY KRISTI JOY

The triangle flame

burns wildly,

dirt resting cool

against my toes.

Hips aching

Slightly.

Back curled,

arms grasping knees.

Hot front

cold back,

sky blue

behind black.

This is the landscape

of my longing

and fulfillment -

fused together,

burning
and cold,
contracted
and vast,
cool ashes
caressing
and settling
against
my skin.

EVERY THING, EVERY TIME

BY KRISTI JOY

As I turn into
the center
of myself
I take something
with me
that I didn't
have
before.

When the wave
and the particle
set down
the rules
I am helpless
in the face
of the whole.

There is me,
or who I
think of
as me,
believing
I am
here alone -
connections
isolated events
between
stretches
of isolation.

Yet science
tells us, clearly,
that there
are no separate
me's -
no things we
can pin down
and name
or even

claim to
exist!
As I fold
this knowledge
inward
the formerly
contained
space
at my
center
unfolds
into a
universe
of every thing,
every time,
every possibility,
all happening
at once.

THE KISS

BY BRIELYN FLORES

In my house, girls did not date. This was a strict rule, enforced by my mother, father, and Jesus Christ. Growing up in a conservative town in central Washington, the rule didn't strike me as completely unfair. The kids at the Calvinist church I attended had even stricter parents. Compared to them, I had it easy, so I made a saint's effort to obey. No amount of devotion, however, could prepare me for the hormones of late adolescence. In my senior year, at seventeen, I found myself desperate to kiss a boy.

It was February when I noticed Andrew. He walked out of the boys' locker room with his dress shirt un-tucked and his tie pulled loose, his gym bag slung over his shoulder. He was showered and triumphant, having just led the varsity basketball team to a win.

Though we'd hung out in the same Christian social group, I'd never considered him before. I never noticed his height or good skin. I never thought about his muscular build or his status as a top student. I definitely never imagined his lips against mine.

Andrew's pheromones glowed in his sweat, and when I looked at him, six-foot-two and shining under the basketball hoop, something inside me stopped. My fight against the flesh, and all its corruption, faded. In its place, a clear determination rose: I was going to forsake my parents; I was going to forsake Jesus. I was going to kiss this boy.

A week later, I flirted with Andrew at a friend's party. I teased and cooed and sent signals the best I could, but, at eleven, it was time to say goodnight. I walked

to my car, un-kissed and unhappy. On the drive home, a car pulled beside mine in the next lane. The driver was waving, trying to get my attention. It was Andrew.

“Do you want to come over?” he mouthed the words. My arms turned into air. I nodded. He pulled his car ahead of mine and we accelerated down the highway.

I met Andrew in his driveway.

“Wait here,” he whispered. “I’ll be right back.”

He went inside his house and returned with sleeping bags. We went to the backyard and climbed onto his trampoline. Under the blankets, we moved closer to each other, slowly, until our hands touched. I remember the Big Dipper and the North Star, the smell of sagebrush off the hills, the anticipation of arrival. And the
kiss.

It started small—a polite kiss, lips closed. Soon, we were frenching. Kissing was no longer a fantasy. It was happening to me, right then, and with so much
saliva.

I brushed the shave of his face against my cheek and took in his smell of Old Spice and laundry detergent. Every part of me felt on fire. My ears burned, my lips burned, my chest, all on fire, all warm with happiness and, inevitably, the first
pricks of shame.

Afterward, on my drive home, I rolled down the windows. I wanted the night air on my face. It was fresh and smelled of flowers and dirt. The stars followed me. The moon was not yet full. I could hear coyotes in the distance and crickets in the grass. And for a moment, before my shame rose, like a wave, to drown me, I felt myself wondrous and bold. I was velvet, a new bud escaping the soil. I was
alive and seventeen.

THE END

A PAINFUL ARRAY OF PAINFULS

BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI

draped across the ceiling – like a bed
or, perhaps
your teeth – Cheshire and fervent (a little boy, or a little wanderer)

the obsession i have with last tuesday 6 years ago,
the obsession i have with the memory of your socks in the drawer clanging
together like bells

the obsession
is a healthy one
if I do say so myself
and these days
i'm the only one diagnosing (so i get to call the shots)

when i reach towards you with my webbed appendages
i only remember
swimming towards

i never remember the edge/ the weight of your hairs
piled next to me on the pillow

i only remember
swimming towards

hot blooded Christmas afternoon - dolphins in the waves (you spotted them;
I dove under and felt their hulking gray gracing towards me like a lullaby

i only remember
a painful array of beautifuls

swimming towards me / webbed hands;
webbed appendages;

dolphins, or you, or the obsession i have with last Tuesday 6 years ago

BONES AND BLOOD, IF YOU ASK ME

BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI

Rumble-fire/let me write again today
let me play my son's hair into a warp-maze;
into a tunnel-hunger

let me love the way the wind moves with such delicate song-bird rhythms
that i too - will be a song of that wind

let me love the aching frame of your body so reminiscently
that i might fall through matter
back to that
home i am always craving for

back home in your bones
where my bones are your bones are my bones are just
bones again
(or rock,
or something hard enough to build earth's crust on—
meadows, mountains, rivers and the like—

bones and blood, if you ask me)

OH,

BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI

Oh,
Oh,
I remember
(now)
what it felt like to take it out of myself –
like a rib
Or two ;
like a blue lagoon
siphoning out of my blood

I remember the ventilator; the
way creating feels
like an elevator ;
the way motion is carrying you,
(but didn't you press the button?)
(but i didn't make the buttons)
(but i didn't make the elevator)
(do i get credit for pushing the button?)

Oh,
I remember now
the feeling of
feeling
like I
had any control
over what was tumbling out of my body
and at what point
it would take shape
and if the shape would be recognizable

who would name it
first?

(name, or recall?)

ROMANTIC LOVE

BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI

Romantic love – I'll just say it's something I haven't grown out of –
that's what I'll say;

I'll pull my teeth out of your whiskers;
I'll come back up for air
gasp
clutching my clavicle
for something
to ground me
to root me
a stray hair out of place
a stray root
still rooted
in these silly ideals
I should have given up 10 years ago

I'll tell you I've grown past them –
mossy edged and weed ridden, I'll tell
you I'm a woman now; I'm a realist now;
this isn't my first rodeo,
and about 10 other cliches that roll off the tongue
that roll through my body
like a fire
like a flood
I'll tell you it's ok,
it's just a Saturday afternoon; just a little prayer to the moon;
I'll tell you I'm a big girl now
firm handed, strong-fisted
a real realist radiating with reason
I'll sit in the stars and suck on the methane of the sun,
I'll tell you I'm just a girl,

But by now I can't believe you haven't noticed
I'm hot breath and oxygen – supernova imagination,
Wildfire captivation, I am helium
I am exploding
(Your mouth just a catalyst)
(my heart just a chemical)

THE GOLDEN CONCOCTION

BY LAUREN SUCHENSKI

the golden concoction of feelings on the water;
the seven pm Spring light:
I am that and
I am that too –
the willful ignorant rage of the shadows creeping

something about a day beginning or
something about a day ending or
can I manufacture something like emotion
something like Love –
can I turn it on;
Off;
inside out
like a weapon

Can I graze it against my face;
a finality; a river
Escalations of bone; I am broth; I am hunter
you press me; flower ribcage into your book –
a field guide gatherer, a fumbled heart forager;
a finder of lost lingerings
I, a postcard,
I, a lock of hair still
attached
to the
head
Is it a lock then – or a key – or a strand?



UNTITLED

BY SULYN GODSEY

RECOVERY

BY DEBBIE ROBSON

The wind brings her messages,
soft whispers in her ear. Her muse
is back after a long absence. And on
short walks she peers into houses,
studying the lie of the land.

For a while all she could see was people,
furniture and things. Safely bland.
Today some houses are rainforests.
Hope and expectation growing
like exotic ferns and hanging vines
with butterflies flitting in between.

Other houses are deserts. The sands
of lassitude, resignation and despair
piled to the window sills with not
a palm tree or oasis in sight. Bitterness
the harsh sun shining down on them.

And her. And then it all begins again.
Reality a vision she must re-interpret
before the ground falls away
and her house is dismantled.

MORLOCKS

BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM

Dark beneath the surface,
water flows blindly
through stone caverns.

Here we harvest
crops of limestone,
fans blowing false wind.

Weak lanterns light
our brittle shadows
that stay in two dimensions.

We surface only
for moonlight,
pallid echo of the sun.

Rain comes in rushes
of our buried Styx
tasting a new sweetness

of the earth

it has seeped through
to reach us.

This is what we live
after the abandonment
of the surface.

This is the darkness
that pales our flesh
and weakens sight.

We are those who
went below
in true belief—

now translucent
as a forgotten thought
after silence.

WIND BECOME ELAND

BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM

I ran from the waterhole,
leaving behind my meat,
my bone and blood
to feed the lioness
and her cubs.

I ran with fear and joy,
leaving my eyes behind
in the sated stare
of the lion,
clouds in a dark iris.

I ran in the gasp of winds
as the lioness felt my breath
ruffle her tawny fur,
stirring Serengeti dust
into her eyes.

A MURDER

BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM

When fields rime to stillness
and the towns of the slaughtered
lie vacant of angels,
from the defilement of nature
dropping from black heaven,
the dear ravens descend in appetite.

They are a harsh uncanny army
crying the north winds
above yellowed rivers,
over the roads that have led
to new Calvarys, armored
in sleek black feathers.

The trees are emptied of warblers
and the only songs are these
from carrion crows.
For those of us at the bottom
of this new food chain,
defeat without a future.

Where the dead sleep,
the ravens resurrect their voices
in screeds of hunger and avarice.
I crouch beneath their yellow eyes
and bow my head below
this funeral of birds.

(after Rimbaud "Les corbeaux")

PROVIDING

BY CRISTINA MARIE PAGAN

I know I spend hours a day working,
And often don't see you till evening.
But remember that every effort I make,
Struggle I endure,
I do it for you, dear child.

Every hour I work,
A prayer is in my lips.
That all I earn provides
For your security,
Your health,
And your education.

Never forget, dear child,
I do this out of love for you.
One day you'll realize
That when I was away,
I was working for you.

SMALL

BY FEE THOMAS

this belt
i found it in the back of my closet
i am at least three sizes too full for it
though it is cinched around my waist right now anyway
uncomfortable as i am
no breathing will be done today
forget bending, there is no range of motion
however, the belt is on
that's all that matters
the world is wide and expansive
just like my waist has become
it terrifies me
can't go here, can't go there
it's much, much too much

B I G

i wonder who or what
taught me to be so
s m a l l



UNTITLED

BY SULYN GODSEY

Biographies

BREANA

My name is Breana I'm 16 years old. I play piano and sing in my school choir. I take ballet and modern dance classes. In enjoy reading books in my free time outside or in my room. I enjoy going to school because I like to learn new things.

GEORGE BRIGGS

George Briggs is a Latin & English teacher who lives in Rhode Island.

CHRISTINE A. BROOKS

Christine A. Brooks is a graduate of Western New England University with her B.A. in Literature, and is currently attending Bay Path University for her M.F.A. in Creative Non Fiction. She has been published multiple times in Chicken Soup for the Soul and various other worldwide publications. Most recently a series of poems, *The Ugly Five*, are in the current issue of Door Is A Jar Magazine and her poem, *The Writer*, is in the June, 2018 issue of The Cabinet of Heed Literary Magazine. She lives in Springfield, Massachusetts with her very opinionated dog, Clancy.

<https://www.facebook.com/ChrisBrooksauthor/>

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SARAH J. BUDD

SARAH J. BUDD---S.J.Budd grew up in Cornwall surrounded by myths and legends. She has always been fascinated by anything out of the ordinary. Her work has appeared in over

twenty magazines including Aphotic Realm, Sanitarium Magazine, Siren's Call Publications, Deadman's Tome, Innersins, Aphelion, Bewildering Stories and Blood Moon Rising Magazine.

Twitter @sjbuddj

COLIN W. CAMPBELL

Escaped from the day job in Scotland and now writes very short fiction and poetry in Sarawak on the lovely green island of Borneo and faraway in Yunnan in southwest China.

www.campbell.my

JAMES D. CASEY IV

James D. Casey IV is a southern poet with roots in Louisiana & Mississippi. He currently resides in Illinois with his Muse, their goofy dog, and two black cats. Mr. Casey has authored three books of poetry: *Metaphorically Esoteric*, *Dark Days Inside the Light While Drunk on Wine*, and *Tin Foil Hats & Hadacol Coins*. He is also in the process of penning a new collection of poems, *Owls in Hot Rods with Pink Elephants and Dead Bats*, about a rockabilly serial killer owl named Elvis Lector and his surreal adventures in debauchery with his fellow cohorts. His poetry has been published in print and online by several lit mags and small press venues including *Triadæ Magazine*, *Pink Litter*, *In Between Hangovers*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Beatnik Cowboy*, *Dissident Voice*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Horror Sleaze Trash*, *Zombie Logic Review*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Outlaw Poetry*, and many others. Links to his books and other projects can be found

here: <https://cajunpoetjames.wordpress.com/>

EVA COATES

Eva Coates has a B.A. in journalism and a heart that lies with dark fiction. Located in central Pennsylvania, she spends her days creating marketing copy and her nights writing stories about things that go bump in the night.

LINDA M. CRATE

Linda M. Crate's poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has five published chapbooks *A Mermaid Crashing Into Dawn* (Fowlpox Press - June 2013), *Less Than A Man* (The Camel Saloon - January 2014), *If Tomorrow Never Comes* (Scars Publications, August 2016), *My Wings Were Made to Fly* (Flutter Press, September 2017), and *splintered with terror* (Scars Publications, January 2018), and one micro-chapbook *Heaven Instead* (Origami Poems Project, May 2018). She is also the author of the novel *Phoenix Tears* (Czykmate Books, June 2018).

EG TED DAVIS

Poet who resides in Boise ID as a disabled veteran and retiree who now pursues poetry full time and has or will have work in various online literary journals in the US and in the UK.

BRETT DIONYSIUS

B. R. Dionysius b 1969 in Dalby, Queensland Australia. He has since lived in Melbourne, Brisbane and Ipswich where he is an English teacher, was founding Director of the Queensland Poetry Festival and in his spare time watches birds. He has recently published work in ginosko literary journal, Juste Milieu Literary Review, Remington Review, Sobotka Literary Magazine and Sky Island Journal and was short-listed in the 2017 Montreal International Poetry Prize.

KELSIE LYNN DONALDSON

Kelsie is a senior at Michigan State University where she studies professional writing. She is a bookworm, ukulele player, and Netflix enthusiast. When she's not at school in East Lansing, Kelsie lives with her parents and younger brother in South Lyon, Michigan. Find her on Instagram @kelsiedonaldson

JONATHAN DOUGLAS DOWDLE

Jonathan Douglas Dowdle was born in Nashua, NH and has traveled throughout the US, he currently resides in South Carolina. Previous works have appeared or are appearing in: Hobo Camp Review, 322 Review, The Right Place At The Right Time, Blue Hour Review, Whimperbang, After The Pause, and The Big Windows Review.

KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

Ken Allan Dronsfield is a disabled veteran, prize winning poet and fabulist. Born in New Hampshire, he now resides on the plains of Oklahoma. He is widely published in magazines, journals, reviews and anthologies throughout the US and abroad. He has three poetry collections, "The Cellaring" Poems from the Darkling Side of a Shadowed Mind, contains 80 poems of light horror, paranormal, weird and wonderful work. His second book, "A Taint of Pity" Life Poems Written with a Cracked Inflection, contains 52 Life Poems Written with a Cracked Inflection. Ken's third poetry collection, "Zephyr's Whisper", Poems and Parables of a Seasonal Pretense, contains 64 poems and has just been released. It includes his poem, "With Charcoal Black, Version III", selected as the First Prize Winner for Realistic Poetry International's recent Nature Poem Contest. He has been nominated three times for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net for 2016-2018. Ken loves writing, thunderstorms, walking in the woods at night during a full moon and spending time with his cats Willa and Yumpy.

BRIELYN FLONES

Brielyn Flones is a writer currently living in San Francisco, CA. Brielyn enjoys writing about her experiences growing up in Central Washington. Some of Brielyn's favorite authors include Mary Oliver, George Elliot, Audre Lorde, and Elena Ferrante. When she is not writing, Brielyn enjoys hiking, surfing, and spending time with her black lab, Bear.

KRISTIN GARTH

Kristin Garth is a poet from Pensacola and a sonnet stalker. In addition to The Mystic Blue Review sonnets have stalked the pages of Luna Luna, Rag Queen Periodical, Drunk Monkeys, Occulum, Anti-Heroin Chic, Fourth & Sycamore and Ghost City Review among others. Her

chapbook *Pink Plastic House* is available through maverickduckpress.com. Follow her on Twitter: @lolaandjolie.

SULYN GODSEY

Sulyn Godsey has been writing poetry since she was very young. She has recently begun to enjoy photography as well. She is happily married and is the mother of 2 grown daughters.

She works as a Student Assistance Liaison, assessing students of all ages for mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues.

She and her husband own a small farm in Pennsylvania where they have a large garden, fruit trees, berry bushes, and raise their own pigs for food.

V.S. HOLMES

V. S. Holmes is a gender-queer contract archaeologist and the author of the *Reforged* series and the *Nel Bently Books*. Her short fiction has also appeared in *Out of the Darkness*, *Beamed Up*, *Love and Bubbles*, and *Vitality*, an LGBT magazine.

Smoke and Rain, the first in her fantasy quartet, was chosen for New Apple Literary's 2015 Excellence in Independent Publishing Award. She can be found online at vs-holmes.com and through most social media.

KRISTI JOY

Kristi Joy has been writing poetry since 2009. She is published in "*Sunrise Summits: A Poetry Anthology*" and was a finalist in the Fifth Annual Battle of the Bards - Poudre River Public Library.

PAUL KINDLON

The author has had published ten short stories and six poems. After having graduated with a Ph.D. in Russian literature and Philosophy, he taught Humanities for 23 years in Moscow, Russia. He now resides in Buffalo, N.Y. The author is 66 years old and counting...

ELLIOT LEGRANGE

Elliot LeGrange, granddaughter of a mortician, grew up in a household where death was dinner table conversation. Currently, she lives in southern Illinois with her cat Hannibal. Her short story "The Shadows Under Our Skin" received a silver honorable mention in the L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future contest.

STEFAN LIENHARD

After having spent half a lifetime supporting agricultural cooperatives in remote corners of the world, Stefan has settled on the coast of Borneo to contemplate the formation of huge equatorial clouds.

KIMBERLY MADURA

Kimberly Madura has been a social worker for the past 20 years. She currently lives and writes

in Vermont. She has also lived in Indiana and North Dakota. She is planning a move to Wyoming this year.

She has been published in *The Poets' Touchstone*, *Green Mountain Trading Post*, and *Brief Wilderness*.

MARK MARTYRE

Mark Martyre is a Canadian writer and musician. His prolific songwriting has produced 5 full-length studio albums since 2012, and his music has garnered critical acclaim and attention both nationally and internationally, and has earned him "Best Songwriter" and "Album of the Year" nominations. In 2016, Mark also published a collection of his lyrics, spanning his music between 2012-2016., and has had several poems published in online journals and literary magazines.

DANIEL MILTZ

He was born in Michigan and now comfortably retired, resides in Hampstead, NH. (U.S.A.). After devoting 40 years to the Engineering domain-- now contributing value to society through his writing as a freelancer Writer & Poet. Academically, Daniel is a 'Mechanical Design Engineering' degrees holder from Detroit Engineering Technical Institute & Lawrence Technological University. In his Engineering career, he contributed in the Aerospace Industry, and in many Government Aerospace Programs. Now these days, he is writing a fiction novel, based on his past experiences. He has won over 50 accolade awards to date from numerous Poetry Forums. As a young aspiring writer, he was fascinated and guided by the spontaneous prose and poetry written by the writers of the 'Beat Generation.' Writing poetry has been Daniel's passion since his early bohemian days living in California.

CRISTINA MARIE PAGAN

Cristina Marie Pagan is an 18-year-old Hispanic homeschooler from Upstate New York. She was the cover artist for the first issue of Seshat Literary Magazine. Besides writing, she enjoys other activities, including drawing, composing music, and playing video games. Feel free to follow her Twitter account @Ocristinamarie.

ALEXIS QUEEN

Alexis Queen is a first year student of Aeronautical and Astronautical engineering at university who enjoys writing poetry whenever she can.

EDWARD RASO

Edward Raso is a fiction writer and survivor of the music business. His stories have been published in Causeway Lit, eFiction Magazine, The Naked Feather Literary Journal, and New Flesh. He lives in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, with his family. He can be found online at www.edraso.com, and on instagram as ed_raso.

RON RIEKKI

Ron Riekki's books include *And Here: 100 Years of Upper Peninsula Writing, 1917-2017* (Michigan State University Press), *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (Michigan State University Press, 2016 Independent Publisher Book Award Gold Medal Great Lakes Best Regional Fiction), *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (Wayne State University Press, 2014 Michigan Notable Book awarded by the Library of Michigan), and *U.P.: a novel* (Ghost Road Press).

DEBBIE ROBSON

Debbie Robson has been writing poetry since the 1990s and has performed some of her poems on radio, at Sydney poetry events, in the Blue Mountains and more recently as part of the Women of Words project in Newcastle.

SAMHITHA SAIBA

Samhitha Saiba is currently a junior in high school and lives with her family in Edison, New Jersey. Samhitha puts in countless hours perfecting the art she loves--writing--as well as loving the journey to perfection. Her works have previously been recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

DAVID ANTHONY SAM

Born in Pennsylvania, David Anthony Sam has written poetry for over 40 years. He lives now in Virginia with his wife and life partner, Linda, and in 2017 retired as president of Germanna Community College. Sam has four collections and was the featured poet in the Spring 2016 issue of *The Hurricane Review* and the Winter 2017 issue of *Light: A Journal of Photography and Poetry*. His poetry has appeared in over 70 journals and publications. Sam's chapbook *Finite to Fail: Poems after Dickinson* was the 2016 Grand Prize winner of GFT Press Chapbook Contest and his collection *All Night over Bones* received an Honorable Mention for the 2016 Homebound Poetry Prize. In 2017, he began serving as Poetry Editor for GFT. www.davidanthony.sam.com

Twitter: @dasam

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DavidAnthonySamPoetry/>

In 2017, his poems were accepted by *50 Haikus*; *Aji Magazine*; *Allegro Poetry Magazine*; *Burningword Literary Journal*; *Chantwood Magazine*; *The Deadly Writers Patrol*; *Dual Coast Magazine*; *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*; *Fredericksburg Literary and Art Review*; *GFT Press One in Four*; *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*; *Gravel: A Literary Journal*; *Heron Tree*; *The Hungry Chimera*; *Into the Void Magazine*; *Inwood Indiana*; *Literature Today*; *The Muse: An International Journal of Poetry*; *The Mystic Blue Review*; *Piedmont Virginian Magazine*; *Poetry Quarterly*; *The Ravens Perch*; *Red Earth Review*; *The Sea Letter*; *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine*; *Summerset Review*; *Temenos Journal*; *Three Line Poetry*; *Two Cities Review*; *The Voices Project*; *The Wayfarer*; and *The Write Place at the Write Time*

FARIEL SHAFEE

The author has degrees in science but enjoys writing and art. Her prose and poetry have appeared in *decomp*, *Ygdrasil*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Ibis Head Review* etc. A recent short story has been included in the anthology *Selected Places* by Simone Press.

DONETTA SIFFORD

Donetta Sifford is a writer that resides in a small town of Virginia, nestled in The Blue Ridge Mountains. She has had her poem 'Progress' published in *The Reverie* and her poem 'Barefeet and Thorns' published in *Ink and Voices*.

LAUREN SUCHENSKI

Lauren Suchenski has a difficult relationship with punctuation and currently lives in Yardley, PA. She has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize as well as twice for The Best of the Net and her chapbook "Full of Ears and Eyes Am I" is available from *Finishing Line Press*. You can find more of her writing on Instagram @lauren_suchenski or on Twitter @laurensuchenski.

FEE THOMAS

Fee Thomas is an internationally published poet and activist. Her favorite thing is teaching children music. Her debut book "Owning the Color Blue" is available through Clare Songbirds Publishing House.

WILLIAM WATERS

William Waters is an associate professor, in the Department of English at the University of Houston Downtown. Along with Sonja Foss, he is coauthor of *Destination Dissertation: A Traveler's Guide to a Done Dissertation*. His research and teaching interests are in writing theory and modern grammar.

EFFY WINTER

Effy Winter is a contemporary romantic poet, provocative by nature. Her work explores eroticism and heartache while portraying the spawning of a carnal hunger for witchery, lust and self-sacrifice. Effy's first novel, *Flowers of the Flesh*, is set to be released in December 2018. You can learn more about her and her work at <https://www.effywinter.com>.

