



The

Mystic

Blue Review

Issue 4

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Masthead

Alexa Findlay (Founder, Editor-in-Chief):

Alexa Findlay spends most of her time writing fiction and poetry. She is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *The Mystic Blue Review*, *Cadaverous Magazine* and *Drabblez Magazine*. Her work has appeared in El Camino College's Literary Arts Journal: *Myriad*, *See Beyond Magazine*, *Pomona Valley Review*, *Better than Starbucks Magazine*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Halcyon Days*, *Halcyon Days Founder Favourites*, *Oddball Magazine* and forthcoming in *The Quail Bell Magazine*, *Grotesque Magazine*, *Blood Moon Rising Magazine*, and *Scarlet Leaf Review*.

Poetry Readers

Stephanie Chang is fifteen years old and lives in Vancouver, BC. Her writing has appeared in *Horn & Ivory*, *Verdancies*, and *The Occulum*, among others. When not writing, Stephanie can be found trying not to kill her plants, attending poetry slams, and studying.

Angelie Gison is a sixteen-year-old Filipina with an unflappable interest in cryptids and the secrets lurking in the local dark suburbia. Aside from reading, her other interests include: making art, watching life-changing movies and listening to dark, gritty and atmospheric music.

Fiction Readers

Cheyenne Current is a fourth year creative writing major at UCR. She has been writing ever since she can remember. She's written everything from poetry and short stories to novels and screenplays. She's a script reader in her spare time as well as practiced literary critique. She is a fiction and nonfiction reader here at *The Mystic Blue Review*.

Elizabeth Ruth Deyro is a 20-year-old BA Communication Arts student from the University of the Philippines Los Banos. She majors in Writing, with a minor in Speech Communication and Theater Arts. She is a prose editor for *Minute Magazine* and *Culaccino Magazine*, and a prose reader and staff writer for *The Cerurove*. She advocates for mental health awareness, HIV awareness, gender equality, and human rights. She volunteers for organizations that fight for these causes. At present, she is a copywriter and social media team deputy head for the Youth for Mental Health Coalition, and a social media associate and volunteer editor for MentalHealthPH.

Nonfiction Readers

Cheyenne Current is a fourth-year creative writing major at UCR. She has been writing ever since she can remember. She's written everything from poetry and short stories to novels and screenplays. She's a script reader in her spare time as well as practiced literary critique. She is a fiction and nonfiction reader here at *The Mystic Blue Review*.

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Tanya Talwar is doing her graduation in english literature. She is a focused and diligent person. She aspires to make her mark in the field of journalism. She has worked as a student editor for her college magazine with zeal. A voracious reader by nature and loves to try out various genres. She has proved her academic excellence by being a topper in 10th and 12th boards in her school. Along with academic excellence she has proved her mettle in extracurriculars at school and college level. She is a debater, orator and writer. She clinched the title of best debater at school level. She won a second place in a Youth Fest. She won a gold medal in The English Olympiad and crossed the first level of N.T.S.E. exam. Her holistic development has helped her to excel at every stage in life. As her mother, who has seen her through all the stages of her life, she has no doubt that she would work with zeal and see the project assigned to her till the very end and ensure its successful completion.

Artwork & Photography Editor

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BY LILY DAVIES

THE SOUND OF SPEED

BY HOLLY DAY

Even through the splintering of wood and the thunder of passing trains
I can hear you in the dark, the rush, the roar of your heart
like a desperate bird struggling to fly free, up and past
the flickering bare bulb swinging over the bed.
I spread my hands wide over your chest and will
the bird calm, imagine arteries and muscles wrapping you in
great blues wires and metal bridge cables
straining to keep everything in place
the scraping of muscle and skin, the sparks
the screech of angry brakes
the silence.

THE FLAVOR OF THE SEA

BY HOLLY DAY

She bares only half of her history to him, spreads her hands wide
to hide the stories that should stay buried. There are screams
sandwiched between pages of sunlight, blood washed into wasted breath
parts of her that will always be stained with dirty fingerprints
will never wash clean.

She sets her pleasant thoughts carefully on the quilt before him, delicate as china
lets them unfold into bright, floppy paper flowers fancy enough
for displaying, half-opened, in jacket pockets at formal functions.

She can be good and pure for this one, she can,
ignore the whispers like needles
the panicked dreams of escape.

FLOWERS IN SHADES

BY HOLLY DAY

on a beach of blue and white ink, upright stalks unleash
against a wall, sprout down-turned flowers on thin stems
faces like tiny men. my garden makes me think of
suntanned boys resting after a hard surf, girls parading in swimsuits
ancient monks experimenting with eugenics, octopi
unfurling great purple tentacles in shallows
flashing bits of oiled, fluttering flesh with each passing breeze.

THE STILLNESS OF THE DAYS BEFORE

BY HOLLY DAY

I miss them the most when I'm alone
the very different ways they thrashed inside of me
at very different times in my life. My son
yawned and stretched and pushed so politely
while my daughter kicked and fought with me
every day, even then. I miss
knowing where they were
every single moment, miss knowing, in my heart
that they were okay no matter what anyone around me said,
knew they were safe. I miss them the most
when I'm falling asleep, miss the imprint
of tiny hands and feet beating against my ribs
so eager to escape, even then, my control.

A BLACK WIDOW'S WEB

BY MATTHEW JOHNSON

A black widow's web
Is cruel seduction,
Like using candy to lure a child
To a windowless van.

The sign outside
A black widow's web reads
In vivid symbols of unspoken language,
Take refuge in me —

And under the milk-light moon,
As visitors burrow in the morass of her breast,
She whispers the last words they will ever hear,
I promise wet words of heavenly death...

THE LONGEST HOMECOMING (ULYSSES AND ELLIPSES)

BY MATTHEW JOHNSON

Sing o Sing to me of Ulysses,
That weary warrior longing for home
Who drifted along the veins and margins of the world!
And oh tell me of how crisscross Chaos
Barked and pursued that sun-greased soldier over the article.

Regardless of the grief knocking on his nomad door,
Or the jab of Neptune's trident, hounding across the Earth,
Sing to me of how Ulysses went on and on and on,
Like an ellipsis in a lengthy, epic tale,
Cutting down all foes to reach his wife, his child, and his home!

ABRACADABRA

BY MATTHEW JOHNSON

Create what I say,
And you'll be exquisite.
See my wand, and
Count the wonders,
And so shall be my offering
To you, my terrible art:
As exquisite as levitation,
As exquisite as making someone come back.

FONDNESS

BY SRAVANI SINGAMPALLI

Some are fond of chocolates
Some are fond of collecting
The colourful chocolate wrappers
Some want to enjoy life
Some know how to cherish life.

Some are fond of food
Some are fond of collecting food
Some have a lot to eat
Some hardly get any.

Some are fond of pens
Some are fond of collecting only parker pens
Some know how to write
Some live only to write.

SKY

BY SRAVANI SINGAMPALLI

When I look at the sky
I don't think about its vastness
Nor the changing colours.
I only think how I can
Climb so high
How I can touch it
With my own hands
How I can colour it
With my own painting brush.

GREEN

BY AMBER D. TRAN

Someone tossed me in a pool
of algae and frog eggs.

It was you, your right leg,
to which I clung, while
liquefied shells leached
to my cheeks.

You did not move when I breathed.

Somehow I peeled back
the skin on your hand, revealing
salt and yolk.

And then you were
at my teeth.

We crossed mirrors that day,
a fabrication strewn between
the guts of my brain while
it slept.

At the end, you clipped
me when I was not looking,
and as the tomb crumbled,
you laughed.

I now drink water
before I sleep.

HEAT AND DUSK

BY AMBER D. TRAN

You once carried me through an infested kitchen.
Beetles and larvae crawled around the sink, and
the drain hummed with the dance of the pulvilli.

That was the first time I touched your skin,
the warmth weaved into some sort of song, the
carcass of our relationship shattered between us.

Then you drove me to a dead-end street, the sounds
of exhausted car engine and high school football
interrupting as you leaned in, closer, too close, far away.

We do not look at each other in the mornings.
I am petrified that you can see behind my eyes,
read the backs of my skin as it sings like you think.

I interrupted you on a dangerous morning, ice
clouding the windows. The flinch in your face
urged me to step back, and nausea swathed me.

These are the dreams in which you appear.
I do not know how to ask you to stay away, because
refusing to learn, I continue to hide the sun.

INFESTATION

BY AMBER D. TRAN

rolls of skin dough
plagued by red slime and cells

rusted dots at left ear,
a semi-colon that trembles

when i am near.
hidden pockets stuffed

with cotton found
between my eyes, items

that remind of childhood
blisters from kissing the oven.

cut open the wound
to find the cancer,

serve it to your enemy
while i sing your eulogy.

LOTTIE AND THE MAGIC LAMP

BY ALEXA BOCEK

There was once a little girl named Lottie, who saw magic things. Everywhere she looked, her eyes grew wide. On blank walls she could see beautiful murals. In empty fields her mind built castles. She watched imaginary flowers bloom from cracks in the big, grey, brick walls. The only thing Lottie couldn't see was her mother's reason for sending her away.

"I can't afford to keep you around anymore." At first the words sounded like another language to the young girl. Why couldn't she make more money, why did they need money to stay together, and of course, the strangest question Lottie had was why had her mother given her, of all things, a lamp to take with her?

The cardboard box sat lamely in Lottie's lap. She rocked in her seat as the train swished past the green world that Lottie watched from the window. Her wool sweater grew warmer and itchier by the minute. Finally, the outline of her grandmother's estate came into view. The train let her off at the station and Lottie walked until she reached the little cobblestone path to the pearly sparkling gate, or at least that was what Lottie saw. The metal clanked and the gate opened. Lottie walked with her head down and one arm wrapped around the box; the other arm held a bag with her clothes and a small teddy bear.

Lottie's grandmother greeted her at the door and brought her inside rather forcefully. "Oh my my." Lottie's grandmother whispered. "You are hardly the proper young lady." Lottie had prepared herself for this. Her grandmother had a very specific idea of what a young lady should be. "What's wrong with me?" Lottie couldn't help but inquiring. "You, dear, are much too short, your hair is much too dark, and..." the old woman paused, looking deeply into Lottie's face "Your eyes are much too big" she finally stated. Lottie, having heard enough, nodded and climbed the steps to the room she stayed in the last time she visited with her mother. The sun slipped out of the sky and left a trail of twinkling stars behind it. Lottie could not reach the one and only small window in the room. The grey walls were covered in flowers in Lottie's mind. She beamed at her imagined art. In her mind, the window stretched the length of the wall. Lottie pretended she could see her mother dancing outside beneath the stars. Lottie turned from the window and peered at the box her mother had handed to her this morning. She'd seen the lamp before, in her mother's room. The lamp shade

was blank, a tan-white, and the base was a simple brown. The lamp almost looked brand new. Lottie plugged the lamp next to her bed and turned on the light. Something taped to the inside of the lamp caught her eye. Her hand cautiously avoided the now heated light bulb as she reached for the object inside.

Gently, she plucked the object from the tape and held it tightly in her little hand. It was a pencil. The young girl now had an urge to draw something on the plain lamp. She began to draw a little girl that resembled her. Next to the first drawing, she drew herself again, only a bit taller. Lottie drew one more picture of herself, a bit taller once again. Then, the young girl drew arrows going from each girl to the next, starting with the smallest. Lottie sighed and pulled the covers on her bed up to her chin and clicked off the lights, still thinking about her grandmother's unkind words.

When light hit the inside of her room, Lottie awoke with a tingling feeling in her legs. When she turned on her side she noticed something that made her sit up abruptly in bed and rub her eyes. For the first time in her life, Lottie couldn't believe something she saw. Her picture had disappeared from the surface of the lamp shade. Lottie began to panic, unable to tell if she was dreaming or not. Standing, she shook her and walked clumsily to the bathroom across the hall. When she made it to the sink it occurred to her that the faucet seemed farther away. The mirror seemed closer. Lottie seemed taller, no she was taller. She considered the reasonable possibilities, though they were scarce. She had grown 11 inches in eight hours. With a shiver, Lottie wondered if she should be concerned. For a moment she thought, no. Magic lamp or no magic lamp, this didn't have to be a bad thing. Except that her grandmother wouldn't understand the magic even if Lottie could explain it.

And so Lottie spent the rest of the morning and eventually the afternoon avoiding her grandmother in every way possible. By nightfall she had sprinted around the house twice to keep her grandmother off her trail, snuck into the kitchen to hid in the pantry, and searched her grandmother closet for something she wouldn't miss.

Lottie had grown out of most of her clothes. Her shoes still fit but now her wool sweater had a tear in the arm from when she tried to pull it on. Lottie collapsed on her bed and looked at the bright lamp on her bedside table. Curiously, she picked up the pencil and began to draw herself on the lampshade. She scribbled her hair as dark as she could and then, next to it she drew an arrow leading to another version of herself. The second figure's hair wasn't colored in at all. If it could make her taller, she figured, there was no reason it could make her hair lighter. She would find a way to present herself to her grandmother, and be the perfect, proper girl that was wanted.

Maybe if she was perfect she could even return to her mother. With happy thoughts, she switched off the lamp, shut her eyes, and was asleep in moments.

Light poured through the window once again and Lottie woke with another tingling feeling, only this time it was in her head. She blinked a few times and breathed deeply before peeking at the lamp. The picture had again disappeared. Admittedly it's absence startled her, although it was what she had hoped for. Lottie shut her eyes and felt her way to the bathroom. She opened the door and her eyes simultaneously. A shriek like gasp escaped her lips. Her hair was lighter, however, not blonde. No, her hair was a snowy shade of white. "Oh no" she whispered stroking it with a look of fear spread across her face.

She quickly threw on a bonnet and ran from the house, sure that someone had heard her shriek and was now searching for the source. Lottie did a fine job at hiding out for most of the day. She stayed visited her grandmother's study, filled with books on how to be a proper lady. She flipped through hair style and dressing tutorials searching for a look that may cover up her hair and still please her grandmother, but she found little of use. She spent hours in the garden weaving crowns of flowers that would distract eyes from the phantom white hair, but when Lottie looked in the mirror all she could see was the snowy curtain that burdened her. When supper came, Lottie's grandmother sent two maids out to find her and request that she come to dine with them.

Lottie's grandfather was a quiet man, who hardly left his office. She wasn't even sure if she'd seen him stand up before, never to hug or greet anyone. Her grandmother sat at the round table next to her grandfather and sipped soup. Wearing a long dress and bonnet to hide her changes, Lottie sat down with them, her heart pounding in her chest. The room was dimly lit and Lottie's grandparents hadn't bothered to wait for her. "Good evening grandmother" Lottie said softly. "Proper ladies don't mumble" was her grandmother's only reply.

Lottie kept her head down for the rest of supper, staring at the blank white table cloth and imagining a magical world within it. After choking down a painful silence and an even more painful entree of liver, Lottie shuffled to her room and locked the door. She saw the room as she always had, full of the magic she imagined, but now it seemed sad. As an expert on magic and imagination, Lottie knew that sad magic was the worst kind. Something had to be done. Lottie turned on the lamp and began to draw herself. She drew her old self, before all of the magic began. When she was just plain enough to be ignored. The young girl pulled the blankets over her head and cried until sleep came.

When Lottie woke, the drawing was gone but she soon realized that the white hair and long legs were not. Just as she feared, there would be no getting rid of the magic already in place. Looking around her bedroom, Lottie saw again what she always saw. Beauty in places where it was less obvious. Now, however she didn't want to see it. Lottie felt heavy and sunken. Even with the magic she wouldn't be good enough for her grandmother, and now there was no going back. She was a freak. She'd have to live this way forever just because she had tried to change to please her grandmother. What a horrible trick her mother had played. Now feeling sullen, and sleepy again, even after a full night's sleep, she watched sadly as imaginary fish swam through the stitching in her blue blanket.

Lottie gripped the pencil in her right hand and turned on the lamp with her left. She thought of the words her grandmother spoke to her when she arrived, it felt like so long ago. The words played like a mantra in her head. As she drew, Lottie glanced around at all of the imaginary flowers and castles and colors that made her happy. But now she was not happy. She drew to the beat of her pounding head and heart, making lead lines thicker and darker than she ever drew them before. Then Lottie crawled under the cover, pulled the switch and waited. She laid for minutes or hours, unsure of time. The young girl felt herself fading between conscious and unconscious every now and again. Lottie couldn't bear to move so she just kept her eyes closed and pretended that she was dying.

When Lottie finally opened her eyes again, hours or maybe days had passed. When she was ready, she peered over to the lamp to see that her final drawing had disappeared to likely the same place as the other ones. Lottie sat up and stretched. She looked around her blank room. Very blank room. She looked at the blank window, and even stood to peer out of it at the blank yard. Lottie felt the blankness inside of her too. She wondered what caused all the blankness. Perhaps it was her much too long legs, or maybe her much too light hair. But then again, she thought, it could have been because of her eyes, which were much too small.

I AM EVERYTHING

BY RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN

I am comfortable with myself
the same way we imagine chesterfields
with many pillows must be,
and strangely, that allows me to become
almost anything besides myself.

I am not running. The steeplechase has its place
in the Olympiad without me.
This is a mass acceptance almost to the degree
of complete negation.
I empathize with everything, even inanimate
objects.

When you approach me take heed.
I may be a Celtic raiding party
in 12th century BC, or twin batteries to a television
remote that were separated at birth,
but find a way to make
things work.

That feeling you have
that the dead are watching over
you?

I will be that
too.

And the trains that run on time
and even the ones that
are late.

WET NURSE

BY RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN

let's kill these
tired arms

and hold
each other

without
them.

FACING THE MUSIC, IN O MINOR

BY RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN

Octavia!

Octavia!

my brand new shoes
are showing

let leaderless men
fumble around in thicket
shadows

I know you couldn't have been pleased
with being the fourth

and a minor
at that

and all that Cleopatra talk

take my lunch money
sister Octavia
before the taxman gets it

compliment me
on my nose 2000 years

behind the
times.

BEHIND THE BARN

BY ANDREW MILLER

Whenever I pass a meadow, I think of Elsa Anderson.

I met her in the spring, at the end of my freshman year in college. I had just switched my major from Creative Nonfiction to Environmental Studies when the Chairman of the Biology Department invited me to a party at his farm. The festivities took place in his living room that overlooked a large hay field, where I had seen a flock of meadowlarks. The first person that I met was Elsa Anderson, who was from Sweden and studied the mating behavior of fruit flies.

Since I couldn't think of much else to say, I asked, "Don't you just love the Meadowlark's song?" She admitted to being unfamiliar with it, but said that she would like to hear one sing. We set aside our *hors d'oeuvres* and went behind the barn and sat on a hay bale to listen. After about the third call, she said, "Well, I don't know much about birds, but when you've heard one tweet, you've pretty much heard them all."

Then she unhooked the top button of her maroon, long-sleeved flannel shirt.

My lips trembled, the color drained from my face, my arm pits moistened.

She touched my lips with her forefinger. The aroma of her perfume overwhelmed me: a gentle blend of Sicilian lemon, mandarin, raspberry sorbet, white currant, then Freesia, magnolia, jasmine petals, orange blossom, overlain by a hint of exotic and sensual woods, white patchouli, savory musk. Seeing my face blanch, my lips tremble, she asked, "Does my *Eros Pour Femme* bother you?" Her voice was deep and warm, like an old tomcat purring; it drowned out the meadowlark twitters.

I shook my head.

"Are you sure that nothing is the matter?" she asked as she unhooked the second button. I cleared my throat and said, "I—well, I have never—never been with a woman before."

Her smile was deep, rich, inviting.

"Well then," she said, unhooking another button, "We're even."

"Even?" I asked. "What—what do you mean?" I unclenched my fists, felt blood on my palms, my fingertips.

She reached behind her neck, removed a silver clasp, shook her head twice. Her rich, auburn hair cascaded around her shoulders, flowed down her back. Our eyes met. Hers were soft and moist, the same shade as the lupine at our feet. She smiled.

“You see,” she said, “I’ve never been with a man whose never been with a woman.”

The other day my wife Judy asked if I wanted to go over to Harrison’s farm for a fall festival and hay ride, and I said, “Sure—let’s go.”

END



BY LILY DAVIES

BY GEOFF BIGLER

Blue light emanates
from deep below, a low hum
growing in our ears.

BY GEOFF BIGLER

The machine slowed, stopped.

What was, forever altered.

All that is, is not.

GHOSTS

BY JENNY LU

ghosts everywhere
come moonlight
swimming through their
misty bodies
hollow, haunting eyes
floating to me each night
untouchable,
eternal.

ghosts in my ears
under my covers
whispering as I will
myself to sleep.

*save the nightfall
let me dream.*

their voices tangled
fading
as I fall
fall
and fall.

racing me to my dreams
to next nightfall.

THE SECOND TIER GODS, OH HOW THEY GAMBLE

BY BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY

Cupid and Father Time are betting on how long Mr. Sandman will sleep. He's been out for 45 minutes, right in the middle of their lunch date at Nick's Diner, and Cupid (overweight, struggling to fly straight, often too drunk to be pointing arrows) thinks Mr. Sandman has at least another 30 minutes of slumber. "No, no," says Father Time, licking his finger and cleaning off the mold from one of the 90 pocket watches kept in his filthy robe, "I think he'll be out much longer, at least until tomorrow morning. He's just getting started." The hacklung waitress at the 24 hour joint asks if the three mystics want anything else with their meal. Mr. Sandman's reaction is hidden, his face down in broccoli spinach. "Any sponge cake or anything?" she suggests, filing her nails with one of the restaurant's menus. "No, no," says Father Time, staring at his snoring friend as if watching a horse race, "just a few more pots of coffee, if you could. We might be here all night."

WHALE TEETH

BY BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY

She swept the floor with teeth of whales, bristles like sticks full of plankton, snails. I fastened my seatbelt only when she drove me to ballet. I was the only boy wearing clean nail polish, using the unused urinal. Slapstick soccer practice is a faraway rodent that only begins to nibble on my toes after I tell it no. I sleep just fine with the windows open. Snow on my bed helps me wake every morning in search of fire. This ancient morphing potion you sold me last week hasn't been beneficial for me yet, how long again did you say it'd take to go into effect?

TELEMACHUS

BY ROBERT PIAZZA

I still cannot accept I lost
My father whom the sea had tossed
Away from Montauk's brackish Sound.
Digging through a drawer, I found
An arrowhead that he had carved
In Nineteen Sixty Three. The curved

Edges his blade had cut
Hard as jetties in Connecticut
Where once he wrecked his fishing boat.
In a closet, I keep his Navy coat
Pressed and ironed in crisp blue lines.

Months sail by when nothing reminds
Me of slapping flounder in boxes of ice
Or following him in the annual race
Through Central Park. A nymph he kissed
On Fourth of July, a feminist
From New York City, sniffed his scent

Of brine. Cursive notes were sent
To spouses whose suburban lives
Were ripped apart. No one loves
Playing reruns late at night
Of father seduced by Aphrodite.

MERMAID

BY ROBERT PIAZZA

My lover's name was Judas,
Old Judas of the Sea—
He often took me fishing,
His net held skillfully.

His eyes would scan the ocean
And scrutinize the sky
To search for squid and swordfish
Beneath where seagulls dive.

On board he was the captain
And I his young first-mate;
We fished for hours in silence,
A time when I would meditate

On ways that I might please him
On what he would approve—
If I could catch a silver fish,
I'd earn from him his love.

Oh, I did much to satisfy
His sharp commands and whims—
I cut the bait as specified,
Ship on tack & sails trimmed.

I oiled and rinsed the reels
And tied the monofilament;
I gaffed the golden dolphins,
Trying to fasten permanent

Our days beneath the setting sun
Where ocean swells would rock

Our vessel like a cradle
Beyond Bahamian docks.

Way out in purple waters
He lured me with his look—
He caught me with his image
And snagged me with his hook—

But cast me on this island,
Himself he sailed away—
The barb with which he kissed me
Still hurts me to this day.

BROTHER TIMOTHY

BY ROBERT PIAZZA

I refuse to play the passive martyr
Floundering on the wine-dark sea
Of sacrifice, drowning in the bottle.

Hair-line fissures in a dam,
My wall of fear will crack apart
And none but you can hold me still.

Blinded by ignorance, the world still
Abuses me as if I were a martyr
Because I renounced my part
In this lost race that wants to see
Suffering and doesn't give a damn
That I am fragile as a whiskey bottle.

Drunkenly, I slashed a broken bottle
Across my alcoholic wrist to still
The pulsing of my veins, the way a dam
Stops a river; but I am not the martyr
Sebastian curled like the letter C,
Dying from the arrows you impart.

Bit by bit, my body breaks apart
Like shards of shattered bottles
Scattered on the floors of silver seas—
But my battered heart is beating still,
And I reject the role of Christian martyr
Wishing for death like Milton's Adam.

I accept that we're forever damned
To mitigate the underhanded part
We played in acting like Saint Peter martyred
Upside down in Rome, his anguish bottled

Behind his sailor's eyes, serene and still,
While blood bequeathed itself into the sea.

There is much to emulate in you, O Sea:
You cannot be constrained by a dam,
Nothing can hold you perfectly still,
You cannot be broken nor torn apart,
You cannot be trapped inside a bottle,
And you are deep like the soul of a martyr.

Your watchful eyes can see that I depart
Without Madame duVin whose frosty bottles
Distill the spirits of the blessed martyrs.

CALYPSO

BY ROBERT PIAZZA

When I miss my father,
I marry the sea——
I smell him

in the briny breeze——
I smell him
in the flesh of fish——

I hear him
in the crashing surf
pounding upon the beach——

I hear him
in seagulls' cries
piercing the sky——

I see him
in blues and greens,
iridescent aquamarines——

tentacles of Portuguese
man-of-war who keep
clownfish in captivity——

I feel him
soaking ankles, soaking knees-,
soaking my virginity——

My father's soul is deep——
I anchor myself
in fathomless mystery——



ALONG THE OCEAN
REMEMBER OLD MEMORIES
IN DEEP BLUE WATERS

Senryu on photo in blue filter, Buntal Espanade, Sarawak, 2018. Colin W. Campbell.

BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL

FIGURINES

BY JARED BENJAMIN

Gloria always found magic in the inanimate. A way to test the strength of her imagination, without distorting reality. Particularly, the figurines were her visionary muses composed of porcelain curves, shaped like forbidden fruits beckoning for attention. They were small, yet ominous, ceramic nymphs hiding their life in the guise of stillness. She holds onto the miniatures like molded odes to joy, gripping even tighter some nights, smothering these clay-cut angels until her smile suffocates her loneliness. Trying to see “how much affection is too much affection?” Glitter dust rains down like enchanted confetti, white nights become more common than silhouettes. shadows are replaced by sun-fire entities. Gloria still doesn’t know if this imagery is better or not, but she expands the frontier within her psyche because sometimes it’s better to be lost in a world of personal fantasy than to be found in reality that doesn’t care enough to search.

BANCO FOR THE BEAK

BY J.E.A. WALLACE

We were taught at school how
to disassemble the edges
of the creatures that sat
at the end of our beds
biding their time
and waiting

For the most terrifying moment
to attack and devour
Then squat and lick
their midnight claws
upon a pile of quivering bones

So
between medieval history
and the birth of the motorcar
we'd tramp through stone corridors
to listen to the teacher with the wild eyes

He would explain how to find the lines
where the creature's realm meets ours
it's from these lines it draws its strength

However, he said,
if we concentrated
we could transform
the spectre's outlines

into a coat
and a shelf
and a shadow

and with that
breathe
again

But at the back of the class
I would find myself wondering
if monsters would just disappear
without putting up a hell of a fight

BLOOD MOON AND SNAKE

BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM

Blood passing through earthbreath
colors the umbral moon.
A jaguar in hunger, triadic toad,

Amaya in red. Hide the unborn,
save up the corn and wheat.
Consult the “Malleus Maleficarum.”

A serpent has consumed
and its venom can cure only
by infecting the malignant sphere.

There is a passing over, a setting,
a horizon that rises up,
gathering the becoming crescent.

What music is apposite?
What silence of shadow and light
played Noh in October.

The shade of the Earth twains
dark and darkest, names by
its intervention between

what is light and what reveals
by indirection: Hope is blood,
harvest is chill and apple rot.

No sky of half-eaten moon or relation
of word to heaven. Just this
cruelty of light and no light.

The witnessing is songless,
a passing of breath to earth,
a becoming of shades of blood.

SÉANCE

BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM

Hope tricks the table
into rising and rattles
the china

Fear dims the lights
and smokes the room
with dry ice

Ghosts loom around
our legs in clouds
of disillusion

Somewhere someone
is laughing into all
the trickery

DEATH ON THE HIGHWAY: A LOVE STORY

BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM

Begin again after
all cells have transfigured
their memory lost
in the breaking

rhythm

The heart itself has no

The lungs have no spirit

And most/least of all
eyes are nothing
where once all was
bright winds
green foliage
shimmer and revelation

I become mere thrashing
false life
twitching spasm
echoes in dying nerves

not so old
but my body died
from our wreckage
and needs
the electric surge
of heat lightning
to fire it alive again

All my heart beats against
my hunger

a broken skeleton
lungs shredding air
trying to taste the words
I once kissed
on angry lips

I am dumb
patternless
lying at the edge
of a crumbling road

quaking
road kill
brain blasted
blood on the concrete
nerves still firing

electric memory

scuttling to flee
the memory
of the approaching blinding
headlights

THE BLUE ASTRONOMER

BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM

Why have stars out of reach,
suns that blind, and winds
you feel but cannot see?
asked the blue man in the shadow.

He's an astronomer who's lost faith
in the planets, gravity and all.
He sits on streetcorners
asking no one in particular.

Once he stood on the same streets
carrying a telescope he'd made
from abandoned carpet tubes
and glass he ground himself.

He'd hold the telescope towards
the moon or towards Saturn or something,
and carnival bark to passers-by,
Come on, see the moon, see Saturn.

They'd stop, they'd look, they'd
smile. We all want to know,
don't we? And they all asked
with their smiles: What are we?

He'd look at the stars, the sun,
or whatever, and say, I don't know.
But come, look at the moon, look
at the stars, look at Saturn.

Inside he wanted to believe in them:
The stars, the passers-by.
He wanted them to believe in him.

He wanted it all to mean something--

 this standing, this telescoping,
 these faces, these stars, the seeking.
And when they'd ask, What do they?
 He would have nothing to say.

 And so they'd walk away, shaking
 heads, raising eyes and eyebrows,
troubled by the man, his telescope,
and what they had seen and not seen

Until at last it got to him, not knowing.
He'd try to look into an eye or eyepiece,
 and connect the two with the line
 of his furrowed forehead.

All remained unconnected. All walked
 or revolved away. Until, at last,
 he came to sit on streetcorners,
telescope-less, blue lipped in the wind.

Why are the stars like eyes unreached?
 Why is Saturn ringed by silence?
Why don't the winds hunger, but not see?
The blue man shivered with empty hands.

GRAND UNIFIED THEORY

BY DAVID ANTHONY SAM

Here on the apex
of rings,
matter unites weight
with the insubstantial
part of nothing.

It is as if a saint sat in rapids
and was not wet,
but smiled for a mote of time
before becoming water
himself.

No moment,
just timeless
understanding
washed with the wisdom
of unknowing.

The rings combine,
dance together
beyond the range of vision,
or touch, or any sense
remaining.

The brain, organ
of complex fire, burns
to understand, to accept, to be,
to surrender into nothing but
potential of heavy water.

The image blooms brief,
fades into the fall of a star
small enough
to pass for nothing
in such vibrant blackness.

BY ELISABETH HORAN

Nothing to hide -
nonetheless,
I close.

BY ELISABETH HORAN

This is the top
to you.

SO WE'RE KLEPTOMANIACS

BY CAROLINE GRAND-CLEMENT

so we're kleptomaniacs, too busy
stealing kisses to keep track of the
stolen laughter in our pockets. we're
taking hands that aren't our owns,
sneaking glances past oblivious
parents because if they knew;
darling, love, sweetheart, if they
knew, they'd handcuff us to the devil.
chained to the eighth circle we're
stealing each other's bodies
because what else is there to do
with a love like ours than combust.
we are born of fire & sin. we are
poison-breathing snakes that know
only of our own burning. we are
burning at the stake for love, for
calling out into the red night. we own
nothing but the eternal torture we've
been damned to, & we will rob the
world of hate.

THE CIRCLE

BY MARC CARVER

I wrote a poem once
it was a long time ago
I guess that makes me a poet
but I have a strange feeling I was a poet
a long time before that.

The wind is strong today
and if I tore this poem from the pad it would fly and fly
I would never see it again
just like my first poem about that big fish and my pain
long
long
gone.

BY MARC CARVER

people come and they go
not many stay
the ones you want to stay
are always the ones to leave
You can sit with the stillness
until it almost makes you crazy.
And still they come and go
days turn into months and months years
seasons pick up speed
grow and grow like doubts in your mind.
they all mean something
they all mean everything
everything and nothing



BEACHSIDE WITH YOU

BY JACQUELINE WEISBAUM

IF I FELL IN THE JUNGLE

BY RICHARD GREEN

The sun streams in my
south-facing sunroom.
It's winter out there, but in here
plants from the tropics
ignore the fact—
spider plant, snake plant, rubber plant.
Bougainvillea bloom
purple, orange,
magenta and white,
relying on me
for food and water
like animals in cages.
If I fell in the jungle
they would feed on me:
my bones their stems,
my sinews their fibers,
my skin their leaves.
I'm safe enough
in my sunroom,
plants caged in
terracotta and talavera
like midnight cats.

THE ROACH

BY RICHARD GREEN

A nod to Neruda
The roach,
who has
traveled so far
through the dark
tunnels of time

The roach
who has seen
so much
with her
many-faceted
eyes

The roach,
who has endured
eons of extinctions
accommodated herself
to swamps and savannahs
deserts and drains

The roach
who roamed
with Dimetrodon
and Diplodocus
iguanas and
Iguanadon
Mammoths and mastodons

The roach,
who survived
comets and volcanoes
fire and ice,

flood and drought;
rats and raptors,
basilisks and
bobolinks,
cats and
scorpions
snakes,
centuries of centipedes
millennia of millipedes;

The roach
who has
crawled up
Cretaceous
cracks and
crevices
peers into the
blinding brilliance
of cold porcelain
freezes
tests the air with
waving antennae
lifts her
chitinous armor
on feathered feet,
scurries
to find the dark.

THE BIRTH OF VENUS

BY RICHARD GREEN

Botticelli

Newly formed from foam
off the Cytherian coast,
she is all line and pale color,
passionless,
pure,
virginal,
borne on tiny waves,
weightless
on a cockle shell,

Pomona rushes
with a robe of flowers.
Its fertile restless folds
eager to caress
the perfect body.
But the robe will always flutter
in this suspended moment,
celebrating innocence
before the birth of lust or love,
when the world will burst in bloom.

Boucher

They wash ashore like bodies from a wreck at sea,
Venus, mermen, mermaids, sea nymphs, all aboard
a great gray grinning rubber raft of dolphins, like
a bathtub toy, splashed by gods against the shore.
Venus rides a salon couch of satin waves.
Triumphant blasts of conch and banners rising high
held aloft by putti tell the world that now

love's arrived. Let there be joy among all men
for doll-faced, youthful, rosy soft and supple flesh.

The distant turbulent black-clouded stormy sky,
a hint of Saturn's bloody rage that gave her birth,
is past, a distant myth, let's think no more of that.
and let's not loiter long by dark forbidding cliffs.

Wait a bit, this painting looks familiar, we've seen this
all before. Boucher makes a wink and nod
to old Poussin, whose sober canvas seems a lecture
on religion of the ancients and their art,
formal, stiff and so old fashioned.

Let's party! Love is here to stay, get it on
wherever Venus waits, in salons, parks or woods,
palais, chateaux, hotels, streets or dark allees.

Redon

Not yet the flesh of love, she lies recumbent
On a shell, like a pearl, nestled in its depths,
Still in the sea, part of the ocean's listless
Life, vague and listless, waiting,
Not yet stirred by currents from the deep.

MURDER HOUSE

BY KALLIE BONNEVILLE

A cold blooded killer.
Merciless and cruel,
sips a rum and coke at the bar.

Hours later,
he grabs his navy blue
Tommy Hilfiger blazer.
On his way home,
he breaks into the house
of his past beloved angel,
Madison Nicole.

Intoxicated,
he crept towards her room,
entering where she
lies reading a book.
Wrapping his hands
around her neck,
his fingers interlocked.

Attacking from behind,
she thinks nothing of it.
Shrugs it off
as a shoulder-neck rub.
Things changed however,
almost instantly.

As he crept closer,
inch by inch,
she could smell
the alcohol on his breath.
His grip becoming tighter,
allowing less and less

air to enter her lungs
as she fights to break free.

Her face,
a pale white from
the lack of oxygen.
Moments later,
she lies frozen
on the foot of her bed.

Trembling, he extends
two fingers out.
Making contact
with her neck,
he checks for a pulse.
Nothing.

Adrenaline runs through his veins
as he drags her body
through the house,
out the back door,
disposing of it.

The deceased body
swept the floor,
as the neighbor watched
in terror and disbelief.

Reaching for their phone,
they dial 911.

Police, FBI show up.
Surrounding the scene,
guns pulled out
as they yell to freeze.
The man continued on
without a flinch.

Within an instant,
targeting the young suspect,
they shoot.
His grip on the body gradually loosens,
as he crashes to the ground,
blood escaping from his abdomen.

Another man came
running from the house.
He confronted the police officer,
as he asked what was going on.
Confusion entered
the officer's mind.
This man has the same
sharp-edged jaw line,
dark brown eyes,
suave dark brown
hair as the man
that was just shot.

Suddenly, his surroundings disappear,
crumbling from existence.
He was soon standing in
a pitch black room.
No surroundings
except the ghost
of the deceased woman.
Her voice, a glowing aura
mimicking those of a
once warm, living being.
She looked down as asked 'Why?'

Waking up in complete terror,
sweat dripped from
the man's forehead,
slowly trickling down
from his lips,
onto the sheets

of his bed.
It was all a dream.

Shortly after,
he fell back asleep.

Transferred to a black
plastic body bag,
she was zipped up,
hiding her identity from
every lurking soul,
except that of the man,
who she would haunt
for the eternity of his existence.

THINGS I CAN'T UNLEARN

BY SAMANTHA SIDWELL

“And now my fears, they come to me in threes, so I, sometimes, say fate my friend,
you say the strangest things, I find, sometimes”

“Someday” - The Strokes

Everyone knows me as Samantha Elizabeth Sidwell, and that’s because that’s my name. I can’t forget my own name, because my name is repeated time and time again. It echoes. It talks to me. My name is an irreversible fact. It’s etched into the lobes of my brain and the fine structure of my cranium. My name is Samantha. It can’t be undone.

My birthday is July 24th, 2000. I know this, because every year on July 24th, I’m suddenly important. However, I wasn’t as important before, and when I lay my head down on the night of the 24th, I won’t be important when my eyes close. Or when they open. I receive gifts in commemoration of surviving another year, seeing another day to the last second. Seconds are minutes and minutes are hours for me. For most, the right gift is a simple card with money grasping the insides, intertwined with some specially crafted appreciation, just for me. They write things inside the card like “Happy birthday, we love you!” which is funny because no one told me they loved me the day before. Or the day after. Whatever they decide to write in the card, it’ll be penned down carefully with their best ink. My birthday is July 24th, 2000. It can’t be undone.

My hair and eyes are dark brown by birth. This is simple fact down to genetics. Sure, I’ve fried my hair with bleach and lived with a head wrapped in rainbows more times than I can count. I could wear unique contact lenses, but on my driver’s license it will always say “Eyes: Drk Brn.” If I ever went missing, I could be identified with my dark brown eyes. I can’t forget this because of how often people have told me my eyes are beautiful. It can’t be undone.

I'll never forget that his middle name is Kekona. I'll never be able to forget the way his dimples creased into his cheekbones when happiness struck his chest. I've seen it far too often. I've laid my head to rest too often on his sternum, only to look up at his face and see his individuality. He named his guitars Alice and Jaynee. He loves chocolate. He has dogs named Seven and Sergeant. I can't unlearn the fact that his anger issues tend to get the best of him and more often than not, the only way to handle them is to break something. A destructive person has destructive thoughts, and destructive thoughts made him beautiful. He was a mess. He was my first beautiful mess. I'll never be able to unlearn the fact that we broke each other down daily, and viciously. The way I loved him has shaped the way I live now. It left wounds on me that will never heal entirely, because he loved the way my tears stung. It wasn't love, it was the art of being naive. What I mean by this, is that we were far too young to understand the psychological damage we crafted for each other. I don't think that it will ever be okay to fear your partner. To fear what they could do next to you. To think that maybe, they could hit you instead of the wall. That they may break your spirit instead of their personal belongings. What's even worse, is being so emotionally devoted to someone, only to have that loyalty slammed into glass walls. We were toxic. It can't be undone.

The lesson here, is that people will use you, time and time again for their own benefit.

I'll never forget that his middle name is Earl. I'll never forget the way his whole face lit up the minute he smiled. Or smirked. Or saw me smile, or smirk. Thinking back, there was never a time where he didn't smile in my company. I'll never forget, how he made me compare his hazel eyes to opioids. He loved playing Magic the Gathering. He had a gigantic bin under his bed full of trading cards. He has 3 bass guitars, one of them is acoustic. His dog's name is Lucy. Lucy was going blind. I'll never forget staying up all night talking. I can't unlearn this, because his deck of Magic cards used to remain untouched on my glass desk, with a photo of us, a note he wrote for me, and his guitar pick. It took me awhile before I realized that these belongings weighed down the strength of my desk. I was his glass desk. Too often he came close to shattering me from piling on his own baggage. It was impossible for me to carry it all. His laugh is pierced into the flimsy fabric of my limbs. He is the hole in the linen of my heart that I didn't think I'd be able to sew. He loved me as easily as he left me behind. He was my first love. My first perfect love. However, if this were the case, it was not a two way street. He was controlling. The days where I was happy, were only ever tainted by the days I spent in isolation, and the two would never be able to equal

each other out. Can you be a prisoner in your own heaven? I lived it. You can. He isolated me. I don't think that in any sense, it will ever be okay to feel guilty for surrounding yourself with the people who make you feel human. We were toxic. It can't be undone.

The lesson here, is that you never know someone the way you think you do.

I'll never forget that his middle name is Alexander. It was 3 weeks of sitting at a one-way street that reeked of cigarette smoke and pure loneliness. You see, people say they crave a love so deep that the ocean would be jealous or happiness so blindingly bright that the sun would be insecure. I find that a lot of people are simply lonely. Love is not tolerating someone's insurmountable flaws because their words fill your water-pitcher heart with the liquid validation you think you need. Love is saying those words for them, because their breath is far too precious to waste. From my past were ripped pieces of myself dangling from the vessel as weakly yet as persevering as humanly possible. I can't unlearn this, because he dismantled the word "sobriety". In the days where he couldn't be without what he thought was love, he snorted his problems and constant thoughts of me away and shot up his anguish. Despite the fact that I'm speaking in metaphors about his coping maneuvers, it can easily be inferred that he did in fact do these things. It's an awful feeling to feel as if you can fix what is already broken, that you can aid someone who has already mentally flatlined, but this can never be true. He is a reflection of myself. He represents my codependency, my addiction to happiness, and my anxiety. He is a mirror image of myself that I cannot escape. He won't let me escape, because he dug my name into his internal mechanism with his dirty fingernails. He clung to me to validate his existence. He was the first heart I broke. The first one I completely decimated. I was his muse and he was simply my burden. We were toxic. It can't be undone.

And finally, the lesson here, is to never become the forces which demolished you.

But you see, I can't forget these simple facts only because they were once common knowledge. There is no room in my heart for any of these past middle names, or one-way streets. I'm not some starstruck, hopeless romantic desperately

waiting for some archetypal character to sweep me off my feet. I'm simply someone who has been shaped by trauma. When you have anxiety, seconds become hours and hours become years. The seconds between when I was whole and when I became broken down, have lasted years. It's inevitable that I became the forces that destroyed me. People often use the word numb to describe heartbreak, but in every sense of the word, I was numb, and I made people numb too.

I'm too young to expect my ocean of feelings to turn desert hearts into lush oasis' that are encased in life, but I don't think I'm too young to understand what love can mean.

Love is sitting on their floor while they make you 25 pizza rolls just because you swear up and down that you can eat them ALL in one sitting, no problem.

Love is not letting go of them while they have a manic episode of pure anxiety over their disorganized internal chaos.

Love is thinking of them at 3 in the afternoon while you're driving, not at 3 in the morning while you're alone.

Love is listening to them play the drums in a small room without leaving, no matter how loud it is.

Love is slowly evolving into the best version of yourself, because their love inspires you to make carnations out of weeds.

Love can't be defined in concrete.

Love is dynamic, not static.

Love is the first serene thing that my overworked, neurotic mind ever got stuck on.

Because of this, in turn I know what love can never be.

Love will never be accepting their sugary words to make up for the fact that your arms had just been burnt by black coffee.

Love will never be pretending you're Play-Doh. You can't always let someone mold you into what they're craving that day.

Love will never be running down the same one-way street every day while they sit on the sidewalk.

Love will never be sewing together every red flag to make a blanket you can finally feel warmth under.

Love will never be one-sided compromise.

Love will never be a synonym for panic attack.

Love will never be pain.

Love will never be verbal abuse.

Love will never be abuse.

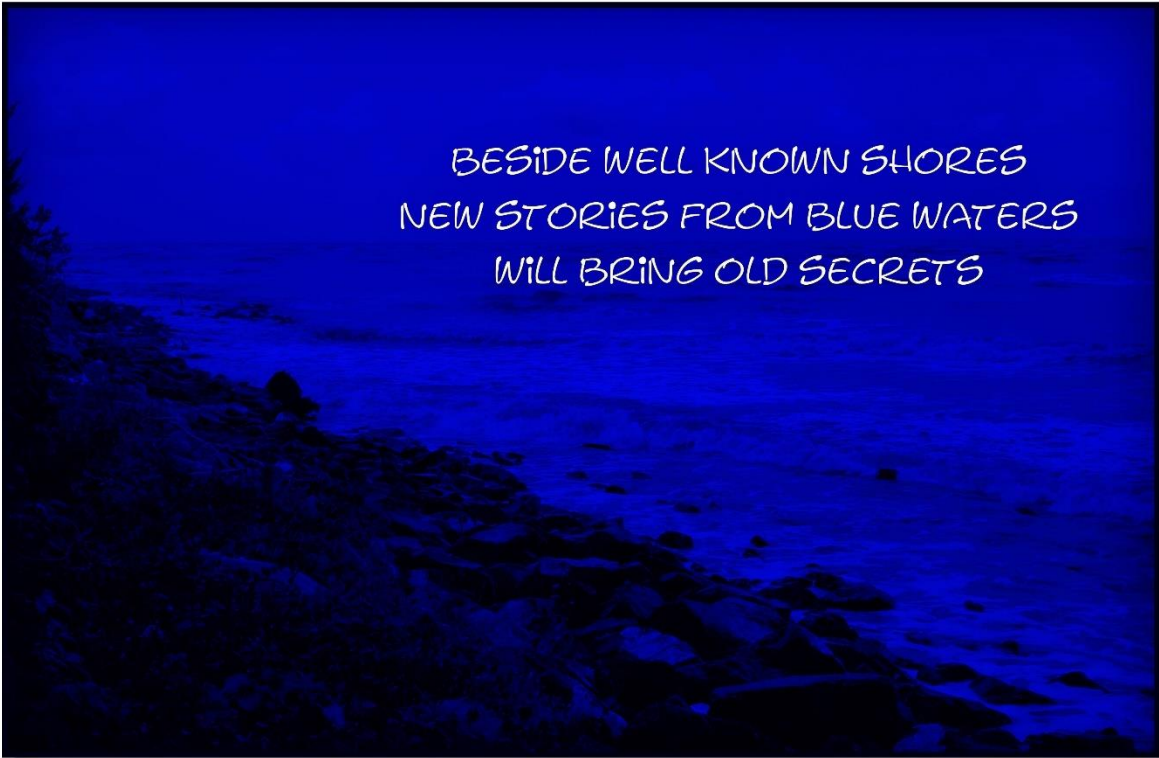
We try to comprehend a construct with no definite meaning, and the ultimate outcome is a chameleon, constantly shifting with time. It can't be undone.

Time and time again, I think that I can't be undone. I used to have days where I'd look into the mirror as many people have, and I didn't recognize the person who stared back at me. I don't think anyone has ever looked at me and thought I was pure art among a room of commoners. I'm like a home that will forever remain lit with flames, I'm a guitar that will never be in tune no matter how much you attempt. I'm the pencil that just can't seem to get sharp enough, or the light that will always be too dim. However, I'm also a force of nature, bringing the wind to my whim and radiating love like I'm the sky it's raining from. I'm a sketchbook of beauty and I could never stop loving the world around me. Someday, someone will write for me, all of their dreams, hopes for the future, goals, and fears. Except this time, they won't rip the pages away.

My fears have come to me in threes. So maybe now, I won't have to be afraid of words slapping me in the face. I've been liberated. My revelation doesn't expect me to rip my arms apart to replace his own. My serenity wants to see me turn myself into a carnation. The most sublime being breathing my air thinks I'm the oasis. So maybe now, my arms will stay intact. Maybe now, I won't cry hard enough to remember it. Maybe now, I don't have to wince when I press on my invisible bruises.

We drive on the right side of the road to avoid oncoming collisions. If two cars purposely drive in different directions, in one lane, will they cry for help when they crash, or will they understand what they've done?

It can't be undone.



BESIDE WELL KNOWN SHORES
NEW STORIES FROM BLUE WATERS
WILL BRING OLD SECRETS

Senryu on photo in blue filter, Buntal Espanade, Sarawak, 2018. Colin W. Campbell.

BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL

ALICE

BY ROWAN SIAH

a rabbit hands me a blood-splattered rose
i follow the darkness down the hole
(i'm warning you, alice, they'll steal your soul
it's all hallucinations; you'll soon enough know)

i'm dancing in a halo of black
lost my footing, caught by the wind
(they are miles away now, and you are free
let go of the carved grins and lukewarm tea)

my mind is void of destination
but the cat smiles like it's a delight
(mad girl, sad girl, you'll be fine
dreams of wonderland cloud your eyes
keep your pills close and say goodbye,
for what was wrong is now right)

mad hatter, mad hatter, have my heart;
it's a psychedelic work of art.
I'm falling in love; feeding on cake,
bittersweet tang, but not more than I can take
(you're shaking from the sugar in your veins,
it's been days since you've heard the clock tick
its hour hand frozen at three)

the array of treats can't fill me up;
the lights are escaping me
(you're fading fast and it's too late
picture perfect porcelain; never to awaken
you'll be sickened if you could see them now
huddled together in placid remorse)

rest your fears for I am well,
i am back where I belong;
tethered to his garish splendor;

nauseated by the notion of the drab

(you've never looked so beautiful;
dressed all in white.

Your story has come to an end,
so blow out the candles and say a last goodnight)

THE GRIM CADAVER

BY ROWAN SIAH

Within my new confines, I can't help but ponder
over my lackluster existence, I once cursed upon the world.

I take respite in the heady black;
map the footsteps of those above,
the sweet sinners; catalogue the rhythms
of beating hearts, and aching limbs.

I must confess,
i. I tire of their caustic smiles
ii. The road to happiness is surprisingly vile
iii. The flowers in my ribcage are dead
iv. Rampant thoughts devour my head

The rot and wither seeps from above,
damp and unrelenting,
tainting the soil that keeps me whole.
It's all that holds me together, stripped of flesh and bone.

Without the onslaught of blinding veneers,
I do admit that I have a confession to make.
It is by no error that I have met my fate
For mortality used to seem unbearably trivial

in a world of haste and speed.
The notion of days drawing to a close
weighed heavy on me,
each second fading seamlessly into the next.

Do not pity my swift demise, for it was most liberating
to be separated from one's shell and cease to be,
if only for the briefest of seconds,
before my lungs ached once again in protestation.

I long for the oblivion that escaped me;

a cruel promise from the depths of the unknown.
It was blind faith that drew me to the rope;
or perhaps the razor, or maybe even the bottle.
The details fade with the passage of time.

For now I have the better part of an eternity,

to wither
to breathe
to be

BLUES

BY ROWAN SIAH

i'm sick of the frigid
i'm tired of the cold
she'll rob you blind
but i won't steal the show

i'll drain you of the bitter
i'll tear you from the blues
maybe it'll win me a night
away from what you have to lose

you've said it again
you've shouted it twice
till you think I can't hear
the plea bleeding through your lies

there's a crescent on my wrist
there are more buried deep within
maybe one day I'll have the courage
to color them in

i've taken the shot
i've bitten it black
but in the muted afterglow
it still shimmers blue

RETURN TO FORM

BY CAVIN BRYCE

R. Sundrum, leading physicist on the Rift Assault Team, opens a conference room door to find his peers scribbling geographic figures and sprawling equations on a whiteboard, analyzing the scarce data they have gathered.

“What have we got?”

“It’s stretched roughly three thousand miles over night sir.”

“What about our probes, were they able to make contact?”

“They were unable to lock onto the target. It seems that everything we fire at it is steered away somehow, possibly due to the fluctuating electromagnetic fields that surround it.”

Sundrum takes a seat among his scrambling kin and tugs at the string of a tea bag steeping in his mug. All around him great minds squeal and shriek, struggling to comprehend the apparent unraveling of their solar system.

“For God’s sake,” a mathematician in the background pipes up, pausing from his frantic calculating, “we can’t combat what we don’t understand, sir, what do we do? What *can* we do?”



“This is Sundrum speaking, Mission Control to Lapetus.” a static whisper echoes through the Major’s helmet.

“I can hear you loud and clear Mission Control.”

“We’re preparing to launch, please do a final check of your equipment.”

“Everything is online and functional sir, you are free to continue.”

“Roger, commencing countdown-- ten.”

A violent quake to slithers up from the launchpad to the small cabin where the astronaut is strapped to a chair before a control panel. The interior of the shuttle shudders as freezing rocket fuel makes its way through metal intestines, fuel pumps churn and steam hisses from hidden vents.

“Nine.” The Major clenches his teeth.

“Eight, seven, six-- commencing final countdown-- five, engines on!”

Lights from the control panel cast harsh prisms onto the aluminum walls, the Major’s face is highlighted a violent red.

“Four, three, two- -check ignition-- one!”

Americans across the country watch plumes of smoke billow from burnt orange rocket boosters on their dazzling technicolor television sets; their savior, the former military man and fledgling astronaut, was on his way to investigate the astronomical trench that hovered above their planet. And so, they cheered, hugs were exchanged. Tears were wiped from faces and champagne bottles were popped; their corks soaring through the air in emulating fashion of the Major’s rocket.

It seems instantaneously that the Major finds himself among the stars. Bright blues of the afternoon sky bleed to dark purple, to black, and finally to bright teal.

Light spewing from the rift illuminates the sparkling vacuum. Rather than being swayed off track, as the previous unmanned probes were, the Major's shuttle seemed to be drawn towards it. The Major can't shake the strange, creeping feeling that it *knew*

he was coming, that it *wanted* him to do so.

"This is Mission control to Major, are you stable?"

"Everything is fine sir," the Major responds, disengaging his safety harness and floating to the viewport for a better view.

"And the rift?"

Above him, the Major could see an ever expanding, bright blue vastness. The rift seems to breathe, swirling colors together like a gargantuan paint mixer as it does so. Fantastic stalactites, glowing like enraged comets, ooze from it's jagged fringes, dripping slowly through the vacuum of space towards Earth. It looks much like a giant, cosmic, stab wound bleeding pastels. Giant neon fish swim in large packs, darting away from the incoming shuttle. Celestial clams rest on passing meteors and it's obvious, to the Major, that an ecosystem has developed in the rifts presence. A light purple squid drifts into open space from the bleeding anomaly, gazing directly at the Major, it's pupil larger than the entire craft, as it passes.

"What do you see Major?"

"You wouldn't believe me sir. It's . . . it's so . . . alive! Like an ocean floor!"

“Alive? You’re being ridiculous Major, focus!” As Sundrum speaks, the stalactites oozing from the rift wrap around the space shuttle and begin dragging it inward.

“Sir! It’s moving, it’s alive I say! It lives!” At Ground Control, they can see that the shuttle has been terribly damaged by the prehensile tentacles that grasp it. Oxygen is depleting rapidly.

“You need to relax, get in the escape pod, and evacuate.”

The astronaut clammers into the tiny escape pod and ejects from the main shuttle as it is consumed by the rift, dissolved in a spectacular light show. At such a close proximity the cosmic anomaly looks like a grande ocean of morphing colors. The substance it is composed of is constantly in motion, bubbling and swirling. Great waves of gravity crash and recede. Glowing jellyfish are carried by the rivers of energy, floating passively.

“Major, do you copy?”

“Can you see this through my helmet cameras?”

“We have no direct visual of any details. You’re our only eyes and ears now.”

“This is insanity sir.”

“That’s why you’re there, to gather this information. We need you to get closer.” Adrenaline floods the Major’s veins and he reaches for the lever that will open the door to his pod.

“Tell my wife that I love her.”

“She knows, soldier, and your country thanks you. I thank you.”

The door cracks open with a slight hiss and the Major floats from it toward the anomaly. Small tentacles, similar to the stalactites that had wrapped around the shuttle, meet him halfway and softly probe his body, investigating the intruder. The alien material seeps through his suit, into his skin. The Major can't feel his body. He can't even tell if he's breathing. As he floats, he's filled with a sense of total belonging.

The rift seeps into his bloodstream, his nervous system, his psyche. Suddenly, a
vision:

*The rift consumes everything, it's fanged teeth seeping from it's fringes. Meteors are caught, black holes absorbed, and entire solar systems devoured-- their matter coagulating inside of it's gut. Families sit huddled in their living rooms. Children wrestle and parents stare silently at each other. Their televisions read: **ASTRAL ANOMALY EXPANDING RAPIDLY, CONTACT IS IMMINENT.** Everybody on the planet; every criminal, every doctor, every man, woman, and child huddle like scared animals inside of their homes as the cosmic fire touches down on their planet. It sweeps across the street, absorbing everything on contact. Finally, there's only the rift. The glittering, edenic, rift, it's morphing colors prominent*

*against the white backdrop of nothingness. The ball is contracting rapidly, smaller and smaller and smaller still, condensing the weight of existence into a marvelous particle. Pressure builds, continues building. As soon as it can't shrink anymore--
an explosion.*

All digested contents spew forth, though they're discombobulated and shattered. Great cosmic gases collide, wrestle for billions of years. Planets form. Explosions, grand and terrifying. Bacteria squirm in a murky pond, growing and growing and growing. Life. Death. Life. Death. There's alien life too, scattered among planes nobody will ever know of; tentacles and bulbous eyes. Intangible consciousness. Glowing plants. Reptiles. Gills. Fur. War. Man, mankind is walking. Humans are wearing lapels and caps, dresses and bonnets. The Major's father is dancing with his mother on a stage and now they're married the major is born, born and growing, growing, he's in a rocket now and he's face to face with a magnificent eye and the eye is peering into him, a whale crashes into its omnipotent graphite iris and all is dissolved.

The Major opens his eyes, tears are streaming down his face.

“What do you see Major! Humanity deserves to know, we need to know!”

Our humble astronaut looks down at the microbial marble that is his home planet, a planet that will soon be absorbed and rebirthed. He imagines the stop lights

and skyscrapers, the atomic bombs. Preachers, teachers, and chefs. Cheetahs and tortoises. Rich and poor. Dichotomies in abundance; meaningful, meaningless, it's a matter of opinion.

The Major wiggles his feet through the fabric of space, above his planet, like a child sitting above the sand on a swing set and whispers, "the Earth is blue, Mission

Control, so very blue."

END

BY DENNY E. MARSHALL

spaceship hover low
in middle of earths oceans
unloads formula
then depart, aqua life forms
grow legs have both gills and lungs

BY DENNY E. MARSHALL

in planets orbit

alien ship visible

no place to land craft

because of unexpected size

two moon and forty meters

COME IN IF YOU DARE

BY SUSANDALE

In a dark night
A green sign flares
Come in if you dare
To the lair
of 2017

Warily, with bated breath
we watch a curtain descend
Do you tremble to push it aside
and witness a treacherous game
of Russian Roulette

Speak, but softly
Of a scorched spring that blazes into
sweltering summer
Of seas that sizzle into hurricanes
Of rains that fall to swell
But cannot wash away
a chorus of life___ into nothingness
Dark silences embalmed in unspoken words

Marked with crossed swords
the entrance,
or is it the exit?
Too late to turn back
If you could, would you

IN OUR DISHEVELED LIVES

BY SUSANDALE

In our disheveled lives
there happened once
the sweet charm of a day's romance
Aboard by way of an outstretched gangplank,
we strolled on board, hand in hand
The ferry's horn sounded long notes of leaving
and pushed off from the pier
to glide amongst shimmery currents
While under the sun-stroked skies of late autumn
Winter rattled chilly bones

Autumn separating from summer
even as we were riding the waters
that separated us from the steady grounds
we were leaving behind
Wherever the ferry was going
We'd go with it,
And end up wherever the silver afternoon would take us

JUNE, 06

BY SUSANDALE

In silver-star time
Travel the traipsing feet of young spring
barefoot and soon to bronze
Quivering clouds hang in
Warm-window skies
Impaled with the pale ribs of rainbows
Arching down to winds
of soft songs
And the throbbing wings of maiden doves

The bullfrog sings lopsided songs
While roundelays of blossoms
Rapacious - Feverish
Rush to embroider the tapestry
Of fields and meadows

SEPARATION

BY RAJANI RADHAKRISHNAN

A lone tree props up the heavy night, the weight of all that
darkness, of unconsummated dreams, of things that sigh
in the after-light. He watches the unstill sky impaled by the
wounded bark, knows the world is lighter in the sunshine, the
unencumbered blue, the unfettered clouds, that strange
anomaly of time and sight replaced by this impenetrable murk
that watches with its many eyes. He knows something will give
before dawn, but what if the shadows do not rip, what if the
separation of heaven and earth breaks down and the deathly ink
stains all eternity, what if the now is swallowed by that open
mouth and will never be again, he shifts slightly, feeling his
roots dig deeper, the cold seeping into his old, trembling feet.

TWO CORPSES

BY WANDA DEGLANE

we'll sleep away until sundown
or until your mother calls
to ask you where you've been.
we hide away and bury ourselves
six feet underground.
they already think we're dead,
so why not start now?
curled up together,
i'm the only one you need
and someday she will stop calling
and crying "I want my son back,"
someday the flowers will grow out of my bones
and you'll still be holding on.

CHOCOLATE & CHERRIES

BY WANDA DEGLANE

My hair woke me up one day
to tell me she wasn't feeling very brown
anymore. She says she envisions herself
more purple, a shiny amethyst waterfall.
I sigh and look up pictures of violet-haired
girls on Pinterest. When my hair is unhappy,
she wakes the following day looking as if
a cyclone just passed through her, and
she spends the whole afternoon weeping bitterly.
I find it's easier to give her what she wants.

Months ago, she suddenly announced
she wanted to go blonde. *Everybody wants
to go blonde*, I told her. And she said,
Then let's be like everybody.

*I'm tired of boring old dirt brown. The birds
want to make nests in me and I'm sick of it.*

Later that day in the supermarket, I walked by
the aisle for hair dyes, my hands tracing
the boxes of brightest gold. The girls on them
smoldered back at me, happy, sultry, sexy, and
their locks looked like they didn't have much to
complain about. I compromised with my hair,
and got blonde highlights, some honey for my chocolate.

On the day of my hair's violet dreams,
I went to the hair salon and paid to turn my head
into an explosion of berries. I looked at my hair
in protest. *This is what you wanted?*

And she grinned and said, *Of course.*

*Chocolate and cherries makes for
the best concoction.* She slept soundly that night,
woke up the following day with
the shiniest waves of plum.

CLIMACTIC

BY SHAMAR ENGLISH

Theo paces back, and forth in the hallway. The doctor exits a room and approaches him with a firm posture. “Mr. Winslow, I’m sorry but your wife is gone.”

Theo frowns, wiping his eyes, “What do you mean Anya’s gone? This is our due date. We’re having a baby. How can she just be gone?”

She nods repeatedly, “I know, Mr. Winslow. However, there were some unforeseen complications.” Theo rubs his forehead like a sandblaster. “Mr. Winslow, your wife succumbed to an aneurysm during labor?” Theo takes a deep breath, “An aneurysm, what about our baby?”

She shakes her head. “The baby didn’t make it either. I’m sorry, we did everything we could.” He falls backward. The wall catches him, Theo shuts his eyes.

He contorts his face, trying to beat back more tears.

#

It’s one year later. Theo awakes on a turbulent charter plane. It’s on course for The Mahalangur range in the Great Himalayas, the home of Mt. Everest. Theo admires his picture of Anya and a copy of their baby’s sonogram drifting into slumber.

The next morning, Theo deplanes with his gear. “I’ll be right here waiting for you, Mr. Winslow” says the pilot. Theo adjusts his backpack. “That won’t be

necessary, Nigel.” Nigel says, “Are you serious? This is fatal weather.” Theo says, “I’m aware. It was nice to meet you, goodbye.”

Theo pulls down his ski-mask, saunters into his excursion. Nigel watches Theo until he’s swallowed whole by the sleet. The temperature is so bleak that it’s more excruciating than third degree burns. It pushes Nigel back inside the plane.

#

Theo stands at the base of the mountain. He has a memory of him and Anya lying in bed together. “Theo, if I die before you, promise me that you won’t go back to your adrenaline junkie days. Please, I need you to live a happy and fulfilled life for the both of us. So, promise.” Theo kisses Anya on her forehead and says, “I promise.”

Theo unbuckles his backpack, throws it to the ground. He removes his gloves, tosses them to the ground, too. He starts scaling the mountain. He’s hardly at the mid-point. The frost bite’s building on his hands. His breathing’s shaky. His stamina is fatiguing.

Theo drops to his knees in the snow. He crawls to the wall, leans against it. The snow’s spewing down, hitting him like powder anvils. Theo’s too numb to feel anything, eyeing the ivory sky.

Theo feels around the inside of his pockets. He pulls out his picture of Anya, and their daughter’s sonogram. He gazes at them, making a wish. The blowing and whistling wind has a wicked punch. The hypoxia is now interacting with him. There’s a blinding light peeking through all the snow. Theo stares at it.

He sees his gorgeous wife Anya holding their beautiful baby girl in her nursery room. “Theo, come home to me and Thea, our daughter. I named her after you. Isn’t she beautiful?” Theo smiles and nods, “Yeah, just like her mother.” Anya smiles, he approaches his girls. The snow dog piles onto Theo until he’s no longer visible. His photo and sonogram lie in the snow.

THE END



BY LILY DAVIES

CARDIGAN STYLE

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

Whispered dreams
of gentle breathing,
seagulls tease in flight,
Sunday calm in Tampa.
Coffee or tea, of bacon with egg,
baguette and brie
a southern breeze.
Terns fish on the blue bay
kids flying kites high
beach walk awaits
my cardigan style.

INTO THE FIRE

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

I've thrown myself into it;
yes, thrown myself in.
And the fire has been lovely.

It's flames jump,
leaping toward impossibility,
beautiful stellar show.

So if today,
my body is dragged down,
the courage which hurled me
into the heart of the flame
has smoldered into mere embers.

The knowledge is there,
even today, when an albino raven
comes to sit upon my shoulder,
my vision doubling all objects
indiscriminately.

Those which I choose to see and
those which I do not,
the images imprinted on my eyelids
over lapping one another,
awkwardly, as a child's collage.

Yet I see beyond the darkness,
beyond the terror, beyond the spark.

Oh life of mine, incredible
harvest, this roaring bonfire
of hope which we feed with
ourselves.

I've thrown myself into it,
I'm warmed from within,
a soul afire, peace smolders.

DAILY BREAD

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

Maybe that's the lesson for me today,
to hold on to these simple moments,
appreciate them a little more as
there's not many of them left now.

I don't ever want that for you, finding
things that make you happy shouldn't
be so hard.

I know you'll face pain, suffering and
hard choices, but you can't let the weight
of it choke the joy out of your life.

No matter what, you have to find the
things that love YOU. Run to them,
There's an old saying, "that which doesn't
kill you makes you stronger."

I don't believe that, I think the things that
try to kill you make you angry and sad.

Strength comes from the good things,
your family, your friends, your faith and
satisfaction in hard work and play.

Those are the things that will keep you
whole, those are the things to hold onto
when you are broken.

They shall keep you healed.

BURNT SKY

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

in the way of progress
on the final frontier
eyes kept closed to
falsified fantasy and truth.
contrails scribbled across the sky
of collapsed lungs they fell,
and finally died.

REVELATORY

BY KEN ALLAN DRONSFIELD

In this world of heartless consumption
waste of human life to the whipsaw;
never did so little mean so much
then when two deer in a field
saw you and you saw them
what else mattered...
neither blinked.

I PAID WITH MY HAIR

BY SIMON ORYCHOWSKI

I paid with my hair
for this body long ago
aging rapidly in exchange for
a thinner frame,
then supple limbs held fast
by now aching bones
my skin has been pulled taut
face sunken, cheeks concave
white in the absence of blood
quickly edging
ever nearer
to the final frame underneath

WHALES IN HEAVEN

BY SIMON ORYCHIVSKI

passion's hard to come by these days for me
the white whale of our love's gone belly up
the see-through sky is filled with great dead fish
floating higher now than nature intended

love poem's inscribed
when the giant orcas die
on each's insides

they float
as if heaven were a place we could go
and the whales were worth watching

WHAT LONELY LOOKS LIKE

BY MAY JARED LE

The more you make me miss you
The more I hate you
The more I wish I could come crashing into your arms
As a breaking
wave
And once my pressure is heavy against your ribs
I will give sound to the pretty words you hoard
under your chess—never thought to say them to me
All the while my love shall be rushing rushing rushing at your blood
Making them run through your well-guarded veins
like wild currents
rippling through your soul.

HOW I WILL DIE

BY MAY JARED LE

Even dead in the rain
I still hear Mother's screams as the coroner
powders my face.
But the examiner shall not find a single rhyme
still trapped in the cavity of my chest.

I might have lived in jest, loved in vain,
always envious of the gods
But there shall be no couplets
Missed by the pen of these hands.

THE RETURN

BY MAY JARED LE

The rain came and ruined all.
The pretty flowers you wait all summer long drowned:
murdered by a violent rush of simple droplets.
Once upon a time you've dream of the early petals:
the ways they shall open to your smile, or gleam (perhaps like gems)
dew-soaked at sunrise.
But now all that had been said, and done, and wished upon
and the things yesterday held sacred--today profaned
return as clever lies and prick like thorns
They leave a trail of fire ants quietly crawl beneath your skin.

Time lifts the veil off the world's painted face
stings knowledge until the pain reaches your liver.

Love?

What love?

You have always been the only
child under the dome.
Today some will go home
drenched with the blood of your heart
But you'd rise again tomorrow
And the Light will be glad to kiss
Your broken limbs.

CLOISTERED

BY MAY JARED LE

I come home with nobody, to nobody
but the walls that cloistered me
the yellowed books on shelf—half opened—eyed me down
I kneel to their lessons
adore what people called the old decay of yesterday

For me it is Love:
The fulfilling of the Law.

Ever since Mother's womb I've reveled in solitary
I don't drink flavored lust and call it Love
nor unzip my heart in the loudest club and dance to false melodies.

Every night as I waste my blood alongside the moon
When the drunken and the lost are staggering home
Muttering in judgement my girlish reticence
The woman in me awaken
Observe
with a gentle smirk.

BY SIMON PERCHIK

These crumbs are from so many places
yet after every meal they ripen
sweeten in time for your fingertip

that shudders the way your mouth
was bloodied by kisses wrestling you down
with saliva and rumbling boulders –you sit

at a table and all over again see it
backing away as oceans, mountains
and on this darkness you wet your finger

to silence it though nothing comes to an end
–piece by piece, tiny and naked, they tremble
under your tongue and still sudden lightning.

BY SIMON PERCHIK

It had an echo –this rock
lost its hold, waits on the ground
as the need for pieces

knows all about what's left
when the Earth is hollowed out
for the sound a gravestone makes

struck by the days, months
returning as winter :the same chorus
these dead are gathered to hear

be roused from that ancient lament
it sings as far as it can
word for word to find them.

BY SIMON PERCHIK

Before its first grave this hillside
was already showing signs
let its slope escape as darkness

mistake every embrace for dirt
though one arm more than the other
is always heavier, still circles down

bringing you closer the way rain
knows winter will come with snow
that was here before, bring you weights

till nothing moves, not the shadows
not the sun coming here to learn
about the cold, hear the evenings.

BY SIMON PERCHIK

Though you can't tell them apart
your tears came back, marked the ground
the way leaves go unnamed to their death

as the need to follow one another
one breath at a time, face up
and after that the rain and warmer

—you weep with your collar open
make room for another grave
near a sea each night wider, further

no longer heard the way now and then
comes by to close the Earth
with buttons and sleeves and tighter.

BY SIMON PERCHIK

You open this jar the way each raindrop
breaks apart mid-air, stops telling time
when struck by another, head to head

as streams —your hands stay wet
let you gather the hours that are not
the bottom stones mourners use

for water though this lid is still circling
where you listen for those nights
on the way back as the puddles

water makes when trying to breathe
into a place on its own and empty handed
the glass shatters all at once.



Senryu on photo in blue filter, Buntal Espanade, Sarawak, 2018. Colin W. Campbell.

BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL

GOTHIC AFTER DUSK

BY LAUREN WALSBURG

I hear a faint tapping on my window
as the storm outside thunders on with an almighty crack
that tells me the Gods of old are in a fierce battle with the underworld.
I feel an undulating tide of terror creeping up from my toes as I
desperately try to stave off the assault of body and mind.
There is a sharp pain at the base of my neck.
I lay, paralyzed with fear as I envisage the Count
crouched over me,
stealing my body's life force.
An almighty howling barrels through the twisted warren of
empty halls, threatening to crash into my den
and envelops its wickedness around my heart.
The tide rises higher in my body,
licking the base of my navel in a fiery tumult of panic.
A chill ebbs its way through the crevices between the earth
and the planked floor.
I feel an iciness
tearing away the dulled warmth from my overexposed heart
that thumps so harshly I fear it will tear apart my ribcage
and burst through my skin in a spectacular display of brilliant red.
The shrill sound of the uncanny pierces through the pitch of night
as I see a flash of white.

Could it be her?

No, my dear! I did not neglect you!
See me! Look into my heart and see it is true to you and truly yours!

Ah! Be gone! For I am not the one you seek,
my sweet Weeping Woman!

BE THE FLAME

BY TIANNA GROSCH

Do not be the moth
flocking toward destruction.
Be the flame withstanding pain
burning bright
to fend off the darkness
with your sheer light.
Do not be the moth
singeing your wings
so you may no longer fly.
Be the flame, impenetrable.
Feed off the oxygen which
makes you want to live.
Do not be the moth
returning to your agony.
Be the flame, dancing,
your body flickering
in the wind.
Be the flame, igniting and
consuming all obstacles
in your path.

CONSUME ME

BY TIANNA GROSCH

my forbidden fruit

sweetest juice
touches
soft lips
tongue licks

deft fingers
peel away skin
open me up

teeth dive in
seek the pit

heart-stone

IMPOSSIBILITIES

BY TIANNA GROSCH

i've been searching for

love
in a clenched heart

acceptance
in a damning society

contentment
in a cavity of suffering

i've been relying on

myself
although I am lost

my dreams
although they stretch far

peace
although there is none

and what is left
when it is all gone

but never existed

a hopeless mind
dreaming impossibilities
that could never be true

too good, too false
too much to desire

FIRECRACKER

BY TIANNA GROSCH

i'm always waiting,
waiting to explode
my heart is Burning,
Burning through my clothes

my skin's pure, slick plastic,
my head a Firecracker

my head a Firecracker
starting to implode

words tear me apart
pinning me like labels
sticking to this skin

no matter where I turn,
can't get out
no matter how I scream,
nobody comes

left to
wait, wait for the match
the flick of the lighter
smell of sulfur as it's struck
Burning, Burning

heart is beating,
fighting to be free
head is pounding,
don't know
where i'm from

skin is only plastic,
my head's on Fire

Firecracker, exploding
sputtering
flicker and sizzle
set me off,
my insides swirl,
higher

come too close
too late, too bad
you'll be blown to bits

desire for control eats away
like poison in the vein
like a long, sad exhale
a stale, sour taste

my gut aches
i waste away
fizzling down
'til nothing more

my head a Firecracker
heart burnt black and brittle
my skin melted, oozing wax
always waiting to explode.

APHRODITE'S MIRROR

BY ANDREA DIEDE

The briny ocean breeze danced with the smell of warm buttered popcorn and funnel cakes. The Pismo Beach boardwalk was overflowing with a balance of tourists and locals alike. Aphrodite sat deep within the canvas tent staring into her hand mirror carved with dolphins, admiring her undeniable beauty.

Her son, paced around the perimeter of the tent, weaving through the people. Eros yelled over the rumbling crowd, "Come one, come all, witness what your future holds. Just one look. Are you destined to be cursed or blessed with beauty?"

He darted in front of those avoiding eye contact as they strolled passed him, "You, dare to expose your deepest passions?"

"Or you," he popped in front of a woman with glistening skin and a glowing smile, "dare to witness what true beauty is?" she scoffed.

"Eros," Aphrodite called from within the folds of the tent, "The man, bring him to me," She adjusted the myrtle-wreath upon her head of cherry red curls.

Eros scanned the crowd, "You there, Sir." He grabbed the man who was embracing a young lady and wearing tan cargo shorts and man flops, "please, see what love has in store for you." Eros gestured to the tent wedged between the popcorn and funnel cake vendors.

The man shrugged towards the young lady, "I already know what love has in store for me," He grazed his lips across the young lady's, her hair the color of wet sand.

"Yeah, let's do it," the young lady yanked Timothy toward the tent.

"Wait," Eros jumped in front of him, "you must go alone."

"Why?" the young lady asked.

"You can go after him."

"She can go first," Timothy kissed the young lady on the neck.

"No, you must go first and go alone," Eros said.

The couple exchanged questioning glances.

"Okay," the man stepped into the tent. When the canvas door swept closed behind him, he saw Aphrodite who sat on the other side of a card table. He was stunned by her ivory skin and pursed lips. He stared at her as she stroked the handle of the antique mirror.

"Sit," she said.

"What's this?" he pointed to the mirror lined tent, each of them unique.

"You need to know."

"Know?"

"Sit." She picked up the mirror she had been tracing with her finger.

"What, no tarot cards?" he chuckled and eased himself into the chair across from her.

Aphrodite ignored his ignorance and held the mirror inches from his face. The fog that had initially been blurred the mirror disappeared. He sat back in his chair, the pink drained from his complexion.

An image appeared of the young lady waiting outside the tent, standing in the middle of an apple orchard. Timothy watched himself kneel in front of her in the mirror's reflection. He presented her with a beautiful diamond that gleamed from within his hand. In the mirror, there was a pleasure on the young lady's face, and she jumped into his arms.

He looked up to stare into Aphrodite's seafoam green eyes.

"What's this?" he reached for the mirror, blinking away his tears his lips formed a smile.

"No," Aphrodite pulled the mirror to her breasts.

"Is there more?"

She nodded her head yes.

"Please, show me."

"Can you handle it?" she glided her pointer finger around the edge of the mirror.

"I want to see," he leaned toward Aphrodite, a yearning in his eyes.

She lifted the mirror again. A surge of sand whipped through the canvas walls. Timothy covered his eyes, blocking the particles from his face. When the wind stopped, he stared back into the mirror. Timothy grinned, mesmerized he watched himself and the young lady outside grow together, first getting married, then moving into a stunning home, and having a couple of children, all was perfect. He swiped his hands under his eyes, clearing his moist cheeks.

The images in the mirror faded into dark, swirling haze.

He rocked back, "what's happening?" The mirror cleared, exposing the young woman, who was entangled within their bedsheets with another man. The image changed to the two of them in a raging fight. She stormed out of their gorgeous home, dragging luggage behind her.

"You're a witch," the color was back in his cheeks, this time as red as a boiled lobster. He swung to grab the mirror, but Aphrodite pulled it away.

"I assure you, I'm no witch."

"What's happening?" Eros burst into the tent, the young lady close behind him.

"Than what are you?"

"I'm the goddess of love," Aphrodite's smirked.

"You're sick. Let's go, Rachel," Timothy snatched the young lady's hand and tore out of the tent.

Eros stared at his mother in the smoldering tent illuminated by the afternoon sun.

"Bring me another." She slid a scallop shell comb through her curls, "ah... here he comes now."



BY LILY DAVIES

DIFFERENT RESPONSES

BY MICHAEL T. SMITH

The snow comes through your shoe
no matter how you step --
as if you're trying to steal the cold from winter.
My socks are an emblem of futility at this point.

My toe plowing,
I walk up the crunchy driveway,
in what might as well be a lethargic mosey
for all the good it does.

I'm numb.
The message I meant to say
was explained
by the spirits in the air, who
only come out this season. But none
of them --
ponder what you would say
in turn.

SUPERNATURAL ELOQUENCE

BY KAILEY TEDESCO

This will be a ritual tomorrow: I put on my mourning
beads. I've had tea. I've downed six cosmos

at the lyceum. My words / their words / our words /
froggy voice the dummy on my wrist. I'm a woman

filled & you make believe my fill is not of
woman. My fathers exact words were:

you were born looking like the inside
of a pumpkin & this must mean he believed

my mother was the pumpkin outside. This ritual
tomorrow is going to be a hit: they think my

voice is gruff, they think my body is a jewelry
box. There are a thousand dead bodies inside

of me, but I promise you none of them
will volunteer to do the talking.

FORECASTED

BY KAILEY TEDESCO

When every little bone
of my body
has calmed, when

October, when the sky
gallops / trapezes / gulps,
when the fortune teller

removes her rings, ascends –
I have died at that time
without knowing

& only small
flashes of light
against the stucco

ceiling & inside my
closed eyes
show me the backyards

long glimmered.

Sheets that have frosted
around me, shrines
of Southern fruit

orange / peach / nectarine
all contused juices & aroused
with insects –

I sit at the kitchen table
asking for candy apples,
wedge-sliced

while my grandmother
ignores me in favor
of God –

the earth of this moment
whirlpools and lakes
my blood still.

WHEN WE DIE, OUR GHOST BECOMES SOMEONE ELSE'S DREAM

BY KAILEY TEDESCO

it's midnight –
i buy myself white
oleanders / death

cups / potassium
cyanide – i can
only awaken

once a year & even
then it is
a burden

to lift
eyelids
from within. small

me in a modest
dress, city-
stolen, tumors

each rib
before reaching
the eye. when i

hinge the lid
closed
your body

will be
my body & your
tongue

will taste
the milk
of strangers.

MAKE ME SPINDLY

BY KAILEY TEDESCO

Come upon these briars carpeted
pinkly & drench yourself in small
cuts, puncture wounds, violet
fruits. So much of what you desire
is made by your own body. Speak
of your cloak & pillow; speak in
sobs of gold leaf – currency to burn
cheeks like hot ovens of butter
bread & cocoa. Come see me
for shifting fingerprints & palms,
life lines centipedal. My breath
is the only kingdom. Come to my
sternum antlered in brown
moss, valerian bloom, hung limp
to the wall. Pull at the threads
of your augury, knife-cut to knife-
cut, blood spill against skin, against
bark, against seed. Needles pile
to frozen roses – here I lay varicose
in the white of your eye.

BY MARIBEL C. PAGÁN

The rock skipped four times--unlucky.

BY DIANA CUEVAS

My mom tells me not to go
That I'm stupid if I go
Yes, that blunt
I can't help but feel
Trapped
I kinda get it I'm her baby
She doesn't want me
Hanging around that
Type of
Crowd
But I LOVE HIM
Yep,
I'm that
Naive
Despite
the drugs
Despite
the laziness
Despite
the nothing
She is sure to entail
Without actually knowing
His life and I know!

Again
I'm that naive
And
Irresponsible enough
I should be chained
Throw away the key
And
Looked at for life
Like a specimen
In a quarantine
Never be able to look at
The fruits of life

Cause.
I'm that naive...

HARVEST

BY GOLD OSITA

she gave her soul away
suddenly, swiftly
no warning, no care
perhaps now the void between her breasts
will scream out to her
the coming of an entity
bathed in a cloud of certainty
long, trembling fingers
crooked smiles
and empty eyes
she sowed the seed
now it's time to harvest



IN A QUIET MOMENT
ALONE BY THE BLUE OCEAN
FIND ANOTHER SOUL

Senryu on photo in blue filter, Damai Central, Sarawak, 2018. Colin W. Campbell.

BY COLIN W. CAMPBELL

Biographies

GEOFF BIGLER

Geoff Bigler, a poet, Father of three, husband and all around maker. @haikupoetrys on twitter.

ALEXA BOCEK

Alexa Bocek is a young writer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania whose work has appeared in The Claremont Review, Literary Heist and Pulp Literary magazine. She has won several awards and honorable mentions for her poetry, fiction, and screenwriting. She's been writing for several years and attends the Lincoln Park Performing Arts school as a Literary arts student.

KALLIE BONNEVILLE

Kallie Bonneville is an 18-year old senior at Fort Vancouver High School. Her hobbies include drawing, people watching, and spending time with her family.

CAVIN BRYCE

Cavin Bryce is an emerging writer from the University of Central Florida. He spends a lot of time in an armchair fantasizing about hobbies he admires but doesn't indulge in. One day he'll build a ship in a bottle. You can find him on twitter here: @cavinbryce

COLIN W. CAMPBELL

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

MARC CARVER

Marc Carver has published some ten collections of poetry and over two thousand poems on the net but what he really enjoys is when he gets an email from someone he does not know telling him that they like his work, so why not if you like what you see, send him an email kronski669@yahoo.co.uk

DIANA CUEVAS

Diana Cuevas is a Senior at the University of California, Riverside. She uses poetry as a way to express herself. Other than writing she loves music and hopes to one day be a lyricist.

LILY DAVIES

Lily Davies is eighteen years old and currently lives in Devon, England.

HOLLY DAY

Holly Day has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, since 2000. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Big Muddy*, *The Cape Rock*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Gargoyle*, and her published books include *Walking Twin Cities*, *Music Theory for Dummies*, and *Ugly Girl*. She has been a featured presenter at Write On, Door County (WI), Northwoods Writer's Festival (CA), Spirit Lake Poetry Series (MN), and Hampton Roads Writers Conference (VA). Her newest poetry collections, *A Perfect Day for Semaphore* (Finishing Line Press) and *The Yellow Dot of a Daisy* (Alien Buddha Press) will be out late 2018.

WANDA DEGLANE

Wanda Deglane is a psychology/family & human development student at Arizona State University. Her poetry has been published on Dodging the Rain, r.kv.r.y, Porridge Magazine, and elsewhere. She writes to survive. Wanda is the daughter of Peruvian immigrants, and lives with her giant family and beloved dog, Princess Leia, in Glendale, Arizona.

ANDREA DIEDE

Andrea Diede was born in Fresno, California but now resides on a little ten-acre ranch in Northern Colorado. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University, Los Angeles and has work upcoming in Pure Slush magazine and The Sirens Call. You can find her writing in the comfort of her home, but on occasion, she slips away and writes in some of the local coffee shops.

SHAMAR ENGLISH

Shamar English is an emerging writer. He has pieces published in *literallystories2014*, *Better than Starbucks*, *the writing disorder* and one that will appear in *not your mother's breast milk in the spring*. He's originally from Santa Barbara, California, but lives in Douglasville, Georgia with his family, and attends Georgia State University pursuing his bachelor's degree.

Instagram: [variousinterpretations](#)

RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN

Ryan Quinn Flanagan is a Canadian-born author residing in Elliot Lake, Ontario, Canada with his wife and many bears that rifle through his garbage. His work can be found both in print and online in such places as: *Evergreen Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Word Riot*, *Literary Yard*, *Red Fez*, and *The Oklahoma Review*.

CAROLINE GRAND-CLEMENT

Caroline Grand-Clement is a 16 years old, half-time poet, half-time student at an international school in Lyon, France. She dreams of art in any form, falling stars & late night conversations. She takes part in the school magazine where in which her poems were first published. She tweets [@waytoogaytoday](#).

RICHARD GREEN

Richard Green lives in the borderlands of southern New Mexico, writes mostly about the high desert. His poems have appeared in *Avocet*, *Weekly Avocet*, *Malpais Review*, *Sin Fronteras/Writers without Borders*, *Penwood Review* and most recently in *The Almagre Review*.

TIANNA GROSCH

Tianna Grosch lives in the woodlands of PA, works as Assistant Editor at Times Publishing Newspapers in Bucks County, and received her MFA at Arcadia University this past May. Her work has previously appeared in New Pop Lit, Who Writes Short Shorts, The Odyssey and Loco Mag, and is forthcoming in Ellipsis Zine and Echo (Paragon Press). Follow her on Twitter @tiannag92.

ELISABETH HORAN

Elisabeth Horan is an imperfect creature from Vermont advocating for animals, children and those suffering alone and in pain - especially those ostracized by disability and mental illness. Her collaborative nature and feminism chapbook "On This Path We Travel", is published at Moonchild Magazine. Her column *Arsenic Hour* is live at TERSE. Journal. @ehoranpoet ejfhoran@weebly.com

MATTHEW JOHNSON

Matthew Johnson is a poet and an irrational sports fan. His writing has appeared in The Coraddi, The Yellow Chair Review, Jerry Jazz Musician, The Roanoke Review, The Sport Literae and elsewhere. He has poetry forthcoming in the The Stray Branch. You can find him on Twitter at: https://twitter.com/Matt_Johnson_D

MAY JARED LE

May Jared Le was born in Sai Gon, Vietnam in 1996 and moved to the U.S at the age of 13. She is now living in Ohio, working as a young professional in marketing. On a good day May can wake up early, make perfect omelettes, and write poetry that doesn't end up in the rubbish pile. More of her work can be found at www.winningsummers.com.

JENNY LU

Jenny Lu is a poet and artist, having recently published her first poetry book, "Still Life." She strives to continue using her talents platforms to not only express herself

but to also empower others and speak for those who cannot. In her free time, Jenny enjoys learning new languages, boxing, and feeding ducks.

DENNY E. MARSHALL

Denny E. Marshall has had art, poetry, and fiction published. One recent credit is art and poetry in *Night To Dawn* 33 April 2018. See more at www.dennymarshall.com.

ANDREW MILLER

Andrew Miller retired from a career that included university teaching and research in endangered species and aquatic habitat restoration. Now he has time to pursue his long-held interest in creative writing. Recent work has appeared in: Literally Stories, Foliate Oak Literary Magazine, The Fair Observer, Gravel: A Literary Journal, Fiction on the Web, and Microfiction Monday Magazine.

BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANV

Benjamin Niespodziany is a librarian at the University of Chicago who runs a multimedia art blog known as neonpajamas. He self-released a chapbook of poems in December known as [Dress Code Aquarium](#) and has had work published in Luna Luna Mag, The Occulum, formercactus, tenderness, yea, and Water Soup Press.

Twitter/IG/Facebook/SoundCloud: @neonpajamas

SIMON ORYCHIEWSKI

Simon Orychowski is a soon-to-be undergrad English major at UC Irvine. He has always sought out poetry on his own and has recently decided to pursue his passion seriously.

GOLD OSITA

Gold is an undergraduate student at the University of California, Riverside. Some of her habits include not finishing any of her stories and making movies in her head. When she's not writing, you can find her reading, coding, or waiting for her Mr. Darcy

MARIBEL C. PAGAN

Maribel C. Pagán is a Latina writer. She has appeared in *Gone Lawn*, *Foliate Oak*, *7x20*, *Cuento*, and others. Additionally, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *Sesbat*, a Prose Reader for *Apprehension* and a Poetry Reader for *Frontier Poetry*. Visit Maribel at <http://therollinghills.wordpress.com/>.

SIMON PERCHIK

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Osiris Poems* published by box of chalk, 2017. For more information, including free e-books, his essay titled “Magic, Illusion and Other Realities” please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

ROBERT PIAZZA

Robert Piazza studied literature and practiced creative writing at Boston College and the Bread Loaf School of English where he served on the editorial board of the literary magazine and won Honorable Mention in the 2004 Robert Haiduke Poetry Prize, respectively. One of his poems appears in the Spring 2017 Issue of *Lyric* magazine, and another poem is newly published in *Haiku Journal*, Issue 56. Two more poems are currently accepted for preliminary consideration by *Time of Singing: A Journal of Christian Poetry*.

RAJANI RADHAKRISHNAN

Rajani Radhakrishnan is from Bangalore, India.

Finding time and renewed enthusiasm for poetry after a long career in Financial Applications, she blogs at thotpurge.wordpress.com.

Her poems have recently appeared in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Lake*, *The Calamus Journal* and *Parentheses Journal*.

DAVID ANTHONY SAM

Born in Pennsylvania, David Anthony Sam has written poetry for over 40 years. He lives now in Virginia with his wife and life partner, Linda, and

in 2017 retired as president of Germanna Community College. Sam has four collections and was the featured poet in the Spring 2016 issue of *The Hurricane Review* and the Winter 2017 issue of *Light: A Journal of Photography and Poetry*. His poetry has appeared in over 70 journals and publications. Sam's chapbook *Finite to Fail: Poems after Dickinson* was the 2016 Grand Prize winner of GFT Press Chapbook Contest and his collection *All Night over Bones* received an Honorable Mention for the 2016 Homebound Poetry Prize. In 2017, he began serving as Poetry Editor for GFT.

www.davidanthony.sam.com <<http://www.davidanthony.sam.com>>

Twitter: @dasam

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

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

ROWAN SIAH

Rowan Siah is a Singaporean freelance writer currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and aspires to be a full-time novelist or academic when she graduates. She has written several magical realism short stories and poems that she intends to publish as a collection and she is also in the midst of drafting her first manuscript, which is a young adult dark fantasy novel. Aside from writing, she also enjoys spontaneous travel, indie rock music and art house cinema.

SAMANTHA SIDWELL

Samantha is a 17 year old senior at Fort Vancouver High School. She is passionate about writing and computer science.

SRAVANI SINGAMPALLI

Sravani singampalli is a published writer and poet from India. She is presently pursuing doctor of pharmacy at JNTU KAKINADA university in Andhra Pradesh, India.

MICHAEL T. SMITH

Michael T. Smith is an Assistant Professor of the Polytechnic Institute at Purdue University, where he received his PhD in English. He teaches cross-disciplinary courses that blend humanities with other areas. He has published over 50 poems in over 20 different journals (mostly within the past year). He also has critical work recently published in Symbolism and Cinematic. He loves to travel.

J.B. STONE

J.B. Stone is an emerging poet/fiction writer originally from Brooklyn, NY, now residing in Buffalo, NY. Stone has a flash fiction piece on 121 Words.com's Summer Issue Vol. 2 and poetry featured and/or forthcoming in *The Occulum*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Vending Machine Press*, *Ghost City Review*, *Steel Bellow* and *Riggwelter Press*.

SUSAN DALE

Susandale's poems and fiction are on WestWard Quarterly, Mad Swirl, Penman Review,

The Voices Project, and Jerry Jazz Musician. In 2007, she won the grand prize for poetry from Oneswan. Two published chapbooks, *The Spaces Among Spaces* from languageandculture.org, and *Bending the Spaces of Time* from Barometric Pressure have been on the internet.

KAILEY TEDESCO

Kailey Tedesco is the author of *She Used to be on a Milk Carton* (April Gloaming Publishing) and *These Ghosts of Mine*, *Siamese* (Dancing Girl Press). She is the editor-in-chief of *Rag Queen* Periodical and a staff writer for *Luna Luna Magazine*.

Her work has been featured in OCCULUM, Phoebe, American Chordata, and more. For further information, please visit kaileytesdesco.com.

AMBER D. TRAN

A Pushcart Prize nominee and a two-time Best of the Net nominee, Amber D. Tran graduated from West Virginia University in 2012, where she specialized in lyrical non-fiction and contemporary poetry. She is the Editor-in-Chief for the *Cold Creek Review* literary journal. Her work has been featured in *Calliope*, *After the Pause*, *Spry Literary Journal*, *Cheat River Review*, and more. Her award-winning debut novel, *Moon River*, was released in September 2016. She currently lives in Alabama with her husband and two dogs, Ahri and Ziggs.

J.E.A. WALLACE

J.E.A. Wallace has been a hotel night porter, an abattoir security guard, and a barman in The House of Lords. Born and raised in England, he is now a happily married poet who lives and writes in New York City.

His work has been published in *Lowestoft Chronicle* and *Illumen* among many others.

You can read, hear and see more at jeawallace.com

LAUREN WALSBURG

Lauren Walsburg is an Australian writer and editor. She has been published in *Skive Magazine*, *Positive Words*, *Cauldron Anthology* and *The Mystic Blue Review*. Her debut poetry collection *Ink Stained Heart* was released in April 2017. She is the Editor of *Into The Well* and Fiction Editor of *Cauldron Anthology*. For more information visit <https://laurenwalsburg.com>.

JACQUELINE WEISBAUM

Jacqueline Weisbaum is a Los Angeles based mixed media artist and a current undergraduate student at the university of California, Irvine.

