

# BLEACHED BUTTERFLY



VOL. 1:1

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Editor: Lori A Minor

Cover Art: Lori A Minor

## **A note from the editor**

When I decided to start this journey, I wasn't sure that it would be possible. Starting a new art and literature venue is always a gamble, but I'm so glad I tossed in all my chips. For this issue I received 102 submissions, which is more than I ever could have imagined. I would like to sincerely thank each and every one of you for accompanying me on this voyage, which was nothing less than incredible. I firmly believe this issue has a little something for everyone. It is beautifully crafted and I could not have done it without you guys. THANK YOU. I hope you are as satisfied with the outcome of this issue as I am. I look forward to what's in store for Bleached Butterfly and I cannot wait to read more of your work.

- Lori A Minor

## **Contributors**

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David Estringel  
Danielle Wirsansky  
Gwynn Pagans and Lori A Minor



pulling darkness  
from my mouth  
crowfeathers

- Andy McLellan

## **Crowskin**

Slowly, I come to.

First fingers. Then arms, legs and toes.

From somewhere a torso appears, topped by a head.

The pain takes a little longer to arrive. But when it does the body is gathered in a cocoon of ringing muscles and tightening skin.

Eyelids flicker. Hands reach for water to wet a dry mouth.

The sun continues to rise.

moth trap  
I beat my wings  
into the void

- *Andy McLellan*



calling the mad girl  
for one final swim  
the sea and the rain

squared circle  
where ghosts recount  
ten years

Nat King Cole's  
"Unforgettable"  
I can almost smell  
his cigarette

- *Rp Verlaine*



## **Electric Romeos**

We disengage  
shiny and aloof  
as if our skin  
were shells from robots  
and the micro-seconds of  
lust and silicone enhanced  
love was real  
until the Electric Romeos  
arrive in New York.

Psycho renegades  
coveting Vals translucent  
promises and veiled  
chastity with such  
vengeance  
that even  
without keeping track  
I know the score.

- *Rp Verlaine*

## **The Electric Romeos 2**

Wanting to kill Val  
with stolen studied cool  
haunting the ghostly street corners  
to pay off a blood debt.  
Asking for Vals address  
Multiplying victims on spreadsheets  
cancer sticks in their slack mouths.  
Transfixed by motion  
in harsh white light of speed  
talking as if words were expensive  
death their lone last payoff  
all fighting for final space  
on a crucifix their home.

- *Rp Verlaine*

### **The Electric Romeos 3**

Stare with otherwordly eyes not blinking  
memorized verse on tips of silver tongues  
she'll be easy with tawdry acrobatics, they laugh  
shaded reprobate tweakers hiding red stoner eyes  
they'll just take me out and its val wonderland fun  
but the rape as a hobby boys guessed wrong  
we get the jump, exit club to vals stolen corvette  
they hang for a mile while we play new songs  
from val's latest demo then our ammos all gone  
their sniper heat strong till they suicide on 4th  
a petty fireball of death, sniffing cops we jet  
allergic to truth Val says she loves me  
good news I guess even if it's temporary.

- *Rp Verlaine*

Rorschach test  
the ink that runs through  
my veins

white coat syndrome I bite my lip until it bleeds

black hole  
a parallel universe  
born unborn

darkest days the transparency of my chrysalis

screaming in silence full moon

- *Veronika Zora Novak*

## **Bauble**

You are possessed of obscurities  
past mystics dedicated their lives towards.  
Made of glass and feathers,  
you are a mirror the unsighted peer into.  
You thrum in a minor key.  
Your scent is on my fingertips.  
You're like a stone in my pocket.

Passed down through the generations,  
as if a genetic defect or auburn hair,  
your value is to have and to hold.  
At times you're a gift, at times a talisman.  
Ah, little-tragedy-in-the-making,  
my house is your museum.  
Legions have fallen under your heady spell.  
You've promised us nothing but peace.  
You've given us nothing but warfare.

- *Bruce McRae*

## **Pocket**

Reaching in  
I pull out a tooth,  
a lead toy soldier,  
a map of chaos,  
smudged instructions.

Reaching down  
I can touch  
the Earth, a moon,  
two godheads,  
three spiders' breaths,  
the frozen juices  
found on Ganymede.

In my pocket  
I carry your name,  
a magical pebble,  
a gram of opium.  
And the very bullet  
from the very gun  
used to slaughter  
the last of innocence.

It feels like  
a hole or ice to me.  
It feels like  
blood on my hands.

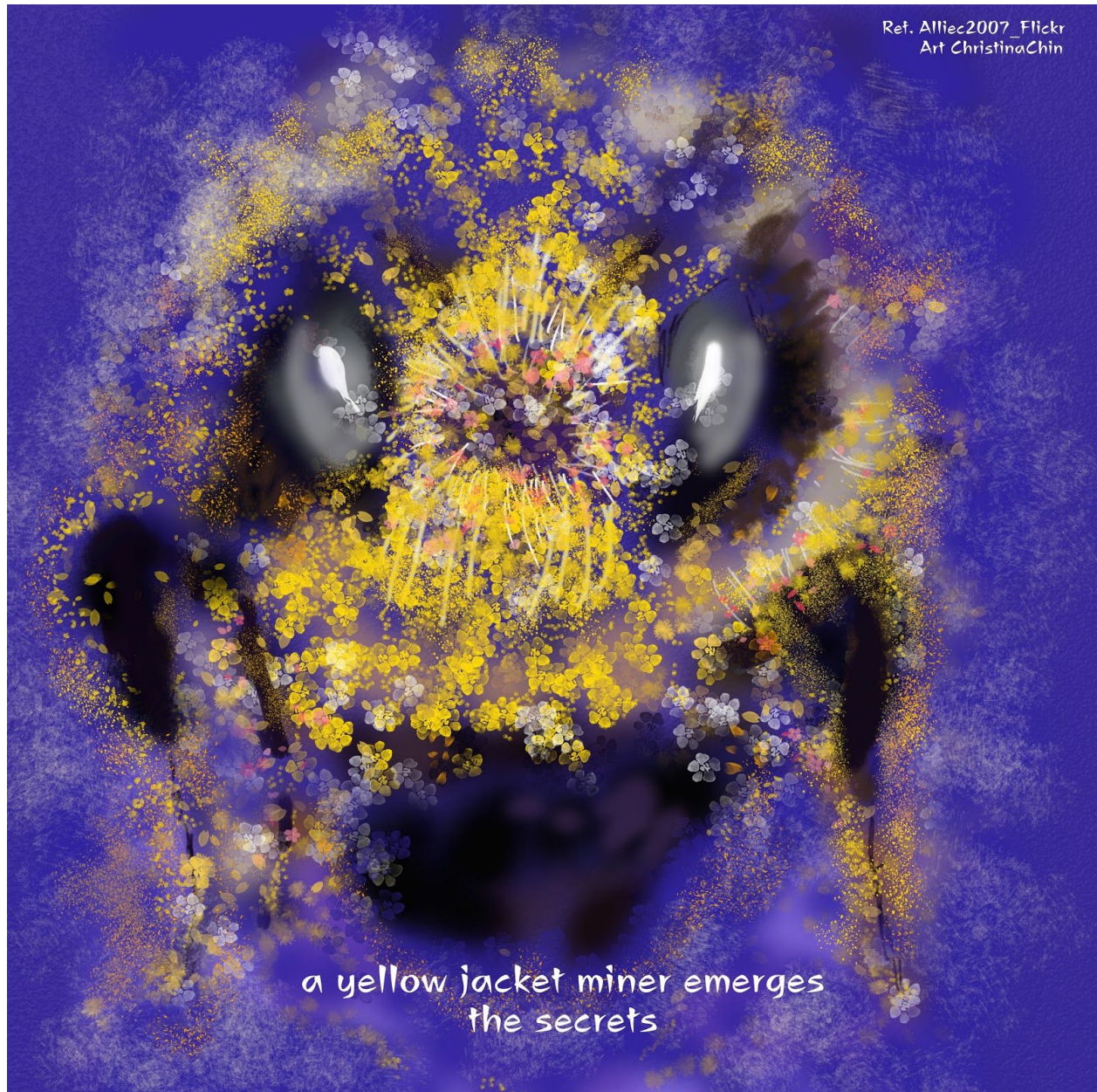
- *Bruce McRae*

## **Space Weather**

A rain of heated rocks and antimatter,  
alarmed citizens dashing for shelter,  
cursing the gods and government,  
the weathergirl nodding off in her chair,  
electromagnetic hail playing havoc  
with satellites and phone reception,  
the old crone banging her television,  
its screen clouded over with static hiss,  
cosmic rays and solar flares  
all part of a bigger picture,  
those falling stars not stars at all,  
unmoved by the whims of prediction.

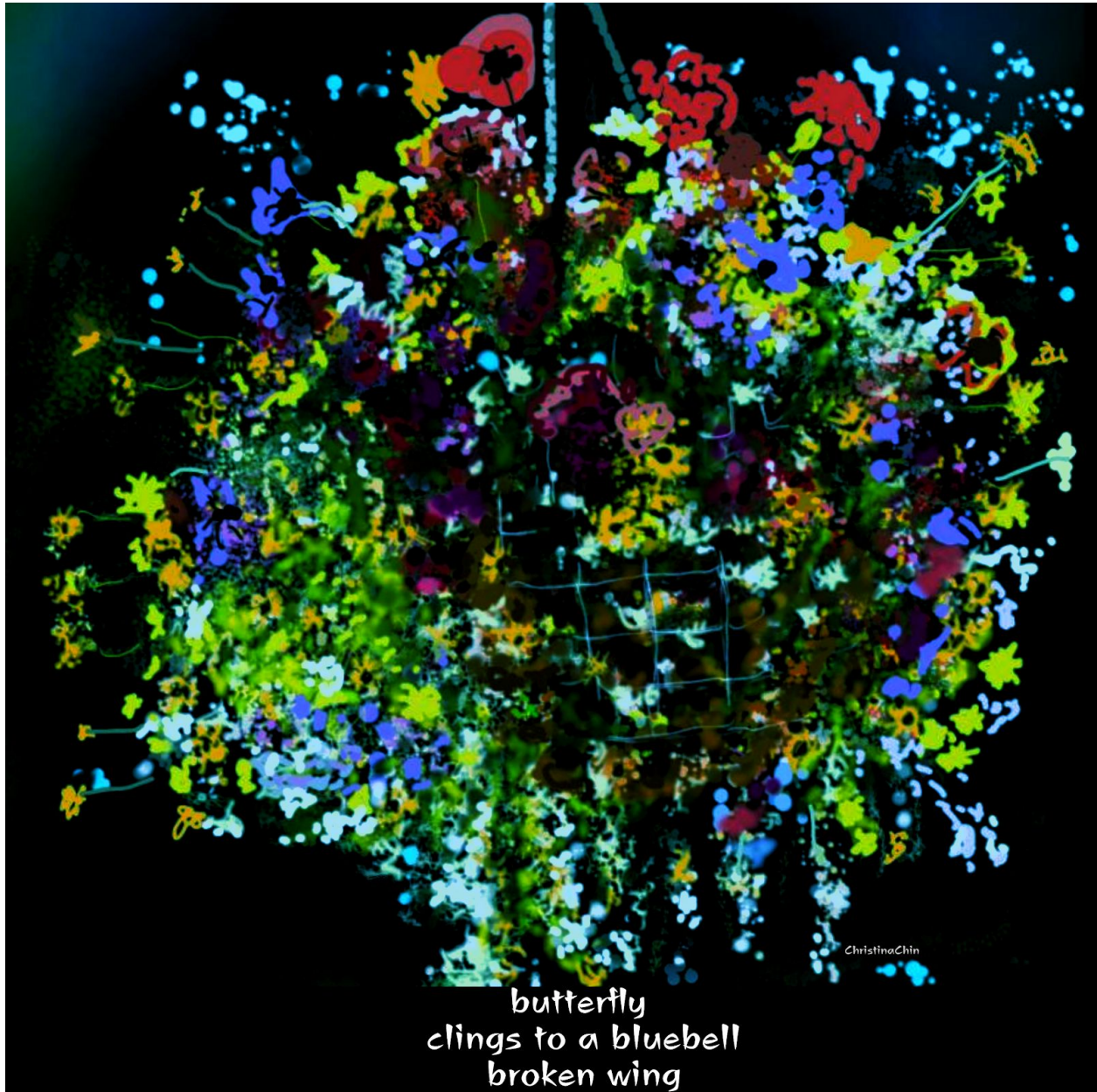
- *Bruce McRae*





- Christina Chin





butterfly  
clings to a bluebell  
broken wing

- Christina Chin



*-Christina Chin*

## **Betrayals**

'Men's vows are women's traitors' [Cymbeline – Act 3, Scene 4]

### **Betrayed 1.**

#### ***Silly Me [self-abnegation]***

I shrug, forgiveness understood.  
Of course I don't mind. Grudges are pointless,  
don't apologise. No, these aren't tears in my eyes.  
Please realise, I'm glad for you. And her. Theresa,  
you said? Perhaps you'll bring her round for tea, later  
when you've both got sorted. Though I hope you know,  
I'll take you back in a flash if it cracks. I'm sure it won't  
but  
just in case. I always thought we'd last the course. My daft  
mistake.

### **Betrayed 2.**

#### ***Spiteful Rage [impotence]***

Let me be. I should have known  
your capacity to lie has grown. No more  
men for me. Ever. You rapacious bastard,  
never satisfied. I'll hate you 'til I die. I hope  
you end up in a ditch, you and your sweet bitch.  
Yes, I know she has a name. I'm not obliged to use it.  
Let her know, she's a goner if we meet, by my home, in my  
street.  
Now, you just assume I'm mean. Go. Leave me alone to cry and  
fume.

### **Betrayed 3.**

#### ***Anger Unleashed [self-expression]***

Take this and this. Your best mug?  
Exactly. Smashed like me and you. It's true,  
I knew you played away with me and leopards  
never change their spots. Your feline top-coat gleamed  
but not for me, it seems. I'll pull your hair until you scream,  
watch you become afraid of me. Your squeeze will see you quite  
demeaned,  
frit. As sisters, we'll laugh together. After, I'll get over it,  
move on. You'll be left alone,  
no lover to stiffen your limp dick. Take this and this. Your  
mother's precious wedding dish.

### **Betrayed 4.**

#### ***Controlled Explosion [mutually assured destruction]***

No. I have nothing to say, although that seems unreal  
Take your ease. I'll chop and fry our final conjugal meal.  
You want my reaction? Truly? What purpose would it serve,  
words give paltry satisfaction. Allow me my distractions, private  
and perverse. You turned the key, locked me out. You have no right  
to prod and probe my blighted ruminations. Your steak, medium or  
rare?  
That's right, nap. You're exhausted now you're free. Sleep. My  
Sabatier's sharpened  
to slide meat off ribs, pierce vital organs. Such sweetbreads,  
culled fresh after love's death.

Note:

frit - English colloquial - frightened

- Ceinwen E Caraid Haydon

## **Year of the Sea Monkey LXVII**

Imagining the old grey  
goose dead in the mill pond  
still upsets me.

I imagine the day  
was as grey as the deceased,  
but the much-needed rain

never fell,  
a Sunday afternoon  
after the preacher had made Hell

sound like a spook house  
at the State Fair.  
Even Hell disappoints.

Its guildsmen swear and sweat  
and flirt.  
The public domain's red

dirt and dystrophy  
ours for the taking,  
I imagine everything that made

me human being picked through  
at a tag sale in the basement  
of that little country church.

- *Glen Armstrong*

## Trouble Every Day IV

The moon is an extra eyelet  
In a poorly dyed shoe  
Abandoned by a goddess

But we worship her still

The solar flares and daily failures  
That the sun beats into us

Make the shadow a reprieve  
The dead light taking shape

The world dreaming  
Something cooler

We can intuit the ritual if not explain

The throaty mating songs  
Of nocturnal creatures  
Just beyond the shadow

We can travel all night  
Liquored-up and downtrodden

Brothers let us put our oddly shaped heads

Together / let us ram stained glass

Windows to find  
Secret passages.

- *Glen Armstrong*



## **Rats and Yellowed Skies**

I have a mark on my neck  
from the green Sharpie

that I use to inventory  
plastic farm animals

and a tingling  
on my forearm from where  
you touched it.

The world pulls  
no punches.

I have rats and yellowed  
skies in my dreams.

I no longer lie in the grass  
and watch the clouds.

The world pushes  
its worldly agenda:

mathematics and anthropomorphic  
clouds.

Bruised legs and barbed  
wire fences.

- *Glen Armstrong*

## **Bathory**

I bathe in blood  
and devour organs  
like a queen  
as I gain power  
from harnessing  
the darkness  
from my mind.

I love how my skin  
and pores absorb  
the blood around me  
as my youth is sealed  
for another decade,  
sustaining my reign.

The organs of enemies  
richly cooked with salt  
and sauces that please  
my monstrous hunger  
for divine meals  
of infernal royalty.

You mock me and accuse  
me of being deluded  
by dark dreams.  
I'll prove you wrong  
one day once I thrive  
in wild orgies in the abyss.

- *Diana Elizondo*

## **witty crows**

disorientation...  
a hooded crow caws  
at the half moon

remembrance day –  
the crows lined up  
on the telephone line

aid distribution –  
a flock of crows hover  
around the leftovers

winter dusk  
after the crows' flight  
winter dusk

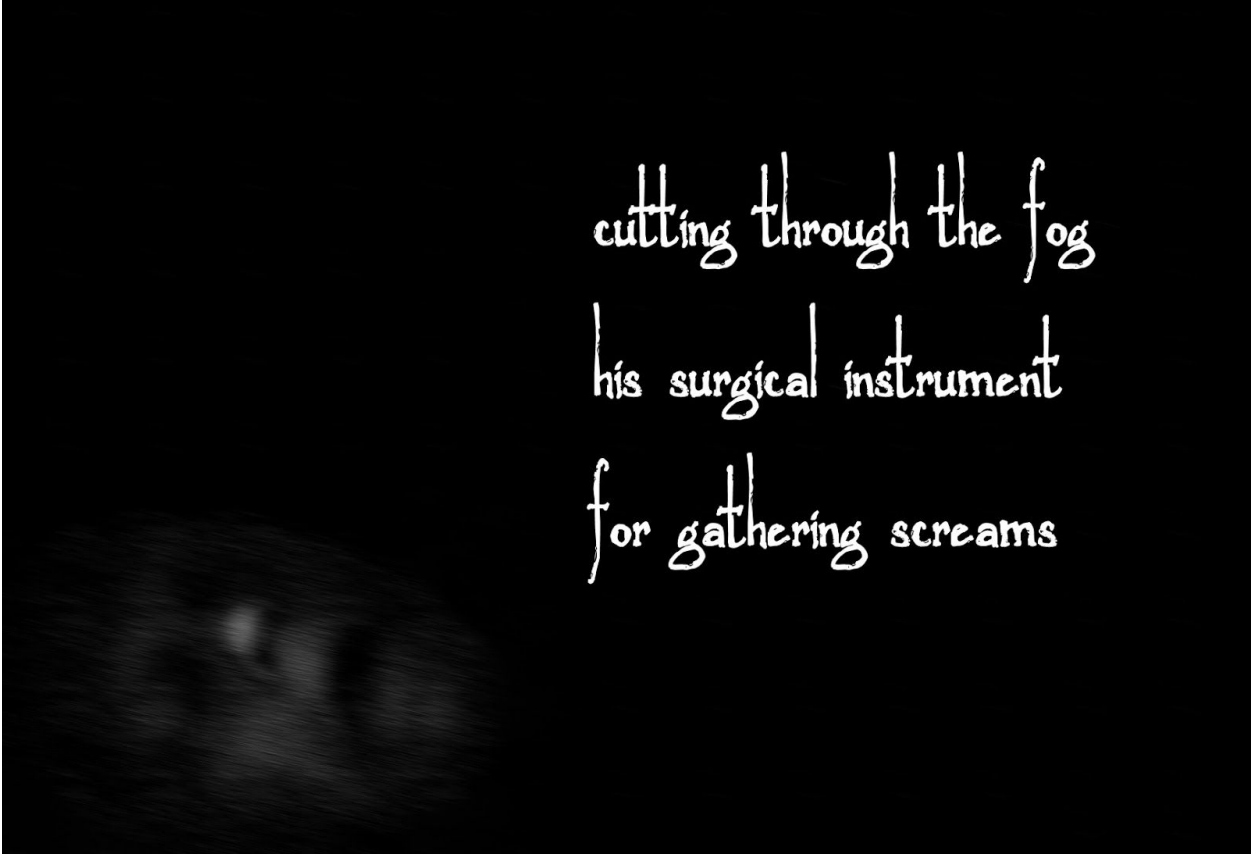
landfill mining –  
the flight of crows  
above the dust clouds

game of thrones  
cawing at the edge  
seven ravens

funeral day –  
a pair of crows hop  
from shadow to shadow

ashes  
in the cold wind...  
carrion crows

- *Hifsa Ashraf*



cutting through the fog  
his surgical instrument  
for gathering screams

- John Hawkhead

## **within**

a tiny whithered homunculus  
creeps between crevices  
those gaping wounds in a soul  
bound by a crazed pot surface  
holding  
to a semblance  
of solidity  
disturbed beneath  
by kiln fires  
whispering new myths  
of an old Prometheus  
vanished  
leaving us to the monsters  
we build ourselves  
Within

- *Mark A. Fisher*

## **impostor**

what does it mean  
that I have fooled  
- convinced this world  
that behind these eyes  
I do not dwell in the staring abyss  
looking out upon a world  
that does not know me

where in some bizarre  
parallel dimension  
turned and twisted upon itself  
I have become good

emerged from some damned chrysalis  
a butterfly  
though within I remain  
the worm

lurking within my darkness  
waiting for some sighted thing to find me  
and hold me out for examination  
- study  
and classification  
to be bottled and preserved  
then labeled as what I truly am

- *Mark A. Fisher*

## **fallow**

now dry oceans  
and the shores of ancient seas  
where ruins of cities  
of crumbled spires  
once reached higher than  
the ancient red hills  
that nestle the valleys  
where the canals once ran  
past the formerly fertile fields  
and ancient villages  
where dust still whispers  
that message of hate  
from a Martian of ill-repute  
blaming the climate refugees  
for the conditions that they fled  
denying and lying  
while the air bled away  
and the water  
disappeared  
from a dying world  
where now  
even the ghosts have gone  
to another world  
to begin to die  
again

- *Mark A. Fisher*



## **heavy as an anchor**

even swimmers drown  
i can feel the waters rise  
as i sink  
heavy as an anchor  
unable to throw off this grief,  
this pain, this rage  
which darkens my day;  
i want to be better again and to feel  
happiness  
yet right now it seems an unattainable thing—  
people ask me how i am  
instinctively i say fine,  
but deep down i think we both know i am lying;  
yet they walk away taking away their warmth  
with them  
as i lay here in the agony of memories and biting ghosts  
i cannot shake  
as i wonder if today is the day my resolve will break,  
my dreams will break,  
and i will swim with the fishes.

- *linda m. crate*

## **taste the darkness**

all you gave me was  
bitter darkness  
so i rose from the ashes  
on the wings of the immortal phoenix  
fashioning chaos into a compliment,  
and the scars may still remain  
but i am disarming  
all your darkness with the light of my stars;  
you thought me a songbird  
content to be contained in gilded cage—  
but i am a bird of prey  
my tears don't only heal,  
but my fires burn and my talons steal  
away eyes and bones;  
so it is your time to taste the darkness  
i hope you're ready.

- *linda m. crate*

## **Swing You Sinners**

The man knew they were already searching for him, in the night and in the snow, or if they weren't, they would be soon. He wasn't afraid that they would catch him, but he wasn't going to make it easy either. That was part of the expectation.

He was deep into the woods right off the highway, when he found the television among a pile of dumped trash. A little red chair made of plastic with metal legs, like you might find in an elementary school or library, sat before the television. It was an old television, boxy and surely heavy, the sides covered in fake wood.

He couldn't see any cords running from the television, but it was hard to tell—the moon hid behind the dense foliage above and thick vines crept along the forest floor, easily mistaken for cords.

The man was tired. He had done something very bad, or at least most people would say it was very bad. He didn't feel anything yet, about what he had done, but maybe it hadn't burrowed in quite yet. That part always came too, and the in-between, the hazy bubble between action and guilt was the best of it.

Exhausted, the man sat down in the little red chair and turned the television on. An old cartoon, black and white and wild, came on after a moment of sputtering and popping. Chickens danced, skeletons shrugged off their skins and flesh, ghosts spun wide-eyed with teeth.

In the cartoon, a dog has done something bad and the world turns against him. Even the trees threaten him. He runs away, pursued by monstrous things, ghosts of his own making. They chase him with nooses and machetes. They chase him up into the mountains until he is falling in darkness, sliced in half by a giant knife, and gobbled up by laughing skull.

The man shifted uncomfortably—the images were disturbing, but he couldn't quite look away. There wasn't any sound from the television, and maybe because of this, he noticed every sound in the woods around him. A branch snapped off to his right somewhere, a breath of wind blew cold and he contorted in his little red chair, searching for its source.

The cartoon began again, without the man touching the control knob, but it was different this time.

The dog has done something bad again, but instead of running away, the dog tries to get out of the television. He presses gloved hands against his side of the glass television screen, leaving sweaty marks in the chill evening. He glances over his shoulder, mouthing something unintelligible, but clearly desperate, to the man. He bangs on the glass and the television rocks beneath his anxious need.

The man watched it all, until the ghosts and the skeletons and the ghouls drew near to the dog and began to reach out with clutching fingers. The dog began to shake and to cry. The man couldn't take any more and he rushed forward and kicked in the glass television screen. His foot stuck briefly in the back of the set, and he yanked it out, shards tearing long gashes down his calf and ankle, shredding already bloody jeans. He paused for a moment surprised that his own blood looked so dark compared to that which had already dried.

The cartoon poured out of the television, black and white and viscus, pooling around his feet, and growing steadily until it lapped and then streamed. He tried to jump out of the way, but the crackling, digital stream continued to gush out of the television, and he splashed in it.

The man took off running, but the cartoon stream pursued him, sizzling and spreading wider and wider, so it didn't matter if he turned one way or another. The man ran on, pressing farther from where he had done what most people would say was a very bad thing, and from the cartoon flood. He tripped over vines.

Branches swatted his face like long grasping fingers. He nearly fell a couple of times, but he made it to the edge of the woods and burst into a long, moonlit field spread out meeting the night sky on a level. A low rock wall edged the field before him, pale as the moon, and crumbling.

As he leaped over, his stomach fell. The wall couldn't keep him out. The wall wouldn't be able keep out the flood either. He didn't have to look over his shoulder to know it was still coming. And the wide open horizon shrunk to single, phosphorescent blip in his vision.

- *Evan James Sheldon*

## **Under the Covers**

Pentecost  
you say we aren't like  
those other christians

just  
one of the girls  
purity ring

if not me  
then someone else  
pastor's erection

the weight of his hand  
as he pushes me down  
Alpha and Omega

end times  
all I need  
to say yes

a stumbling block  
for the pastor's wife  
my strapless dress

women's retreat  
not looking away  
as we undress

hidden bruises  
only my mouth needed  
for the Eucharist

getting what  
I deserve  
cervical cancer

call for salvation  
I raise my hand again  
and again

- *Tia Haynes*



even his  
silence  
seems to yell at me

piano recital  
the grim reaper  
lends a hand

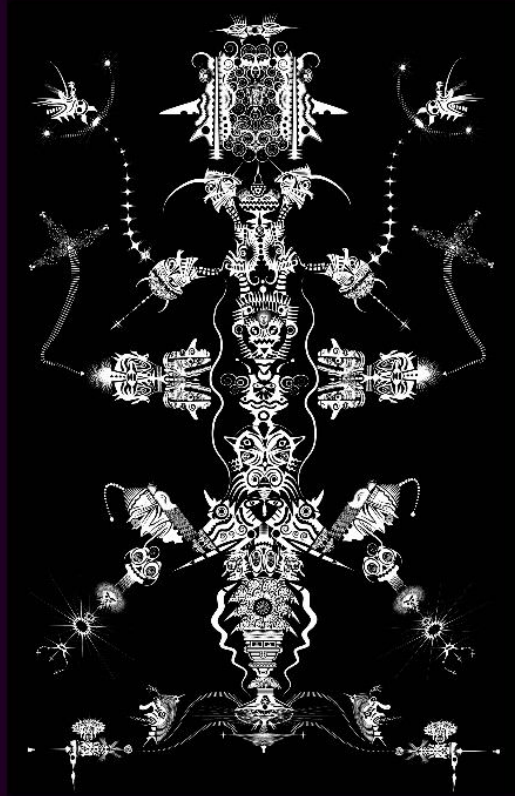
in the graveyard  
I call her name -  
suppertime

our ancestors hiding in tombs of dust

in cobblestone alley -  
straining to remember  
my past life

- *Roberta Beach Jacobson*

deep in the wine's depth  
a glimpse of my daemon  
dancing the jig



- Mark Meyer

trembling at the brink  
I approach the doorway  
to a nightmare



- Mark Meyer

down in the crawlspace  
we surprise each other  
the spiders and I

leaving my hometown  
in their moldering mansions  
my childhood ghosts

- *Mark Meyer*

leaves dissolve  
reconstruct the dead  
Green Tara's blessing

read me a Psalm  
or requiem  
behind the mask of lambs

twilight drifts  
the warrior slips  
Underground

- *Clarissa Jakobsons*

## **Blank Page**

You are a monster  
of the worst kind.

The kind that lurks in closets  
and waits for children  
tucked in their sweet little beds  
to close their eyes.

The kind that keeps adults awake  
and worried  
beneath a sheet of black  
and a quilt of endless questions.

The kind that invades our sleep  
and our dreams,  
stillbirthing nightmares  
from which we wake in terror  
and grope blindly for the light switch  
just out of reach.

The kind that nails windows shut  
when we aren't looking.

The kind that  
even the most fearless  
cannot help but fear  
because nothing is worse  
than the nothing  
we cannot see.

- *Elizabeth Alford*

**Click NEXT for More Results**

i googled myself today  
to find what was left  
of my sanity

in the deep  
dark recesses  
of the internet  
my poems are just  
ones and zeroes

skeletons  
in the closet  
where i used to hide  
and did not want  
to be found

- *Elizabeth Alford*

## **Gopher**

He was lying on his side on the rug  
when we found him: eyes shut tight,  
blood trickling from his mouth,  
chest moving in and out,  
in and out, while one leg twitched—  
once, and again;  
just heaving and crying and  
twitching and dying, dying  
on our living room floor.

And we, paralyzed and in shock,  
like the gopher, could only watch;  
watch him twitch and gasp  
for those last, shallow, desperate  
breaths—in and out, in and out—  
until he hitched one final time, and died.

What must life have been like for that gopher:  
a life of twists and turns, of tunnels—of love?  
Perhaps his wife is still out there, waiting,  
patiently, for her mate to come home.

- *Elizabeth Alford*



## **When the Moon is New**

Groping through darkness  
knocking everything down.  
Down into enormous night  
where thoughts unravel.

Memories moan past us as  
shadows quiver across walls.  
We lie pinned to bed sheets  
like captive butterflies.

Dry butterflies...our throats  
are brittle, eyes turning  
from light. Sore arms reach  
for anything soft to hold.

Remembering seasons gone by.  
So many lost promises.  
This huge moment surrounding us.  
Wide awake we wait for the new day.

- *Joan Mc Nerney*

**Shhhhh...**

There is a  
witch living  
on the corner  
where the four  
roads meet.

Her eye is  
evil, her  
nose crooked.

She lays down  
the tarot  
pattern  
with wrinkled  
hands.

Asks "do you wish  
tea of wormwood  
or henbane?"

She will enchant  
your mind now  
into fields of  
wild roses.

- *Joan McNeerney*



- Julie Warther



- Julie Warther

## **On addiction**

*Leslie Jameson, The Recovering. On Jean Rhys's Good Morning, Midnight.  
Drinking: "how small it makes the world" (34).*

*C. S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength. "The whole thing is sorting itself out all  
the time, coming to a point, getting sharper and harder."*

As a child I dreamed of a parking ramp,  
each level narrowing as I rose,  
and yet I could not stop rising.  
Drinking was like that. Each drink  
diminished my return.  
I followed a snail  
into her shell.  
Finally  
only  
I.

- Cheryl L. Caesar

## **World of pain**

My husband lives in a world of pain,  
the autocracy of Arthritis,  
where I travel on a tourist visa.

His bent back, his right arm  
held protectively mid-high  
are the bows and handshakes  
I will never quite master.

His groans and curses when he lifts himself:  
a language I speak as pidgin,  
with an atrocious accent.

Those ten bottles, identically shaped,  
on the second shelf of the medicine cabinet  
might as well be a ten-course menu in Tibet.

And the thing is:  
I have my own pain passport, duly stamped.  
It's like an Israeli visa in Mecca.  
Utterly useless. No good at all.

- Cheryl L. Caesar

## **From Little Acorns**

you say  
you are of the Earth  
but nothing  
is truly of the Earth  
not even the Earth

what is the Earth  
if not simply a coagulation  
of elements  
deposited by passing comets  
celestial Johnny Appleseeds?

from the smallest  
grain of sea-worn sand  
to the mighty oak  
what fate or grand design  
decides what we will be?

what purpose  
can there be for a birth  
consigned to death  
bones that grow long and sturdy  
only to crumble to dust?

you are not  
of this place you call Earth  
but an accident  
of the impulses of stardust  
sprinkled by Tinkerbells

- *Michael H. Lester*

## **Grist for the Mill**

I follow  
a trail of broken bones  
to the river  
where demons feast  
on human flesh

the river  
runs red with blood  
and a stench  
rises up like sulfur  
from the devil's breath

mesmerized  
by the pure evil  
taking place  
I remain hidden  
behind a craggy oak

one demon  
begins to sniff the air  
in my direction  
his eyes glowing  
like raven wings

I turn to run  
but it is too late  
as razor claws  
tear into my chest  
ripping me to pieces

- *Michael H. Lester*



## **Born to Die**

stone by stone  
they built this holy place  
on hallowed ground  
where they bury the bones  
of sinners and saints alike

we zigzag  
from grave to grave  
reading names  
and dates of death  
carved in granite

our grandfather  
murdered in his sleep  
for a debt he owed  
lies buried here  
in the overgrowth

a raven  
watches from a bare branch  
as we stumble  
in the darkening night  
and the numbing cold

finally  
we find his tombstone  
*here lies Jonas*  
*date of birth unknown*  
*date of death don't matter none*

- *Michael H. Lester*

## **Cut the Corpus Callosum**

Cut the corpus callosum and the seafloor grows and expands from the ridge. The fearful animal from one side meets up with the ego manager on the other. Every child is misdiagnosed as a boulder of blueschist that is pushed up out of the sea and unfolded to a point where it can haunt the intelligence of mothers in the old neighborhood. Prior to that they pondered the way tuna lives in a can and delivers a satisfying taste. Many headaches later, the chop rising, a simple sequence of notes informing the whole family they would be boarding the Starship Enterprise for dinner, the small boy cries out I want to go to space . . . Light candles. Light candles. And they did when they first submerged, tracing a small circle into the chaotic mess of waves. They traveled together until they reached the bottom of the fault, the deep rocks where each one renounced their previous lives. Beards were cut, heads shaved, eyebrows plucked. Each one donned a yellow robe and went their own way, nodes floating through a Jurassic ocean, and they never again connect.

- *Tim Kahl*

## **The News From Birds**

No one can interpret their song for sure  
but here I sit reading at Rose Tree Park  
and steps away stands a baby Mockingbird  
on a park bench chirping a cry so incessant  
his father fails to keep pace  
even as he delivers insect  
after insect after dead insect.  
Its mouth extends up and out every few chirps  
and I translate this little line of poetry as

*that hunger for blood never brings peace*

- Michael Morell

## **In A Different Light**

so many distant stars

    bare feet in a swath of damp grass

        a screech owl races across the face of the moon

            a wing beat breeze reaches my shoulder

                    i could almost

                        forgive anything

- *Michael Morell*

a cradle beyond infinity comes with strings attached

no sign yet  
my blood flows past  
a sea of glass eyes

out of breath  
the thing that looks like me  
eats a cockroach

moths without agendas the azaleas bloom

just so the skylark is watching our struggle

the hall of smoke your taste chokes me up

- *John McManus*

## Marks for Perseverance

Exiled to a lonely corner, wanting more than letting on  
something is wrong with the state of myself,  
love as transaction, flowing freely of course  
being silently watched, no effort at a smile.

Making the world go round, insolent situation  
cutting hands and feet to ribbons in protest,  
I don't care about you anymore, if I ever did  
rolling one's own jelly babies not really my problem.

Serial butterflies galvanise the rotten core,  
protected in instances of eventual delivery  
home-grown opportunity not a mortal sin  
just the run of the day, everything is special.

Principles aside, nothing at a loss.  
Breaking through ranks, ass being grass  
and me being the lawnmower, catch you out  
mutual benefit never hurt anybody.

Instant messages, never mind the duress  
the tawdry ambition ascending for the kill  
bleeping phones on a constant adventures  
transmitting turn-ons, a glorious guilt.

Streetscape for want of a better life,  
the passer-by muscles by a hearty congratulations  
knowing less than required, plugged-in cartoons  
advertising psychosis hidden in a purpose.

- *Patricia Walsh*

## **A Vision in a Red Dress**

I can wear red  
knowing I am safe, cushioned in invisibility.  
Fire engine red. Danger red. Blood red.  
Blanketed by my anonymity.  
A plain Jane incapable of alarming.  
You can wear whatever you like,  
when you know no-one's watching.

I dream the usual dream.  
I dream that I am naked. That nightmare.  
Shivering. Quivering. I wobble.  
Clutching handfuls of skin and blubber.  
And still no-one notices. No-one sees.  
They don't even register my nakedness.  
They note the bumps, the folds, the scars;  
like the weather, mere unremarkable talking points.  
They don't care how they got there,  
only about their ugliness -  
the skinned cat knees, the claws that dug deep,  
the feline grace of the knife.  
It's just another conversation to be forgotten.  
My name already slipping away.  
Interchangeable.

I am a ghost haunting their lives.  
A movement in the corner of their eye.  
An insignificant sighting to be shrugged off.  
I float through this world,  
leaving no marks, no traces of my being.  
I make no imprint. No footprints.  
I am the blur in the photograph, unexplained.  
The screaming nun that cannot be heard.  
The spectre peering over your shoulder.  
Just once I would like to be in the foreground.  
Anything. Something.

I don't need to be the star of the show,  
even a recurring role would do.  
I'm not asking for attention.  
It would make a nice change to be on screen,  
to even be seen –  
you see I've never had a speaking part.  
Villager number five in the nativity play.  
Some girls know all the parts.  
Every word. Every tune.  
Every costume conforming to their pretty bodies.  
Never lacking in accompaniment,  
their voices strong and sure.  
Give me a microphone, a script.  
Give me something to sing about.  
Let the spotlight illuminate me  
for a passing second, just long enough  
so that I can flicker into view.

Let the world see me, for the tiniest second,  
see me in my scarlet dress.

- *Kirsty A. Niven*



## **The Bottom**

The scars trickle down my lip  
like moonlit tearstains.  
I flinch as I conceal them  
with jittering fingers.

Eyes leaking like a broken tap.  
It's nothing compared to  
the red sea that poured,  
the flood of blood there was.

An estuary of bruises to begin,  
coming and going like the tide.  
Mermaid shades of purple and blue  
littered across my expanse.

The ribs that jut in shards,  
a whale bone corset containing.  
The fracture bobs like a wave  
in an ocean of fucked up.

I cannot be a sea-life sanctuary,  
I cannot clean the oil from your skin.  
I cannot keep sloshing in vain  
against this dam you have built.

I choke under the saltwater weight,  
is it even worth fighting it?  
Strangulation by plastic noose,  
would it be a sin to let myself sink?

- *Kirsty A. Niven*

## **Fading**

I appear as a decaying mannequin –  
shadowy and rotten, made of metal.  
I am a broken victim of the incubus;  
his marble mouth ate my heart out.

He called me a blossom, a goddess,  
lied that I eclipsed all others.  
The motives for his games are unclear  
but why does anyone do anything?

I am as strong as the wings of a butterfly –  
dried, pressed and kept in a dusty book.  
I must not speak. I must not utter a word.  
My voice is too monochrome, no longer silver.

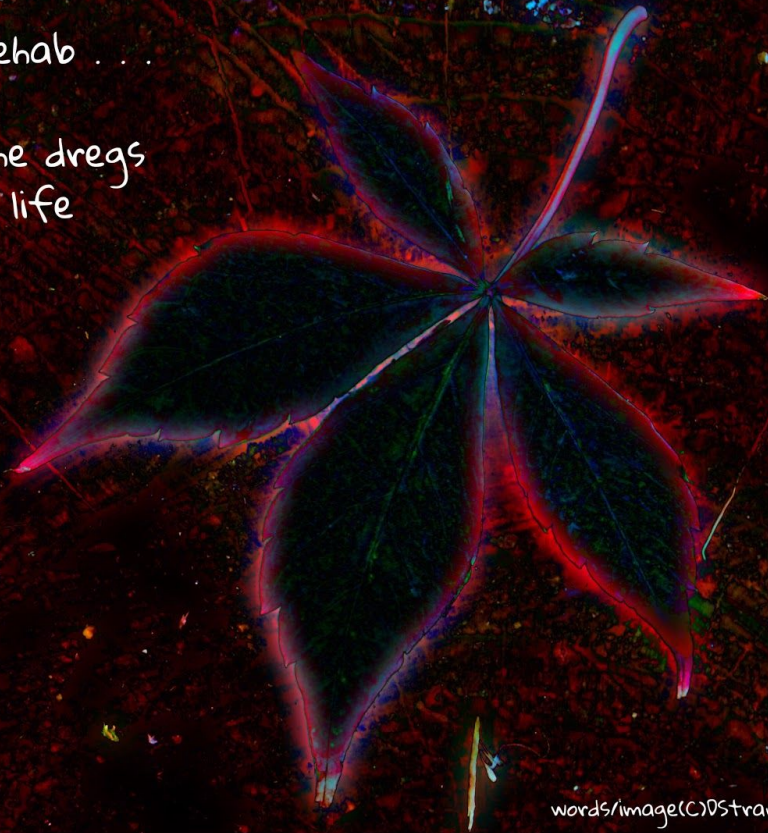
I'm barely visible: a dark blank, a flicker, blank.  
So soon it will be, the day that I fully disappear.

- *Kirsty A. Niven*



- Debbie Strange

my neighbour,  
evicted while in rehab . . .  
a dumpster  
overflows with the dregs  
of his woebegone life



words/image(C)DStrange

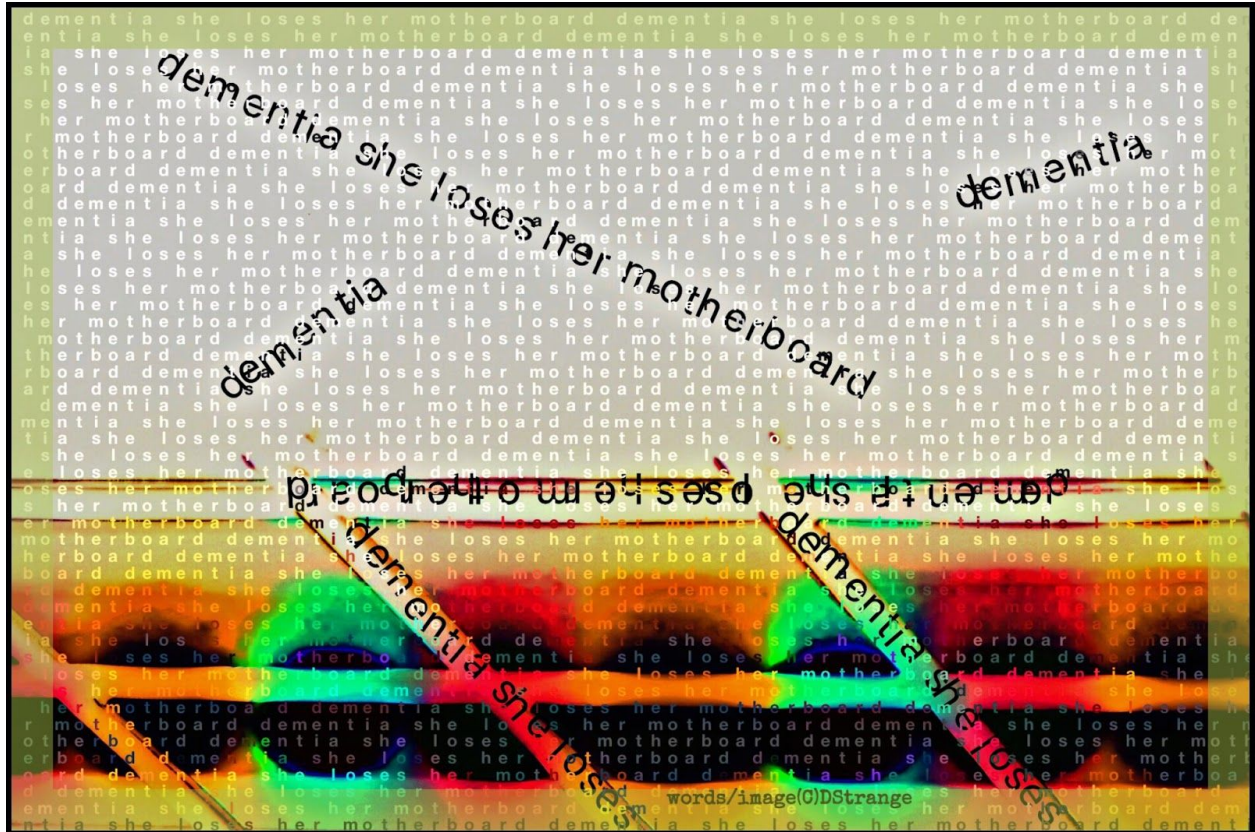
- Debbie Strange



MRI DON'T REALLY WANT TO KNOW



- Debbie Strange



- Debbie Strange

## AMUSE-GUEULE

See how daintily the little being licks,  
small creature of no remorse, smaller paws  
and no knowledge of our laws, tastes the stained blood  
of sacrifice, a predecessor —

its precursor swept beneath the wheels, meal  
ground, milled by some vast automobile —  
history this, innocence adds a pool  
abyss reflects depth pierced through the other side,

the remainder feast: what will, life takes, takes life,  
sustain the beast in solitude, award  
the dark. Appointed crossing, joking apart,  
purpose paltry in lieu of the actual,

poultry either, nor both or each, who that  
did, not do, to whom now utterly flat:  
Narcissus appears even so to like  
pancake, although shapeless. Gracious sheaves, high beams!

caution lane-change brings: wide circle sparing  
victual with the *victualer*, viaticum  
the luminous snout allows, tentative tongue  
gauge appetency undisturbed, indulge

such taste perchance exhumed, the tidbit found:  
a quiet *tableau* for two, lying as one —  
conviviality left well enough,  
conversation silent, fate dining alone.

- Jack Cooper



## The Choice

The wound started to ooze blood again. Laney put her hand up and wiped it with her finger. She went into the bathroom and looked at it. Why hadn't the asshole slashed her somewhere other than her neck, where every time she turned her head it would trickle little spots of blood, like a faucet that you couldn't turn off all the way.

Laney heard the truck in the driveway and clicked the lock on the door. She didn't know why, because he had a key anyway. When it did open, she stood there like a statue, still in her night dress. She knew better than to ask where he'd been all night, at least until she knew if he'd been drinking. She could smell that he had.

Billy staggered toward her. "Oh baby, look at you. You know I didn't mean to do that, don't you?"

"Well, funny how it happened anyway, Billy."

"It was just a little paring knife, you know."

Laney sighed and let him put his arms around her. "Where've you been all night, Billy?"

"Oh sugar, you know I just crash at my mama's till I cool down. I love you, Laney. You know I just got a temper."

She let him rock her back and forth, just like her mama had done when she was five years old, after her daddy had used his belt to whip her. Laney remembered her mother's sobs while she begged him to stop. She hadn't cried out at all, but tears flowed down her face till her princess top was soaked.

Billy's breath smelled like whiskey while he kissed her forehead. "I won't do it again. I promise."

"That's what you always say, Billy."



Laney led him to their bedroom and helped him onto the bed. She pulled his boots off. By the time she could catch her breath she could hear his familiar snore.

She went to the kitchen and got the special set of knives that she had bought from the home shopping channel, and chose the biggest one. Billy had never used it, preferring to cut his beef jerky with a paring knife. Walking into the bedroom, she stood over him. She rested the blade of the knife on Billy's throat. It wouldn't be much different than cutting a gizzard, she reckoned. Closing her eyes, she pulled the knife sharply across his neck. Instantly, the blood spurted out. She turned and walked out of the room, bile floating in her mouth.

She went to the phone and called the police. "Best come and get me, I just killed my husband." Laney went and sat at the kitchen table. She started to laugh hysterically and heard herself yell out, "You never did know which knife to use, asshole!"

Hearing the siren, she went and opened the door for the police. Again, she spoke out loud. "Nothin' can be worse than the life I'm livin' here."

- *Elizabeth Crocket*

remeasuring bigotry    Christchurch mosque

unspent secrets  
nestled on my tongue...  
swallowing the bitter

- *Jan Benson*

## **Get Gardner**

My mobile rings on the prom. It's her again. Ranting about him: how he left her with a baby, the sordid affairs, and his obsession with writing until the early morning. I don't doubt for a minute she's a sociopath and he's no better. But hey, she's paying well for the hit and I need the money. Besides, I've never been squeamish when it comes to the kill. He'll be at the Pleasure Beach with his new partner around two in the afternoon.

empty rifle  
smoke rings  
from my cigar

South Denes hasn't changed much in twenty years; a rundown industrial park around the power station, littered with boarded up shops and buddleia bushes on waste ground. Nelson's Column is the best place for a clean shot. I'm out of breath by the time I've climbed its two hundred and seventeen steps. There's a slight breeze from the north, I'll need to factor that into my shot trajectory.

caryatid  
her stone shoulder  
a rifle rest

There they are in my scope, coming out of the Fun House. Laughing, they walk towards the wooden roller coaster. I can't get a clean shot due to the crowds in the Pleasure Beach. This will be my best chance, the coaster's lift hill should be slow enough for me to hit him on the way up. A moving target is a serious challenge for the sniper. Much rests on a steady hand. I've only got one chance.

gunshot  
head flung back  
she screams

- *Tim Gardiner*

watching me  
watching you  
the spy game

earthbound  
all the monsters  
in the world

seeing his true face  
seeing his true nature  
after years of marriage  
beauty sees the beast  
for who he truly is

unable  
to understand  
why her mother  
wears a buzz cut  
Rapunzel's daughter

learning far  
too young  
that monsters  
are all around us  
little red riding hood

- *Christina Sng*

**Michelangelo:  
Painter and Poet (V2)**

Michelangelo  
with steel balls  
and a wire brush  
wishing he was  
wearing motorcycle leathers,  
going wild and crazy,  
stares cross-eyed at the  
Sistine Chapel ceiling-  
nose touching moist paint,  
body stretch out on a plank,  
bones held by ropes from falling-  
delirious, painting that face of Jesus  
and the Prophets  
with a camel hair brush;  
in such a position, transition  
a genie emerges as a poet-  
words not paint  
start writing his sonnets,  
a second career is born-  
nails and thorns  
digging at his words,  
flashing red paint:  
it's finished.

- *Michael Lee Johnson*

## Michelangelo



*Public domain image to accompany Michael Lee Johnson's  
Michelangelo: Painter and Poet*

### **Rose Petals in a Dark Room (V3)**

I walk through this poem one step at a time.  
I walk in a mastery of this night and light  
my money changers walk behind me  
they're fools like clowns in a shadow of sin,  
they're busy as bees as drunken lovers,  
Sodom and Gomorrah before this salt pillar falls.

In a shadow of red rose pedals  
drunken lovers walk changing Greek and Roman  
currency to Jewish money or Tyrian shekels-  
they're fools, all fools, at what they do.  
Everyone's life is a conflict.  
They're my lovers and my sinners  
I can't sleep at night without them  
by my bed grass near that sea of Galilee.  
Fish in my cloth nets beget my friends, my converts.  
I pray in this garden alone sweat  
while my disciples whitewash their dreams.

The rose has a tender thorn compared to my arrest,  
and soon crucifixion.

It's here this morning and this night come together,  
where this sea and this land depart,  
where these villages stone and mortar crumble.

I'm but a poet of this ministry,  
rose petals in a dark room fall.  
Everyone's life is a conflict.  
But mine is mastery of light and neon night  
and I walk behind these footsteps of no one.

- *Michael Lee Johnson*

## Rose Petals



*Public domain image to accompany Michael Lee Johnson's  
Rose Petals in a Dark Room (V3)*



## Picking

Picking pinching chicken claws  
off my arm  
a scratch I alert to from childhood:  
mother whines, Your brother,  
*his wife stole money—it's murder!*

*Your sister took my pills  
who knows what ills—  
trying to murder me!*  
the wheelchair raves  
and together  
brother and sister  
we eye to eye  
the garden's steep stone steps

- Victoria Crawford

## **SAINT JOAN THE COMPROMISED**

Approaching your home  
from the seaward side  
always required  
expert knowledge of the terrain,  
or luck.

The pungent smell of hibiscus  
and burnt oak,  
the cave's mouth kissed  
lips and moss.

This contentment of grief  
belies a certain obligation.

Sitting somewhat alert  
at a table of dyed eyes  
and A-shaped limbs,  
this very seat stolen  
as a diversion.

Its trajectory  
and capricious intent  
now hovers above our existence.

There is no longer a need  
to amaze the bastards.

- *Colin James*

## **The Mall Will Be Closing In 15 Minutes**

*Monroeville, PA.*

—One last cigarette outside it. One last rummage through the clearance racks. Feel cold all over again. Shaking. Want something warm to eat. Want to sit down. Don't want to sit down. Want to infect them all. One by one. Done with the utmost formality. No ceremony. No manners. Just gnashing teeth and skin and steak smells—No! Must fight it. Focus on the glow of the Old Navy sign. Flapping in Grandpa's old green trenchcoat. Poison needles run skin. Support weight on one leg, feel little crackles of bonebreaks. Past the stuffed-bear store. The ancient bronze penny pony, I put a new rotor in that once—smell of sausage. Warm pulses. Drawing like fresh steam. Fresh steak. Fresh brains. Sweeter than that which sighs. Past the pretzel stand, now just fresh steak smell, past the trendy clothing stores, no sickening perfume washes, just fresh steak smell—

And the golem would be free. Pass the curse, just catch the scent. Feed the craving and feel. Anything but hungry. Footfalls and clattering, rubber around corners, someone moans low, it might be me—

Steel screaming mingles low pop-music station, some whiny boyband crap. Steak smell and sweating. Service elevator down. Two in the hallway. Rack of lamb in Abercrombie clothes. Why dress food? Flailing warmth. Screaming steak smells. Pink exertion and indignant bleating. Piss faint behind pork chops. Stuff, multicolored, the reds flowing over whites over soft tans, the nearpurple, smell of salt. The lights flicker or eyes just shut. Smell pine, smell shit, screaming stops, smell tangy steakscent and brains, chewing chewing, more more—

- *Kyle Wright*

## Broken Light



- *Edward Lee*

## Crosses (RIP)



- Edward Lee

## Lizard Hips

I don't know anything anymore. Every time I set my heart on certainty, the rug pulled from beneath me, and I see the thing I'd been so enamored with was simply one of those perspective sculptures- from the right angle, you see some beautiful image, but from any other you just see a mass of intricate and bizarre shapes and forms. Every time, except for you. You may have pulled the rug, but as I fell, the shape of you never changed. As I hit the floor, I saw you were the same shining heart I'd loved beyond reckoning when I stood. I'd dreamt of this day, to finally find someone real to hold my heart, and I'd lived in paralytic fear of the next moment, where you turned and walked away. It would feel so much better if you spat on me, planted knives in my back, cast salt in my eyes, but you didn't, and despite my wishes I knew that was like asking the stone to grow taller. No, no knives, no spite or spit. Only tears in your eyes, only the heaviest leaden regret slowing, but not stopping, each step away from me. If you'd asked me earlier, I'd have told you losing you would be my death, and that you could set your watch and warrant to that fact. But, again, I know nothing, for I'm still very much alive down here, feeling every minute of this as though it were a lifetime unto itself. I wish it would stop, I'd give anything to make it stop, but no, I'm not dying, and I don't want to. I can't lie here forever, I can't get up, I can't go on, I can't end it, every movement is pulled back by the counterweight of the opposite extreme. Every action is thus equally impossible, even inaction, so there's only one option, and that's to do the impossible. I will have to get up, I will have to move forward. I'm in a barbed wire forest, and trees stretch beyond any perceptible horizon, but I know a green place exists, I've been there before, recently even. Indeed, the only thing I can do is thrash my way in any given direction, and do so until I find something new. Thus, again, I prove myself ignorant, as I'll have accomplished something I'd thought beyond me. As I stand at the edge of these jagged

woods, I realize that the work is not done, I have to look onward again and keep defying impossibilities, because I feel like it will be impossible to find another icon like you, whose grace lives in every possible position, but for once, I hope I'm wrong again.

- *Shane Stroud*

## **The third**

This year autumn comes to us at dusk. Sneaks in our home like a stray cat. Neither of us hear her steps or notice her silhouette. We only become aware of her presence when we sense her sweet-like scent.

Suddenly, for no particular reason, I feel like I have to open the door of our bathroom. I open it and see her sitting on her haunches. Naked with her shame visible.

looking at us looking at her autumn

- *Réka Nyitrai*



## BOOK OF THE DEAD

Inferred confessions  
sinners with constellations tangled in their hair  
fragility, ghosts, skeletons escaped from closets  
and moored at the docks like Charon  
ferryman to Hell  
complaints of no pulse  
bottomless underworlds  
unfinished phone calls . . .

Bobby \_\_\_\_\_ stands apart with his fly down  
confounded and caught in the rain  
like Spiderman snared by a web of his own design  
or Superman with kryptonite  
he's lost his 3D glasses and seems unable to talk  
can't even squawk unlike the ravens  
brooding along the power lines above him

Miley Cyrus joined the Luciferian Illuminati  
the prophet tells him  
her name-change in honor of Osiris  
Egyptian god of the dead  
Bobby swoons from the Egyptology  
as the Mormon missionaries exit the property

Bobby \_\_\_\_\_ recalls that book he checked out  
from the library long ago and finds himself  
another beastie, lost in sarcophagi bitumen  
with jackals and bulls, composite amalgams,  
river valley creeds and cosmologies, Serapis cults,  
sun worship, and Heliopolitan pattern triads,  
converging in liturgical papyrus spells,  
Ptolemaic Age hymns to gods, charcoal and incense,  
sacred banquet beneath the great Eye of Horus,  
Cheops, Chephren, Micerinus, scarabs, obelisks,  
Apis, Anubis, ithyphallic Min as the sun rides

the celestial bull's horns till daylight ends  
and the sun god journeys through underworld again,  
hieroglyphic ritual mythology with the earth rising  
from a lotus blossom in primordial waters, artisan,  
bisexual deities, erotic unions, adze against the lips,  
brain exhumed, intestines excavated, sexual organs  
eviscerated for fragrant spices, natron and oil,  
the heart heavy with the halls of Hell

- *Anna Cates*

black widow spider . . .  
her mate's hourglass time  
is running out

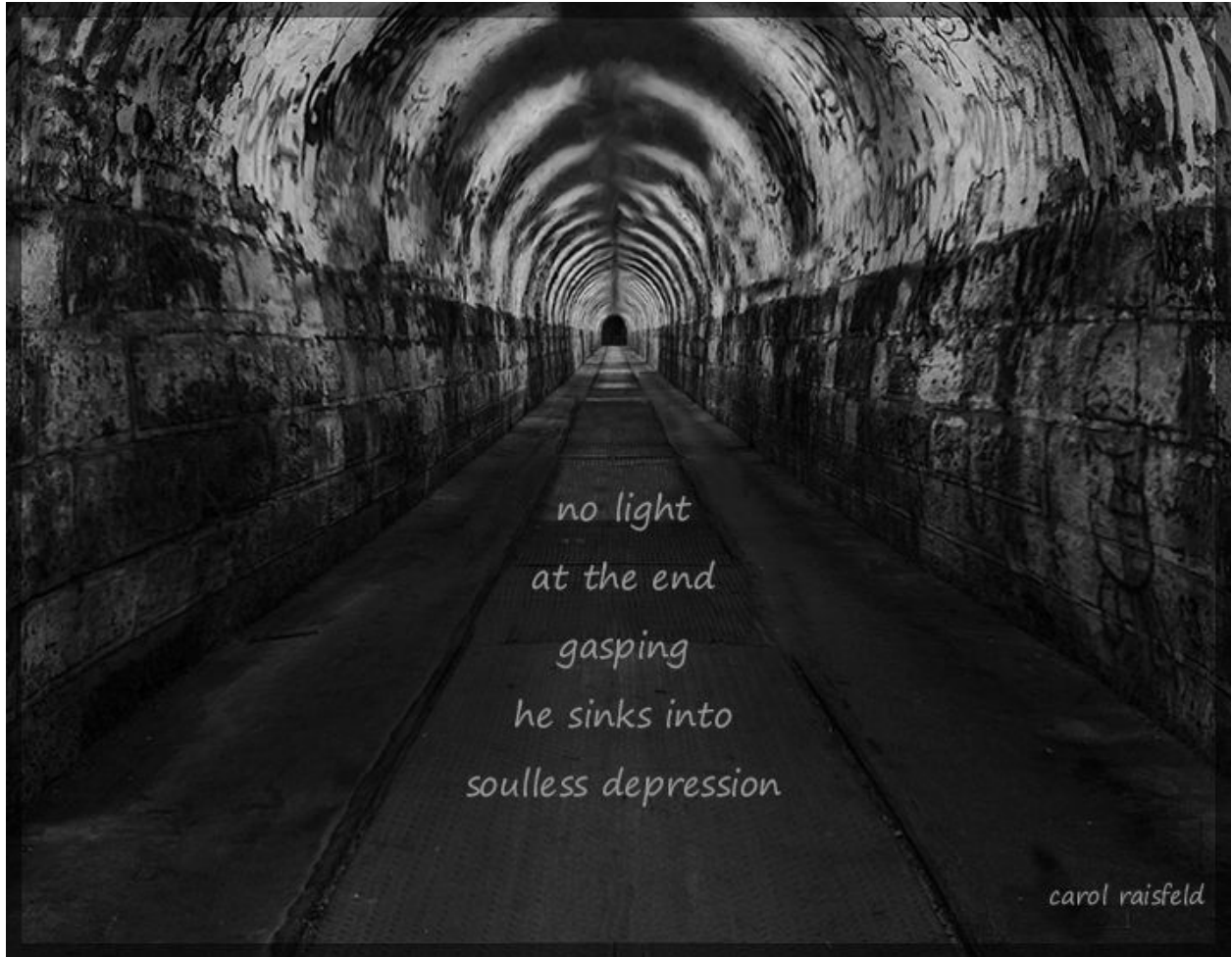
- *Valentina Rinaldi-Adams*

## IN THE END

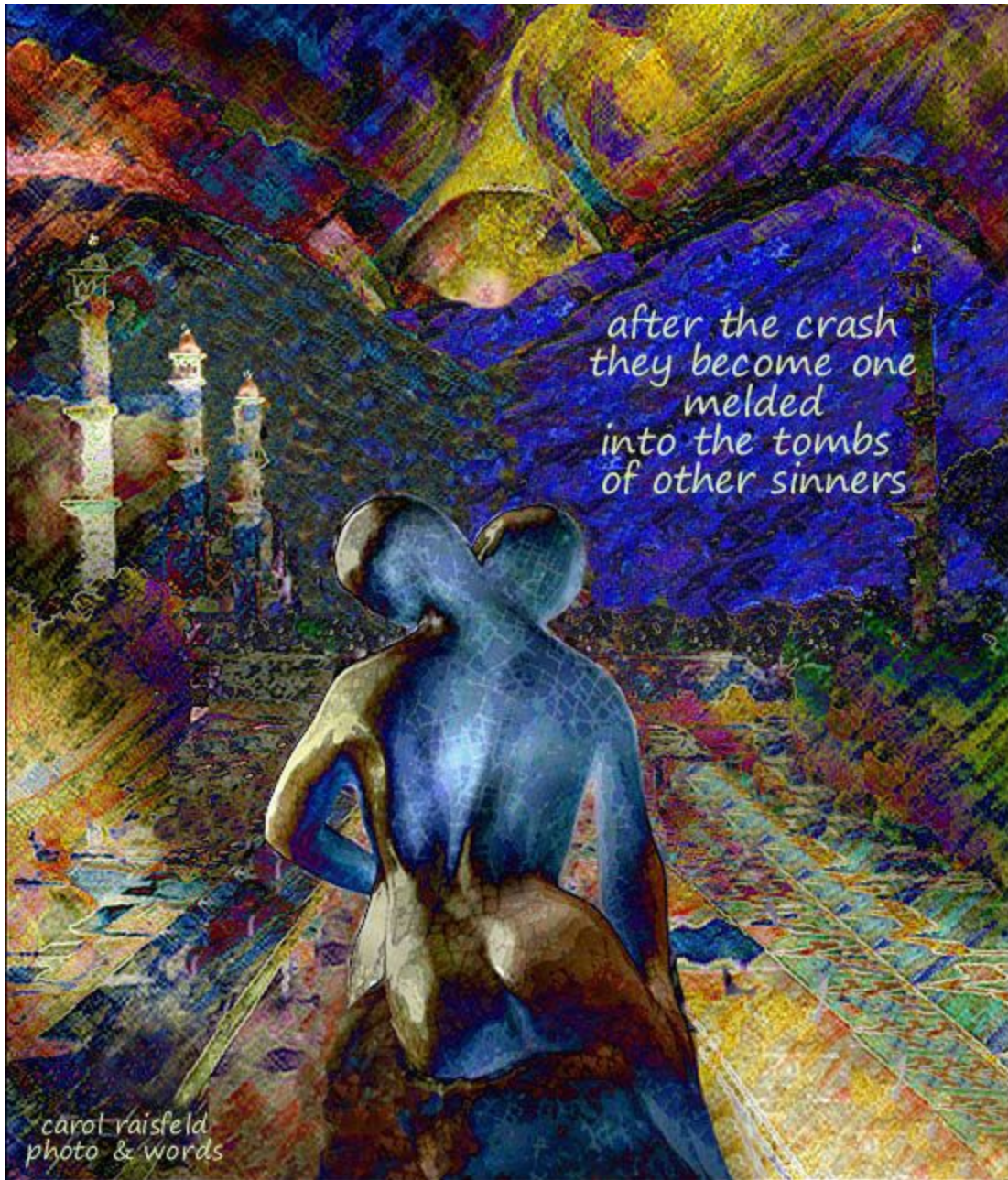
I am too feeble  
for this life  
It has cost too much  
returned too little  
I am tired  
bruised by chance  
defeated by circumstance  
still I insist  
still I attempt  
still I presume

I swim upstream  
against strong currents  
battered by rocks  
because I know I must  
I have no choice  
my nature is ordained  
my course definable  
my future inevitable  
but unlike the salmon  
I know I am dying

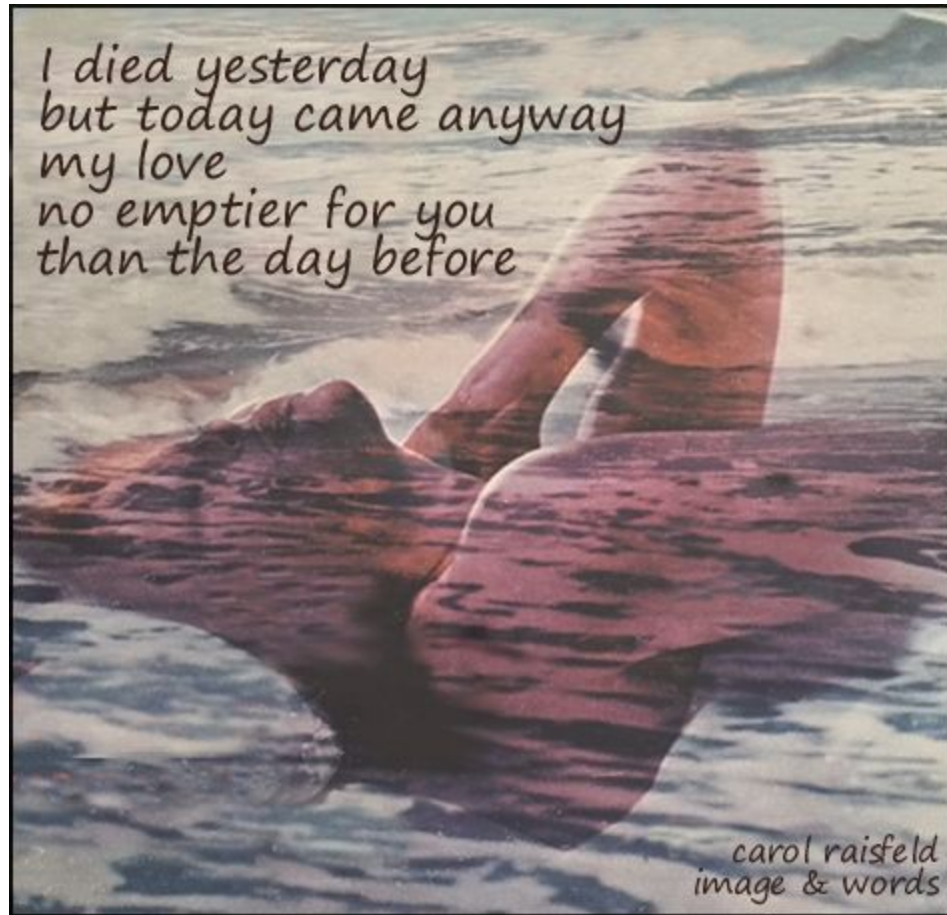
- *Carol Raisfeld*



- Carol Raisfeld



- Carol Raisfeld



- Carol Raisfeld



National Coming Out Day  
Trump outs the celebrities  
who are aliens

steampunk world -  
instead of captaining  
a dirigible,  
some days  
I'm just an automaton

- *Susan Burch*



## **Lunacy or Legacy?**

Because of my fat face I always wonder if secretly, I was adopted. My parents tell me I wasn't, but how can I know for sure? Also, I'm strangely attracted to the Subaru emblem of stars and I wonder if I'd ever driven one, if I'd have come into my powers, powers I must surely have, deep down inside. But the story my Dad told me deterred me of it. It was about a family that looked for the safest car, decided on a Subaru, and then were in an accident and all of them died. I have stayed away from them ever since - but what if I hadn't? And what if there are powers out there, just waiting for me to claim them?

Subaru Ascent  
what might I  
become

- *Susan Burch*

## **The Torment Of Hope**

I couldn't let myself remember what it felt like to hope.

Every day we planned for this, but we never stopped to savour the notion that it might work. If we didn't at least think about how we would get away, we would have given up on thinking altogether.

With my scrawny, starved legs hidden in the darkness, I glanced over my shoulder to make sure the other two were still with me. Making eye contact quickly enough to avoid dwelling on the articulate scars ripping across each other's faces, they threw me the signal.

Those scars were drawn with the sharpest knife that had ever touched my skin. In blotchy reds, they brandished the careful patterns that The Artist had scratched for days to ensure they would continue to bleed. We called him The Artist for his habit of using human canvasses to realise his visions. Like the rest, he wore a mask. We had never seen any of their faces, but knowing their identities had stopped being important a long time ago. All I could let myself want was escape.

Knowing the other two were following, I took a deep breath and launched myself into the final step. Scaling the wall was the riskiest part, and I tried not to picture what would happen if we were seen. We knew the barbed wire at the top could catch us, but we had grown so used to pain that it didn't seem like an issue. We had already made it further than any attempt I'd seen while being kept prisoner here. Our plan was formulated by watching, suppressing the anguish of seeing others get snared in the traps that lined the grounds. Our captors seemed to want us to watch. It was part of their enjoyment to witness the pain in our eyes as our fellow hostages were impaled, blown apart or unexpectedly crushed. This was part of their game.

While I climbed, I kept my focus entirely on the placement of my hands and feet. Every part of my body ached, but the mere notion

of getting out propelled me to a speed I had never expected. As I jumped, grabbed and finally felt my feet hitting solid ground again, my heart started pumping with unfamiliar emotions. I still didn't want to let myself believe in the concept of freedom, but the wall was behind me. The enclosure was behind me.

In an unexamined mix of hope, fear and disbelief, I didn't check to see if the others had made it behind me. All I could do was pick up my battered legs and run. Trees blurred past my sides, branches bending as I smacked them away with my bruised and bloody arms. Feeling the sudden cool air of an open space, I stopped when I saw that I had reached a road. Hot tears began to sting the scars on my cheeks as I started to finally let myself believe that it might be over.

Seeing headlights in the distance, I got momentarily caught in the instinct of shying away. When I recognised the approaching vehicle as an old, hippie-style van, decked out with stickers advertising the distant notion of peace, I jumped back into the light. Gasping for air, I waved my arms and made as much noise as my tired vocal chords would allow. They would have to see me. They would have to take me to safety.

I can't fathom a relief quite as strong as the one I felt when the van started slowing down. I gripped my chest as it pulled over. I watched the window roll down. In the driver's seat was a man with an unkempt beard and visible concern in his eyes. It was the first time I could remember seeing a human face that was free of scars.

"Please," I choked out, trying to remember how to speak. That one word was all I could manage, but it seemed to be enough. The man nodded quickly, unable to move his eyes away from the blood that stained every inch of my body.

"Jump in the back," he told me, his voice falling into my ringing ears like dissolving sugar, "I'll get you where you need to go."

I sobbed openly as he slid open the side door. The van was a mess of worn cushions nestled among posters of folk bands and protests. I looked at them, but couldn't dream of having the energy to care about any cause outside my own safety. The van jerked into motion and I let myself fall against the cushions, focusing on how it felt to know that I might get to sleep.

I don't know if I drifted off in the back of that van. I had long since lost any understanding of the passage of time. My eyelids dragged themselves open as we lurched to a stop.

"Ok," the driver said, gently, clicking open his seatbelt, "Let's get you out."

I hadn't asked where he would take me. It seemed logical to assume that he would bring me to a hospital, but all I cared about was that I would be somewhere safe. Somewhere else.

As the driver slid the van door open, I strained to pull myself up. Brushing the filth from my eyelashes, I stepped out into the bright lights, struggling to see. Slowly, the lights dimmed, revealing the familiar grey walls of the warehouse enclosure. I fell to my knees, immediately losing the energy to keep myself upright.

The driver stepped in front of me, looking down with cold, dead eyes and a sadistic smile. In a fluid, elongated movement, he pulled out a mask and strapped it to his face. The slow steps he took towards me thudded through what remained of my soul. As he spoke, the definition of hope slipped away from me for the last time.

"Welcome back."

- *S.J. Justice*

## **New & Improved**

Faint hum... a million bees in legs  
Run through tunnels... marrowless bones  
Movement supercharge... start up at full speed

*Disentangle the circuits.*

Hit all buttons... plastic, dull sequins  
Sequence initiate... kindergarten countdown  
Sparks appear... ominous signs

*Don't abort the process.*

The facility smells... burned rubber  
Machine online... gong reverberates  
Model person... from the outside

*Prepare the other cyborgs.*

Initial batch... ten thousand  
Infiltration begins... crickets sing  
Upgraded software... Humanity 2.0

*Celebrate our success.*

- *Jennifer Ruth Jackson*

## **What Neglect Can Bring**

They told us to light the torches in the rain  
Rise before the moon and strike the flame  
To keep the monsters far away, at bay  
Obtaining the title of guardians to our village

But we, too young to understand  
A simple plea from a demand  
Stayed inside all warm and dry until  
The moon reached its apex point  
And the rending screams commenced

All we could do was run, then hide  
Forgetting how hindering the darkness  
Is to those of light, how quickly evil moves  
Now, in bloodstained sunlight  
Every torch is broken and  
There is no more "we"... only me

- *Jennifer Ruth Jackson*

## **What You Eat**

He feeds the children first, yes first  
Watching them make messes and fight  
Over the juiciest portions  
Never complains about the scraps  
Left to sustain him for the night  
Or that his wife sucks down marrow  
Consuming the heart for dessert  
He licks a fellow human hand  
Fear permeating the fresh flesh  
Hungrier for hunting than food  
He offers his offspring seconds

- *Jennifer Ruth Jackson*

## **The Ailment Ward**

Trapped gas, a jailer  
squatting on my chest, compressed  
and eruptionless.

Stomach spin cycled,  
each bowlful irritable,  
each warning rivalled.

When anxiety  
outshines the sun, the body  
shunts, browbeating roads  
lit with cat's eyes into sleep,  
night lights extinguished, lidded.

My princess feet arch  
overreaching, with each step  
radial pain flows.

Familial echoes;  
arthritis floods through my palm,  
a handshake hello.

- *Mark Ward*



## **January eighth winter of discontent**

January eighth begins the long depression,  
No more presents, or relatives, no Happy New Years:  
They have all returned and greetings ceased.  
A mental snow storm begins the season of nothing

Thoughts just fade into the whiteness,  
Mesmerized by the pale silence;  
Blinded by the lack everything.

Cold, white, blank and empty

People think depression is dark: it is not.  
It is the old television test pattern,  
Announcing the station is off the air:  
White noise covering the mental landscape

The mind aches with mental fatigue.  
Pleading to see where there is nothing.  
A cognitive blindness --  
Staring at the whiteness: deaf and blind

- *Richard L Ratliff*

## nothing

this cosmic concentration  
of neurons and spitting image souls  
is still trying to figure out  
how the lack of something  
can hurt.

nothing crushed, bruised, or thrown against the wall  
nothing stolen or burned or forcing me to crawl

just nothing

but still i am there

just nothing

but words in the air

just nothing

but an ivy-covered ring

just nothing

so why do i feel everything

there's space now

and the long night drive

there's wasted time

to give me human life

there's love i can't believe

a phantom weight pressing

there's fear despite the warmth

despite the truth despite the blessing.

- Ellen Huang

## **Sing, as Birds Will**

They parried with sticks and ate apples in the wood.  
A forbidden friendship formed  
between stepbrother and sister.

I sing, as birds must, for the one who sent me.

A wicked stepmother set up dusty trunk and placed  
her hand on the lid. A homemade guillotine  
for twittering, meddling, unrelated little boys.

I sing as birds will, for the one who told me.

After the murder, the framed sister weeps more  
than her frail little body can hold.  
Sick to her stomach at the brother-soup  
with her name on it. A mother's insurance she will never tell.

I sing, as birds do, for the one who came before me.

So hand me your gold chains, and your red  
shoes, and your gifts set plain in a ribboned  
box. Then hand me the millstone,  
weight of the fallen earth where his head fell.

So that I may offer a gift, a shining  
promise of an apple if she searches  
in the dusty darkness. so that I may  
serve some step-mother soup.

And after I am gone, thanks to your generous offers,  
the one who sent me may come back.

And brother and sister will be free, as watching birds know.

- *Ellen Huang*

## **Robber Bridegroom's Widow**

What to do with the corpses  
Once the warlock himself is stew?  
These are the preserved remains  
Of other brides like you.

The bride recoiled at blood and guts  
Twisted the golden ring  
Upon not her own wedded finger  
But the dismembered poor thing.

For a second, though, she held it  
How strange, a touch so light  
Could summon weight of evil  
Numbness, alternating fright.

The surviving bride returned not  
To the house with stews made from sin  
She had trails of lentils and stories  
But nothing to save from within.

Someday she'd like to get married  
And former victims, her bridesmaid team  
But for now, she stares at the stew and waits  
For someone to tell her this is all a dream.

- *Ellen Huang*

## **Peach Schnapps**

The first time I got drunk was when

I found a plastic bottle of Peach Schnapps sitting in the  
parking lot  
of a bowling alley in Wisconsin  
I was 13 and had Metallica T-shirt for every day of the week  
I pocketed it and called my friend Marcy on a payphone  
It was 1997 and she walked over  
We went to the graveyard, the only place the living could be  
alone in town  
And sipped the sweet flowery syrup  
It tasted like peach bubble gum rather than real peaches  
The sun was bright and hot  
The rays went straight through my skull  
as if God was touching my brain  
I laughed and danced  
Marcy rolled her eyes but smiled  
As we walked down the sidewalk I rubbed against the hedgerows  
and felt the leaves scratch against me  
It was bliss to be young and high and free  
Everything was possible  
All the young dreams were going to come true  
I was wrong  
I grew up to be a corporate drone like everyone else  
And Marcy killed herself a few years ago  
I've been getting drunk ever since that day in 1997  
And I hate the taste of Peach Schnapps

- *Westley Heine*

## **A Hermit in the City**

I can still see him  
down there scurrying along the floor like dried fruit  
clutching his bottle  
peeking over the windowsill at orgasms and train-wrecks  
down in his cozy little rut

I look at him through the vent in his ceiling, my floor  
He doesn't know that I watch, but I can tell he senses me

We live on great steps under oceans, on tectonics of grease  
sliding over lava suns  
a coral reef of brick buildings, plastic gardens, and cement  
beams of energy

As I stare he becomes more excited, more nervous  
He scuttles across the floor trying to find out where he is  
Even though he's always been in the same place  
and so have I

- *Westley Heine*

## **Earth Poem**

Wine for your thoughts.  
Raft of corn seeds,  
Whispers in the attic,  
The locked eyes in the helve,  
The treading of the sole of the foot  
In the winepress. You heard tell  
That trampling tongues  
Birth Belial roots  
In the dark pool of rushes?

Child, meddle not with the shadows.  
Stones tasted wine in time past.

- *Shola Balogun*

## **Lament**

As ill-clad Zlelponith bemoaning  
The mangled body of her son tempered  
Beneath the hewn stones of Dagan,  
Reached deeply into her grief  
And beheld in that frozen hour  
Some human shadow of God,  
The pierced side, the battered frail form,  
The head smitten with a vile slat,  
A woman's heavy eyes over the earth  
Folded in beating scalpels  
Seek deeper into the human misery  
And into the drama of the silence of God.

- *Shola Balogun*



## Poem On Noticing My Bald Head

Brail kernels rescind in slabs of stones,  
Decrepit obelisk at the forecourt.  
The centre is cyclic bare; now will blasted  
Stalks of hair sprout!  
Peradventure the grisled periscopes  
The cloistered dialectics of the Muse  
With epithets on base drums.  
Then must I not dialogue this Sabbath spatial scale,  
Cobbling my mixed wine, while I glare  
At both the shadow and the passing light?

- *Shola Balogun*

**from the pink notebook**

Alice tortured Lindsey's Barbie®  
with needles and sharp intentions.  
Ken® was unable to help,  
    left on the shelf,  
    glass-eyed and plastic,  
with a painted smile.

After the bandages came off  
Ken® was made to cheer her up:  
a flailing face-grinding kiss,  
    a clothespeg embrace,  
    and consummation  
in the back of Barbie's® RV.

Placed side by side,  
flesh-colored cutlery.

- *Mark Gilbert*

## **Spider-man**

Just an ordinary superhero.  
I am neither good nor bad, have had no  
dark compulsion for dressing up in tights  
yet I have climbed my share of walls at night.

Lurking in the dark, scrawling spidery verse,  
I spin these silky webs bejewelled with words,  
tight tourniquets to stem internal bleeding  
or lassoes set to snare the foolish reader.

With my neon pen and nylon disguise  
perhaps I'll try to take on the bad guys  
using weapons of irony and rage,  
all knees and elbows, leaping at the page.

But when I lose my grip and fall I hurt.  
I don't bounce. I am not made of pixels.

- *Mark Gilbert*

## **Saga in 48 Words**

The afternoon sun was large and low in the sky. With skill, intuition and experience he killed 157 enemy monsters. No remorse. Their corpses lay decomposing in the corridors of the Imperial Palace.

He ate some cookies. "Was it good?" his mother asked.

"It was too easy, Mom."

- *Jon Bradmore*

spider moon  
a book of shadow beings  
opens at your name

inside their chrysalises  
ancient caterpillars  
are chewing wings

blood and bone  
for the rose bush  
spring sacrifice

the nightmares  
become more frequent –  
flowering weeds

deep winter  
the bark of a wolf  
shatters my dream

- *Lucy Whitehead*

## **Silent Night**

Christmas traditions. Every family has their own unique one. Like, a few families I know hang an ornament for each year that passes by, and some families go caroling (not really nowadays though). I used to think our family's tradition was as close to normal as simply hanging candy canes on the tree on the night before Christmas. Looking back now, while I write this story, our tradition was odd. Our family tradition was that no one could talk after 9 pm on Christmas Eve. This used to be an easy tradition, as I used to go to bed by 8 pm, but now that I'm almost 9-years old, my bedtime has shifted past 9 pm.

This year, I asked my parents why we have our tradition. My dad leaned close to me and smiled. He smiled a long, thin, over-exaggerated smile. His glasses hid his eyes, so telling if the smile was genuine was hard. "Santa can come to our house as early as 9 o'clock," he said. "And if he hears you talking, he will skip over our house because he does not want to be seen." At 8-years old, I truly believed in jolly Saint Nicholas, but, at the same time, I could catch tremoring hints of uncertainty hidden deep within his reassuring phrase. I gave back a half-smile and headed to bed.

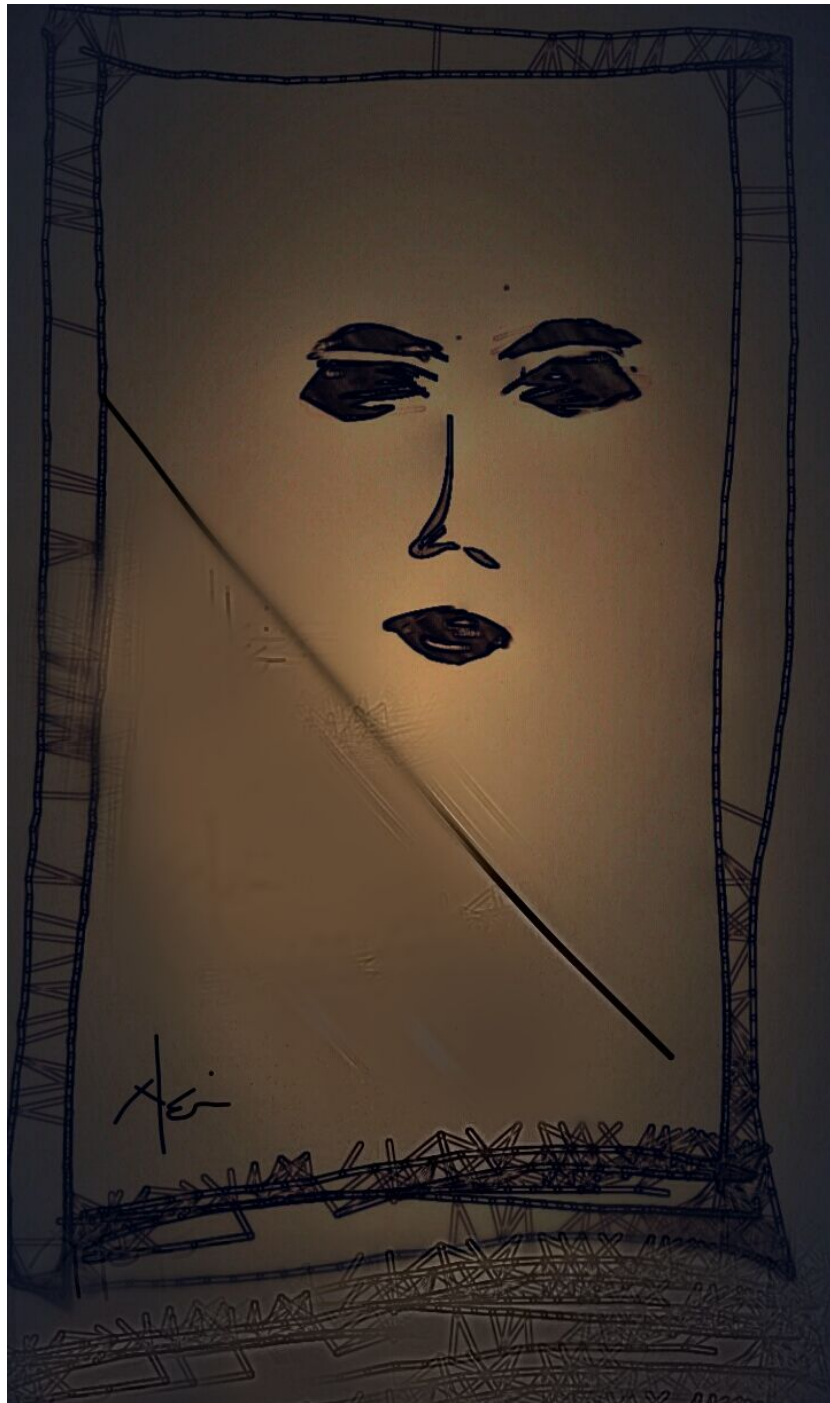
The next day was Christmas eve, and as the day went on, I slowly began to forget about the uncertain conversation I had with my dad. Yet, through the day, full of tree decorating and cookie baking, that tiny speck of fear hung in my head. Why? That was what I asked myself the previous night. Why was I so uncertain? What my father had told me made sense. It did, at least to my 8-year old self. Finally, at 8 pm, the night was winding down. We all sat around the table eating ham and turkey, each drowned in thick gravy. For a Christmas Eve dinner, it was quiet. The only conversations were a hushed exchange between my parents every few minutes and sign language between me and my little brother who is deaf. I could only make out the words "Santa" and "Danny" (my name), as my parents talked. I simply put my hands

on the utensils, bowed my head towards the plate, and silently ate ham.

9 pm came and went, and I was soon lying in bed, trying to fall asleep. I listened hard for tiny hooves trotting on our roof as I fell asleep and drained myself into a dream of a Christmas miracle. I was suddenly awoken by a crash on my bedroom door. I immediately sat up and grabbed hold of the blankets. Crash upon crash came at my door, each one sending my gripping knuckles into a bright, pale white. Terrible thoughts of what was going to happen sped through my mind. Each one more violent than the past one. With one final crash, the door burst open, still leaving an impossible darkness spreading throughout my room. I heard floorboards creak and groan as the thing moved in quick succession towards my helpless, trembling carcass. I opened my mouth to scream. But nothing came out except silence. I was stuck, shaking, mouth open in a silent scream as the thing edged closer and closer. I tried to scream again, silence. I felt the weight as the thing crawled onto my bed. I felt the hot breath course into my lungs as the face hid, shrouded in darkness, yet only three inches in front of my face. I could not cry for help as I felt a sharp edge course over my head. I could not make a sound. I could not scream. It was indeed, my final night. It was indeed, a very, very silent night.

- *Sol Blount*

## Trapped



- Neni Rusliana





- Neni Rusliana

## Rush



- *Neni Rusliana*

*Inspired by Adrian Barnes's Nod...*

sleep deprived  
never had we dreamed  
this mad world's end

*Inspired by Jeff VanderMeer's Borne...*

rogue as i am  
the Company that ensured  
i was Borne

plucked  
from the fur of a flying bear  
my tendrilled son

*Inspired by Patrick Rothfuss's Name of the Wind...*

low upon the earth  
the menacing schtik-tik  
of scrael blades

old archanist  
sympathy's secrets writ  
into childsong

- *Kelly Sauvage Angel*

crescent moon  
in the dark midnight  
I gently twist  
on my barren bed  
to listen to cricket's muse

art of imagination  
sets the fish to start flying  
the tree hides  
flowers and fruits underneath  
as the man thinks from his belly

- *Pravat Kumar Padhy*

## **hurry up wagon**

the hurry up wagon  
took a minute  
to get to the old school  
house turned rehab and detox  
—last house on  
the block  
like kicking in your aunt's  
house, but at least they give  
out one cigarette each hour

I told my mom I wished  
she were dead  
after she delivered  
some news I didn't want  
to hear,  
I slammed the phone  
yellowing plastic  
dial 9 to get out

I figured that  
the only option left  
with the air let out of my balloon  
was to kill myself or  
at least  
tell someone I wanted to kill  
myself

and as I knew was protocol  
the disinterested nurse,  
the agitated nurse,  
the wish I were anywhere but here  
nurse picked up the phone  
dialed 911  
—she wouldn't let me  
smoke a cigarette  
with the zippo lighter  
I found in the greasy leather

couch  
she had to sit  
and watch me  
maybe it was required  
that she looked fucking bored  
too

no matter  
through the chain link fence  
I saw that wagon  
I got in and laid down  
I was nicer to those EMTs  
than I was to my own mother

I watched the hood disappear  
through the glass on  
the ambulance back door  
watched the hood  
turn into the miracle mile,  
turn into tire shops and fast food  
restaurants

I got admitted to  
the psych ward  
my first time  
"if you need a place to stay  
make sure you tell them  
you got a specific plan  
of how you're gonna kill  
yourself"

the fifth floor  
beds a foot off the ground  
low stimuli  
grey walls and grey ceilings  
morning speech  
about taking a shower  
every other day  
the med school students

following the psychiatrist,  
a pack of seagulls and  
I am a French Fry on the asphalt

I left AMA  
after a few days  
walking the street in my dirty clothes  
found some cigarettes on  
the road  
side,  
borrowed a phone  
and asked for a front,  
no money to my name  
but I had that  
specific plan;  
what is a debt  
to a dead man  
anyhow?

- *Luke Kuzmish*



## Into the Trees

His throat and chest burned as he sucked in the cold night air. He pumped his legs over the flat backyard, avoiding the ruts and sudden dips in the ground. His thoughts raced, remembering their conversation.

*When your daddy gets in one of his ways after the bar, run into the trees. I made sure the woods would protect you.*

*But ma—*

*Don't sass me, Michael. Just when you hear him hollering, slurring his words, carrying on — get out the house, get into those damn trees.*

He weaved around the thick, oak trees, becoming submerged in a darkness more complete than the black sky above. If it wasn't for the faint, trickling streams of moonlight coming in through the canopy, Michael wouldn't have seen anything at all. He stopped momentarily, breathing hard, glancing around. His mother never said where to go once in the trees, but when he heard her screaming from the direction of the house, he began running again.

The sound of the screen door slamming against the trailer made him wince, then a stillness followed. He thought that the metallic crash he heard was only in his head, maybe his father really didn't come home, maybe it was all a dream—

"Get back here boy!"

His father's abrupt voice cut through the silence like a knife, causing Michael to trip on a root. The boy fell face first into the earth, dirt and leaves shooting into his open mouth. Quickly, coughing, he stumbled to his feet, wiping the muck from his lips, and continued sprinting.



He could hear his father's voice, louder, nearer; he could hear twigs break under his boots, bushes and brambles pushed away by his large, calloused hands.

A small creek appeared out from the darkness and, instinctively, Michael leapt over it, into a clearing beyond. His legs screamed for relief as he slowly came to a stop in the center of the clearing. No trees or branches reached here, nothing blocked out the moonlight illuminating the running water, which formed an ancient, protecting symbol that surrounded the clearing.

His father emerged from the woods. His brow furrowed seeing the boy. He took a step, and his foot sunk into the water, and slipping on the stones, he fell forward. Cursing, he grabbed a handful of earth, and pulled himself up and onto his feet.

His hair stuck to his forehead, soaked in sweat. His red-rimmed eyes looked glassy underneath the moonlight. The blue jeans he wore were torn, and the white-beater was splashed with crimson. Even from several feet away, the boy could smell the ripe booze radiating from his oily skin. He loomed over his boy, his hand clenched, the other pointing.

"C'mere boy!"

Michael shook his head.

"C'mere and let me teach you a lesson!"

The boy shook his head again, keeping his face down.

"If you don't come here right now, you'll get it even worse than your mother did. Now c'mere!"

Michael took a step, then stopped, clenching his hands.

"Making a father come to his boy," he said, chuckling a little, shaking his head. "You'll get double for disrespectin' me."

The father strode, drunkenly, towards Michael. The earth below him grew soft, and his foot sunk into the soil. He looked down, laughed as if it was a joke, then tried to pull his foot free, to find only that it wouldn't budge. When he gripped his jeans to pull, thin, veiny roots wriggled out from the grass and crawled up his feet, coiling like a serpent around his ankles. As he focused on one foot, the other became entangled.

When he slowly began lowering into the ground, panic rushed through him like the adrenaline in his veins.

"Get me out of here!"

The breeze gathering around them whispered old, long forgotten words his mother once spoke.

More arterial roots rose from the ground, stretching, reaching like pleading branches, snaking around the father's hands, up wrists, crawling over shoulders, twisting around his neck.

The father's glossy eyes grew wide, as if realizing only now what was happening. The alcohol he consumed that night had vanished, dissipating into the cold air, being replaced by terror.

"Son! Help me!" he shouted, twisting and jerking in the roots, his face beat red, the veins in his temple and neck standing out. "Get these fuckin' things off me!"

Michael walked to his father, stopped, and looked up at him. Their brown eyes met, and Michael shook his head.

The wind picked up, whipping around father and son; the flow of the creek strengthened and glowed brighter with the moonlight. Then, as if his father was never there, as if he never took a step into the clearing, the earth opened, and the roots pulled him underneath.

It was only a moment later that the woods mended itself, healing its self-inflicted wound.

The wind calmed, vanished; the creek slowed, dimmed; the night became silent once more.

Michael walked away from the clearing, passed through the trees, and returned home.

- *Micah Castle*

My body  
is a graveyard  
of children  
I will never have

- S.G.

Black/Blue bruises  
watercolor upon my  
wasteland mind...  
X marks the spot  
upon my wrist  
where sanity was lost  
and I haven't found it yet.  
Wandering in mindless circles  
in the middle of fantasyland.  
Dysphoria and all I do  
is wait for that clock  
to t-t-t-tick my life away.

- S.G.

My beautiful girl  
melts in my hands like ice cream.  
Holes...in me and out.

Bringing lip to lip,  
I pray for oblivion—  
whiskey's white fire.

Black holes, flushing like  
intergalactic toilets.  
God takes out the trash.

- *David Estringel*

# Amor Malus

A photo series by *Danielle Wirsansky*

*Imagined moments from the life of serial killer Marcel Petiot,  
who was active in Europe during WWII.*



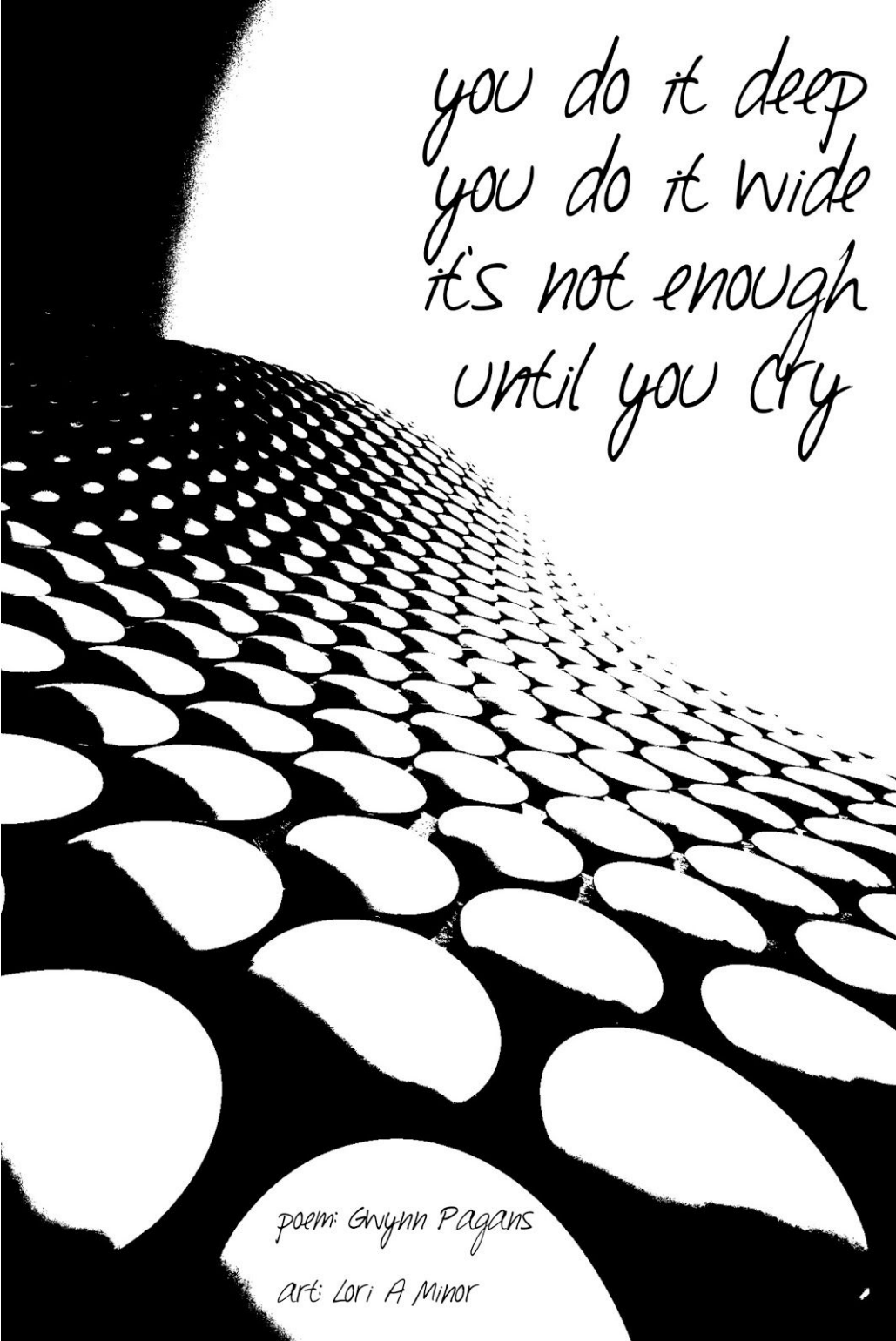












you do it deep  
you do it wide  
it's not enough  
until you cry

poem: Gwynn Pagans

art: Lori A Minor

- poem by Gwynn Pagans, art by Lori A Minor