

RHYTHM & BONES



DECEMBER 2018 | ISSUE THREE

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BREAKFAST ALONE

"MY HEART FLUTTERED AND
I COULDN'T HELP BUT SMILE.
HE ALWAYS SENT ME A MESSAGE
FIRST THING IN THE MORNING."

-ERIC S. FOMLEY

ISSUE THREE: BREAKFAST ALONE

December 2018

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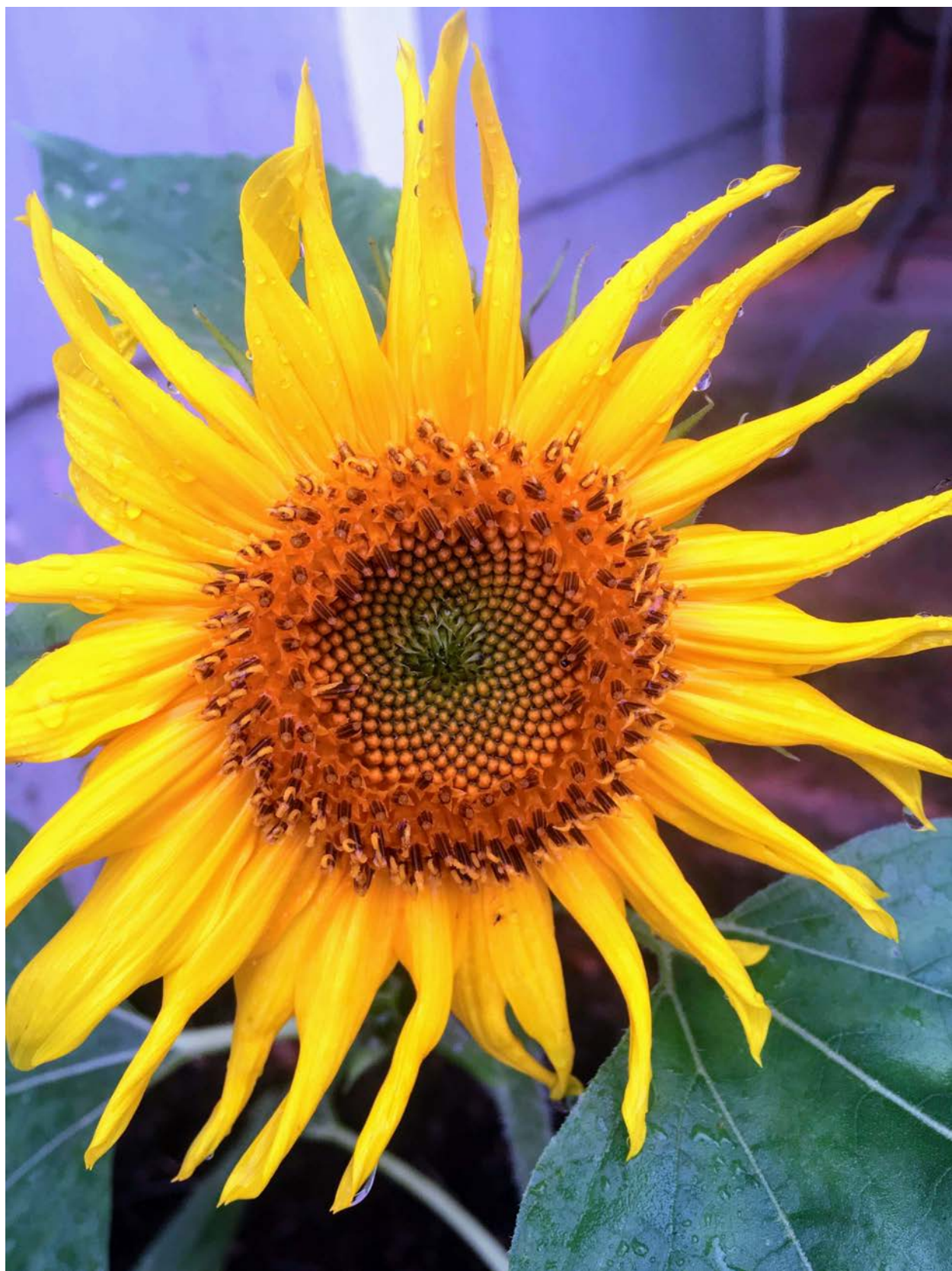
Photography by Sarah Huels, Neel Trivedi, Penny Sharman;
Artwork by Amy Alexander, Jen Rouse, Matthew Yates
Photography by Stephen Briseño, Sulyn Godsey

Creative Study:

Fabrice Poussin
collection of photography

EXCLUSIVE BONUS:

Interview with poet and editor, Kate Garrett
(Interviewer: Renee Firer/Tianna G. Hansen)



"Out of the Darkness" by Sulyn Godsey

A Letter from the Editor

The past few months have been a whirlwind for us, and we are beyond pleased and proud to bring you **Issue Three**. We weren't quite sure we would make it to the end of the year, but here we are: strong as ever; stronger, even. Our passion and motivation have not flickered out, if anything they have grown. Many things have happened in the past year, lots of time was wasted for us with our recent fiasco, but many discoveries were made in the process. We find ourselves reflecting on everything that has occurred for us, everything we have created. The most weighted accomplishment for us has been the creation of *You Are Not Your Rape (YANYR)*, our anthology speaking out against sexual abuse and assault and giving voice to survivors and their onlookers and supporters. We are endlessly grateful and moved by the reception this work has received and have to thank Kristin Garth for her co-editing efforts and making this into reality.

For our Issue Three, we are honored to highlight numerous talented writers, again giving voice to both emerging and established writers and shedding light on how trauma can be turned into art. How writing can act as an art of healing. We are excited to feature Kate Garrett as our exclusive interview, discussing her widespread published work, her life as an editor and mother, as well as her forthcoming full-length collection which we are publishing in April 2019.

We also have a special poem published here, honoring my sister-in-law, Michelle Hansen, who wrote a stunning poem for my recent wedding to her brother this past September. This was one of the greatest things to happen in the past year, getting married to my best friend. Michelle is a wonderful writer and this is her first publication. I hope everyone will give her a warm welcome.

This is also the first issue in which we have chosen to highlight a photographer for our Creative Study, and we are moved by the work of Fabrice Poussin, who we were originally hoping to include in YANYR, but due to the image quality and format of the anthology, we were happier to give him a highlight as his work deserves. We hope you will enjoy this issue as much as the others that have come out, and as always, be conscious and gentle with yourselves as some of these pieces deal with the darker sides of human nature and deep subjects which some may find disturbing and upsetting. We noticed, however, that there are a number of pieces in this issue which take a more light-hearted tone, and while this wasn't intentional, it fits the tone of entering the new year well, and coming out on the other side of chaos.

With much love, light, and adoration, we give to you our *Issue Three: Breakfast Alone*.

Warmly,

Tianna G. Hansen

Founder, Editor-in-Chief



“connected” by Stephen Briseño

Breakfast Alone

by Eric S. Fomley

The sun shimmered in through the curtains of my bedroom, warm rays that pulled me from my slumber. I opened my eyes and heard my phone vibrate.

“Good morning beautiful!” It read.

My heart fluttered and I couldn’t help but smile. He always sent me a message first thing in the morning.

“Good morning babe!” I replied. “How’s work?”

I got out of bed and made my way to the kitchen. His next message came just as I started warming up breakfast.

“Work’s okay. I probably won’t be home until after you’re asleep again.”

Work had been keeping him from me for a while. I missed him so much.

The microwave had almost finished when the power suddenly flicked off. I cursed. I hated everything about that old house.

I went down to the breaker box in the basement and flicked the misplaced switch back on. I gave myself a moment to lean against the wall. My chest was tight and I felt the tears welling up.

Back in the corner of the basement on his old desk, I saw the lights on the black box flashing from the outage. I forced myself to go over and reset the AI program.

After I reset, my phone vibrated. Tears streaked down my face.

“Good morning beautiful!”

I tried to smile. He always sent me a message first thing in the morning.

Eric S. Fomley is an American writer from Indiana. He is a member of the Codex Writers' Group. His fiction publications include Galaxy's Edge, Daily Science Fiction, and Flame Tree Press. You can read more about him and his work by following him on Twitter @PrinceGrimdark or going to his website ericfomley.com.



I See You

by Michelle Hansen

Looking out over a book.

I see you.

The night before I met you.

I was bold, we exchanged contact.

Who knew the next chapter?

We learnt from each other.

Leaned on each other, miles and an ocean apart.

You are my new kind of strength.

Somewhere in an ordinary world.

Through travel and circumstance.

Laughter, tears and shared hope.

We stand today to marry.

I see you.

A Michelin star meeting an alphabetizer.

In a book filled of unfilled pages.

Our story is about to start.

Difficult times may come.

We can read each other now even in the dark.

You are my newest chapter.

I'm me, you're you, together and stronger we're we.

We stand today to marry.

I see this and I see you.

Michelle Hansen wrote this as a special dedication for Tianna G. Hansen and her husband, Scott, Michelle's younger brother, and read this poem at their wedding. This is her first publication, but she has a promising future as a writer. She currently lives in Denmark.



Spring begins somewhere

by Jennifer Wolkin

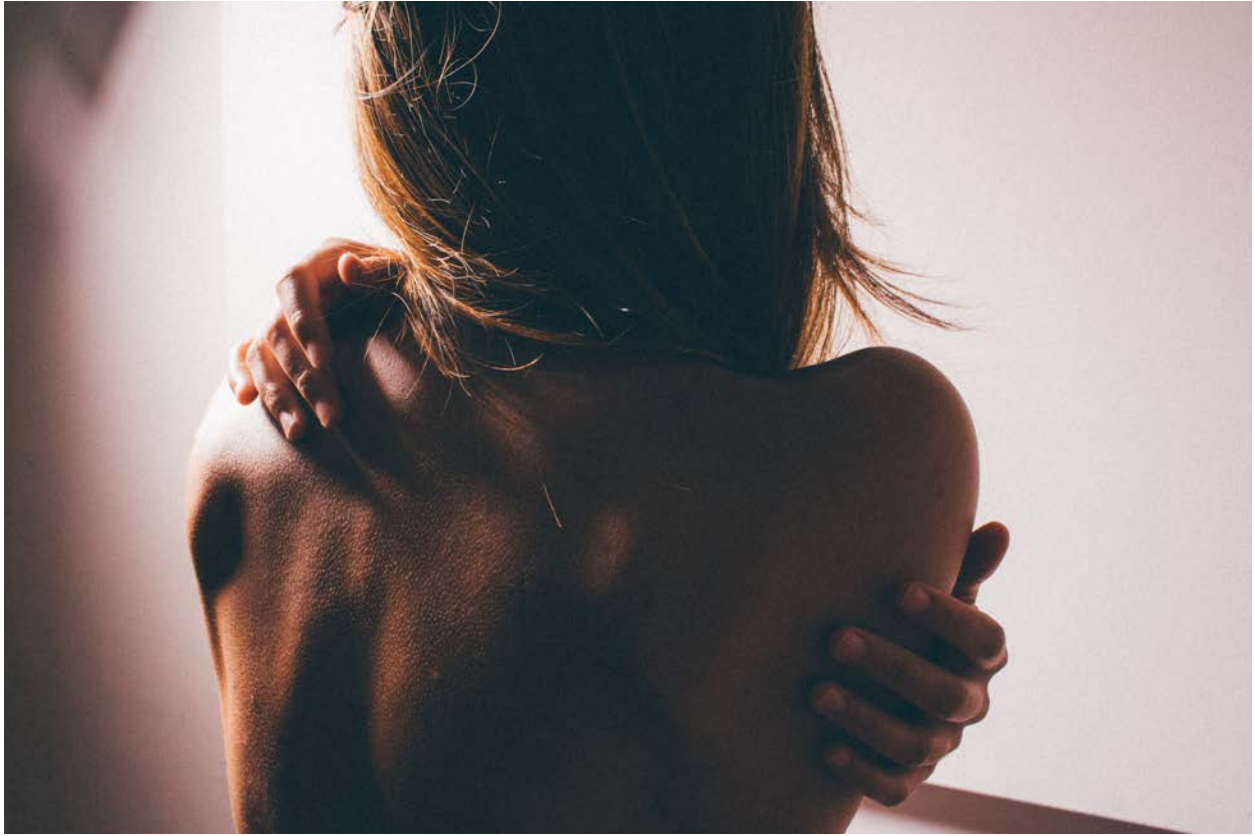
but yours is a winter mind-
memory, frozen
in time.

I'll be your hippocampus
so you can reminisce
of Hyacinth—

I'll be your

Spring.

Jennifer Wolkin is a health/neuro psychologist, speaker, writer, and mental health advocate. She is most passionate about writing at the intersection where the mind, body, brain and spirit meet - about the holistic human experience - through the eyes of both her own experience, and through her professional lens. She is touched by the profound pain that is both individually and collectively felt, how this pain can displace someone from others and their own selves, and yet, the profound capacity for resilience, healing and growth.



Volcanoes and Hurricanes

by Caitlin Cording

Sometimes my skin itches, but not like on the surface where all my freckles and scars are visible. It itches in a place my nails can't dig. It's as though there's something trapped between the layers—something that wriggles and squirms and yearns to gush through my pores. Sometimes I hear my brain buzzing, and when it does, it conjures memories that sting. I prefer silence for that reason. Stillness too. Whenever I take a bath, I hold my breath and stay as still as I can so the water can't slosh around. Sometimes I envision myself in a lake and duck underneath. When my throat starts burning like there's larva spurting from my stomach, I break the surface and gulp the steamy air.

I suppose if I had to label it, I'd call it a need for control. I don't know why I need it. I guess I just like to be reminded the world can be paused sometimes—that the heart of the hurricane is a serene one, and I can stay there, in its eye, and observe mass destruction without being a part of it.

Is that it? I need to believe one's soul can find peace even in the midst of chaos. Is peace what I'm truly seeking here?

I run my finger over the barrel's grooves and its scaly leather handle and contemplate the plausibility of this theory. I give it a three out of ten and sigh. My breath vaporises. It shouldn't be this cold in here. I touch the radiator, then snatch back my hand. It's *not* cold in here.

More insight. I've got to jot that down.

I grab my diary from the top drawer, take a moment to study the planets and stars adorning its cover, then open to the relevant page and scan the list entitled, *Epiphanies in Order of Appearance*.

- 1) *I can leave my body*
- 2) *I see things; ghosts?*
- 3) *I hear voices*
- 4) *They tell me to do things*

With each day that passes since *that day*, I've learnt something new about myself. Or maybe it's an old personality quirk I never realised I had until now.

I scrawl, '5. *My surroundings do not affect my body temperature*,' and slam shut the notebook. It makes a satisfying clap. I smile. Okay, maybe I do like some noises.

My gaze shifts to the gun.

I started scribbling down everything when I began losing track of whatever is happening to me. I thought keeping a diary would help me feel normal again after he had tainted me. I believed if I could find an explanation for each one of these things I experience now, then I realise I'm not the maniac the world suspects me to be. It's ironic, really, because after tonight, if the police uncover this and stamp it as evidence, then it'll be my ticket to the mental institution. Does realising this fact prove I'm sane? I don't know. I don't know much of anything anymore, except I need everything to stop. Just stop.

The gun is heavier than I expected. At best guess, I'd say it's about the weight of a standard garden-fence brick. I'm glad. It's nice to have something solid to hold in my most unpredictable moments. I like the sense of power deadly things give me. Holding them reminds me that I still have choices, that I'm still the one in charge of my own body and mind. It helps me to remember that this descent into madness isn't perpetual—not if I use the deadly things to do something about it, to make it end.

The handle creaks as I twist, and the door squeals when I pull it toward me. A peculiar smell, akin to burning plastic, wafts in my direction. Wrinkling my nose and fighting the urge to run to my diary, I tiptoe over the landing. Treading the threadbare carpet and taking care to dodge the gripping floorboards, I chew my bottom lip until blood fills my mouth. It tastes just how I reckon the gun would taste if I bit it—metallic. Imagining myself as the Pink Panther, I ease through the gap between the door and its splintered frame and into my dad's bedroom.

He snores. Not that I didn't know that already. I did. But tonight the snores seem different somehow. Deeper, louder, more ... *grunting*. His arms encircle his girlfriend, and he's drooling on her hair. If I were to paint the scene on canvas, I'd name it, 'Lying in a Bed of Lies.'

My index finger traces the trigger's smooth curve.

Just the fact he's sleeping taunts me. And the fact he can sleep so Goddamn soundly, with his limbs tangled in crisp sheets, is testimony to how little he cares about what he did to me—how nothing has changed for him since he stole my innocence. He's not the one with a hornets nest inside his head, or the one with the impenetrable itch. I doubt he feels the need to pour all his secrets onto the pages of a fucking diary.

The injustice of it all rises in me. I gulp. He omits a snort, and I snarl.

Sometimes I think of myself in terms of a natural disaster, as if I've always been an explosive volcano. My gut a molten chamber and I'm about to erupt.

I know I am.

Raising the gun, I wonder if I'll blaze like a comet or crash like a fallen meteorite. I gnaw on my inner cheek and cock the hammer. I don't care anymore. All I care about is unleashing this larva and escaping this black hole where he's imprisoned me.

I watch him tug her closer to him and slide down so his naked torso is pressed against her back. I wonder if his chest hair is prickling her exposed skin and making it itch. I wonder if the smell of his sour breath makes her feel dirty. I'll bet it does. I'll bet she wants to soak in the bath.

The invisible noose around my neck tightens until it crushes my windpipe. Voices start to whisper, stirring the air around me and making it whirl until it forms a hurricane.

I push the gun harder into my temple and squeeze.

Caitlin Cording wants to live in a world where love letters are always handwritten, ice cream vans come around in the winter, and watching funny cat videos online every day is a legal requirement.

When she's not wrestling with the thesaurus or bashing the keyboard, you can find her snoozing in the back row of the cinema, or writhing in the local tattoo parlour's chair.

From the foot-swelling world of retail, to the back-aching world of call centres, Caitlin has worked a variety of jobs. Now a full-time freelance writer, she is working toward finishing her first novel for young adults.

Learn more about Caitlin at twitter.com/caitlin_cording.



Nightfall

by Jen Persichetti

Dark velvet nights and betrayal consume me
It's been an eternity since I last saw the sun
Emotions ran high that night, as we recited our truth
I reminisce on the past as if it was an hour ago...
You would always list my worst qualities before my best
I admire your manipulation –
To this day I have no use for wishbones and butterflies
Scorpions and black sparrows are my weakness
Who needs daylight when the darkness and fog guide you?
The moon has become my muse and I live just to execute the sun

***Jen Persichetti** holds a Bachelors in Journalism and is a member of IAPWE – International Association of Professional Writers and Editors. Writing has always come naturally to her. It is her first love....she can't get enough. Jen decided to pursue writing because nothing brings her more joy than to put pen to paper. A collection of Jen's work has been growing over the years as personal journal entries. She hopes to share them with the world one day...Jen is striving to make that aspiration a reality.*



Suitcase Full Of Broken Dreams

by Amanda McLeod

I laid them all out on the bed, all the broken parts and shattered pieces of my dreams. For all I'd held on to them so tightly, they didn't seem to amount to much. But dreams can be priceless and you never know, especially if you're not an expert. So I wrapped them up carefully in sheets of old newspaper and packed them into my dented leather suitcase; then I dragged them down to the curio shop to see if they could be repaired, if they were worth anything. As I walked, the suitcase bashed against my knees. It was heavy, as broken dreams often are; they tend to get heavier the longer you carry them.

The curio shop smelled of dust, and things people didn't love enough to keep. These objects of neglect and despair seemed coated with a fine layer of glitter, in a bid to convince customers that other people's heartbreak was valuable. The only other client in the shop passed me on his way out the door. He was wearing a coat the colour of regret and cuffing furiously at his eyes. I wondered if his dreams were irreparable, or just not worth fixing.

I manoeuvred my suitcase between cloudy glass cabinets filled with oddly shimmering pieces of the collateral damage of living. It was impossible not to look; to see what shapes other people's unfulfilled desires took. I passed a case which held a shabby leather-bound volume open about half way through. The pages were yellowed and mouse-eaten around the edges, with only a few scant words written on them. Across the book lay a fountain pen, with a chewed tip and a broken nib. I realised this was the book someone couldn't finish; the story they couldn't tell. Even the film of glitter across it couldn't make it appeal. Nearby was a faded rosette, frayed ribbons hanging limply from a withered centre adorned with a disc reading 'someone for mayor'. I couldn't make out the name. This was someone's dream of making a difference, of contributing to civic life. On a plinth near the counter stood a music box, lid open, tiny ballerina figure in her minuscule tulle tutu frozen mid-pirouette. I turned the box, looking for the winding mechanism, and giving it three careful turns. Instead of some cheesy music box ditty and a spinning dancer, I was rewarded with a tuneless grinding sound, and a ballerina who lurched a drunken three quarter turn before stopping. A broken hearted little girl somewhere wasn't going to be a principal dancer, then.

I reached the counter at the back of the shop. My knees were purple and aching from having the heavy suitcase bash against them with every step I took. With one last effort I heaved my suitcase full of broken dreams up onto the counter, and peered about for the valuer.

I heard her before I saw her. She was humming a melancholy dirge, which drifted out through the open door behind the counter. There was a privacy screen, so I couldn't see what else might be through the door. Based on what I'd already seen in the shop, I was relieved; I didn't think I could take too much more of other people's sadness objectified. The sad, lilting song that drifted across me brought with it a soft cloak of despair, which settled on my shoulders.

The valuer appeared in the doorway, a tiny woman almost swamped by wild blonde curls streaked with silver that hung around her head like mist from a waterfall. She looked about the

same age as my mother, I thought, but something about her eyes seemed much older and much younger at the same time. They were slate grey, and I felt as though they saw me and through me and within me all at once; and knew all of me and had known me for millennia. I felt a tightness in my throat.

“How can I help you today?” she asked. I swallowed heavily.

“I have these...” I opened my suitcase and stared at the bundles wrapped in newspaper. “I’ve carried them around with me for years, even though they’re all broken,” I said in a rush. “I thought it was time to maybe see if any of them are worth repairing,” I drew a shaky breath, “or if I should just give up on them and see if others have any use for them.”

The valuer gave me a sympathetic half smile.

“All I can promise is that I’ll be honest with you,” she said, patting my arm gently. “It may not be what you want to hear, but everything you hear from me will be the truth.” She slid my suitcase across to one side, leaving an expanse of empty counter. “Let’s see, shall we?” And she took out my first wrapped bundle.

She unravelled the layers of newspaper, revealing a pair of tiny, ivory and lace booties. They sat in a nest of shredded cellophane in a clear plastic box riddled with cracks. I carted that dream of a baby around with me from my very first relationship until the end of my last one and beyond, until after yet another failed round of IVF my older sister suggested it might be time to let go. My eyes prickled as I looked at them. The valuer held the plastic box in her hand and surveyed it critically.

“There is nothing unique or special about this. I have a dozen pairs out back just like them.” She wrapped them back up and slid them to one side, without saying anything more, but I understood perfectly.

The valuer unwrapped my next bundle and stared at the travel guide. All the pieces were there - the embossed cover, the frontpaper with the handwritten message from my mother commemorating my graduation from university, each of the individual pages with my own notes and highlighted sections. All my plans, in pieces. The valuer opened the cover, checked the spine, counted the pages.

“Everything is here,” she said, looking up at me. “This can be repaired. We can rebind it all back together, inside the original cover.” She paused. “Of course the only value in it is the value you attach to it yourself. Sentimental.”

I’m surprised anything could be done with my dreams of travelling the world, given their age and fragile state, but I readily agree to having them repaired and agreed to a price and collection date.

She continued through my bundles of dreams, consigning some to abandonment and others to salvation, but none were rare treasures to anyone but me. Finally she came to the last one. Carefully she unwrapped it and lay it out in front of her. It was a set of tiny mirrors, each no bigger in circumference than a teacup. They were hinged together so they folded like a concertina, and each disc had an enamelled back that depicted a defining moment in my life. My breath froze in my lungs. I’d kept that one wrapped up and tucked away for so long I’d almost forgotten about it. The valuer raised her eyebrows.

“Now this,” she murmured, “this is something incredibly special. Nobody has these anymore. They're all so obsessed with who they want to be, or who they think they should be, they forget who they are. There are a few chips, but nothing that renders this useless. It's not really damaged, just unfulfilled.” She turned it over in her hands, running her fingers over it, tracing the enamel. “This is rare. I can assure you an excellent price. Will you sell it to me?”

I stared at it, sitting there in a stranger's palm. My dream to truly know myself. Chipped and battered by the demands others had placed on me, buried under the construct of what I thought the ‘best me’ should be like. I considered the other dreams I'd seen, out in the shop. They seemed trivial, compared to this one. Even the other broken dreams I had in the suitcase when I arrived seemed insignificant beside this one. And yet I'd pushed it aside for so long. I thought of my non-existent baby, the travel I didn't do, all the other broken dreams in my suitcase, and I began to wonder. Had burying this one broken all the others? Was I ready to give this dream up?

As I watched the valuer's fingers curve around it, my dream told me the answer. I took it from her hands and wrapped both of mine around it.

“I'm sorry,” I said. “I'm not ready to part with that one.”

The valuer smiled.

“I know that,” she said, “but if I hadn't asked, you never would have realised.”

Amanda McLeod is an author and artist based in Canberra, Australia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Spelk Fiction, 101 Words, Five2One's #thesideshow, and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter @AmandaMWrites



The Child, Up in the Tree Again

by *Eric James Cruz*

My daughter spends the last of June pulling herself up,
one-armed swings and bellows from being
between two spaces. In unburdened light
she climbs into the dark hours barefooted and far enough away that
if she slips, her bones will give.

Dangling in a nation of empty nests, wingless as she becomes
part of it, I forget there are a million joys awaiting us.
I see part of myself drifting; I already feel too old to cradle her weight;
then, the catch in my throat--a longing
as she tosses down small fruit we will share later.

Eric James Cruz is a high school English teacher and poet who lives in San Antonio, Texas. His most recent work appears or is forthcoming in 8 Poems, Ghost City Review, Carve, and River River Review. Cruz is currently pursuing his MFA at Warren Wilson's MFA Program for Writers. Follow him @encodedmuses on Twitter.



The Huntsman

*Creative Nonfiction
by Hannah Storm*

We're slow dancing to Bryan Adams. He can't understand the song, the boy with his hands on my bum. But I can.

I pull away, look into his eyes, like the words tell me. They dazzle in the disco ball. He pulls me closer.

His lips slide across my face like a snail and he tastes of garlic. When I gasp for air, I breathe in body odour.

We move apart when the song stops. It still has a few more weeks at number one. But long after it has slipped from the charts, it will pin itself to my memories like Robin Hood's arrows.

I am 14 and this is my first French exchange. It's also my first French kiss. That sounds so much better than snogging. If it wasn't for the garlic snail it would almost be perfect, especially since it happened during the theme tune to my favourite film.

If I am Maid Marian, my prince of thieves is Sylvain, the cousin of my school exchange partner Aurelie. Her father is a huntsman and they live in a cottage on the edge of France's own Sherwood Forest.

I wake the next morning, lyrics of lust in my head. I footstep across the floorboard to dreams of beautiful maidens and handsome heroes. I throw open the wooden shutters to my own fairy tale forest.

Spilt blood stains the decking. I smell flesh and hear flies. Strips of sunlight sharpen the dark bristles.

I creep down the wooden stairs to the kitchen, toe-tapping to musical memories. Smell hits before sight. The metal tang of fresh blood, the fat, misshapen flesh of the beast straddled across the kitchen table. The family cat mews from beneath folds of meat that drip dark juice onto the tiled floor.

It's the same table we sat at yesterday, dunking our brioche into tepid bowls of drinking chocolate. The same we'll sit at tomorrow when I'll scour the wood for dark patches where the blood seeped in.

'Un sanglier, Sarah', they laugh at my look of horror. I know the local delicacy is wild boar, but it's the first time I've seen one like this.

Foreign laughter follows me stumbling through shuttered shadows. Heave open the wooden door and I am blinded by light. He's there staring at me, Sylvain. It's as if by fending off the hounds, I've found myself in front of the huntsman.

He pulls me towards him, twists my wrist, tries to kiss me in the street. I wrench from his grip, trip inside, past the table, blood still dripping on the floor.

There's a door that I dive for, throw myself in, locking the toilet behind me. Two huge eyes terrified in the tiny mirror over the moulding sink. He's coaxing me, trying to draw me from my den.

Laughter in the background and I imagine them stabbing, slicing, finally stewing the dead animal.

Then there's a flash of knife down the side of the door. I pray the lock will hold. It appears again, shining metal against the tiled floor. Blade bloodied from the prey.

Hannah Storm is a journalist, media consultant, mother and marathon runner who has been writing since she can remember. She has only recently discovered the joy of flash fiction and short stories and tries to do as much of it as possible when not wearing one of her many other hats. @hannahstorm6



“thorns and flowers and hummingbird” by Jen Rouse

And These, My Least Best Selves

by Jen Rouse

Self #1

First each leaf shredded from the philodendron vine, followed by a ritual gutting of the stuffed puppets.

What do you want to talk about today?

So many, so many mouthfuls of sand. Gritted teeth and decomposing jaw, I crawl the pale green walls like something damned.

Sit with your feelings.

Nails rake the leather from each couch cushion. Out of the corner of this post-historic eye, the glimmer of a small glass cat in a sand tray. *Mine*, I hiss, *meeeeeeee*.

Please, let me help you.

And from my chest I wrench it free, this bludgeoned and silent heart, placing it gently, so gently at her feet.

Self #2

And you said your prayers and played pretty things. Good girl, Alice. But you cry into your pillow nonetheless, flooding the room with the giant cups, spinning in thimbles and stars.

Mother, why have you left me here? Where they rip at my clothes and tear at my skin? I feel I will never be quite pretty again...

and Tom Petty dances in. You are Alice made of cake. A cold slice from your abdomen smeared on slick and demented smiles. Every greedy bastard standing above you with a piece. And you look down with your giant Alice head and think, *Why, yes, it has come to this*. A handful of lyrics and a shit-ton of weed. Never the straight teeth and starch they imagined for you, just the lunging guitars and phthalo blue. Devouring, this man in the shiny top hat. And so you say, as your body slips away, under tooth and under tongue, *Here's hoping the frosting is fine, you sad fucks*. ♥Alice

Self #3

The night is ice, blue and burning. Every door is shut now. The snow-glowing streetlamps throw down their shadows. I refuse to look at anyone passing by me. Just the sound of one determined boot slamming the pavement and then the other. Just the sound of breath escaping into frozen curls. There is a conversation with the night I have lived inside of for many winters--walking into the wind without a coat, clawing through brush until bare fingers bleed, waiting for the sky to open. The stars lick at wisps of clouds. The moon sighs. I used to sit inside of houses. Where hands reached for mine around warm mugs and candlelight, where gentle dogs nestled at my feet, where someone else made dinner and stroked me to a contented sleep. So long ago, the softness. So long ago, the days when I felt almost beautiful.

To live in the land of the missing. To hear a voice and not be able to listen or respond: "Why are you fighting me?"

I don't know.

In the car I put my head on the steering wheel and scream. It is like this and it is not.

I am not the child in the doorway, tripping, tearing a hole in her knee on a loose nail. I am the child in the doorway, waiting, waiting, waiting. For no one.

“I love that little girl very much,” says the voice.

Then I will protect her from you.

The child throws herself against the sky. “No! Not this time!”

But you will get hurt. There are no more houses, warm fires, gentle caresses. There are no more inside places. There are no more chances. Or women to love.

“Let her hold my hand.”

You should be quiet. You should want less. You can’t stay with her.

There is only anger, ice white and flickering. Always underneath the calm.

“I am in pain. And you aren’t listening.”

I have taken care of you for so long.

“You have ignored me.”

I have kept you safe.

“You have kept me quiet.”

I have kept you quiet.

“Let me talk to you.”

I am afraid of what you will say.

Self #4

She comes back sun-kissed and still in love. *Someday, when we leave them. When it’s over. When you have no other commitments. When the tide turns. When your day seems endless, and you can’t stand the feeling of your heart collapsed in your throat. When you can escape for more than lunch. When you’ve licked the last crumbs from your fingers and all you taste is me. When you come to the garden, and I am there, sun-drenched, hand resting on pelvis. When the hours melt into this one drunken lull. When.*

Jen Rouse's poems have appeared in Poetry, Poet Lore, Midwestern Gothic, Wicked Alice, Southern Florida Poetry Journal, Yes Poetry, Crab Fat Magazine, Up the Staircase, and elsewhere. She was named a finalist for the Mississippi Review 2018 Prize Issue and was the winner of the 2017 Gulf Stream Summer Contest Issue. Rouse's chapbook, Acid and Tender, was published in 2016 by Headmistress Press. Her collection Riding with Anne Sexton, came out this fall from Bone & Ink Press in collaboration with dancing girl press. Find her at jen-rouse.com and on Twitter @jrouse.

****Purchase her newest collection CAKE, which contains this poem and many more, from Headmistress Press.***



Pewter and Pebble

by Savannah Slone

birds coast in configurations out the window,
reflections on your laptop screen. hypnotic ribcage

heaves.

Coming Out is putting everything on the line:
an orphic sinkhole, knowing life will undoubtedly alter.

unveiling
your inner workings,
your sinkhole of self
bearing your narcotic
teeth as you bite
into that ripe
peach
and warm honey oozes

out, dribbling
down your prickly
chin—

neck and hands
and thoughts
left immobile with adhesive.

guzzling down that effervescent elixir seeking an assemblage of catharsis,
left only wilting as your tinny voice sounds.

sharing that bumblebee
hum of words that shouldn't have to be said.

the world goes pigeon grey for just a moment.

Savannah Slone is a queer writer who is completing her M.F.A. in the Pacific Northwest. Her poetry and short fiction has appeared in or will soon appear in Heavy Feather Review, Boston Accent Lit, The Aironaut, Ghost City Press, decomP magazinE, Maudlin House, FIVE:2:ONE, Pidgeonholes, TERSE Journal, Glass, and elsewhere. She enjoys reading, knitting, hiking, and discussing intersectional feminism. You can read more of her work at www.savannahslonewriter.com.



The Perfect Woman

by Gillian Davies

He closed his eyes, hands running over his creation, checking for imperfections and finding none. He sighed and looked at the form before him, the perfect woman sculpted, lovingly, from clay. The clay was drying now, moist grey turning to a milky white, and he stepped back for a better view.

The hair wasn't the right colour, and neither were the eyes, but that would come afterwards, when the Gods blessed her with life. He frowned, wondering what he would do if they continued to rebuff his prayers. But they'd granted those of his master, Pygmalion, and this sculpture was far better than his. He heard voices outside and scowled as he recognised Pygmalion and his daughter Metharme - she who had turned him down and broken his heart. He clutched at the sacking that littered the floor, throwing it over his masterpiece, to hide it.

"Sir" he said, turning and bowing low as his master entered.

Pygmalion bowed slightly and moved closer to his pupil.

"Your latest creation, Idas?"

Idas nodded, his eyes straying from Pygmalion to Metharme, standing silently in the doorway.

"I'd very much like to see it," Pygmalion said as he moved closer to the sculpture, his hand outstretched towards the sacking.

"Of course, but it's not finished." Idas pushed in front of Pygmalion, taking his arm and turning him around. "I can show you something I've completed. It's in the other chamber."

Metharme stood back as Idas steered Pygmalion past her, then moved slowly towards the sculpture. She plucked at the sacking and it fell to the ground. She held her breath in wonder at the image, then raised her eyes to the ceiling.

"Such beauty should live and breathe," she whispered.

Light bathed the sculpture, giving colour to her hair, eyes and cheeks. The limbs moved, at first awkwardly, then with a fluidity that echoed the beauty of the form.

Metharmes' eyes opened wide as the sculpture stepped towards her, unaware that Pygmalion and Idas had returned.

The living statue spoke, her scarlet lips opening, as she embraced the other girl.

"My perfect woman."

Gillian lives in a small village in Wales, on the edge of a National Park. Being the eldest of a group of cousins, she started to make up her own stories to entertain them and began submitting to writing sites. Some of her short stories and poetry have been published in anthologies and she is currently completing her second novel.



STORM SURGE

by Jennie Badger

The water charged angrily
Cold and black, foaming and relentless,
It rose

Like a furious hungry beast
It gorged, unsatisfied
Obliterating everything in its path

I held on tight as its wrathful maw came for us
With one brutal tug, it sucked me in
And ripped you away

The three of us tumbling like marionettes
Through its entrails
Clawing, reaching, gasping we spilled

Then, silence.

I lie broken and cold
Alone in a sea of destruction
Remnants of a life I knew

Float beyond my grasp

My heart has been ripped from me
But I still feel it beating
And breath is all that remains

So I breathe.

*Born and raised in Cuero, Texas, **Jennie Badger** has lived in San Antonio since graduating from Trinity University. Professionally, she has worked in public relations, practiced law and written for a local magazine. None of that remotely relates to the volunteer position she held for six years as choreographer and director of middle school musicals for her children's elementary school. She and her husband of 23 years are parents to three children – a soon-to-be college senior, college freshman and high school sophomore.*



Shadows Cannot be Seen in the Pitch-Black

by L. N. Holmes

Tessa stares out toward the woods, alert to the sounds of yipping and barking coyotes, flinching at the scream of a rabbit. It unsettles her every time: that eerie cry, the tone and timbre. A dying rabbit that sounds like a terrified child. In the flat Ohio countryside, nearly every noise carries on the wind.

Out here the night embraces its full darkness. Tessa's wrinkled hands hold the handles of a garbage can. She nearly forgot tomorrow is trash day, is starting to forget many things these days. It's spring, the air chilled from the recent rain. At the end of the gravel driveway, across the road, the unplowed field separates her from the woods. The trees are nearly indiscernible against

the horizon, their presence more felt than observed. The dim glow thrown from the lights on her porch does little to brighten the near surroundings. Even the cascade of stars, the radiant shine of Venus and Jupiter, cannot obliterate what her late father would call the “pitch-black” of this night.

In the distance the screaming halts. Tessa gently places the garbage can down at the end of the driveway. Trepidation eclipses her initial discomfort. The silence sounds too loud. She tries not to think of teeth ripping flesh from bone. Thinks of it anyway. Turns and speed walks back up the driveway to her front door. Rushes back inside to the safety of enclosed spaces, of man-made shelter.

It is silent in the house too. She walks to the couch and sinks onto it. When her husband died unexpectedly last year, he created a kind of vacuum, sucking all the noises that filled this place down into the quiet of the grave. It was like a laugh cut off, startling in its sudden absence. No more football games turned up too loud. No more sizzle and pop of eggs frying in the morning. No more whir of model helicopters, flying through her kitchen window, dipping as if to bow to her. No more soft giggling in bed, when they talked about the good old days, about when their children were young and not living on far-flung coasts. No more whispered reassurances that he would be there as she slipped farther into the spiral of disease, which would eventually make her forget she had a husband at all.

None of her children know yet. Her reluctance to make them worry, to wreck their lives, stops her from making the phone calls. Her youngest, her son, is a father yet again, surprised by his wife’s pregnancy in their early forties. Her daughters teach biology and finance at universities on opposite coasts. How can she burden them now? How can she ask them to put aside their own needs to take care of her? To help her sell the farm their father worked until his last days?

But she lives alone out here: her, and the coyotes, and their prey.

Tomorrow she’ll call her son and they’ll make a plan. Maybe she can help with the baby. Or maybe they’ll put her in a home.

The silence is too much. She decides to turn on the television. The remote lies on her husband’s recliner, which is across from the couch and next to the window. She’s gotten into the habit of placing the remote on the arm of the chair because he lost it so often. When she rises up to retrieve it, she notices something like a shadow move outside. She presses her nose to the glass and squints against the dark. The porch lights are still on. Yellow eyes shine momentarily then disappear like burned-out bulbs. There seems to be a shadow in her yard, inching closer to her window. She holds her breath. The shadow halts a few yards from the house. Something in her understands its fear, its hesitation to move forward.

Before long her eyes are straining, blurring, from the effort to see the animal. She’s sure it is a coyote: maybe a young male, chased away from its pack. She blinks and it seems the shadow disappears. She wonders if it actually existed, or if her brain and eyes deceived her, a trick of the lack of light. Another answer eluding her.

She moves away from the glass, snatches the remote, retreats to the couch. In the glow of the television, she draws in a long breath, reminds herself there aren't answers to everything. Besides, what shadows can truly be seen in the pitch-black?

*L. N. Holmes is the author of the micro-chapbook, **Space, Collisions** (Ghost City Press). Her flash fiction has appeared in *Fathom*, *Newfound*, *Vestal Review*, *Obra/Artifact*, *Crack the Spine*, and other magazines and journals. Her story, "Phoenix Fire Fight," won the Apparition Lit April Flash Fiction Contest. You can learn more about her at lnholmeswriter.wordpress.com.*



"Braving the Storm" by Sulyn Godsey

Making a winter coat

by Penny Sharman

I am bringing these things to you,
memories from the stone house where
we walked out from doors to moorland.

I a child of violet heather who gazed over
the backs of sheep, who saw big skies
in small shoes, where light expands forever
in skulls.

All the potions and herbs were gathered
into a pouch, a daily duty like baking bread.
I a child am bringing these things to you

when time came to knit the fur from
heather buds and sheep tufts,

to card, to comb them by hand
and fingers, always in the light,
the spotlight on bog pools
full of rain.

Here was the act
of making the coat
the girl to woman
the waking nights of visions,
the seeing of dark sky,
Orion's belt, the Bear,
stars to pluck, to pull
down knowledge,
to weave them as jewels
into fur and skin.

To weave yellow gorse flowers,
cotton tops, black juniper berries,
to proof the coat, to grow me,
to humanise me into new skin.
Here then, I bring my coat to you.

Penny has been writing poetry for over 10 years and has an MA in Creative Writing from Edge Hill University. Penny has been published in various magazines and anthologies such as The Interpreters House, Obsessed with Pipework, Poetry Quarterly, Outburst, Picaroon, Strix and Marble and also Beautiful Dragons Anthologies. Penny is an artist, photographer and therapist with an eye for the lens and music for the words. She loves to dance when her ageing joints allow.



Vacant Vessel

by Lindsay Popolizio

A cold doctor's office
"You should schedule an appointment
with our infertility specialists."
I pretend to be polite
just to get away

Everyone on the street
on the internet
friends of friends
fertile with joy

The universe sends signs
a promise of children's laughter
My son talks to me in my dreams
And I wake up to vacancy

Each moon passes by
Lonely and tired

Strung out, insane
Intuition burning

A woman's desire
is a mountain of strength
With each disappointment
I still pee on a stick
of Hope

***Lindsay Popolizio** is the author of Love Isn't Always on Time. You can find her musing on writing and supporting indie authors @LindsPopolizio on Twitter.*



Little White Lies

by Steve Campbell

“You get those from telling lies, you know.”

She nods down at the white marks that are etched into the surface of my fingernails which, like those on my other hand, are bitten down to blunt stubs. The surrounding flesh is raw where I've gnawed and pulled at the skin. I curl my fingers into my palm, ashamed of what they reveal.

“So what have you been lying about?” She asks.

I flick my eyes towards the ceiling in search of an answer.

“Nothing,” I say, returning her gaze.

I keep my eyes wide and fixed on hers while she scans my face for something that says differently.

“Hmmm.” She blinks and looks away but not because she's conceded.

I gather her hand in mine, taking care to avoid the drip line that's taped down across the back of it, and stoke her hand with my thumb.

“It's going to be okay,” I say, doing everything I can not to look down at my fingernails.

Steve Campbell has short fiction published or forthcoming in places such as *Spelk*, *Fictive Dream*, *MoonPark Review*, *formercactus*, *Twisted Sister Lit Mag*, and *Idle Ink*. He somehow finds time to manage *EllipsisZine.com*. You can follow him on twitter via @standondog and read other work on his website, standondog.com.



The Times I Was Almost a Mother

Creative Nonfiction

by Amber Aspinall

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Whenever an adult asked me if I wanted kids, I said I didn't know. I thought it was a ridiculous question to ask a child. But one day, after another round of abuse from the terrible team of my mother and grandmother, I wanted a baby. I realised that I had no family. My mother had always been terrible, but after my grandfather's death, my grandmother became unrecognisable. She had lost half her body weight through the stress of his illness, and with it, the happy family facade she had managed to keep up during my childhood. The cheery, cuddly nan was dead to me, and her ghost could only be seen by those on the outside.

I wanted someone who I could love who would really, truly love me back. Maybe not even a real baby. Maybe one of those animatronic dolls that you sometimes get given in school to prevent teenage pregnancy or whatever. Something that needed me. Someone.

I had a few friends, but none of them close. My home situation had only worsened as I got older and my mother feared any independence that I might try to grab hold of. Desperate for any sense of being wanted, I fell into an abusive relationship. I was raped two weeks in, though I wouldn't admit to myself for some time that that was what happened. One day whilst at college, I went to shut a window, complaining that a smell from outside was making me feel sick.

"You're not pregnant, are you?" an acquaintance joked. She was the same person who had commented on how creepy and possessive my boyfriend seemed. She was right about him.

"You're didn't say no - are you pregnant?"

The possibility kicked me in the chest. I had been feeling a little strange recently.

"I don't know." I said.

She told me about how she had become pregnant at 16 and had an abortion. I wanted to know what it was like. We talked about what I was going to do. My friends, who had been in on the conversation, wanted to take me to the college nurse, but it was too early to take a test. I can't remember how it happened, but I told my mother when I got home about my concern. I had only had my first kiss four months prior, and she knew that I preferred girls. She didn't ask for details about how it happened, and I didn't offer them. I was told I was stupid and a plan was made to buy pregnancy tests as soon as the week was over.

The day came to go into town to make the purchase. I took an iron supplement after breakfast, asking aloud about whether it was OK to take if you were pregnant.

"Well you wouldn't be keeping it, would you, so it doesn't matter."

My mother had already made that decision for me.

I had terror ringing through me all morning. I was convinced that I was pregnant. Despite everything, I thought about "my baby". The thought of not having him or her terrified me almost as much.

In typical fashion, my mother drew out our trip before I could get the tests, insisting we first get lunch and she try on clothes. Advertisements for baby products seemed to be everywhere, looking at me and asking me if I was ready. I said how scared I was. I was told there was no point in being scared now.

I took the test the next morning, with a full bladder as instructed. With the stick in a cup of my pee, my mother crouched over it as I sat on the toilet. After the three-minute wait, she took it out.

"Not pregnant," she said, matter of fact. "Good."

My heart dropped as she took the stick out to throw it away. I thought back to the words of the girl in class, how she'd told me "talk to him, it makes it easier".

I texted him. We weren't together anymore - he had suggested an "open relationship" after I said I might be pregnant. I said that even though I had been scared to death, I was also kind of sad. He messaged back to say that it was probably just from the break up. It most definitely wasn't. I hated that fucking bastard.

There was no way I could admit to anyone else that part of me desperately hoped for a baby. I had to keep on smiling and pass on the good news to my friends.

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I had gone a few years without thinking too much of babies. Then my wife's younger sister got pregnant. I was the first person to see the first scan. My wife and I knew that her sister and her boyfriend would struggle. The baby, a girl, wasn't planned, and whilst we got on with her parents, we knew that they weren't suddenly going to become responsible. However, they made the decision to have her, and so we hoped that they would try their best.

My sister-in-law became severely depressed not long after the baby was born, and with her boyfriend providing little help, the baby came to us when she was 3 weeks old, still tiny and utterly dependent. The first night that I held her against my chest, my head resting gently on hers, I felt that she was intrinsically part of me. I had found serenity, and it belonged in this little girl. We took to looking after her like ducks to water. By day three, in my mind – as much as I tried to fight it – with her own mother professing to not want her, she was firmly mine.

Friends and family came to see us every day that she was with us. It was a whirlwind, hectic time, but love came at the baby girl from all sides, and I helped to pour it into her as she relied on me throughout each day. When we were brought brand new, beautiful clothes for her by my wife's family, I secretly took this as a sign that she had been accepted as being ours. It was talked about, that we might adopt her. I said over and over again, "I would take her in a heartbeat". I didn't know if that was even quick enough.

She was taken from us, then given back again. This went on for a while, becoming more and more painful each time. She was simultaneously all mine, and not mine at all. It has now reached a relatively stable point, and I barely see her at all. This, I can cope with. It's when I see her and how wonderful she is, and in contrast to her wonder, how much she is neglected that hurts me. I know that I could give her the life she deserves and needs, and yet I have no say in it, even though I was responsible for her first smile, her first laugh.

Amber Aspinall is a 23-year-old Creative Writing student from Kent, England. She believes that pain and comfort should be given equal attention, never forgetting either of them.



Hodor

by Gervanna Stephens

And when you hurt me,
seeking the opposite of what I had to give,
I still held the damn door open
your safety net to fall into.

Gervanna Stephens is a Jamaican poet and proud Slytherin with congenital amputation living in Canada. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Bone & Ink, Rose Quartz, Persisan Sugar, 8 poems, TERSE. Journal, WusGood.black, Whirlwind Magazine, Enclave and Anti-Heroin Chic. She hates public speaking, has two sisters who are way better writers than her and thinks unicorns laugh when we say they aren't real. Tweets @ gravitystephens



Q&A

by Jack B. Bedell

You'd probably chuckle to know I pass
your grave every morning bringing my kids
to school. They've asked all the questions
their teachers have told them to ask,
and I've answered as best I could:

Did he want to die?

Probably, but not
that night, and not in his parents' house.

How did it happen?

From the beginning?
Coltrane, Hendrix, the dude from Blind Melon.
They were all beautiful to him. Release.
A slowing of heart. Sleep. Stop.

What was it like?

He always said
it was like swimming in honey.

*Why would he do something that made him
sick every time he did it?*

The other side
of sickness or pain is heaven, and that
lasts much longer than it takes
to empty your stomach.

Do you miss him?

I miss the way his pick hand
moved so casually over the strings of his bass,
how perfectly his thumb glided
down the neck of his guitar. His
potato rolls, the glaze he made for pastries.

Why couldn't you stop him?

I held him
like a brother, threw him against the wall
by his collar like a parent, set him free
to make his own choice like God does.
That river only flows downhill.

What do you remember most about the last time you saw him?

This one I always have trouble answering out loud,
how your stubble felt like needles on my cheek.

Jack B. Bedell is Professor of English and Coordinator of Creative Writing at Southeastern Louisiana University where he also edits *Louisiana Literature* and directs the Louisiana Literature Press. His latest collections are *Elliptic* (Yellow Flag Press, 2016), *Revenant* (Blue Horse Press, 2016), and *Bone-Hollow, True: New & Selected Poems* (Texas Review Press, 2013). He has recently been appointed by Governor John Bel Edwards to serve as Louisiana Poet Laureate 2017-2019.



“Shared Landscape” by Sarah Huels

Convergence

by Sarah Huels

My mother, my son, and I.

Fierce, fiercer, and smoother of storms and ruffled feathers.

Anchored calmly in my chair with boy on my lap, picture book in my hands, and the elderly lady sitting in chair beside me.

I read, slowly and gently, my voice flowing in to the soft afternoon air of the quiet room. I turn the pages and lovingly show the pictures to fierce and fiercer. Their eyes are wide with innocent delight and wonder at the discovery of new worlds.

A wave of sadness and joy at the sheer beauty and loss of the moment almost knocks me flat.

Fierce and fiercer are but innocents afloat on a vast ocean of unknowing. One moving backwards and one moving forwards. This is the moment they converge. I am the boat, the oars, the bale bucket, the rope. The smoother of storms and ruffled feathers, as we sit, read and breath.

My mother, my son, and I.

***Sarah Huels** - Born 1965 in Toronto Canada, lived in Lorraine QC and Montreal QC until Jan 1 1970. Grew up in Peterborough Ontario. Stared writing little stories in Grade 3. Always a voracious reader. Definitely a romantic admirer of 70's. Observer and photographer of minutiae. Poems are an extension of that. Live with my husband and son in Newmarket, Ontario.*



As if a door has been opened

by Tara Isabel Zambrano

Rangrez, the dyer, paints my body deep blue, like a summer night, to let the evil out, an alien girl under my skin who has slept with a lot of men. “The heat inside your body has blown you off course,” he says and starts with a fresh coat of paint. I shiver and scan the room, searching for a warm place. Then I fixate my gaze where sunlight is drilling a hole in the wall.

He reaches the soft skin behind my knees and uses his fingers instead of a brush. His breath strokes the hair on my thighs. Out the window, the houses look like distant neighbors watching us. I think of his wife and children, see their faces in his. The smell of the paint on his hands draws me closer.

When he touches my underarms, I bite my lip and imagine rolling in colors: indigo and crimson, carmine and ochre, painting each other's body with our names. I forget about my life in the city, the concrete running for miles, rising to divide the horizon. I try to recall the faces of my lovers, their asses stuck between my thighs, their shadows flickering in my dim-lit studio. I feel the heat in my cheeks, the quickening breath. It's impossible to be someone else than who I am. I'm a sex-crazed devil. I'm a train in search of a wreck. The skin around the neck is pinched and nervous, he tells me to relax.

I collect my breath. The paint stains my skin, covers the paranoia flowing over my bones. His hand slips to my navel, rests there for a moment longer as if making a connection with my insides. There is a rush of saliva in my mouth. From the window, the sunlight splinters and casts golden rectangles on the floor. He tosses his hair back, away from his eyes as if a door has been opened. I imagine brown-eyed babies with him and let his fingers slide in between my thighs. But he isn't distracted; he carefully traces the curves and lines, the tip of his tongue showing between his teeth.

I'm dreaming of him while he's here. I'll dream of him when he's gone.

Dusk falls slowly. When I emerge from my dreams, he is collecting his things. There is a stoop in his voice when he instructs me to wash my body at dawn. The indigo on my body is capturing light and whispering a language I don't understand. I see my skin peeling away, clustered blue kernels scribing in air like unfinished sentences. My body drips with memories. The door is yanked open. I pull air into my lungs and start talking to an empty room. I imagine a life without loving my body so much. I imagine a life without waiting to be saved.

Tara Isabel Zambrano works as a semiconductor chip designer in a startup. Her work has been published in *Tin House Online*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Slice*, *Bat City Review*, *Yemassee*, *The Minnesota Review* and others. She is Assistant Flash Fiction Editor at *Newfound.org* and reads prose for *The Common*. Tara moved from India to the United States two decades ago and holds an instrument rating for single engine aircraft. She lives in Texas.



"Some Turtles are Safer Than Others"
Digital collage with photograph and art by Amy Alexander

Weight of the World

by Amy Alexander

When the turtle bore the world on its back,
only the rock could break it.
We were slow, then.

The rock was slower,
collapsing into gravity,
its always lover,
so the turtle was whole
over many springs,
laying down the shell circles,
telling stories to its children,
children of mud,
distant cousins of rocks,
crawling, red-eared,
out of muck,
that was how it was
for many years.

Karl Benz's tri-car was slow, too,
made for pleasure,
but faster than horses,
then measured by them,
their bodies piled up
and turned to power,
more and more matted sorrels,
sinews, sodden,
pelvises of women stacked
all the way to Talladega,
to turtles cracked by the millions
on their mating walks in spring
and I am bothered by this
in a way most people find to be tedious,
too sensitive,
they whisper,
too much watching
the side of the road.

In another time,
they would bleed me
to force out the demons
or burn me at the stake.

At the automobile lot
for a used car,
a baby in my belly,
unwed,
I couldn't find the love for speed

and asked my father to choose one for me.
When I'd told him I was expecting,
he looked at me like a broken woman,
and I felt my back snap,
felt the world on me,
then signed the papers
not knowing that a week later,
I would wake up in a pool of red
and remember how many turtles I couldn't save.

Amy Alexander is a poet, visual artist, and homeschooling mother living in Baton Rouge, close to the mighty Mississippi. Her poetry and/or artwork has appeared in The Coil, Cease Cows, Mooky Chick, The Remembered Arts, The RKVRY Quarterly Literary Journal, Mojave Heart Review and many more wonderful journals.



Past the river this evening

by Eric James Cruz

Past the river this evening,
 steam
 in the shaken months of summer,
where jays buzz long-shadowed in the trees.

We climb to wind for a quiet place—
 It is no secret to the hundreds of walkers
who spend breath here—
 over stone and rot from Spring's blossoms
to the one trail I know even when its dark.

Moving
 along this road of dust and stars,
my skin is warm.
 Now and then I find you
stooping, like the flowers winter craves,
 stopping by a mossy log or damp patch of mud
to rest—

In these pauses
fresh air. Everything beyond us
slips from leaves that are like so many bodies
in the ground. I try speaking about
something lost—

--the broken blades of grass.

Hours later, we begin our ritual,
stretching muscles
darkened in the whispers
of this cadence—
One. Two.
Keep pulling.

We are spent, loving
the near burn of our bodies. The lake, too, now a ghost,
a poem growing older by light.

Rants of midnight, the coming haze, a desire
to be home.

And the trees are like thinning beards,
without the weight of music.

Eric James Cruz is a high school English teacher and poet who lives in San Antonio, Texas. His most recent work appears or is forthcoming in *8 Poems*, *Ghost City Review*, *Carve*, and *River River Review*. Cruz is currently pursuing his MFA at Warren Wilson's MFA Program for Writers. Follow him @encodedmuses on Twitter.



“agora” by Matthew Yates

enough

by Matthew Yates

it might be enough –
at the corners of the sky

where the simulation’s seams
start to show where if one watched

long enough they could see a vee
of geese disappear into code

& slip into the ether where on
a rainy day you can see the tempest

buffer & if you throw yourself into
the right wind at the right time

you might sail into disintegration –
it might be enough

to be a simulated thing,
for life to be a sky

that you can touch,
because if you watch anything

long enough you
start to feel watched

& it might be enough
to seem to be seen

Matthew Yates is an artist & poet from western KY. His work can be found in Memoir Mixtapes.



photo by Kimberly Wolkens, used as inspiration for the story

The Thing About Abandonment

by Kimberly Wolkens

I know you would tell me not to come here, but here I am. You would look at me with your big brown eyes and furrowed brow, and gently steer me away from here. I can close my eyes, picture your face and hear you say, “Callie, go home!” I just can’t stop coming here, Abby.

Deep down, I appreciate the concern. You’ve always looked out for me, ever since we became best friends our first day of Kindergarten. You’re like a big sister to me. When I have no one else to care about me or stick up for me, you are there. You are the only person who really listens to me and makes me feel like I even exist.

And now you are gone. So you can’t tell me to leave this place and never come back.

This is where you died. Next to an abandoned building surrounded by an empty parking lot overgrown with wildflowers and crabgrass.

I found this building on one of my lonely walks this past summer while you were on a weeklong vacation with your family. It's an old factory that closed its doors probably before we were born. I was walking with my head down in my usual fashion, and looked up only when I heard some crows, apparently angry with me for coming into their presence. I looked up and I saw what became the subject of my current obsession. An old brick building with peeling, yellow paint. Hundreds of rectangular windows glinted in the sun, sending mirage waves of heat into the air. Missing window panes stuck out like the gap of a missing tooth in an otherwise perfect mouth. Metal doors with peeling paint and rust spots dotted the building's front face. A few smoke stacks and old TV antennae rose above the roof. A dilapidated parking lot was scattered with wildflowers pushing themselves up through cracks in the concrete on their journey to touch the sun.

My heart broke over this poor, abandoned building. Why did it close down? Why was it left to swell in the summer sun and sag beneath winter snow? Why doesn't anybody care about it? I bet a whole lot of conversations happened within these walls. I bet people made things or designed things in this building. Friendships were made here. There is a whole world of history in this building. But now it's gutted out and locked up.

Kind of like me, I thought to myself. Uncared for, unloved, frozen on the outside because nobody - except for you - believes in what I am on the inside.

I feel a strong connection to this building. Whenever I feel particularly lonely, I walk the mile and a half to get here. I sit in the grass next to the parking lot and write in my journal. Or I take pictures from different angles - some in color, some in black and white. I don't care that the occasional person walking or driving past the building shoots me looks of amusement or concern with my fascination with the building. I have a kinship with this place.

Eventually I took you to the building. I looked at you and knew you were trying to understand why I was so captivated by this place. It's the look you get when you disagree with someone, but to be fair, you try to imagine the scenario from their point of view. You purse your lips, tilt your head slightly, and narrow your eyes in concentration.

"I don't know, Callie. It doesn't seem safe here. It must have closed down for a reason. Maybe you shouldn't come here anymore," you said to me.

If anybody else had said that, I would have been angry. I'd pout or stomp away in a huff. But you're my best friend. You love me more than anyone else does. So I swallowed my pride and mustered a smile.

"I just think it's cool. I got some great pictures of it. They're very artsy," I said to justify my newfound obsession with this place. "Maybe photography is my calling."

You looked at me patiently. "I know, but still..."

We turned and walked on, falling into step and resuming easy conversations like best friends do.

I continued to come here after your warning. Even when signs of life started cropping up - stray cigarette butts and food wrappers; a makeshift burn barrel tucked around the corner of the building; sounds of shuffling coming from either inside the building or just beside it, I couldn't tell. I didn't let it worry me. I wanted to document the life of this poor building, in all seasons, in all sorts of weather. My own time-lapse study. Maybe this will be the start of a photography portfolio. Maybe I'll be a famous photographer someday, and in an interview I will mention this abandoned building as the birthplace of my photography career.

Otherwise life went on as usual. Our summer was full of sleepovers, trips to the beach with your parents, and movie nights to take advantage of the theater's air conditioning. However, just before we started school that year, we had our first and only huge fight. I don't even remember what it was about. One minute, we were watching a movie at my house while my parents were at work. And the next minute, we were screaming at each other. We said horrible things to each other. Your harsh words cut into me just as deeply as the regret I felt at the ugly things I hurtled your way. Eventually you were completely fed up and you spun on your heels and left, snatching your purse angrily on the way out of the house.

We didn't talk for days. I don't know if you were as depressed as I was during that time. I didn't want to do anything but sleep, write angrily into my journal or visit the abandoned factory. I turned my phone off. I think you may have knocked on my door one morning, but I was still too hurt to answer the door.

That next day, my mom came into my room when she got home from work. This was weird, considering she usually didn't pay much attention to me. She looked pale and worried. I eyed her suspiciously as she perched herself awkwardly on the edge of my bed. She was unsure of how to talk to me about normal, everyday things. But I could tell she wanted to say something big.

"This is very difficult to say. But, honey...Abby's dead," Mom said.

The words didn't register for me, not at first. I sat stone still, stunned. I sat perched on top of my pillow, pen in hand, staring blankly at her. I was in the middle of the writing the word *hateful* and the pen eventually trailed off the page during my state of shock.

"How?" I asked, more out of instinct than a true desire to know.

"Well...her body was found next to the old McClaney factory building. The police say she was strangled. There was an older man, an ex-convict, who had broken into the place and was living there. He's being questioned by the police. Do you know what she may have been doing out there?"

Yes. I knew why. You were probably looking for me. You wanted to talk to me and figured I'd be there. And then you were killed. Probably by the ex-convict, who was probably

the source of the weird things I've seen and heard out there. All because I didn't bury the hatchet and answer the door the other morning.

The ache in my chest after our fight was nothing compared to the gaping hole in my soul at the realization that you are gone forever. I can't envision a life without you. I don't think I'll ever be normal. I don't know how people expect me to move on, go to college, be a responsible adult. I will never forgive myself for taking part in the screaming match and for cowering under the covers when you came to talk to me. And I will always regret showing you my sad, abandoned little factory building.

So here I am. Standing in front of the building that's just as empty and unloved as me. Grappling with the knowledge that your horrific death happened at this place, my sanctuary, because of something I didn't do. Perhaps I will stand here forever, and allow life to pass me by the same way it's passed by this place. If I'm lucky, maybe someone will hurt me the way they hurt you, since I probably deserve it.

Or maybe I'll just keep taking pictures of this place, using the photos as a reminder that some buildings aren't meant to be loved forever. They're destined to be abandoned.

Just like me.

Kimberly Wolkens works in Marketing for a local material handling manufacturer, thriving on learning different ways to communicate with different types of people. She spends every spare moment reading, writing or camping. Her idea of the perfect day involves writing while eating cake and listening to 90's grunge music.



Fragile

by Gillian Davies

You were always fragile.
You ate like a bird and your bones,
too thin and empty, held your flesh
like an Oxfam coat.

Your anger fuelled you,
that and the case of beer hidden
in the cupboard, next to the cigarettes
that stained the walls.

You had secrets, or so you thought
But they spilled out with wine and vitriol
I kept silent though, who could I tell?
No one wanted to know.

Nothing died with you, the memories are still here,
but children laugh now within those walls.

the paint is white and clean, an exorcism
of pain, no ghost remains.

***Gillian** lives in a small village in Wales, on the edge of a National Park.
Being the eldest of a group of cousins, she started to make up her own stories to entertain them
and began submitting to writing sites. Some of her short stories and poetry have been published
in anthologies and she is currently completing her second novel.*

The Unstolen Heart

by Neel Trivedi

The walk to his boss's office was as apprehensive as can be.

Larry knew he was walking on thin ice. Just last week, his boss had asked him to "off" 11 people. He barely got five.

And now this.

His hand trembled as he knocked on the door.

"Come in," he heard from inside.

Larry opened the door & made his way towards the chair.

It was bad enough that his boss's desk was so small, that even sitting across him would only be a distance of a mere two inches. But even worse was the dark, ominous wallpaper surrounding the desk & file cabinets. Pitch black with so many skulls soaked in blood, they would probably give Satan himself nightmares!

He wondered if that was intentional to keep the employees on their toes. If it was, it was working like a charm!

"I checked all the files this morning but I couldn't for the life of me, find what I had asked you to get. You care to explain?"

Larry gulped. "I'm sorry," he replied. Did he say it? Whisper it? Or just think it? His voice was so soft, even he couldn't tell.

"I tried hard but Bill was a stubborn son of a bitch," he continued. "He said we could do whatever we want to him but even death wouldn't convince him to hand it over."

With Larry's each word, his boss's face got redder & his veins, bigger.

Larry gulped again & reluctantly continued.

"He said it didn't even belong to him anymore because he gave it to his wife for safekeeping years ago."

His boss stared at him with his fiery eyes like only he could and said, "Who am I?"

"I'm sorry?"

He pounded his fist on the table and shouted, "Answer the damn question! Who am I? What's my name & occupation."

Larry was now almost on the verge of tears as he mumbled "The grim reaper. Your job is to keep the world less polluted from over population."

"Exactly!" his boss replied. "And you're my main assistant. And you couldn't even get one measly heart?"

Larry took a deep breath & said, "I said I'm sorry. It'll never happen again. I just..."

"Shut the HELL UP! NO MORE excuses! You're fired! Now get out of my office!"

Larry wiped away the tear streaming down his cheek and got up. He made his way to the door.

"One more thing Larry."



He turned around & saw his boss smiling. He couldn't remember the last time that had happened.

"I don't normally do this but since you've worked for me a while, I'll afford you this one privilege. So here goes: What's your dream coffin to lie in after death?"

Larry's face turned pale as he struggled to breath. He slumped to floor as his breathing got slower and slower.

"Go-go-gooold," he croaked as he closed his eyes & found eternal peace!

Neel Trivedi is a freelance journalist & in the advertising business in Dallas, TX. He writes poetry & fiction. His work has been featured in Drabblez Magazine, Chronos Anthology, Mojave Heart Review, Dodging The Rain & the upcoming anthology, Rising From The Ashes. He can be reached on Twitter @Neelt2001.



Awake

by Elisabeth Alain

My eyes flick open to the blue-dark, to my fast breath and heartbeat, to my ready legs. I listen for the source of the disturbance but hear nothing. I narrow my eyes to search for half-light behind the curtains, but outside the night is black.

You're awake.

It was always this way. I would stir in the middle of the night to feel a palm or a foot pressing through the roundness of my body into the mattress, urging me to haul us over to the cold side. Months later, you would wake me with your loud, insistent cries for milk or comfort, with your quiet snuffles, changes in the rhythm of your breath, a roll from right to left and back again. The brush of your tiny fingers against cot railings.

Older, and past total dependency, you roused me with each stretch and wriggle, your sleep disturbed by a stripe of sunlight finding its way through blinds, or by a cold morning demanding warm covers. A bad dream jolting you awake with a clammy brow and panicked tears. By the time you called out for me I would be halfway across the landing, rushing on hushed tiptoes to calm you with soft hands, to whisper reassurance in your ear. To quieten you, before you could wake him, to defend our safe hours.

I sense you before I hear you. I sleep through thunderstorms, sirens, a heavy knock on the front door, but wake with a silent scrunch of your nose.

I walk to your empty bedroom, sit in my nightdress on your made bed. Placing a hand on your folded pyjamas, I think of you giggling at the trousers, riding up your shins, the top rising over your tummy as you raise your arms up and out. Way too small, but then you never could let your favourite things go.

They said I couldn't keep you safe. I pleaded, showing them the smashed hall mirror, the broken Special Mummy mug I couldn't bear to throw away, bald patches from hair ripped out in chunks, the scar of a split lip. Evidence of what I had let him damage instead of you.

A restraining order keeps me safe now and you're in another house, with another Special Mummy. People with thick folders visit me, offer advice and sympathetic nods, but their eyes shoot blame my way for protecting him, you, myself, and everyone I never told. They say I have to prove I understand. That there's a course I can do where I'll learn how. I say I'll try anything. Maybe then you can come home. I can get you some bigger pyjamas and you can put your toys back on the shelf, sit your teddies back on the bed.

I tell them I don't know how I could have done any different. They say I need to wake up.

Elisabeth Alain lives in Worcestershire, raising two daughters and writing short stories and poetry. Her work has appeared in various places in print and online, including *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Dear Damsels*, *Black Country Arts Foundry*, poetry anthology *Please Hear What I'm Not Saying* and *Hypertrophic Literary*. Find her at elisabethalain.wordpress.com or on Twitter @ElisaWrites.



photo by Sarah Huels

uncover my hollow

by Savannah Slone

unveil my tethered roots:

outskirts

unzip my heavy molar

my watercolor waves
my pale ribcage

deflower my inlaid scapula
stitched with thick wool
thinning thrusts aflame
accelerating tonsils, heaving melody

because my quilted uvula has depth
a patchwork profundity
thoughtfully placing tree seeds that are grown like me
standing tall in the dusty moon radiation
intersection inquisition
match strike

Savannah Slone is a queer writer who is completing her M.F.A. in the Pacific Northwest. Her poetry and short fiction has appeared in or will soon appear in Heavy Feather Review, Boston Accent Lit, The Aironaut, Ghost City Press, decomP magazinE, Maudlin House, FIVE:2:ONE, Pidgeonholes, TERSE Journal, Glass, and elsewhere. She enjoys reading, knitting, hiking, and discussing intersectional feminism. You can read more of her work at www.savannahslonewriter.com.



Soulless

by Jen Persichetti

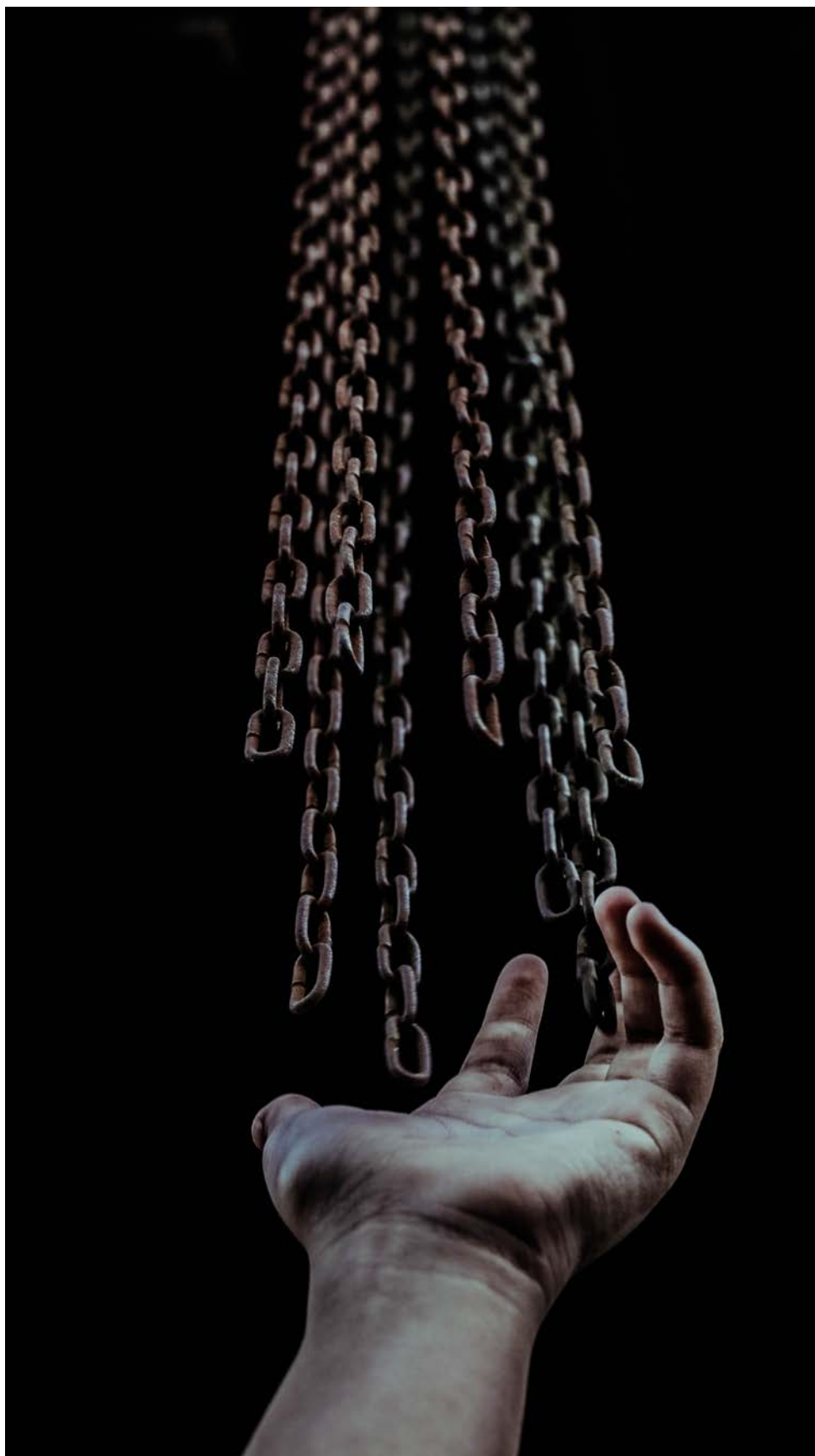
To be soulless is an art

An art you have taught me – and taught me well
My heart has yet to thaw and I crave afternoons of solitude

Cold winter mornings entice me and I despise junipers in Spring
Storm clouds and abandoned farmhouses sit atop mountains of lies
I count the minutes until the sun goes down, so I can bask in the moonlight of deceit

Chrome edged stars litter the sky and each one holds a secret...
Night has never looked so good

Jen Persichetti holds a Bachelors in Journalism and is a member of IAPWE – International Association of Professional Writers and Editors. Writing has always come naturally to her. It is her first love....she can't get enough. Jen decided to pursue writing because nothing brings her more joy than to put pen to paper. A collection of Jen's work has been growing over the years as personal journal entries. She hopes to share them with the world one day...Jen is striving to make that aspiration a reality.



RHINO

by Salvatore Difalco

They said I was a mistake. Or rather, they said I was mistaken. My ears have grown smaller and smaller over time. I cannot explain it. Sumptuous women and men wearing white masks bid from the gallery.

“I want him because he is beautiful”

“I want him because he is brutish.”

“I want him because he is black.”

Someone covers mouth with hand: woman in pink. She could have been embarrassed by the comments or appalled at the lack of respect people have for interpretations of ancient legends.

“Are you saying he will get bigger?”

“I’m saying he will take up more space than we have.”

They hide behind mother-of-pearl opera glasses and black velvet fans, but I can smell them. They reek of dairy and feces. They raise their white-gloved hands. One man raises three fingers.

“The event swarms with minute abstractions.”

“These people have never been to the subcontinent.”

“Have you?”

“My father spoke of it when I was a child.”

The experience of being here brings tears to my eyes. I can see everything for what it is for the first time in my life.

“Sold to Mr. Rhino.”

“Sold to Mr. Rhino.”

Salvatore Difalco is the author of 4 books. He currently lives in Toronto.

@SalvatoreDifal3



Lifehack: Hushing a Troublesome Boy

Creative Nonfiction
by Chad Musick

Who doesn't dream at night of dosing her son with ipecac and then, when he goes to vomit, just... shutting the lid? One terrible accident, and you can dine out on the tragedy for years.

Unfortunately, those little monsters we call boys can surprise us. Perhaps yours didn't even make it to the toilet before leaving a mess, or didn't know he should have been too ashamed to tell about the suppositories your husband had to give him. Is he a doctor, to judge how far in they should be pushed, and by what?

Before you begin, be sure to gather your materials:

- 1 wire hanger
- 1 pair of wire clippers
- 1 drill
- 1 pair of ear plugs

That's it. No rubber hose required, no towels to clean up blood. Minimal assembly required. Works on any number of boys.

First, drill small holes in door jamb above and below level of doorknob.

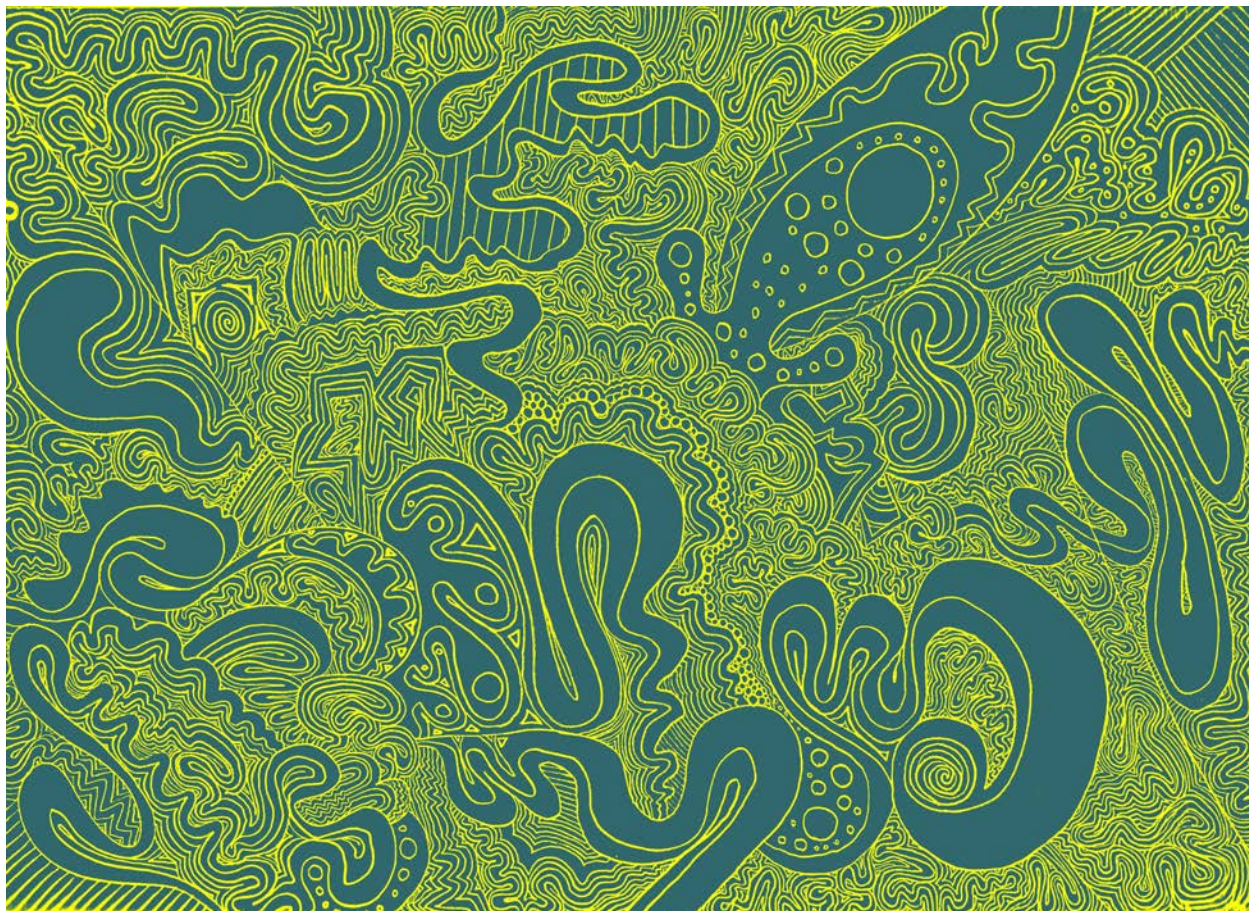
Second, unwind head of hanger. With wire clippers, snip off ends. Shove boy(s) into room. Slam door.

Third, wrap wire around doorknob and thread ends through the holes you drilled earlier. Twist ends together.

Fourth, put in earplugs.

Check periodically for noise. When screaming has stopped and only whimpering can be heard, unwire door. Exceeding 24 hours is not recommended.

Chad Musick is a mathematician and writer/editor who lives in Japan with his family. He has recently been published in Mojave He[art] Review and has work forthcoming in Lonesome October Lit.



“doodles 10” by Matthew Yates

Self-portrait as pie

by Gervanna Stephens

A little bit of this
a dash of that.
Cut and fold to remove lumps of self
no longer one
no longer whole.

I'm combined dark and light
till creamy
to set in dish greased
no stick, for I am neither.

Skewer then to test,
ready, raised, different.
Firm and crested—
brown,
as a result of mixing parents two—

Batter *white* and mixture *black*.

Gervanna Stephens is a Jamaican poet and proud Slytherin with congenital amputation living in Canada. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Bone & Ink, Rose Quartz, Persisan Sugar, 8 poems, TERSE. Journal, WusGood.black, Whirlwind Magazine, Enclave and Anti-Heroin Chic. She hates public speaking, has two sisters who are way better writers than her and thinks unicorns laugh when we say they aren't real. Tweets @ gravitystephens



"ONCE IN SMITTEN MOON:

The one time the moon meets its match: The ever lucky Shooting Star."

by Neel Trivedi

The Other Side of the Nightmare

by Jan Keenan

I'll look out of the window as the city colours give way to shades of green. A young mum with two kids will sit opposite sharing sandwiches from a beige Tupperware. The kids will bicker over who has coke and who has lemonade. The mother will smile me a fellow-traveller kind of

smile. I'll smile back and turn to the window, my body swaying in time to the roll of the carriage as I rest my head against the dirty glass.

*

Jolting into blackness with no idea where you are. A black so intense there are no shadows that move within shadows, no looming shapes to help you navigate your way, a blackness so intense there is only one pure shade of it. You breathe deep, reaching forward.

*

When we approach the outskirts, I'll get up and go to lean against the glass partition because I want to be first off. I'll think about filling the half hour between connections. There'll be time to freshen up, to grab a coffee and a newspaper before the short walk to platform seven.

*

Blind as the eyeless, you fumble into nothing, but you know you're in some sort of corridor because this place has left echoes. You feel for the light switch that's always to your left but there's no relief when you flick it because the darkness holds and the breeze starts to blow like it always does, moving gentle at first, soft against your cheek, growing stronger and colder. Rising. Catching the fine flyaway hair at your temples. You sleepwalk forward, because you know it's the only way to make it stop.

*

The bus station won't have changed at all - same orange and white signs with numbers that inexplicably start with the number five; same eternity of glass and metal that looks like its own never-ending reflection. You'll wait for the 526, because it's always taken you back before.

*

Leaning into the wind as it reaches gale force, whispering a catechism against the howling, praying it won't start, but of course it does, shrieking and keening like a dreadful lament until your hands can't bear it any longer and they clasp your ears to keep it out. It stops. Dead. Like it was never there in the first place, and the dread that always sits heavy in the dark middle of you rises up into the electric silence, so much worse than the clamour, because it heralds what's coming next.

*

Dusk will make the dirty old town seem dirtier still as the bus picks its way out beyond the centre, up the busy main road, through the thin streets lined with dirt-dashed terraces. Nothing will have changed, same shops, same kids in the same school uniforms hanging about on the same grey corners. You'll feel a clench of concern, or excitement, like butterflies but heavier as the bus pulls up at the final stop.

*

The air thickens warm and fetid as something grunts toward you, stopping only an arm's length away in the darkness. Now is where you always force yourself awake, where you gasp yourself sweating back to reality, but not this time. You're sick and tired of always running, and you've been round this loop too many times. You fight to stay inside the nightmare, your sightless eyes fixed wide open.

*

The doors will hiss as they pull apart. You'll climb down into the still familiar street, walk to the same-old front door where you'll raise a fist. One loud knock is all it will take to conjure what has always been waiting for you on the other side of the nightmare.

Jan Kaneen is a self-identifying weirdo who's snowed under finishing an MA in Creative Writing at the Open University in the UK. Her short stories and flash fictions have been published round and about and have won prizes at InkTears, Molotov Cocktail, Retreat West, Horror Scribes, Scribble and Zero flash. She blogs at <https://jankaneen.com/> and tweets as @Jankaneen1



Death Opens

by Jennifer Wolkin

The day I found out you died
I saw perennial carcasses cry
& then begin to
 bloom
 again

from beneath a frozen patch—

I saw your reflection
in the resulting puddle

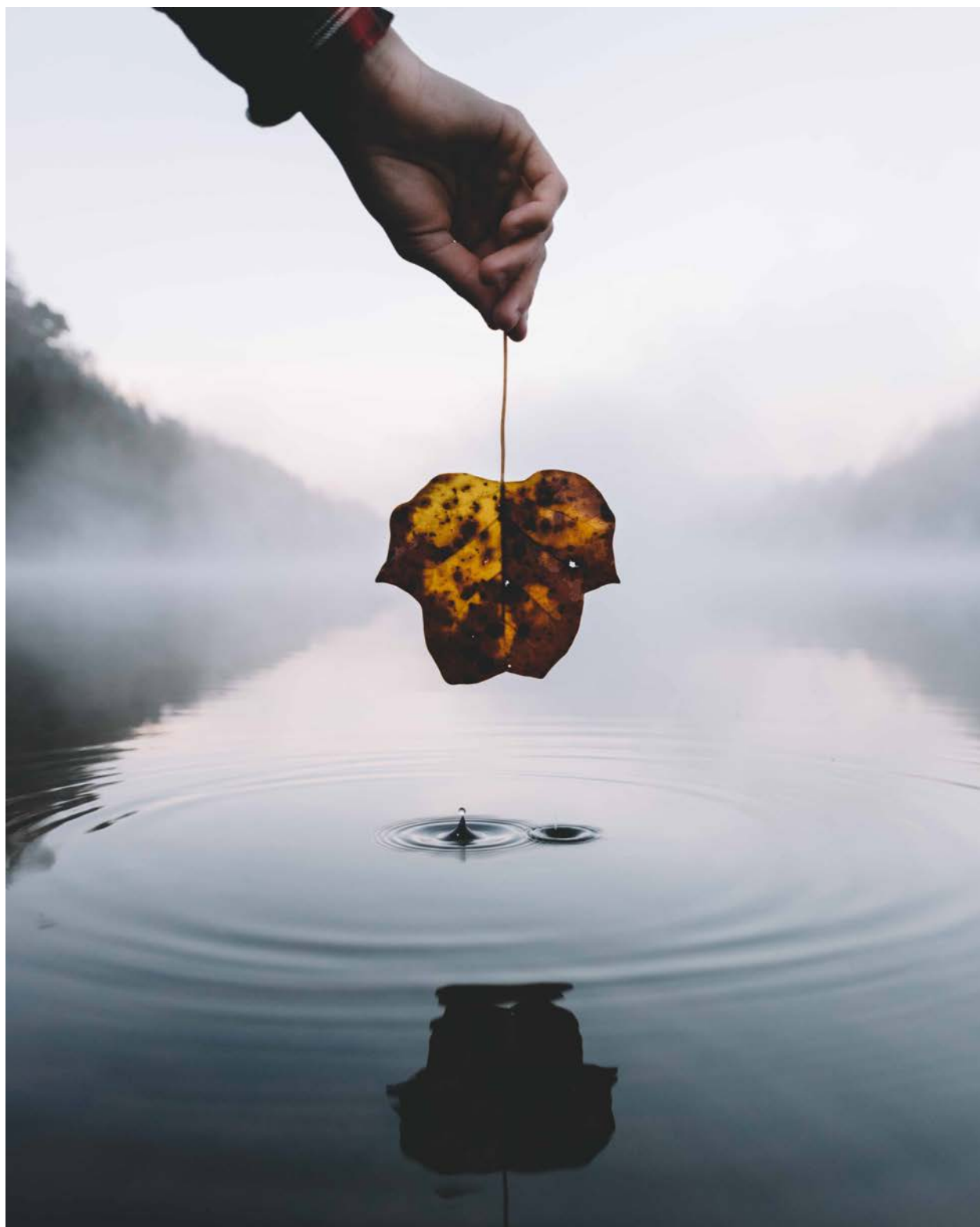
now a child's playground
a place to play with
 purity-

droplets

splashing

everyplace.

Jennifer Wolkin is a health/neuro psychologist, speaker, writer, and mental health advocate. She is most passionate about writing at the intersection where the mind, body, brain and spirit meet - about the holistic human experience - through the eyes of both her own experience, and through her professional lens. She is touched by the profound pain that is both individually and collectively felt, how this pain can displace someone from others and their own selves, and yet, the profound capacity for resilience, healing and growth.



Sunken City of The Ancient One

by Eric S. Fomley

Thom was tormented within, anguished beyond measure, and stressed by life.

He stood in the bathroom and looked into the mirror, into himself, until the mirror rippled. He heard the sounds of waves, saw a sunken city in the glass. A malevolent and ancient voice beckoned in gentle whispers. The vague reflection of a squid-like face appeared.

Thom wanted to go. To be free. He bashed his face against the glass again and again, screaming his delight. He picked up a shard, dug it deep into his flesh and veins until he blacked out, bled out, and answered the call.

Eric S. Fomley is an American writer from Indiana. He is a member of the Codex Writers' Group. His fiction publications include Galaxy's Edge, Daily Science Fiction, and Flame Tree Press. You can read more about him and his work by following him on Twitter @PrinceGrimdark or going to his website ericfomley.com.

CREATIVE STUDY

Fabrice Poussin

collection of photographs

Artist's Statement:

The photographs I sent are part of three different collections. "Gateway to Her Secrets," is a more recent piece. I photographed the Delicate Arch in Utah early in the morning. The great American West is one of my favorite places, and Utah tops the list of those states. I have been going there regularly to try and capture the sites under different conditions.



“Gateway to Her Secrets”

Each summer I have a different project, and this last one took me on a 16,000 mile trek through the Western States.



“No Time for Words”

Another project was "The Ice Experiments." "No Time for Words," "Secret World," "She Loves It," and "The Last Chapter," are all part of this project. In the garden near my home, I used a number of found objects, such as books, broken windows, and natural flowers to create a sense of unity between the world as it once was and as it is much later. Composition, light and color are of course essential to me, as they may be for all photographers. The goal of these images is to give the viewer an opportunity to find peace in my creation.



“Secret World”



“She Loves It”



“The Last Chapter”

The final piece "Sweet Dreams my Dear," is part of an ongoing project within which I photograph things as they have been set up by others. Here, light, shadows, and the use of black and white enhances the contrast and power of the scene.



“Sweet Dreams my Dear”

In a sense all photos carry with them the possibility of a dream for the viewer so he/she may be transported as if he/she were reading a novel while seeking escape and rest. Simple as they may be, the images should lead the viewer to contemplate every small particle that constitute them, so he/she can fully participate in the resulting work.

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review as well as other publications.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Kate Garrett with Renee Firer and Tianna G. Hansen
**on Pirates, Saints, and the Magic Behind Kate Garrett's
Writing and Editing**

Kate Garrett is multi-talented, to say the least: an avid writer, mother of five, and editor of multiple lit mags (how does she do it?! Our only answer is: magic). We were first introduced to Kate's writing when she submitted a handful of enchanting fairy/changling poems for our first & second issue - it was immediate love for her style and unique talent. As we grew to know her, we had the privilege to accept her forthcoming (and first!) full-length collection titled *The saint of milk and flames* (April 2019). When we first met Kate, she had just released her collection *Deadly, Delicate* which explores the feminine side of piracy (another reason we fell in love), and this is what we originally planned to focus this interview on but have since gained many more topics. We hope you'll enjoy gaining this wonderful insight into a mighty talented writer. Without further ado:

RHYTHM & BONES (RENEE FIRER & TIANNA G. HANSEN): It didn't escape our notice that the first poem in *Deadly, Delicate* is titled "Picaroon." When you were writing this poem, were you already thinking of starting *Picaroon Poetry*?M

KATE GARRETT: No, but the journal is named after the poem! Because I was having trouble placing the pirate poems – and I mean this was back in 2015, more journals would be open to them now, I think – because they're historical fiction, but they're poetry... they're feminist/queer in theme... they weren't to everyone's tastes. It made me think a lot of people must have similar troubles with odd poems, outspoken poems... 'rogue' poems. And I started a journal for those pieces, and I called it *Picaroon*.

R&B: *Your lit mag Bonnie's Crew was named after your daughter, but how did Lonesome October Lit and Three Drops from a Cauldron come about their names?*

KG: *Lonesome October* was simply named after a line in an Edgar Allan Poe poem, 'Ulalume': 'It was night in the lonesome October / Of my most immemorial year'. I grew up on Poe's short fiction and poetry, he helped me fall in love with horror (and also gave me a terrible fear of being buried alive), so starting a webzine for horror and gothic writing – he had to be the one to inspire the title, really.

As for *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, it's named after the story of Taliesin – the most famous and legendary of Welsh bards – who according to this myth started out as a

servant boy called Gwion Bach, given the job of stirring the cauldron of inspiration for Ceridwen, a powerful sorceress. The cauldron bubbled up and three drops of the potion landed on Gwion Bach's thumb, which he quickly put into his mouth to soothe the burn – and three drops was all that was needed to grant the recipient insight, wisdom, the gift of poetry. A shapeshifting chase ensued – because the potion gave Gwion Bach no end of powers, of course – and in the end Gwion Bach turned into a grain, Ceridwen turned into a hen and ate him, and in nine months gave birth to Taliesin, who could already speak and compose poems as a newborn child.

Ceridwen was my first chosen goddess in my teen years when I took up paganism (aside from the biblical Marys – the mother, and Mary Magdalene, but more on all of that later), and I always felt her encouragement when times were tough, to never stop writing (being a goddess of inspiration and writing, after all). When I started a journal to showcase writing about myths and folklore, again, it was inevitable I would honour her with it.

R&B: *So often, when thinking of pirates it's not the women who come to mind, but the men. Deadly, Delicate blurs the divide between genders, showing both a vulnerability that lingers beneath the surface, but also the danger threatening to pull them all under. Was this your intention from the beginning?*

KG: Oh yes. Some of the men are relatively gentle while some of the women were positively vicious – John 'Calico Jack' Rackham and his partner Anne Bonny are perfect examples of this – but also of course the opposite is true, and sometimes, with pirates like Jacquotte Delahaye, who turned to piracy to provide for her disabled brother when both of their parents ended up dead, the vulnerable and the vicious, the love and the danger, happily exist in one historical figure.

I'm currently working on a follow up pamphlet called *Holystone*, where pirates I adore but didn't fit as well into the first book (such as Bartholomew Roberts – a Christian Welsh pirate who was a flashy dresser, ran a tight ship, didn't drink alcohol, and was almost certainly gay; and Ching Shih – a woman who was not only a captain, but commander of an entire fleet of hundreds of ships and in charge of thousands of pirates – among others) will be explored in poems of their own, alongside entirely fictional pirate poetry moments, as was the case in *Deadly, Delicate*. After this I will probably put pirates down where poetry is concerned, but I will always love them and research them and annoy people with facts about them.

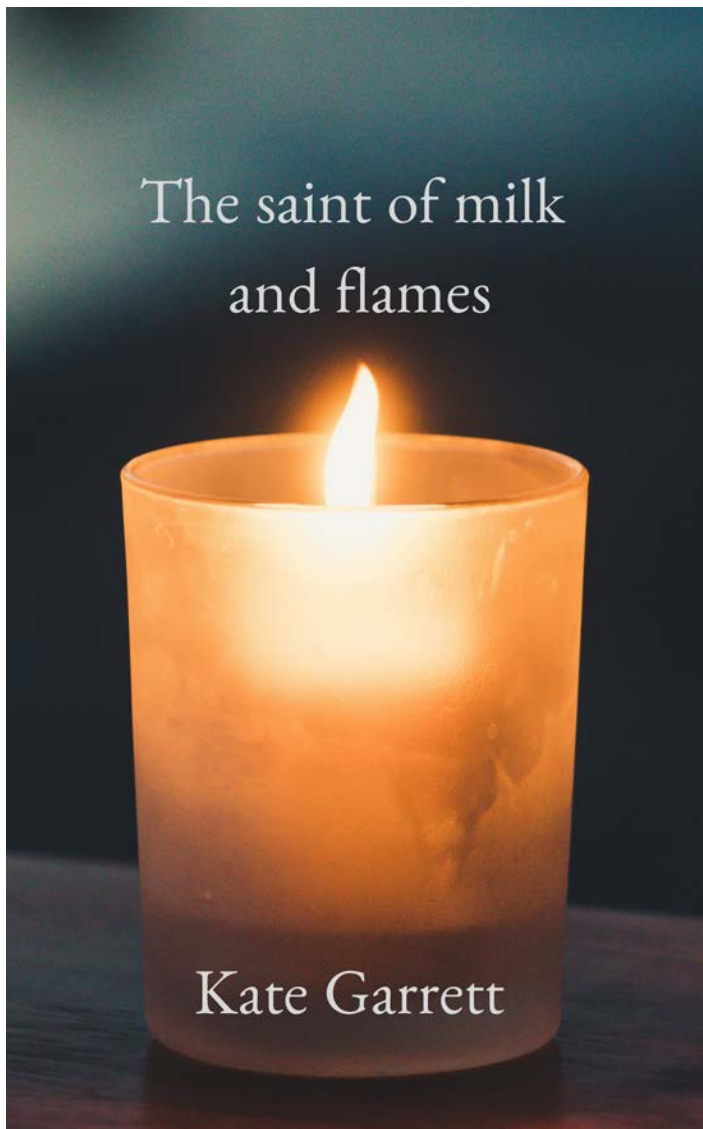


R&B: *In regards to Deadly, Delicate, you'll hear no complaints from us, but why pirates? What draws you to them?*

KG: Probably the rebellion, the freedom, and the life on the sea, most of all. I am obsessed with being near water – rivers are great, the sea is better, and I always wish it was raining. I also admire people who see oppression and reject it, and so often throughout history they are on the fringes or even ‘bad guys’ – but Navy press gangs (forcing people into service straight out of the pub sometimes) and abusive captains and terrible conditions and treatment on merchant ships were no joke. Historical piracy is complicated, and of course I wouldn’t personally steal from someone, but they were making their own way as sailors who might otherwise be on a naval or merchant ship in the face of abuse and hardship. Pirate ships were not short of rules, but they were run in a far more egalitarian than the legal ways of making a living at sea.

So yeah, it was a dangerous life, it was very morally grey career option (some pirates

were technically privateers, working for one country’s king or queen by attacking the merchant ships of another – Henry Morgan was even made governor of Jamaica for this ‘service’), but there’s always this tang of freedom along with it. And the danger itself is exciting, I can’t lie. Imagine living your life like that. I think about it, sailing for your life, away from the hangman, from other people’s guns and daggers and cutlasses, from the elements at sea, and it lights the proverbial fire under my bum. It’s one of many things that inspires me and makes me want to get things done, to live out my own dreams.



R&B: *It's not just pirates. Your work often pulls from history, folklore, and mythology, such as: "For Josephine," "Fenrir," and "The living dead of Wharram Percy" from your chapbook Land and Sea and Turning - just to name a few poems, and not to mention your full-length collection The saint of milk and flames which effectively*

weaves together historical figures, Saint Brigid in particular, and your own personal poems. What is it about the mythical and historical that inspires you to weave those worlds into your writing?

KG: Well in the case of Brigid – whether she’s a goddess or saint, and I view her as both – it’s more her influence overall that inspired the themes of the collection. She’s only in maybe one of the poems specifically, ‘The fifth and final’, because I prayed to her while my daughter Bonnie was in hospital with a poorly heart as a newborn. She’s the goddess/saint of newborn babies, midwives, milkmaids and cattle... but also of the flame of the forge, of life itself, creation and poetry – her festival day in both Christian and pagan traditions is 1 February, representing the light returning stronger as winter becomes spring. The themes in the collection are very much a merging of positive anger – flame – and nurturing and motherhood – milk. There is a lot of literal fire in there, and exploring ideas of belonging and alienation, and faith as well as doubt. For example, ‘He was never the same after Joan died’, which I wrote for the medieval knight and serial killer Gilles de Rais, includes most of those themes in one poem. He was a comrade in arms of Joan of Arc, and a devout Catholic, but after her death turned very much to the dark and was convicted and executed as a murderer of children. I wanted to explore the idea that he was challenging God, turning away from God due to a betrayal, and I don’t know, bring some humanity to someone history has deemed a monster, because he did monstrous things. (Some historians argue he didn’t murder anyone, that it was a set-up, which is fair, but for the purposes of this poem I had to assume he did.)

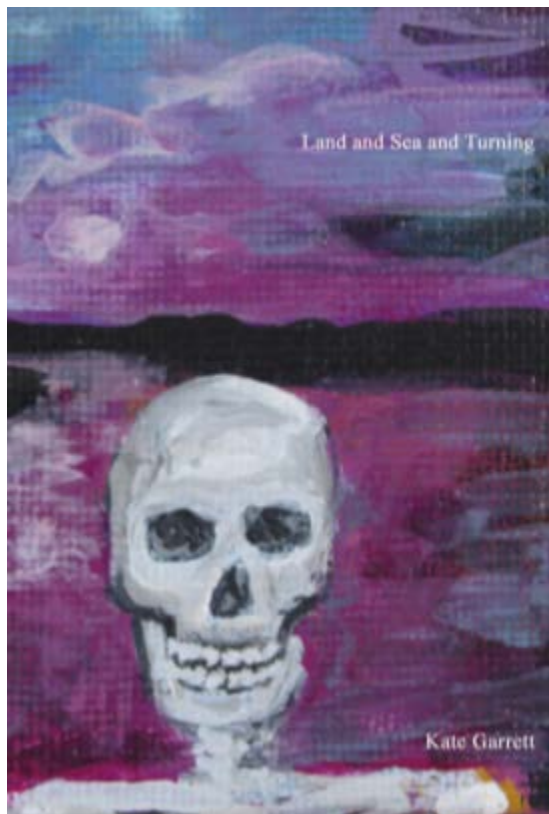
Anyway, history and myth inspire me as a writer because the narratives are simultaneously miles outside of ourselves, but also relatable – if not in any obvious way, we can still examine our own prejudices, fears, experiences against millennia’s worth of stories by and about other humans. We are part of the legacy, we will be history too, but in the sort of learning-by-rote history where dates and battles and numbers take over, people don’t see that. In *The Time Traveller’s Guide to Medieval England*, Ian Mortimer brings an event like the black death – which is so often discussed in terms of numbers of deaths, its wider impact on Europe, etc – into sharp human focus, describing how hopeless this event was, if you caught the plague you died within days, the only survivors were people who didn’t come down with it at all. And no one understood germ theory, not even doctors, they watched helplessly as their entire families died. So keeping this in mind, when I write a poem like ‘The living dead of Wharram Percy’, I’m writing about a belief in revenants, in the unquiet dead, and folks taking extreme measures to stop them, because people who lived in a world where life expectancy for the everyday person was quite short, where even children did die quite often, because physicians were scarce in a village and even if you did have access to one, they diagnosed and prescribed based on superstition, astrology, etc – had a very real fear of the unknown. And I think humans

will always fear the unknown, because there's always something unknowable and we want to think we know it all.

Anyway. TL;DR version: I love humans, very broadly speaking, for our gloriousness and for all of our flaws and fears and screw-ups, and history and myth allow me personally to explore us as a species – philosophically, spiritually, whatever – but on an individual level, in my poetry.

R&B: *Have you always enjoyed incorporating these elements into your work?*

KG: Yes absolutely. My first pamphlets *The names of things unseen* and *The Density of Salt* included historical and mythical figures – Kierkegaard, Medea, Midas, selkies, and so on. I've just gone overboard with it in the past couple of years. I think the more I work out my own traumas and life experiences. the more room I have for thinking creatively about things outside of myself.



R&B: *Within the confines of each poem in Land and Sea and Turning, you have created stories that stand apart from one another, and yet, together they form a cohesive collection. How did you decide the order of the poems?*

KG: I just try to make sure quite different poems flow into one another by finding common themes, I suppose. Or if not exact themes (though all of the poems in any of my chapbooks can relate to one another in some way, I find), something about the poems to link them – e.g. ‘Granny Woman’ which is in honour of my great-grandmother and ‘Feathers, petals, fur, and bone’ which is about the Welsh goddesses Blodeuwedd, Arianrhod, and Ceridwen, link through knowledge of plant magic, strong women. ‘Granny Woman’ is preceded by ‘Merkstave’ and the link there would be magic/divination and a woman having

a knowledge advantage over a man/men seemingly in charge of a situation; ‘Feathers, petals, fur, and bone’ is followed by ‘Witchling’ and that link is strong women in tune with nature. It’s an intuitive flow.

R&B: *How was it creating your first full-length collection with the same expertise? You seem to know exactly which poems to pull together in order to create a lingering emotion or reaction from the readers. How was this with creating The saint of milk and flames? We also know you never planned to create a full-length, so what convinced you to finally do so, and how do you think it turned out? How was this process different from your chapbooks? Similar?*

KG: Again, it's intuitive – even though I have a degree in creative writing with a concentration on poetry in a literary and linguistic sense – I can close-read, I can analyse, but... for me poetry in everyday life is on a sixth-sense level. Reading it, publishing it, curating it when it comes to other people's; writing it, editing it, ordering it when it comes to my own. It is the same part of my brain that lights up when I use tarot or something like that. Creative, spiritual, but also practical. And it connects us to something bigger. (It's straight from Ceridwen's cauldron, or Brigid's flame, or Odin's mead, and so on – myth again!)

As for the full-length... I just always thought I'd be a chapbook poet for life. I couldn't imagine sustaining work on related themes for two or more times the length of a pamphlet. It was simply a lack of self-belief, overwhelming doubt. But then I started writing all these poems about fire and faith and mothers and useful anger, and so on, and it kept going... and going... and it got to pamphlet length and it was still going. So really, I proved myself wrong by accident. Or not by accident at all – but because it was something I deep down wanted to do.

R&B: *What's your process when writing a chapbook, or any collection, in general? Do you have a theme in mind when you start writing or do you notice there's a theme forming organically as you write?*

KG: It's usually something I realise after I've written 6-10 poems that seem related, however loosely: "oh look, another book is on the way". And then it goes on until it feels finished. The only exceptions are *Deadly*, *Delicate* (and *Holystone*, of course), and *To feed my woodland bones* [a changeling's tale] (out in September 2019 from Animal Heart Press), which felt like the start of themed books from the first poem onward, and needed to be written as a sequence or small collection.

R&B: *Is there a poetic form you prefer - ie. prose, free verse, blank verse, etc.?*

KG: Absolutely free verse and prose poetry. Free verse is not, of course, the absence of form, but the chance to create your own organically depending the poem's themes and subjects, and that's what I love about it. I do rhyme, but usually internally rather than the ends of lines, and I do use metre, but again it isn't within the structure of an established form. I have written sonnets, sestinas, ballads, and villanelles, even a *cyhydedd hir* (a Welsh verse form – and my *cyhydedd hir* about coastline ghosts was embroidered by the

artist Sue Burgess on to a textile piece for an art exhibition; it now hangs at the top of my stairs, so I'm pleased I wrote it) – but free verse and prose poetry are where I create at my best.

R&B: *What has been the hardest aspect of running four - soon to be three (we're so sad about this) - literary magazines? What advice would you give to anyone thinking of starting their own?*

KG: Time! Having the time has been the hardest thing. Which is entirely my fault, because no one forced me to start four journals (and a micro press) and have two more children to make a grand total of five... so I guess the advice I would give is to do what you love, but don't burn yourself out. I'm guilty of having too many ideas for publications, and wanting to get them out there, to give people a platform – but meanwhile not considering my own health. (I blame astrology – my sun sign is Cancer, so I'm a nurturer and an encourager, but what makes it worse is my Virgo Mars, Jupiter and Saturn in the 10th house (which is ruled by Capricorn/Saturn) – a combination which, as anyone with a Virgo and/or Capricorn influence can attest, is going to always be a workaholic... ha).

But seriously – ideas are great, running a journal is an amazing experience, but not at the expense of your well-being and your own creativity. Just pace yourself.

R&B: *You as a person have experienced so much; we can feel it through your poems and from working with you since our very first issue (we are so proud of this), and we have grown to regard you as a favorite poet and 'poetry crush' if you will. How have all of your personal experiences gone into/affected your work, in particular the very personal full-length *The saint of milk and flames*, which discusses not only your marriage (we adore the poem 'To the bartender on my wedding night – 31st October 2015'), but also your experience giving birth to Bonnie, your connection to Saint Brigid, etc.? Is poetry an outlet for you? A passion? How do you feel creating something so personal and enticing to read?*

KG: Well, first of all, I don't know if my work is 'enticing to read', but if it is, how I feel about it is "awesome", thank you! I've been a bookworm since I learned to read at two years old, and of course you have to read before you can write (and this is true at every stage...), so even though the urge to create with words is part of me – and from the ages of 3 to 31 I wrote a whole body of work (stories, songs, poetry, and novels) no one will ever read, and I'm just happy I wrote for all those years no matter what life threw at me – it is a wonderful thing to be read. I don't write for attention, adulation, or to please others. I do, of course, write to work out my life and my thoughts and make something out of nothing, or to make something beautiful out of my own trash heap of traumatic experiences – for example a childhood of abuse and neglect, domestic violence, miscarriage. I write about how I've found love and happiness, as well as digging around

in my past – sometimes unsavoury – choices (which always, always taught me lessons). And I hope people read these things, even when the idea of being read scares me. Writing in the hopes of being read is about the connections. Stories, novels, poems, nonfiction books, essays have all reached me as a reader. If any words I write reach someone else in the same way, I'm happy.

When it comes to writing things that are more fictional – historical, horror, or otherwise – my own view of the world is still always going to be a factor. I think it was George R.R. Martin who said (and this is all paraphrased, it was years ago I read it) in an interview, when it comes to 'write what you know' that doesn't mean only your life as you've lived it, as people assume it does, but staying true to the essence of your experience of being human – so if you're writing a world where dragons and icy zombies exist, like he does in the Song of Ice and Fire series, make sure the human emotions, motivations, and responses are believable. I thought that was excellent advice. It's important in prose fiction and it's important in fictional poetry, too.

R&B: *It was an automatic 'yes' from us the moment we read your full-length collection. Tell us some more about what you wanted to accomplish when you set out to write it, and anything you'd like your audience and readers to know before The saint of milk and flames's release in April 2019 (we can't wait!).*

KG: I suppose what I wanted to accomplish was an exploration of faith and motherhood, because of Bonnie's birth bringing both of us closer than is comfortable to death. The other themes crept in as I went along – learning to use anger productively, celebrating a feeling of belonging, examining feelings of alienation, or seeing the value of doubt. I was raised Christian in rural Ohio – Baptist to be precise – and turned my back on it in my early teens because life was terrible, none of the praying I'd been doing since I could speak made any difference, and some people I knew who professed Christianity were outright nasty pieces of work. I discovered witchcraft in my mid-teens and realised it was something I'd always practised as a little weird kid wandering around outdoors doing weird kid things, like talking to killdeer and cicadas, stargazing, hanging out with my pet duck. But being 16 when I found witchcraft in books, and the year being 1996, I believed you had to be strictly pagan to practice witchcraft (which is, of course, wrong – my own great-grandmother was a Christian witch). And I tried, I really did, to be specifically Wiccan... I sat in my room and made altars with all the elements represented and did my best with representations of a male and female deity. But on every level it just wasn't for me.

My god figure was still secretly Jesus Christ and my goddesses were his mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, along with Ceridwen, and Brigid. Hecate found her way in at times, the Green Man as a god figure became important to me after I moved to Britain, but regardless of whether the deities were Christian or pagan, I was a confirmed agnostic theist for 25 years. Deities remained symbolic to me, the idea of God still seemed like an

all-encompassing thing, so these representations felt like facets of a greater whole. And even though I always knew there was more to life than what we can see, I couldn't bring myself to say I believed in anything specific and call it God.

When I was pregnant with Bonnie everything came together. She was going to be my last child and the pregnancy felt blessed but fraught. I wasn't well, I worried constantly, and my faith flared up in response. It became real again. I'm not a typical Christian, and I'm certainly not a typical pagan – I believe in aspects of both paths and blend them, which is known as christopaganism, less a religion than a syncretic spirituality. As I like to say, it's a path that gets you the side-eye from Christians, pagans, and atheists alike. I also describe myself as a Christian witch. As a child I desperately wanted to be Catholic instead of Baptist – saints and ritual and heavy, meditative prayer are very important to my expression of faith. They were also very much forbidden in my childhood churches. It's easy for me now, to blend those practices with the symbolism found in European pantheons. I see pagan deities similarly – though not exactly – to how I see the saints. And it's easy to feel deep love for the earth and her creatures and natural cycles alongside the elevated love Jesus taught us to show our fellow humans.

And what combines the blending of these paths better than an expression of devotion to Brigid, who is both goddess and saint? The situation with Bonnie in hospital felt very much like a test of faith. I didn't only pray for her to get better, but for strength should the worst happen. And a very remarkable thing happened too: people of all faiths and none came together to keep Bonnie, and our whole family, in their thoughts and prayers. People of all faiths and none offered practical help. And if that wasn't beautiful enough, several writers sent me poems they'd written related to Brigid. Bonnie was born on the 23rd January and came out of hospital two days before Imbolc – the 1st February, Brigid's day. So naturally, when I started writing again after all of this, it made sense that even though not every poem is about a goddess, a god, belief, or a saint, the whole collection was a devotional to Brigid for this phase in my life.

Also, how I've written about traumatic experiences in *The saint of milk and flames* is more hopeful and positive than it has ever been. There is a lot of justifiable anger in the collection, but shown in a positive way; it is the flame as power, illumination, propulsion in the right direction, rather than a destructive force. It's not necessarily overt in all the poems, but it's a book written from a sacred place – it is my love, healing, and a tentative stab at peace on display.



Kate Garrett is a history/horror/folklore obsessive, solitary witch, and mother of five in Sheffield, UK. She is the editor of Three Drops from a Cauldron, Picaroon Poetry, and Bonnie's Crew. Her own poetry is widely published online and in print, and she is a contributing blogger at Rhythm & Bones and Pussy Magic. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize, and her pamphlet The Density of Salt (Indigo Dreams, 2016) was longlisted for a Saboteur Award. Her second Indigo Dreams pamphlet, You've never seen a doomsday like it (2017), was Poetry Kit book of the month for January 2018, and a Poetry Book Society Winter 2017 selection. Her most recent chapbooks are Losing interest in the sound of petrichor (Black Light Engine Room Press, 2018) and Land and Sea and Turning (CWP Collective Press,

2018), and her mini chapbook To feed my woodland bones [a changeling's tale] will be published by Animal Heart Press in September 2019. The saint of milk and flames (Rhythm & Bones, April 2019) is her first full-length collection.



*Thank you for indulging in our **Issue Three: Breakfast Alone**. This was a moving collection to put together after a rampant year. We are endlessly grateful for everyone's support in all that we do and look forward to an exciting new year with many more opportunities. May the New Year bless you all with much success and joy! Please check out our site, www.rhythmnbone.com, for more exciting things upcoming this year. We have our debut anthology **YANYR** available now through our site, on Amazon and Barnes & Noble; a first full-length collection upcoming in January by Effy Winter, **FLOWERS OF THE FLESH**; a second poetry collection coming in February by Wanda Deglane, **LADY SATURN**; a testimony told in true crime format in sonnets, verse, and footnotes **PURITAN U** by Kristin Garth coming in March; a debut full-length about motherhood, becoming, and historical saints by Kate Garrett in April, **THE SAINT OF MILK & FLAMES**.*

And so much more awaits.... We hope you will support us and our authors as we dive in and take our role as a small press by the reins.

Much love and light to all of you. xx

Tianna G. Hansen

Founder, Editor-in-Chief