



Crafton Hills College's
Art & Literary Magazine

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



DEAR READER,

Welcome to The Sand Canyon Review, returning for its 13th consecutive year as a distinguished art and literary magazine at the undergraduate level. It is our goal to encourage imagination, creativity, and individual expression through art and literature at Crafton Hills College. Our magazine features Crafton students and showcases a variety of other creative minds from around the world. Our collection proudly ranges from fresh novices, seasoned professionals, and everything in-between, to create a unique collective of styles. We would like to thank all our contributors from the local area, around the nation, and around the world who have risen to the occasion through their captivating contributions to the 2019 edition. Our theme for this year's edition is underbelly which challenged our contributors to explore their vulnerable side, tap into the taboo, and seek their truth. We have sought to portray this challenge through-out the following pages. We hope you find each page to enthrall you, inspire you, and overall, move you.

Welcome to the underbelly.

Sincerely,

The Sand Canyon Review Team, 2019





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Untitled

Allen Triplett





The Medusa

Tom Fontanes

Living dreadlocks coiled and scaled,
along the ground a dragon's tail.
A mane of serpents writhe and hiss
a monster from a dark abyss.

Goddess cursed, this female priest,
one of three a mutant beast.
Warriors stalk yet none escape
the very gods have sealed their fate.

Before striking from her labyrinth lair
predator eyes light in a focused glare.
Mortal heroes that hunt alone
then freeze in horror before turned to stone.

Serpent dreadlocks dragon tailed
the fatal attraction has never failed.
Lethal temptress, exquisite seducer
horrid beauty the Gorgon Medusa

Baby, Honey, Darling, Dear

Katarina Boudreaux

A name,
a title,
a slogan --
a period followed
by commas
and pound symbols --

I would rather
be called
by my name
every syllable
a call,
an affirmation of
breath within
than these lesser
approximations
of humanity.



Facade

Sara Isaak

You remember things that other people don't. Like the day someone blew up City Hall, and the very next morning it was like it had never happened. No one else recalled it, despite the rubble and the 'Under Construction' signs where it used to stand. A few spoke of watching the wrecking ball take out the old stone building, excited to see what they built in its place. But no one else remembered the smoke and dust and red-orange flames reaching for the sky. It was like the event was erased completely. Things like that happened all the time, but no one ever remembered. And the times you made the mistake of speaking up, of questioning it, you were sent to the school therapist who told you it was just a dream and prescribed pills that left you in a fog for days and made those memories fade into fuzzy dream-like recollections. You don't bring it up to other people anymore.

Then there was the girl. You didn't see her often, only when you were running late for curfew usually. She had dark hair and fierce eyes, and when she saw you looking at her she flashed you a crooked grin before disappearing into the shadows. She wasn't always alone either, sometimes accompanied by another girl or a couple of boys. All of them young and all of them with the same wild eyes and crooked smiles, something bright and sharp about them that you'd never seen on anyone else. You saw them most often before something happened, before something blew up or broke down and everyone forgot about it.

So, you started to put the pieces together, realizing they caused the events no one ever remembered. That was when you started to break the rules, curiosity driving you to sneak out after curfew in hopes of seeing them. It was hit and miss, but the girl started taking notice when you kept showing up in their path long

after curfew. She frowned at you as she passed, fierce eyes thoughtful. But you always rushed home afterward, afraid of some consequence you'd never actually seen enacted. No one broke curfew after all, so you'd never seen what happened when they did. Except apparently people did, people who were good at not getting caught. Good enough that you never realized you were being followed, that the alarms didn't go off when you found the girl in your room one night.

She frowned at the posters on your wall, the comforter bunched against the wall on your bed, the cluttered desk in the corner with its' sleeping computer. But she frowned even more at you, arms crossed over her chest and head tilted to one side like she couldn't quite figure out what to make of you. You were too startled to do anything but close your door, something inside you warning that she couldn't be found here. That it would be bad for both of you.

"You remember me." She said bluntly, fire-wild eyes focused on your face. "When you see us, you remember." You nod, swallowing nervously under her scrutiny. She walked over to you, each step made with purpose, and pushed your hair back to look behind your ear. Her fingers, strong and calloused and warmer than any touch you'd ever felt, ran over the faint scar from your implant. The same implant everyone had, to promote peace and understanding. She seemed even more confused when she stepped away, like she'd been expecting something different.

"Who are you?" You finally ask, fighting back the way her steady gaze made you feel like running. Like a rabbit under the eyes of a hawk. She gave you a mysterious smile and shook her head.

"Just a shadow." And then she was gone, out the window and into the night to leave you



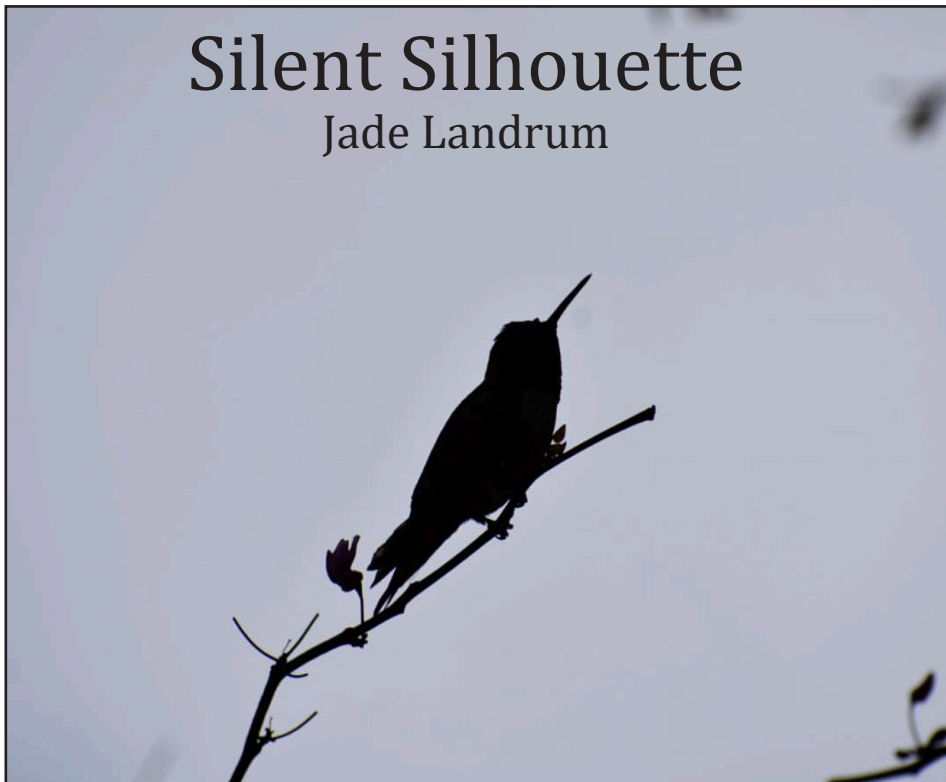
dazed and even more confused than ever in her wake. By morning you were sure it was just a dream. Until you saw the sooty black dust left where she'd been standing. The same kind of dust that accompanied the explosion of City Hall and others like it. That pretty much proved your theory that the girl and her companions were the ones causing these things. But you didn't know why they did it. Or why no one ever remembered. So, the next night you gathered your courage and went out to look for the girl again, walking from the comfortable roads you'd followed all your life onto streets you didn't know existed. Streets where the windows on buildings were boarded up and harsh words were painted on the walls. Where there were no carefully tended flowers or trees to brighten the atmosphere. Where everything was sharp like the girl, where it all felt strangely more real than anything else.

"I told you she was different." The girl's voice rang from one of the broken windows and you spun to face her, watching her step through the shattered glass onto the street. Others followed, slipping from shadows and alleyways

to surround you. They moved together, a group that was more like a single entity than many. And yet they were all individual as well, bright and independent while also a part of a whole. The girl smiled at you and that was the last thing you saw before there was a sharp pain on the back of your head and everything went dark. When you woke your head ached, and the spot behind your ear where your implant had been hurt more than the rest. Reaching up to rub it you found a bandage there and a bump on the back of your head. A small sound had you looking around to see the girl sitting on a chair a few feet away and you took a moment to study your surroundings. There was the cot you were laying on, shoved into the corner of a small room with cabinets full of medical supplies and a small table with a couple of chairs where the girl was sitting. Looking back at her you realized she was watching and you sat up.

"Where am I?" She gave you that crooked smile, sharp and fierce and bright enough that you thought it could burn you.

"Welcome to the shadows."



Beginning to End

Joanna Brock

One hot summer's eve,
The world changed for the better.
Shortly, I did die.




Road To Heaven

Alec Blue

Ashes, Ashes

Howie Good

About 5 in the morning, while most passengers were still asleep, the train barreled across the short border between darkness and light. My carryall bag on the overhead rack contained an entire set of ant-dreams in polished amber. Spies lurked everywhere. "Moose. Indian," they reported me telling a contact. Actually, I wouldn't meet my contact, an Orchid of Asia, until some days later. At one point I forgot the word "cremated" and had to ask her, "What's it called- incinerating the body?" We were standing in a muddy alley by a pomegranate tree whose fruit the children pretended were bombs.



“I’m Sitting on Top of the World or The Quickstep of(f) Hollywoodland”

Wendy Arrington

Pale and waxen she trudged up the hill -
Heavy the moonlight; the hot air was still.

Eager, she once was, for what lay ahead;
Her dreams were now shattered, shuttered, dead.

Gardenias - her essence - clung drastically close;
Intoxicating and yet morose.

“Exceptional player!” past critics did rave,
But now the square peg craves an early grave...

Nymph-like and child-like, she reached out for fame,
Only to find it had been a cruel game.

Thoughtfully searching for some kind of sign...
She found it at last! IT, of perfect design!

Wounded and desperate, demoralized, too -
(She had once been a Broadway ingenue) -

“I am a coward,” she left in a note;
“I’m sorry for everything,” she also wrote.

Sought after by patrons but now quite forgotten
In a town renowned for its misbegotten.

Tormented, clawing her way to the top
To be famous at last! No! she couldn’t be stopped...

Lively... then lifeless, in one ‘H-of-a-leap’
To the brambles in shambles... forever asleep.

Eternal, her nights on the Hollywood hill;
The scent of gardenia is heavy there, still.

*The name of the infamous Hollywood starlet is spelled out using
the first letter from the first line of each couplet

Laura's Last Cigarette

Derek Odom

Dan slowly lowered the body of his dead wife into the water. A single light burned from atop his skiff, a boat he used to wander the swamps and hunt occasionally. His stomach tightened when bubbles rose from her nose. He had the impulse to bring her up and dry her off. When he realized it was simply air escaping as she submerged, he calmed.

Oh, Laura, he thought. Why this? Why now?

He'd found her in the bathtub, wrists and inner thighs sliced open with a paring knife. She'd left a note that read *Sorry, Jim. I want to be with the gators. Take me to the gators. I love you.*

He was reasonably certain what he was doing wasn't legal, but he wanted to honor her last wish. She had loved the swamps, had both loved and feared the big green swimming lizards there. "Such peace, such quiet," she'd said once. "But the gators. Always there, always looming, like bills or the laundry. One never knows when they'll pop up, but sure as shit they will and when they do, you'd better be ready."

"I guess you weren't quite ready," he said, and let go of her body. She rolled off his hands and disappeared from the light. He stood there watching the bubbles get smaller and smaller until they were gone entirely and only the still, calm water of the swamp remained, appearing black in the yellow light of the skiff.

There was a mess to clean up at home. He recalled how he'd found her: naked, one leg and one arm out of the tub. Everything else from her shoulders down was submerged in red liquid that was more blood than water. Her head seemed to float in the mire. One eye was open and the other closed, as if she wanted one last peek at the world she'd leave behind as she slipped away. A cigarette had burned down to the nub in her left hand and gone out. She'd quit smoking over a decade earlier.

Jim didn't panic and scream and sit down

on the floor and cry no, no, no as the men in movies sometimes do. He didn't try to revive her, either; it was clear she'd been gone a while. Her face was gray as a December afternoon and the stench of rot was already present--a creeping scent that, were it any stronger, might have sent him retching to the toilet.

It was a hot August afternoon and Jim had spent the night out in the skiff with Carl, a hunting buddy who lived a quarter mile to the south. Jim thought she probably went the previous night, early. And now here he was, back in the swamp with his skiff, but this time interring instead of tracking and killing. Or drinking and smoking, which was what happened more often than not.

He wondered idly what he would tell the law men when they came knocking on his door. Should he simply come clean? Say he had just buried his dead wife in the middle of a swamp? It occurred to him there wouldn't be much left of her come noon the next day. Probably no need. Still, he was unsettled at the prospect of being thought a murderer.

When's the last time you saw Laura, sir? Why does the bathroom smell like bleach? I noticed her car is still here. Do you have any idea where she'd run? Relatives? A secret lover, maybe? You seem nervous, would you like a drink of water?

"Fuck." He spat into the water and wiped his brow with the back of his hand. It was a muggy night and the work hadn't been easy. Laura had lain in the tub until nightfall. Jim wasn't a real smart man by any stretch of the imagination, but he was intelligent enough to realize his chances were better in the dark when moving a dead body.

He'd reached down wearing one of her dishwashing gloves and pulled the drain plug. Her body settled as the water swished downward and he looked away. It might not



have been so grotesque, that body, the way it was, if he hadn't known her, he thought. But he had known her, intimately. Though she'd given him no children, it was most assuredly not for lack of trying.

And now there she was, blue and gray and cold and dead. The bloody water had stained her skin to just above her breasts. It reminded Jim of full-body, footed pajamas. The last of the sludge ran down the drain with an unwelcome slurp sound and he dried her off best he could. He had taken a cell phone picture of her death scene before he drained the water, and now he took another. He did not want to look at them. They were for evidence, should he ever need them. Eyes squinted, he moved the two images into a folder all its own and put the phone back in his pocket.

When he rolled her over to hoist her out of the tub, the only tattoo she had came into view. It was an alligator wearing boxing gloves. "Always best to keep your fears close, don't you think, dear?" she'd said when the idea was run by Jim for approval.

"Aw, dammit, Laura," he'd said, fighting back the urge to sob. They had never been in love, but they loved each other a great deal and that was just fine by both of them. It's like Carl says all the time: A friend is there to the end. It was true, Jim thought. And there was no doubt in his mind, this was the end. For her, anyway.

And now, standing in water almost chest high, he thought he might use the extra cinder block he'd brought with him. He might just tie it off to his neck and throw it into the murky water, join his wife on her last journey. He eyed it, sitting on the front seat of his gently-bobbing skiff. There was more than enough rope.

But no, he couldn't do that. Laura had been his best friend, had been his lover, but she wasn't his reason for living. Fact is, he never understood why he was alive but he didn't want to die. He thought living would be tough--almost impossible--without her, but it would still be better than dying.

He walked the small craft toward the edge of the swamp and crawled in, his overalls sloshing and dripping. He wished he had thought of his hip waders. In the moment, however, with his dead wife rolled up in an old patch of carpet he'd saved in the garage, getting his clothes wet was the last thing on his mind.

He fired up the cranky old engine and headed south, toward Carl's place, instead of north, toward home. He might not have brought protection from the water but he sure as hell remembered a twelve-pack of domestic beer. Carl would understand and between the two of them, they'd figure out how best to clean the tub, what to say to police when they asked their questions, and how best to move on after this nightmare.

Sitting on top the beer was Laura's pack of cigarettes. There were nineteen left, and Jim suspected that before sunup, there'd be none.



Jack

Shellie Lewis



My Tongue

Candace Morone

Fatherly advice always comes
in snapping rubber bands.
Do not disrespect me.
I gave you everything.

You'll get slapped one day.
Who could stand
that forked tongue?

He yapped dailey,
curdling trophy words
into barks and cries
cheap tricks.

Gagged by the cattails of my tongue,
a girl pretends to trap Satan himself.
Verbal door slams,
He slips.
Heineken's green tint
impairing vision,
He escapes
and scorns nothing less than fourth-degree.
Soft playtoy expressions
digested slowly
not by my cattails,
but rather the carnivorous plants nestled in the soft undertow soil
of a young girl's tongue.



I am a Zombie

Tom Fontanes

Once a human but am I now?
Moving slowly I know not how.

Who am I, where am I?
I cannot speak.

When am I, why am I?
What do I seek?

Infected with a dread disease
a fever burning, my mind a freeze.

Loathsome contagion horrible plague.
My self-identity becoming vague.

Cannibalistic, hungering flesh,
each day craving blood afresh.

Loved ones lost not long ago.
My present condition? Now I know.

Hunting, stalking, spreading dread,
biting, tearing, the walking dead.



70x7
Shellie Lewis



Momma

Kai Shultz

My Momma's eyes are hazel
spirals of dirt, grass, and gold fire.
Her hugs are warmest
when the sun shines on her.

Father's eyes are the blue of
unforgiving ice
and sharp knives
he gave me his cold fury
and showered me with icy disappointment.

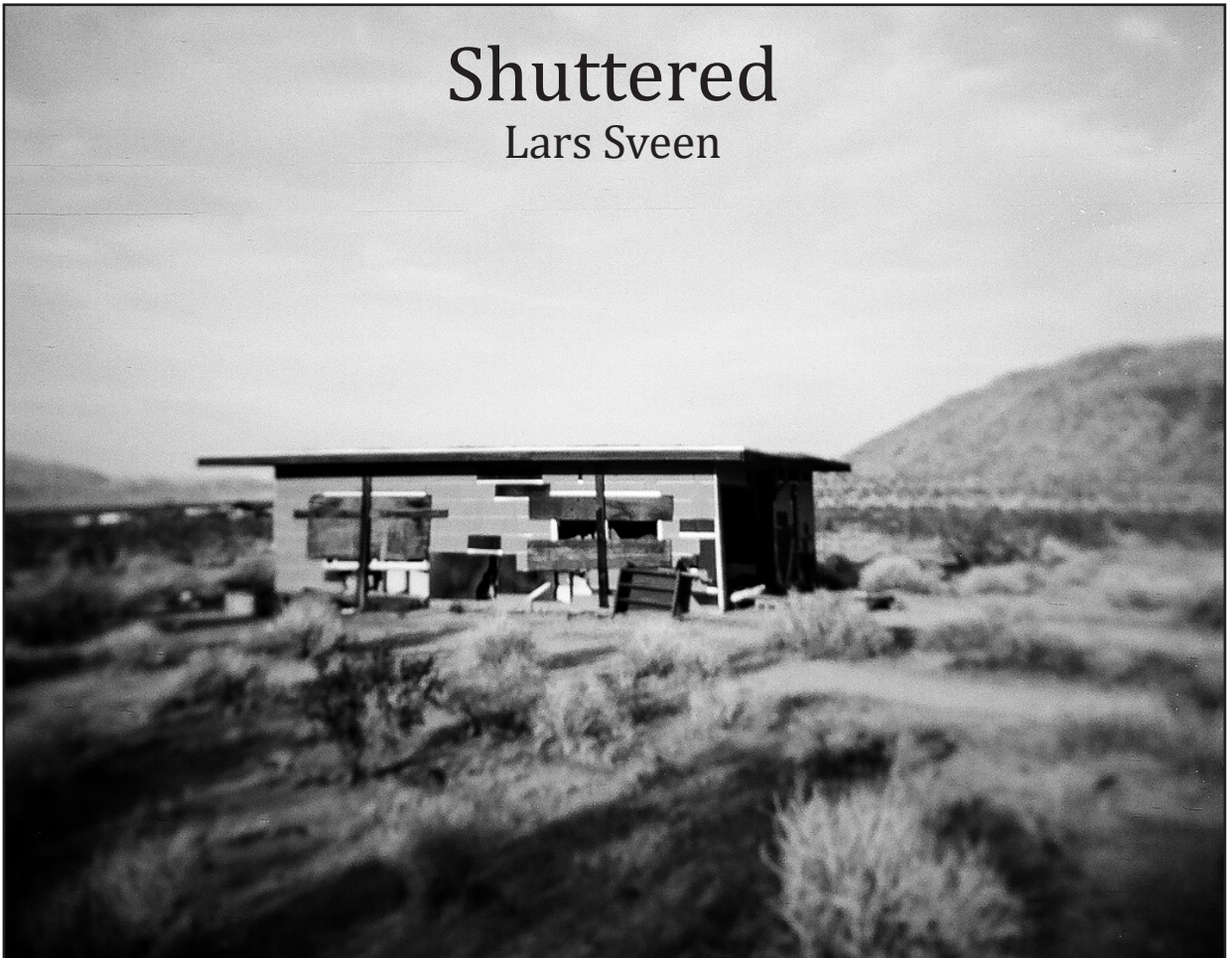
Momma never gave up on me
always overflowed
with home-grown pride
her hands tugged me along
we ran through fields
of yellow memories.

Momma's my shelter
from daddy's hate vomit
her crooked smiles
unravel my barbed-wire heart.

So for now
I'll water the daisies
stubbornly sprouting
If it makes momma proud.

Shuttered

Lars Sveen





Grandma's House

Kai Shultz

We used to be warm
in Grandma's house.
Papa cooking ham in the kitchen,
laughter weaving through the halls,
children sitting at tiny fold-up tables
"Careful, don't spill!"
And gathering 'round the TV
early in the mornings
watching NASCAR in fluffy pajamas
Grandma's rocking chair sways
back and forth, back and forth
we sift noisily through the LEGO bin
and dusty photo albums.
Video games with Uncle Ken
Sharing secret ice cream
And losing at card games.

Where did you go?

I missed my alarm
but not the screaming
pavement chilling bare feet
and a too-late embrace.
Toes brush the floor,
just barely,
spinning left, right, left, right.
"He didn't say goodnight."

Breakfast with a police officer
doesn't taste as good
when milk is tears.

How does that make you feel?

Grandma's house reminds me
of funerals and stolen goodbyes,
of dusty, hollow rooms and blank-faced strangers
changing all that was once familiar.
I still see them
ghosts in old photographs
and muffled static memories
when I pass by.



Masters of Soul

Solange Morris

Absolute Truth and Zero

DJ Swykert

“The Buddhists believe the road to enlightenment is the middle way. If you accept this it means that everything on our little blue planet is subjective, there are no absolutes, not facts, not lies, not even our molecular structure, which goes through a complete changeover every second. Even cold and hot are subjective. Physics defines Absolute Zero as 459.67 degrees Fahrenheit below zero. At this temperature molecular motion in the universe would cease, even the entropy of a perfect crystal would stop. At this temperature there would be nothing, as nothing could bond together to create anything. The same is true at Absolute Hot, the high

temperature would cause such rapid movement between particles that just like Absolute Zero, at Absolute Hot nothing could exist,” Professor Stigleman said.

Several hands went up. Stigleman chose a bearded faced male student with shiny eyes.

“Isn’t there an absolute truth?”

“No,” Stigleman said. “The truth is as you know it. Truth is subjective like everything else. What might be truthful to you is false to someone else.”

“So, there is no absolute truth?”

“Absolutely not,” Stigleman said, which elicited a lot of laughs from the students.



The hand of a cute young blond girl waved from the front row of the class.

"Yes," Stigleman said, granting permission for her question.

"Is the lecture absolutely over, I have a long walk to my next class."

The class roared again. Stigleman frowned. "Yes, class is dismissed. You may leave."

Professor Stigleman put his notes in his briefcase and watched the students file out. Physics 101 was closed for the day and he would be off to his real world and out and away from the entropy of the lecture hall and the young faces that filled it.

Stigleman's real world is the Frog Lounge, where after class he enjoys a bit of what can be absolute, pleasure. For Stigleman it was the physics of a Manhattan and a plate of frog legs, and once in a while the enjoyment of a stimulating conversation, female preferred. In Stigleman's world, the Big Three consisted of whiskey, frog legs and females, not necessarily in any particular order.

About to begin his third Manhattan a full bodied redhead sat up to the bar and ordered a double shot of bourbon and a glass of dark beer on tap. She wasn't gaudily dressed, but the navy dress with the orange flowers kept no secret of what lie underneath.

"You're in early tonight, Delilah," the bartender said.

"I'm officially Unemployed, Butch."

There was a slight pause as Butch set the shot glass down and poured the draft.

Delilah plucked her wallet from a glittered purse and withdrew a twenty.

"Forget it, girl, drinks are on me tonight," Butch said, placing the beer glass on a napkin in front of her.

"I really shouldn't, not needy enough for charity. Not yet, anyway," Delilah said. "But thanks, you're a gentleman and a whatnot."

Butch smiled and walked down the bar to tend to another customer.

This was Stigleman's opportunity, a star, a

red dwarf about to collapse. Okay, she wasn't a dwarf, but she did have the brightest red hair this side of the sun and if she kept on drinking for certain she'd collapse at the bar.

"Can I buy you the next round?" Stigleman said.

The redheaded dwarf star looked at him, eyed him up and down. "Who are you, Sir Lance a Not?"

Stigleman appreciated her sarcastic attempt at humor. "No, just a poor physics professor in need of conversation with a beautiful woman."

"What's the atomic number of bullshit," Delilah sniped. Then, after a closer look at Stigleman, a little bit crumpled, drooping eyes that glistened, she abruptly changed her tone. "I'm sorry. I think you're just trying to be nice. You couldn't help overhearing me and Butch."

Stigleman nodded. "I heard. I didn't mean anything by it, just commiserating with you on what's got to be a bad day for you."

"Yeah, not my best. But I'll survive. It was just a temp job, I knew that going in. And it was an office full of salesman, and those guys had more tentacles than an octopus. It was like being in a jar with a family of them."

"Don't take this the wrong way," Stigleman said. "But I can understand them wanting to grope you, you're very gropeable."

Delilah smiled. She was a veteran of bar guys, hookups, pickups, molesters of all sorts. But she didn't get any sense of that with Stigleman, she was convinced she might have met the last absolutely honest man on the planet. "No offense taken. I consider it a compliment."

"That's how I meant it. But it came out kind of clumsy."

"What's your name?" Delilah said.

"Stigleman."

"Okay," Delilah said. "I'm no physics professor, but I know you're not Stigleman Stigleman, you must have a first name, something simpler."

"Albert," Stigleman said. "But I don't like it much better than Stigleman. Neither are very cool."

"Hey, I can call you Al, you know, like from



the Paul Simon song.”

“No idea what you’re talking about. I told you I’m not cool.”

“Okay, you don’t know pop music. What do you know?”

“I know science is looking for the God particle.”

“You’re kidding. They think God is made out of particles.”

“Everything is made out of particles,” Stigleman said. “There’s this mine in Minnesota, the Soudan Mine, where ten thousand feet underground physicists have been looking for the God particle for the last fifty years.”

“Why are they looking for it?”

“They theorize it holds the universe together.”

“And in fifty years down in a mine they haven’t found it?”

“No, and they probably never will.”

“Okay, so what holds me together?” Delilah said.

“Your bra and panties,” Stigleman said.

They both laughed. Both were getting quite drunk.

“What are you eating? It looks like chicken but smells like a swamp,” Delilah said.

“Frog legs.”

“I’m a meat person. I don’t eat stuff that’s slimy like a snake and can jump.”

“I don’t eat anything that protects their young,” Stigleman said.

“Frogs don’t?”

“No, they’ll sit and watch their young being devoured and not even blink. Then just lay another million eggs and do it all over again, which is how they survive, The Law of Large Numbers.”

Delilah gave him a strange look. “Are you serious?”

“As a hand grenade without a pin.”

“Must limit your food choices?”

“Nah, there’s plenty of things left.”

“Name a few,” Delilah said, peering closer at the platter of frog legs in front of Stigleman.

“Fish, clams, lobster, scallops. Shrimp aren’t anything but sea bugs. You haven’t lived until

you’ve had my Cajun shrimp with lemon parsley gremolata and melted Cajun butter.”

They drank for another hour, Delilah borrowed some quarters and played music. She danced by herself out on the floor. Stigleman didn’t dance, but he enjoyed watching.

And Delilah enjoyed being watched, being fondly observed. At the end of the night she went home with Albert Stigleman. In bed he unwrapped her God particle, the bra and panties that held her together. They enjoyed one another, as much as you can under the influence. But everything has its limits, there are no absolutes, only in theory. Absolute zero does not exist in reality, nor absolute hot, nor absolute truth.

In the morning they both lay staring at the ceiling, a little embarrassed, sharing the paranoia hangovers bring. “What does hold everything together?” Delilah asked.

“Loneliness,” Stigleman said. “Even particles need company.”





Untitled

Marie Recio



Autumn Sun

Hayley Arrington

Half a dozen crows
Fly overhead
Shadows dapple my lawn

The autumn winds have come
Again bringing scarlet tendrils
To homes and hillsides

A fitting response to a night
Of smoke bombs and blood

Hawk whirls high above
The ash tree filled
With crows
My backyard is a haven
A place of balls and slides
A running boy laughing in the sun

But occasionally an intercom
Intrudes the breeze
“Official lockdown” brings us inside
Away from ash trees filled with crows

The autumn sun,
Never higher than the ash tree,
Glowing a yellow
Golden on my son



— — — — —

Shooting at Regional Center

Jennifer Engel

A few miles away, health workers
have been shot.

as the shooter
flies down the freeway nearby.

We sit in the dark
painting butterflies, in a classroom

In a cocoon of concrete walls
I keep these kids

on lockdown.
It is peaceful stroking cool colors

dangling with paint, waiting
on thorny limbs for the all clear,

on fluidic shapes, on the wings
of afternoon,

waiting to hear the names - who walks,
who falls, who flies.

Bristlecone

Heather Westenhofer





College Town

Shayne Keen

And oh, demons live in thick shadows
cast by the moon over darkened houses
where concrete edges instead of coats,
and animals and children go safe outside
to play, day or night, until they don't.

Mrs. Peck disappeared, and Miss O'Reilley
found dead in the dump ten miles away.

Three college girls in thirty years
looked over the whole town from billboards
that went from fresh to flaked,
until no one cared enough to notice
the giant, happy stare of a dead girl lost
on a bicycle, at a night club, or the house
next door. In three years time they go
from tragic loss to warning albatross.

No recovery; no reward.

And oh, demons live in thick shadows
cast by parking buildings and highrise
yuppie hipster squares

and in the country

the wind shrieks the dead girls' names,
if only we could hear we could follow
back to the source where their spirits howl
just above the surface of the quarry pool,

beneath the railroad trestle
that spans the swampy bottoms,

next to the man-made lake.



Strange Dreams

Italia Ruotolo

Fire and Wine

Chelsea Arrington

When I was a young woman,
My lithe, willow body swathed in black cocktail dresses,
There was a fire in my head.
My veins were wine soaked rivers
And I sang.
I was Salome dancing naked under my veils;
Carmen swindling souls for unrequited romance;
I was Medusa, turning men hard with a glance.
Burgundy cherried my lips.
Bordeaux inflamed my cheeks.
My lovers made me bleed:
Red petals dipped in Rhône.
The torch in my brow fed upon scarlet feasts.

Now I am an old woman cloaked in dusters, slippers,
And too much flesh.
I am more smoke than flame.
Snake skins turn to ash in empty goblets
And my voice cracks, stumbling upon half-
Forgotten melodies.
My hair is the color of a storm;
My eyes are milk;
And my lovers are dead.
Apollo and Dionysus have fled to Arcadia.
Alone in my bleak chamber,
I will not look back. Memory is a deceptive companion
And I'd rather be an ember than a pillar of salt.





BED

Chris Roch

Welcome. Please disable your electronic device in every way possible so that it does not chime, beep, buzz, ding or glow. I also recommend tucking it away somewhere where you will not be tempted to either take a picture – there will be none of that in this theater – or check in on all of the important social media activity that has taken place in the last 5 minutes. I have faith that you can give me your undivided attention for our short time together. Try your best.

I have watched this scene many times now and nearly know it by heart. It is brief but densely packed with meaning. If you will allow me, as things develop and progress, it is my wish to press the pause button at certain moments, so-to-speak, and point things out that may be of particular interest or that you might otherwise miss. I'd like to help you get the most out of it. Fair enough?

Okay Ed... now.

--

The house lights are cut abruptly and while your pupils dilate in compensation, you see nothing but blackness.

Slowly, a rectangle begins to glow on the right side of the stage and captivates your attention. You are powerless to resist. The eyes crave light as the heart craves love. They continue their adjustment and you can just make out the vertical and horizontal lines that bisect the rectangle into four equal quadrants. Your mind interprets this to be a window, yes? Good.

The light continues to slowly rise and you detect movement. It is like the motion of seaweed gently undulating in a tide pool, as if in slow motion. Ah!. The gauzy curtains that frame the open window are dancing playfully to the dictates of a silent breeze. Do you not find it mesmerizing? The human mind loves random and ever-changing movement like this -- the waves of the ocean, a flowing river or

waterfall, the flames of a campfire. These kinds of movements are deeply familiar to us, almost at an ancestral level, and yet the specific patterns and shapes in each instant are entirely unique and have never before occurred in exactly the same way throughout all of geological time. There is something so satisfying about these infinitely diverse and random sequences. It seems we can just sit and watch them for hours and be perfectly content. I know you have felt this way.

You feel the increase in light more than detect it with your eyes. The darkness creates a tension and the introduction of light soothes it. Suddenly, you notice a large shape over to the left, a piece of furniture which slowly becomes... a bed. See it there?

Most of us love our beds and for so many good reasons. Think of all the time we spend in a bed! Think of all they represent! Security... safety... warmth. The deepest, most cherished connections to other human beings are depicted within the frame of a bed -- at least where a bed is cherished and protected by those who love it.

Your eyes are piercing into that bed right now, aren't they? The thoughts about your own bed and all of the beds you have ever shared are so numerous and so instantaneous that you cannot distinguish them or decipher their meaning. Your brain is incapable of processing all of that information so it has condensed all of it – all of the time you have spent in a bed, all of those experiences, all of the thoughts you have ever had about being in a bed -- as a deeply felt and deeply personal emotion simply referred to as... BED. Your brain has encapsulated all of that information and converted it into a unique emotion, making it a much more direct and efficient means of processing everything that BED means to you. At a detailed level BED is entirely unique to each person but, as a concept, it is something that you share, that we all share,



with all of humanity. Understood?

Remember, I am here to slow things down for you, to try to put you in touch with things that might otherwise move by too quickly for you to recognize or understand. And what you are experiencing right now, as you peer into this bed on the left side of the stage, is your mind searching for answers to several key questions. Trust me on this -- you have a real need to know what sort of bed this is, because there are many kinds.

Is it a child's bed, imbued with innocence and lovingly protected? Is it a bed of health and restoration or a sickbed? A bed of free expression or a prison of fear? A bed of boundless dreams or a bed of fevered nightmares? Is this the bed of devoted lovers or a bed of salacious betrayal?

You are trying, as best you can, to pick up clues that will help you answer these questions.

Somewhere beyond the scene, out of view, a fader on a control board, expertly managed with exquisite finesse by a professional lighting technician whose name might be Ed, is lifted to slowly increase the electricity flowing to a carefully aimed overhead spot light, allowing you to more closely inspect the surface of the bed. Now we see that the headboard is at stage left and there is someone lying there. It is a woman. Clearly, there is a full-figured woman lying on her side, you know this by the generous curve of her hips, here. She is facing you, and her formidable arm is outside of the coverlet allowing you to see that she has dark-brown skin. I think there is some grey in her hair, no? So it seems we have, in this bed, a middle-aged, brown-skinned, full-figured woman.

Either because it just happened or because the lifting light made it suddenly apparent, you have become aware that her eyes are open. My sense is that she is sorting through her morning thoughts, don't you agree? Something we all do in our beds as we try to muster the strength and courage to get up and start moving. She does not appear to be anxious, necessarily, just contemplative.

Suddenly a white arm reaches across from behind her. Take note: how did you feel just now,

in that instant? What just raced through your mind – pun intended. Anything that alarmed, or hinted at scandal or inappropriateness? The white arm pulls the covers down to her waste, tenderly enfolds her torso, and its hand comes to rest in the scarred space once occupied by her proud breasts. With her left hand, she clutches and pulls it tighter to her bosom.

Take a moment -- I think it is important. Take a moment to consider how much more you now know about this bed than just a moment before. Within a few brief seconds, it seems, you have been given the power to understand so many important things – perhaps decades of shared experiences, both joyful and painful, and countless hours of conversation that wove these two bed-sharers together -- heart, soul and mind -- to make this small moment of intimacy possible. Of course there is still much to learn, so many remaining questions. It is also important that we admit to ourselves that there are many things you and I will never know about this bed and, frankly, do not need to know. But the critical essence of this particular bed has been revealed, at least for now, in this early morning moment -- it is a warm bed, shared lovingly, in blessed peace. Now we will learn some more.

O: I feel you thinking and it feels... sort of murky.

What did you hear in that? What did that one sentence tell you, beyond that it was spoken by a male voice with a pleasant British accent? I hear him extending his powers of empathy, trying to find out where his partner is, in her mind, at this very moment. He is probing, gently, in a light and disarming way. There is nothing interrogative about it. He is giving her ample space to share something with him if she so desires to.

A: Good word... murky. Very visual. Even tactile. You can feel it like mud squishing between your toes.

Hers seems to be an African accent of some kind, but there are so many and I'm no expert. She returns the playful volley, but doesn't divulge any real information right away, you noticed?

O: It is a good word. That's why I used it. I always choose my words carefully... except

for when I don't. Still, I'd rather not have you engaged in murky thinking, especially so early in the morning. How could you have gone so murky so early?

A: Oh, I can murk any time, night or day. My murkiness does not operate on a set schedule.

O: Mmmm.

Ha! See that! He has offered to listen, but she wants him to keep asking – Please, please, tell me what is on your mind! -- but he isn't taking the bait! If she has something to say she should just say it. If she is not ready then he can wait until she feels like sharing it! Well played.

[Male actor gives a secret thumbs-up to the narrator.]

A: Oberlin

I do believe he won! She will tell him what is on her mind without the begging part.

O: Mmmm?

A: Why are you here?

Now she's gotten his attention. He raises himself up on his elbow and we see his face for the first time. What do you make of it? Are you disappointed that he is so... plain looking? That he is older? That his hair is gray and thinning? Don't be embarrassed. We have all been badly programmed to think that love, at its best, is for the young and beautiful. Such a shame, if you think about it. It is only in living through many trials that the true nature of love is revealed. It is only through experiencing heartbreak and loss and loneliness that you learn to truly value your connections to other humans. It seems the more time you've spent alone, the more you value your connections to others. When you place enough value on them they become sacred, and when something becomes sacred to a human it is treated with utmost respect and gravitas. A human will fight and sacrifice to keep cherished and sacred things safe and pure.

The elders among us know something that allows them to experience a depth of love that the young cannot imagine -- they have come to know and have embraced the temporary nature of all things. They know they only have a small window of time, that any day could be their last,

that time is all that really matters in life, that everything perishes, good and bad. The young do not understand how profoundly these common little bits of knowledge will change and elevate their understanding of love... not until they have marched through the wilderness on their own.

O: I think you need to be more specific, Arlyss. Was that a philosophical inquiry, as in "Why am I on the planet earth? What is the purpose of my existence?" Or was it more an invitation to leave, as in, "Why, Oberlin... why in god's name are you still here?"

He's British. The Brits cannot resist opportunities for sarcasm and self-effacing humor.

A: You are on the planet earth because your parents copulated and your mother made the dubious decision to carry you to term. As for purpose, you and I are both atheists and the idea of purpose is asinine outside the context of a creator and puppet-master. All I meant, and you know full-well what I meant, is why are you here with a large, old, negress who has no breasts?

Did you notice his controlled sigh? Telling. It seems that he is familiar with her self-doubt and insecurity. Watch how he responds.

O: Large and old are relative terms, of course. You are larger than some but not others, older than some but not others. I am sorry that you had your breasts removed, mostly because I know how much they meant to you, how much they mean to any woman. I am sorry because they were once so proud and sensitive, that they are no longer here as an additional means for me to give you the experience of pleasure. On a personal level I miss them because I think breasts are really lovely. But there is one thing that I alone can appreciate and love about your missing breasts – there is a direct correlation between their absence and your presence. I can handle their absence, fairly gracefully I think, but your absence? Whenever I imagine it, it never turns out very well for me. Every day I send out a prayer, *je ne sais pas qui*, that I will depart before you.

When you've shared a bed with someone for a long time, you have to always come up with

creative ways to address their concerns! It's a gamble and they do not always work.

A: I am trying to hear that as a tender compliment, but if your prayer is answered, where does that leave me, exactly?

O: Ah. Well, let's be honest... we are in competition with each other on this. If you don't like the idea of living here without me, then I suggest you step up your prayer game. Just know that you have some serious catching up to do, because I've been praying my "Please-take-me-first" prayer for quite a long time.

A: Really? How terribly selfish of you!

O: What! How is that selfish? Would you prefer I pray for YOUR death to arrive first? THAT would be selfish, don't you think? "Dear God... please take Arlyss first." I think a god would be a bit suspicious about a prayer like that. A prayer like that might make sense if you had a great deal of wealth or property to leave me in parting but all we own in the world is right here in this small room, and if you are not here I don't want any of it.

Anyway, imagine if I were not here to cherish this current, breastless version of you. You might only be able to see yourself as Breastless Arlyss, which would be pitiful. In the same way, as much love as we have shared here, I would only be able to see this room as The Room Without Arlyss if you left first. That would suck. I would hate to spend time in such a room.

A: And your point is?

O: Well, since you have me around to be grateful for your life, the matter of your breastlessness is not such a heavy burden for you to bear.

A: And?

O: So I think, to show your appreciation for that, it is only fair that you let me die first.

A: Impeccable logic.

O: I happen to agree.

A: Why don't you just pray that we die simultaneously? Anyway, what does it really mean for a devout atheist to pray? Maybe I shouldn't be so worried.

O: It's true, I have a dismal record when it

comes to having prayers answered, so I wouldn't lose any sleep. If anyone is on the receiving end of my prayers, it seems they speak a different language. As for dying simultaneously, it would solve the problem of one of us being alone... but just seems too dramatic for us.

A: Mmmm.

He has been playing it cool up to now, but in actuality he is not such a formidable opponent. In truth he is a sucker for opportunities to reassure her, to dote on her. He is about to give in, you can tell, because he is wrapping his arms around her. Watch.

O: Moving away from the cheery morning discussion of our pending mortality, I should like to answer your initial question. I am here precisely because I want to be here and because I have this vague sense that you are okay with my being here. I am here because I think we understand each other really well. I am here because I think the whole world craves the kind of respectful and loving connectedness that you and I get to share, and I am really proud of that... proud of us and what we've built over time. I am here because I care immensely about you and because caring about you makes my life better. In fact, the only remarkable thing about me is how deeply I care about you, I'm quite sure of that. I think we are both happier together than apart, certainly more peaceful. I am here because I love our bed. I love sharing pleasure with you. I love knowing how to build tension in you and then guide you through its full release. Our pleasure-sharing is high-quality because we are deeply connected, and our connection is deepened because we share high-quality pleasure. The whole bloody thing turns me on.

Now how do you feel about this bed? Does it matter so much that the partners who share it are not youthful? Does their blackness or whiteness, the absence of her breasts or his missing hair still inform the larger portion of your opinion concerning this bed? Maybe it is time for you, for all of us, to reconsider what is important when it comes to love and BED, no?

A: What are you afraid of, Oberlin?



O: What am I afraid of? Out of anything that I can imagine? Remember that I have a very vivid imagination. A conversation like this could go on for days.

A: Fair enough. How about... concerning us? Watch here... he pulls her to her back, straddles her, kisses her, and looks directly into her eyes. Are you repulsed by his naked body? He is not “cut” or “buff” or “chiseled” or “smooth”... does that bother you? Is the shape or condition of a body really an important criteria in deciding whether its owner deserves to love and be loved? How do those criteria compare to the many invisible things that make up a person’s understanding of BED?

O: I assume you mean, what am I afraid of beyond being left here alone without you, since we’ve already touched on that. So I’ll tell you what my hell is, concerning us. My hell is learning that you are here but do not want to be. I never want to feel that, Arlyss. So I take preventative measures against it. First, I do my best to treat you well so that you are trapped here by your own desire to be happy. But then I decide, every day, deliberately and willingly, that in spite my best efforts you might still wish to one day leave me. If that ever happens I intend to fully support you in your decision, not because I want you to go, but because I trust you completely. I trust your intelligence, I trust your kindness, I trust your soul. I trust that if you ever decide to leave, it will be because you have thought it through carefully and found it to be necessary. I trust you to do what you need to do to make your life work. So please do me no special favors... if your best life is within reach, don’t stay here one moment beyond your desire to leave and pursue it. Don’t be late for your train.

I am too smart, too humble and too honest to believe that I am the best possible partner for you. There may be dozens and hundreds of better suited fellows out there. Some of them could probably offer you a better life than this simple one we share. Those are just plain facts. If a better, happier life is within your grasp, how could I in good conscience keep you from it?

What kind of friend would I be? Please don’t ever use me as the reason for failing to pursue your best possible life. You may not believe me, but that is truly how I feel.

Listen to this silence, while they tenderly embrace. There is so much said here.

A: My happiness is really that important to you, Oberlin?

O: It is, my love. It most certainly is, my dear.

A: Good. Then it’s settled. You’ll let me die first.

O: As you wish.

Oberlin descends beneath the blanket. Arlyss arches her back, grabs the headboard, moans.]

Interesting, what makes this bed sacred. It is worth thinking about. That is why I have watched this scene so many times. It is also worth thinking about the ways that this bed is protected and kept sacred, as well as the ways that it is not – not with chains or bars or binding contracts, but with soft words, kindness and an open window.

You have not considered the window for some time now and may have forgotten it altogether. That is because the ambient light of the room has been overpowering its frail light and the compelling inquiry into the bed and its occupants demanded your utmost attention. But as Ed drops the fader on the overhead spotlight and reduces the bed to a vague shape to your left, and as the room light further dims, the window calls you back and once again commands your attention.

The curtains are still performing their seaweed-dance in the breeze and you allow them to hypnotize you once again. Your pupils dilate and strain to focus on the soft, descending light of the window.

Soon you will reluctantly acquiesce to the impending darkness but, closing your eyes at the very last moment, you envelope the memory of light in a warm embrace and register it indelibly as an important new element in the encapsulated emotion known as BED.



Wonder Woman

Allen Triplett





Galleria Gorgon

Chelsea Arrington

Medusa was a teen-age rebel.
She wouldn't coif her curls
In the style of the time.
She wouldn't even brush them.
She threw her head covering
On the temple floor and stared
At strange men.
When she met a broad-shouldered
Man who smelled of seaweed and crocuses,
She demanded his body and caress.
She took him in front of The Goddess
And renounced her vows,
Her eye-brows lifted and her smile wide.
Athena, ever thoughtful, devised
A fitting punishment:
Ever erect would a man be who came face to
Face with Medusa, though his pleasure
Never to see.
But does Medusa care? She hangs out on her rock,
Gossips with the other Gorgons,
And plays pan pipes on her ipod.
She never really liked sex anyway.
Men still come
For her but they bore her.
In the end, she smiles at them
And adds them to her lawn ornaments.
Suburban Sarpedon could be worse.
At night she sings to the moon
And by day, watches the waves kiss her feet
As they then, snake-like make their way from the shore.



Body Positivity

Candace Morone

Forbidden Words

Jennifer Engel

#metoo

Her heart ran pink.
She was young, proud
of her taut breasts and ass
that fit so neatly in her snug clothing.
But she was shy and tender
as a baby sheep.
Her blood ran pink
down the altar of love,
pieces of heart cut away.
The bitch. Once dubbed
a fucking bitch always a bitch.
Where did she learn
the superiority of the penis
over the womb in this land
of the free?
Tradition? Advertising? Culture?
In the ever quest for a man? Yes,
that must have man!
From the family friend who groped
her childhood body.
From the college student who raped her
best friend into silence.
From the neighbor who pummeled
his wife into a patchwork
blues and purples.
From the shame of transgressions
that must be her fault.
She worked hard, always wrong
in her correctness.
At sixty she looks back
through the haze of mistakes
that overshadow her strengths.
Blood pumps red hot
through a heart stitched
back together.
She has a good man,
yet fear settles in her bones
for a daughter, tender as a lamb,
striking out on her own,
now that the nation's
white-haired leaders have declared
open season on "pussies."



A Love Story in Five Acts

Kassandra Zamanis

you need to believe me when i say that i am not trying to write something pretty
i am trying to write something dirty and
true.

in a world full of spewing exhaust pipes
the gaping maw of my heart swallows it all and
i like it.
the howling of cracking ribs and
squishing dreams turns me on
like an electric shock,
gets me wet and hot.

i want your filthy finger prints all over me.
when you kiss someone they should come up for air vomiting blood.
scratching your nails down your lover's back--
it should leave their skin under each half moon of your fingers.

i don't pretend that any of this is right but
lycanthropic folk tales are more true than
your fucking flowers
your pristine love-kissed cheeks
your asinine declarations of eternal romance.

give me the gutter.
give me hot metal blood.
i know the squelching sound of truth when i hear it.

That Was Then:

An Interview with Julia Amante

Women's Fiction author **Julia Amante**, author of *Evenings at the Argentine Club*, *Say You'll Be Mine*, and *That Was Then* writes emotionally rich stories about family, love, and the passion of chasing and achieving one's goals. Julia began her writing career in 2000 writing Latina romance under the pseudonym, Lara Rios when Kensington Publishing, America's foremost romance publisher, released a new line of Latino romance books. These books reflected the flavor and rhythm of Latino communities in the U.S. and delivered richly textured commercial fiction about a population that had been mostly ignored by publishers at the time. Julia sold four romances to this publisher before moving on to write longer Chick Lit novels for Berkley Publishing by 2006. Her book *Becoming Latina in 10 Easy Steps* was optioned by Disney's ABC Family to become a future TV series. These novels continued to feature Latino characters and the cultural flavor of Hispanic life in America, but they also dealt with universal issues that appealed to women of all cultures.



Julia grew up in California, the daughter of Argentine parents, who taught her to value her roots and to be proud of her Latina heritage, as well as to be grateful for the life they built in America. Julia's other passion is education. She received her B.A. at the University of California, Riverside, and her M.F.A in Fiction from California State University, San Bernardino. She currently teaches writing at Crafton Hills College and California State University, San Bernardino. One of the reasons she loves to teach is to inspire her students to see themselves as writers. Putting thoughts and ideas on paper or a computer screen is powerful; through words writers show the world they exist and that their ideas matter. Julia loves when she sees this realization in the eyes of her students. Another way that Julia shares her love of writing is by speaking to organizations and colleges across the country. Julia has presented workshops at the Latino Book and Family Festival, the Mexican-American Organization Foundation, the Latina Business Women Organization, and was the keynote speaker at El Concilio's Annual Latina Luncheon in Northern California. She has presented motivational speeches at colleges such as the University of California, Riverside, Cal. State LA, Western Illinois University among others. But on a perfect day, she likes nothing better than to be at home writing or reading a good book in her backyard.

Q: What led you to write your story? This one in particular?

A: *That Was Then* is a story about a mother who has been diagnosed with cancer for the second time in five years. What she fears most is not that she might die (though, of course, this scares her) but that she will die without having passed something of value to her two daughters. The idea for this book came to me about the time my own children were entering high school, and perhaps, subconsciously, I had some of the same fears as my main character. Did I prepare my kids for life? Did I give them the tools necessary to survive the challenging stage they were about to enter?

Q: How much of oncology did you have to do a background on before writing?

A: *Very little. I interviewed a cervical cancer survivor and an oncology nurse. Ultimately, the story is about the healing power of love. It is about relationships — mother/daughter, and romantic relationships. I learned enough about cervical cancer and its treatment to make the story sound believable. As a fiction writer, my job is to place my characters in realistic settings, and that's really all I was after.*

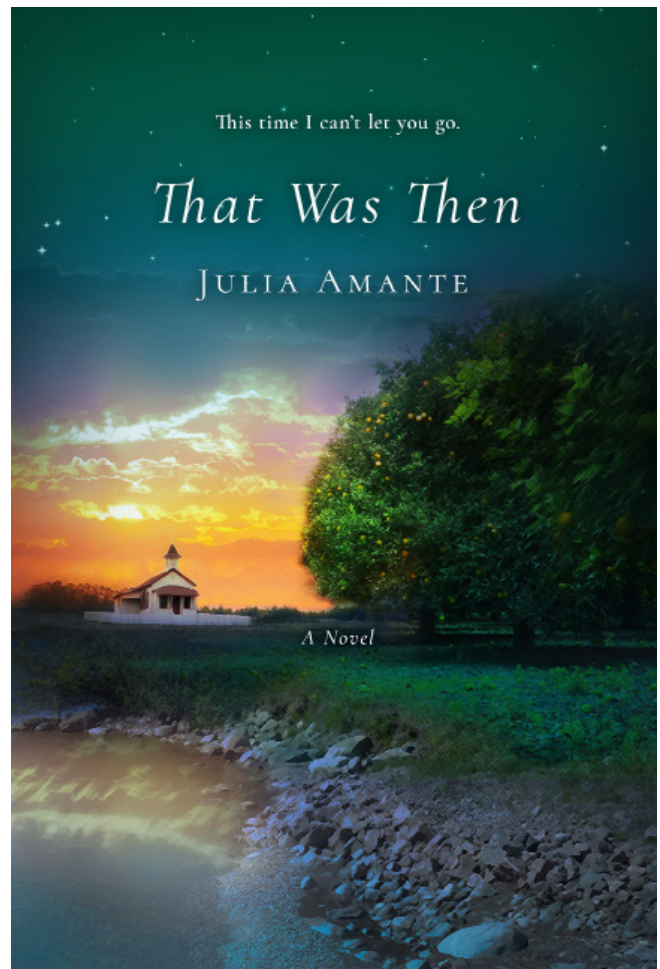
Q: What type of head space or mood do you have to be in to write? This story specifically?

A: *I try to write no matter what mood I'm in. Honestly, sometimes after teaching all day, I'm not really in the mood to write, but I clear my mind and focus on the next scene. Once I begin writing and re-enter the story's world, I don't have a problem writing. I do, at times play music to match the scene I'm currently writing. For *That Was Then*, often the music was a bit melancholic – a lot of country music, ha ha. My kids hate it. Mostly, I try to forget the real world and focus on the story world. After so many years of writing, I'm pretty good at doing that now.*

Q: "That was Then" is your most recent novel. What was one of the biggest key ideas behind it? Can we expect something in the future?

A: *I am currently writing the second book, featuring Margarita, the second daughter who was away at college. She didn't get much attention in the first book, so I want to give her her own story. She is the opposite of Jessica. If Jessica stood for hope and all that is possible, Margarita was the reality check, the kid who absorbs all the pain and sadness from the world and lashes out. All the original characters will appear again in the second book.*

As far as key ideas, aside from what I mentioned in the first question, I wanted to explore the idea of soulmates and lost loves. Is it possible to rekindle a love that has been forgotten (or at least put out of one's mind)? Is there such a thing as soul mates? I like to believe soul mates do exist. I think people



we've loved live within us forever, even if the relationship is no longer active. I don't think we ever forget them, and if the situation were to present itself for us to meet our past loves, we'd probably fall in love again.

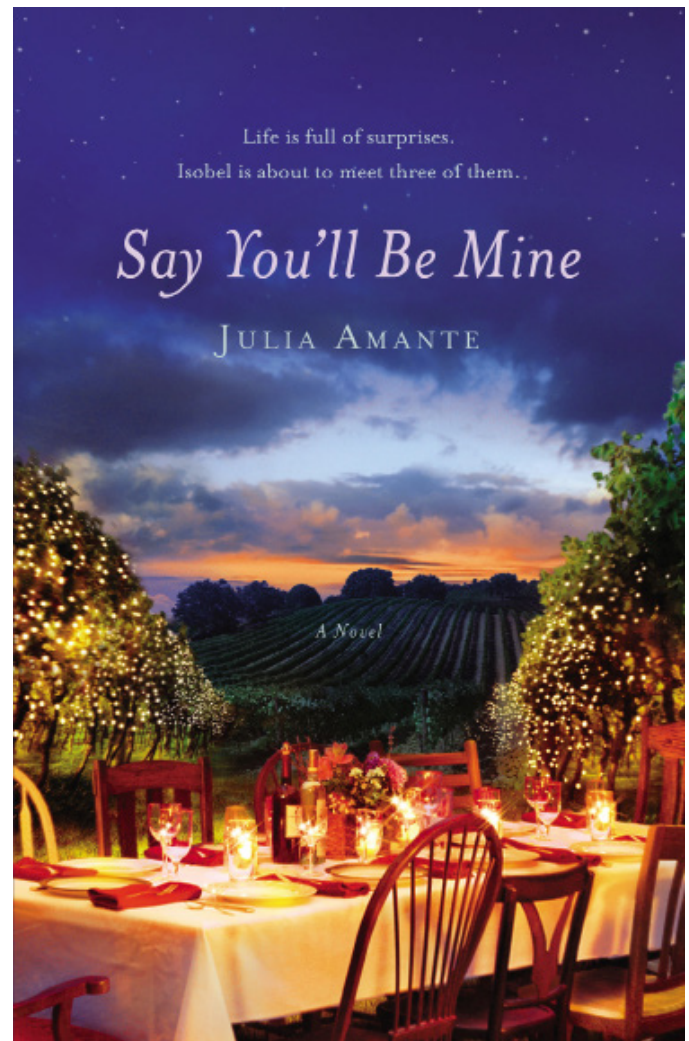
Q: Jessica seems to be in a really tough place with no real role models when we see her in the story. Her sister is gone and she has zero relationship with her father. What inspired you to write her character?


A: *Jessica actually did have good female role models and she was surrounded by love from her extended Latino family. Her grandmother adored her, her aunt was also a strong figure in her life, and her mother left a bad marriage, put herself through medical school and raised two daughters. Even though her mother was a workaholic and not around a lot, she was a survivor and it taught her daughters not to give up when they faced challenges. Sadly, in my many years of teaching, I've known a lot of young girls like Jessica (and guys too) from broken families, and they are not always happy teens. I wanted Jessica to be the opposite — despite not having the ideal family, she was a happy kid with a positive outlook on life. She believed in love and forgiveness. I wanted her to represent what is possible if we face life with the belief that anything is possible.*

Q: Did your Latin culture effect this story? Does it affect your writing in general?

A: *My Latin culture absolutely has an effect on my writing. I didn't start out thinking I was going to write books with Latino characters. I just wanted to be a writer. But my first publishing opportunity was with a publisher who wanted to release a series of Latino Romances. I knew this was a perfect chance to not only write in a genre that I liked and read, but also to include bits of my culture. I ended up selling four romances to Kensington Publishing, writing under the pseudonym Lara Rios. From that time forward, all my books have featured Latino characters, but my themes are universal, meaning that readers do not need to be Latino to enjoy the books. Times have changed, and more books and movies feature people of color, but often only people from the ethnic group represented in the books will read those authors. At the cost of remaining a niche author, I keep writing books that feature Latino characters because I want Latinos to see themselves represented in commercial fiction.*

In That Was Then, there is a little church built out of river rocks. This church is based on a real local church, and the story is that when Mexican men came to work in the orange groves in the





1940s as part of the Bracero Program, they built the church to have a place to worship. Even though they lived in tents, and worked hours picking oranges, they still made time to build the church. I loved that story! So, I included it in my book.

Q: A theme of the story deals with ‘going back to a simpler time’. Why does this theme attract you? Is there something beautiful in the idea of “going back in time”?

A: *I don’t know if it really attracts me, but it fit the main character. Grace was happy and in love when she was in high school, and she had her beloved grandmother to advise her. Once she graduated, her life and her dreams fell apart. Her grandmother, who was her anchor and her connection to a spiritual life, died leaving to make tough decisions on her own. So, the character longs for a simpler time when she was happy. Personally, I like to revisit “the past”, see old friends or drive by a home I once lived in, but I have no interest in going back in time. I am nothing like Grace, and it was difficult to get in her head sometimes.*

Q:As a writer what are one of the hardest things you deal with regarding the process?

A: *Can I say all of it? Writing a first draft that doesn’t suck is difficult, but it’s still fun to get lost in my own creation. Research can be fascinating, but it takes so much time away from writing that it frustrates me sometimes. Rewriting is draining, but it also draws me into the story again, and I fall in love with my characters as I’m working to perfect little things. Promoting and marketing my books is probably the worst. I’m not a sales person and I hate that I have to actively promote my books. But, meeting readers who have read my books and love them is amazing. So, all I can say is that writing is not easy, but I love the creative act so much that it overshadows any negative. I encourage anyone who wants to write, to focus on the joy they get from the creative process and put the hard parts out of their mind. Once the book (short story, poem, song) is finished, they won’t remember the hard parts.*

Thank you, Julia Amante!

Margaret

Mercedes Webb-Pullman

Her hands have held so many men
they feel nothing anymore;
to her the world is made of cocks
unconnected to hearts or minds.
She shoots herself up in my kitchen.

Mechanically she works her beat,
turns and returns to the same spot
as if some program permits her
just this distance and no more;
as if invisible bars cage her.

Her gaze, focused on an inner world
slides over faces sightlessly
like the eyes of an ancient statue
empty beyond even death.
Her husband waits at home.

Justice
Italia Ruotolo





The Lawyer Cup

Jerry Garces

Ferris Weil awakens to classical music. Judge Igor Dresden loves putting on the sound of what he calls motivation incarnate. The two share a beautiful old two-story wood frame home surrounded by a lovely orange grove. The home, far enough from town to avoid traffic and noise is still close enough to walk or jog to the small-town center where one can shop or have coffee. The judge had allowed Ferris to stay in the home rather than live under foster care.

Ferris, almost 17 now, still feeling the effects of what the two drank the night before, began his recall of what the judge had said. Ferris is special, a beautiful future awaits him, the judge is someone Ferris can look up to, thus he is allowed the honor of drinking from the Lawyer Cup. Its resemblance to a silver chalice is unmistakable. The judge, while explaining to Ferris the meaning of his importance in the world, took young Ferris into the study, where after some banter, the two did some roll play.

While rolling out of bed Ferris wondered. Did we shower together again last night?

Ferris, one of four boys, found trouble whenever he left his mother's house. She gave up on him after his repeated violations of the law. She wanted him placed in a group home. He would be fighting with other kids just because he could. His height made him the winner many times over. He would celebrate by kicking in a car window to hear the alarm. When other kids heard an alarm they yelled, Ferris strikes again!

On the street, Ferris would angle for a ride in a patrol car. He loved wrestling with police when he was found. He believed the conflict made him the tough guy in everyone's mind. The day Ferris drew blood was the day a kid called him a fairy. The name caller, bigger than Ferris, survived. Just a few stitches on the eye and head. Ferris then got his first taste of confinement in juvie lockdown.

Dresden, a stocky man, covering his shiny head with a golf cap, got into his sporty Mustang

convertible, leaving Ferris to his video games and graphic novels. The activity would keep him occupied until Dresden returned home. The judge's goal always to keep Ferris happy so that he would never think of leaving.

Arriving at the courthouse, Dresden greeted his staff and made ready to deal with the morning docket. He spent the previous day reading memos, reports and declarations relating to County Child Support Services, Juvenile Hall incarcerations or releases, and other related family law matters. Many youth offenders appeared with their representative. The judge occasionally allowed the minors to speak to their plight. He enjoys the power. He loved telling his court clerk, Cayenne Hopper, a slim redhead, that if not for the guidance received from above in making decisions, that the youth who appeared before him would be left to a thoroughly misguided life, left to fend for themselves on the streets, prey to criminal elements, spending wasted lives in jail, or worse, preying on others.

Cayenne, helpful in every way, operates by the book. Judge Dresden the master and she the loyal servant. Her skill was instrumental in getting the paperwork done, with court administration help, to have Ferris declared a ward of the state and thereby move into Dresden's home, as he requested. A short news story about the matter announced the courts willingness to take on the burden and share in the reshaping of a young life.

When Cayenne's husband was away on his job hauling lumber interstate, she spent time with Judge Dupont Elder. She thought of the relationship as a beautiful secret. In reality, as secret as a movie poster for a vulgar drama.

Old Man Elder, as he is called by his staff and the bar, sported silver-gray hair, somewhat curly, with a beard reaching ear to ear. The absence of a mustache made him appear to be one of the pioneers who settled the county. His gambling

habit kept him perpetually poor, yet he is always able put on a great party for members of the legal community. His wife, finally ending their relationship, enjoys her new life with a successful personal injury lawyer.

As Dresden enters his courtroom, his bailiff calls the court to order. All rise until told to be seated. Dresden gives his usual greeting, followed by a few eager responses in return. The numerous files piled high on the bench only delighted the judge.

The court reporter, Hellzel, considers her job a grim duty. Rude and self-centered, her good looks fooled many a male lawyer into thinking a luncheon date might be in the offing. Hellzel loves only cats. On her walk to parking after work she makes it a point to tell panhandlers to shut up as she hurries to her shiny Mercedes.

The court bailiff, Deputy Trout, stands near the door leading to Dresden's chambers. He is already thinking about lunch with the court staff – a lunch usually paid for by Dresden. Trout is also thinking about property confiscated and located in the evidence lockers at headquarters. He would be looking over some of the items in the late afternoon for first pick.

Dresden called the first case, The Matter of Ariel Passover. Two people stepped up to the counsel table. The expression on Ariel's plump face never changed while standing before the court. The family had designated Dewey Cheatum as her Next Friend to handle the minor's case. Local stores could not leave any goods near the front entrance without Ariel putting them in her bag and hurrying off. Dewey explained that Ariel merely needed understanding, not punishment. The grimy mobile home park where she lives is about to be closed down. The family is in disarray.

Dresden saw Ariel as a needy girl who could benefit from a short stay in juvenile hall for her misdeeds. She might even lose weight during vigorous morning exercise, he thought. An order was given to send Ariel to juvenile hall until a suitable foster home was designated. Someone would find and care for her just as Dresden cares for Ferris.

Though the docket was larger than usual, the court day ended in time for Trout to zip on over to the department evidence room. Cayenne took her special folder to the courts law library where she would figure how much she could remove from traffic fines held by admin to add to her new car fund. The process was figured long ago, by her book.

Dresden stopped at a local deli after work for gourmet sandwiches and wine. A nice dinner with Ferris would include Chardonnay with a small treatment. On arrival home, Dresden found the front door unlocked. He entered, calling Ferris. A search throughout the house, left Dresden more than anxious. The boy had taken his things, comics, games, everything purchased by Dresden. Then – the Cup. The Cup was missing! He sought to contain his nerves by opening the wine. How could Ferris leave after all the love he was given?

Almost two years later, the Arbitration, agreed to by the parties, was nearly done. This procedure avoided a court trial and would resolve matters much quicker. Ferris, now an adult, told his story of alleged abuse by Judge Dresden. Drinking from the Lawyer Cup, the showers, scars on his body, the drugging and mental distress.

Dresden hired his friend Phelony Lynn to put on his defense during the action brought by Ferris. In business for over 20 years, Phelony had her own problems. Bringing meritless actions, co-mingling client funds, failure to represent clients competently. Little things as she put it. She complained of state bar bias and their unfair fees.

During the course of investigation, Dresden's home computer was taken for inspection. He was asked previously, under oath, whether it had been tampered with. No, he said. Today the arbitrator, a retired judge, hoped to complete matters and render a decision.

Inside the meeting room sat Ferris, a pretty young girl by his side holding his hand. Dresden entered with Phelony. They sat at the conference table. The arbitrator reminded the group that Dresden and Ferris are still under oath.

Judge Dresden was asked again whether he had tampered with the home computer. Again, he



said no. Asked again whether he was sure. Dresden forcefully stated that he was sure. The arbitrator then opened a file which, with the help of State Judicial Commission investigators, revealed that the computer hard drive had been tampered with at certain points. Voice and video of Dresden and Ferris together was located and removed by state investigators onto a separate disk.

The arbitrator handed the file to Phelony. She read and showed it to Dresden. He glanced at it, looked toward Ferris, then handed it to the arbitrator. Phelony and Dresden asked if they could speak outside in the hall.

Within 10 days a settlement was reached. Ferris was awarded \$300,000.00. His lawyer took 40%. With what Ferris and his girlfriend, Vicky, were able to keep, the two could move out of state. He would open a custom car body and paint shop. Vicky could learn to be a hairdresser. Life never

looked so dazzling. A fresh start. Ferris and Vicky moved away to Nevada. They rented a small apartment and began enjoying their new life.

After nine months of partying with strangers, most of the money is gone along with their friends, payments on the new car overdue, as well as rent. Worse yet, their local candy man sends messengers daily to collect. Ferris and Vicky decided to gather what they had left and leave town. Five days later their bodies were found in their car, ripe from the sun, just outside Florence, Arizona.

Phelony Lynn, finally disbarred for failing to make monetary restitution to former clients, works in a bank.


Judge Dresden, still on the bench, teaches ethics for the state bar.

The Lawyer Cup sits behind the counter in a pawnshop a few blocks from the court house.



Untitled
Alec Blue





Three Generations of Hit Women & Special Attention to the Boys that Beat Us

Shelby Pinkham

*"My only forced submission
Has been the rape of time
I only own myself, but all of me is mine"*
-Rod McKuen


The morning after my sister's abortion,
I walked out onto a cold patio,
And let the chill of concrete
Shock my entire flesh.
Until my consciousness
Felt numb to the regret
Of leaving you when I promised
I wouldn't.

I boarded a train the night before last,
I spent my entire paycheck
Between then and now
Just so Antoinette could beat at my brain
Over a black bowl of instant.

Just so she could tell me what to do,
As she had always done
In critical moments.

She had a husky voice
That mixed in the air around us
And met smoke from her cigarettes
In harsh disdain.

The more she spoke,
The more she smoked,
And the more suffocating the air became.
It was a smothering experience,
But the hands of her smoky words
Strangling my lungs held me longer
Than I could allow any woman
To leave her legs around me.



I Kerouac-ed my way back home,
And the train was pushing its way past
Abandoned fields and graffiti.
There is some vital point between
northern and southern California

That the landscape changes from
Green against Blue
To Brown against Grey.

I scribbled thoughts for you
In a leather-bound book
I found somewhere between
City Lights and Last Bookstore,
Thoughts I won't be sharing with you
Over coffee at 4am anymore.

I listened to the chitter chatter of
The 6AM girls,
They don't laugh as hard as
The 8AM girls
And they are never as done up as the
12PM girls,

But small talk is the same
On every train
That makes its way through California cities.
It all reminds me of you.

The girls were always escaping
Or bouncing over towns to lovers
Who left them wet messages
On their machines.
Sometimes they seemed lonely,
But not as lonely as the girls
With silver-toothed,
Over-sized sweated,
Dirty-faced children

Tugging at them.
I never got around to asking you
What made you leave San Francisco
On the 4AM train heading south.



Everyone has a circle
And almost everyone leaps
At the possibility of widening that circle.
The small talk,
If listened to in long spells,
Will take you around anyone's full circle.
It's a dizzying word dance played by
Strangers on trains.

I never took the time to dance
Around your full circle.

There was a man
Across the aisle
That had what appeared
To be a year's worth
Of McDonald's crumbs in his
Long, tangled beard.

His circle consisted of
Calls to a brother,
None of which were answered or returned.
He left soggy-eyed messages on the machine.
He left longer messages on the phone
For some lover.
From time to time,
He glanced around,
Almost embarrassed,
But the ranks of the 6AMers
hardly every hold much
S H A M E

I never got around to calling you
From the train to let you know,
I made it on in those last seconds.
As I started to feel cruel,
My eyes meandered over to the glass again.
Across the valley was a man
Selling oranges.
You always stopped and bought fruit
On the side of the road
And we never ate it.
You weren't the type to perform kind acts.
And I have never been either.
I never got around to asking you about that.





Blue

Kai Shultz

All my life
I've been drowning in a sea of pink:
Magenta, rose, and fuschia
But i don't know them
Cuz all I can see is blue...
Blue oceans, pooling in my blue eyes
And the blue I dyed my hair when I turned 16,
And blue Jolly Ranchers, my favorite,
Or maybe my blue antidepressants.

I don't want to play dress up
I don't want to paint my nails
I don't want to wear that dress
I don't want to curl my hair
I don't want to wear makeup
I don't want to sit like a lady
I don't want to mash barbie faces together
In a clash of a kiss
But you don't believe me when I say

That all I can see is blue.
Why were you so shocked
When I cut my hair off?
That hair was a monster
It munched and crunched away at my soul
And screeched pink words
into my ears.
It had to go,
because I didn't want to hear about pink,
I wanted to hear about blue!

Tell me about the blue I felt for 3 years,
falling in love with a girl
who will only see me as pink.
Or tell me about the blue pride
rising in my chest
when the cashier says "thank you, sir."
Or even the blue sadness that chokes me
when father says
"You're evil," "Get out of my house," and
"WHY DON'T YOU JUST FUCKING DIE?"

Don't mock me
For wearing men's deodorant
And growing out my pit hair
And binding my breasts tighter, tighter!
And wanting a dick (but not in that way!)
Can't you see?
I'm feeling so blue!

So fuck pink.
I want her chipped blue nail polish
And a blue tongue, popsicle-stained,
I want blue cars
And blue jeans

Blue scars
And blue dreams,
A blue name
And a blue love for life.

Hasta la vista Betty Boop

Italia Ruoto





Survivor's Sign

Tara Shultz

The girl walked barefoot against the cold white tile, the squares so close together that they were nearly touching. In one hand she held a music-player, purple earphones resting on the antitragus of both ears. In the other hand she pulled the I.V. drip, wheels squeaking as they clacked along the tile. The bumping of the large metallic contraption wasn't bothersome – she'd learned to drown out the noise with her music. The clear baggies filled with fluid dripped down through a thin tube inserted just underneath her skin at the wrist, feeding into her minute-by-minute. Her eyes were dull as she scanned the moderately-sized corridor, the bland milk walls giving off their normal, drab vibe. The ceiling was bleached as well. The bright lights were harsh, the fluorescents flickering with an electric hum. Her gown was white, with small grey dots on it, a dark grey pull-string at the back.

She reached the grey carpet, splashes of color smiling at her, inviting her to step forward. The walls were wood panels – if they were real, she would have guessed that they were cherry wood. Green plants dotted the horizon. She strained to see what flowers they were – white and pink, almost resembling lilies, carnations, and orchids...but she knew they couldn't have been from Earth. They were too large, their waxy leaves just as big as the stems. Her eyes darted left, glancing at the crimson and mauve plaid doorjamb. They were beautiful, in a childish way. The children's waiting room for admission gave off happy vibes. The lights were brash, still uninviting – but the room was large and spacious, filled with blue fabric chairs.

She didn't take a step further, and instead toed the line between the two worlds. With a sad look on her face and a sigh at her lips, she turned and wheeled back the way she'd come. She was welcome in this world of color, but

knew not the ticket needed to cross over.

"Good morning, Mahalah."

She sat up in the white bed, careful not to lean too far back and strike her head against the cold steel frame. She looked at the nurse, who was new – Annie was her name. Her silhouette was framed with the violet light weakly shining in through the window, curtains parted to let the light in. The starry sky greeted her vision as it did every hour of the day.

The nurse handed her a glass of water. "Are you hungry?"

She drank from the teal mug, her breath fogging the sides of the cup just slightly. She handed it back to the woman with the apple-red hair and shook her head. She reached over and pulled the yellow stuffed rabbit back into her lap. The muted green ribbon at his neck had a thin white stripe running around it. She gently patted him.

"Is your bunny hungry, then? Would he like some carrots?"

Mahalah looked up at Annie, insulted and exasperated with being treated like a juvenile. She pointed to herself, and then held out ten fingers.

She caught on. "My apologies. You're ten – you must be too old for that silly stuff." The nurse took the cup, resting it gently in her left hand. "Still, if you ever do get hungry, you can come and find me. I'm always working this floor. I'll gladly walk you to the cafeteria...or, if you're feeling rather adventurous, you can do so by yourself." Remembering her patient's muteness, she added, "If you need me, just write a note and give it to someone, dear. They'll help you find me."

The child rolled her eyes again and laid back down in the bed, holding the rabbit close to her chest.

She turned her back to the nurse, pulling the sheets over her head.



Annie pursed her lips, nodded, flipped the lights off, closed the curtains, and walked out of the room.

She shut the door quietly behind her.

Mahalah couldn't sleep. She was tired – her eyelids felt as if they were weighted down with dumbbells – but try as she might, she couldn't clear her mind enough to drift off to the intoxicating darkness that awaited her. Every time she drifted off to sleep, a warzone erupted beneath her closed lids. She sighed in frustration and got out of bed, her bare feet softly landing on the frozen tiles. The mauve light shining from around the drawn window told her it wasn't too late in the day – she had barely been asleep for an hour. With a shiver, she pulled on a forest green sweatshirt that her parents had given her last Christmas – it was one of the few items she'd been able to grab before she had been brought here. In her left hand was the rabbit, in her right she grasped the chilled metal of the I.V. drip.

She rolled it towards the closed door, reaching a tired hand out to grasp the door handle. She walked out into the cold corridor, choosing to go in the opposite direction than she usually went she wasn't in the mood for smiling faces. Along the way, she heard the muffled moans of other patients in their own rooms. The beeping of the machines filtered in and out of her ears, though she paid them no mind. The news was on as she passed one of the few televisions in the place – she paused, watching. The being sitting at the table had yellow eyes that glowed, a wispy substance flickering out of them as he stared into the camera. He briefly straightened his tie, blue fingers dancing across the scales of his chin and orange feathers of the crest sprouting from his upper chest. He patted down his brilliant red hair. An Andria, Mahala thought as she listened to his angelic voice. "Tonight's news: the death count on Earth has increased to 3 billion. Saturn's crews are still working to dig through the rubble. Humans are said to be slowly dying

from the toxic environment brought about by the shuttle that was supposedly launched from Neptune. The shuttle crashed into the planet about a month ago. The survivors have been sent off-planet to Pluto, in hopes that their advanced medical procedures would be able to cure the frailty of the human body. Talks between Neptune and Galactic Alliance representatives are still in-process. As always, this has been Thiatre with the daily news. Now, to Melinndia with the weather."

She sighed. They don't know anything about the explosion...they weren't even there. Screaming suddenly echoed through her mind, and she shook her head, scrunching her eyes tight. No. S-s-stop... She flinched, fire alighting behind her closed lids. The sound of a rock pelting her in the head brought back pain to her scalp. With it came the memory, fresh and clear as if she were standing in the wreckage in that horrible moment. People swarmed around her, blood pouring from their wounds. Screaming filled her ears as she inhaled smoke and ash. Mutilated people crawled along the ground, lost limbs left behind. A mother screeched at her to move out of the way – the baby in her arms didn't even look human with flesh burned from the blast. Mahala stood still, wide eyes unsure of anything that was happening around her. At her feet was a massive concrete slab, jagged and rough to the touch. She numbly processed that it had been a wall of her home. Looking a little closer, she realized there was a hand caught underneath it, blood surrounding the appendage. Suddenly recognizing her mother's ring upon the finger twitching lifelessly, Mahala recoiled.

No...No...NO. Her eyes flew open, and she pinched herself on the wrist. Hard. Brought back to reality, she found she was breathing heavily. Calming her heartrate, she closed her eyes, forcing air into her butchered lungs, coughing a few times before catching her breath. Once she'd become calm, she continued on, feeling utterly exhausted.

The next day, on a trek through the hospital



again, Mahalah passed by an open door, glancing in briefly at a family circled around a child's bed. The mother was sobbing, the father with his hand at her back. With a shake of her head Mahalah didn't pause in her slow, deliberate walking – the family of Arudds would get over their loss in time, as she had to do with her own parents' deaths.

It was harder for her to walk now – she used to be able to run, and just a few weeks ago, she'd been able to at least walk normally...but now, things were different. Her socked feet were always cold, never having proper circulation. She knew the medication wasn't working – the effects of the radiation hadn't left her yet. Running a hand through her hair, another patch was inadvertently pulled out. She dropped it on the floor, flicking her wrist to release the strands from their stubborn grip to her fingers. Her normally pale skin had taken on an odd tint, something between urine yellow and ashen grey.

Lost in thought, she didn't see the boy in front of her. She swerved, nearly crashing into him. His dirty blond hair was filthy and twisted into an odd shape atop his scalp. His left leg was gone, and he leaned on a make-shift crutch just large enough to be propped up under the stub. His skin, while tan, was covered in a layer of soot. With one look at him, Mahalah knew he was a survivor.

He smiled, and waved. Suddenly, his hands leapt to life, moving spastically.

Mahalah frowned, and tilted her head. He continued to move them, and when she didn't respond, he started to mouth words along with them.

Mahalah did her best to read his lips, and then suddenly put two-and-two together. She waved at him, hoping he'd stop. She reached into the pocket at her hip and pulled out a thin sheet of paper and a pencil. Ignoring his constantly moving fingers, she wrote, *Sorry – can't understand you. My name is Mahalah. You a survivor?*

He took the paper, smiled, and held his hand out for the pencil. Once she'd given it to him, he

wrote back, *Hello! I'm Jaxith – please call me Jax. Here for surgery – docs say they can fix my foot and ears.*

Mahalah took it back and wrote, *I don't speak. Can you not hear or talk?*

He wrote back, *I'm deaf, yes. I can talk, but I'm not good at it.*

Oh, Okay. How old are you?

The boy smiled. *I'm thirteen. How old are you? I'm ten.* Mahalah wrote with a nod.

He moved his hands again.

Mahalah frowned, and started writing again. *Why are you doing that?*

I don't speak good. I'd rather write or use sign.

Mahalah tilted her head and observed him. *Teach me?*

His face erupted in a large smile. His green eyes glistened. *Sure!*

Over a period of months, Mahalah learned sign language from Jax. They started off going between paper and sign, and had worked their way up to communicating through very simple signs, even though Mahalah did still struggle from time to time with certain words. They sat together in two of the most comfortable wheeled chairs that Mahalah had convinced Jaxith to pilfer from behind the counter in the brightly-colored area of the hospital. They were sitting just outside her room. The rabbit sat upright in her lap, green and snow-white ribbon in stark contrast with his yellow and cream fur and the glistening brown eyes of the creature.

Mahalah glanced at Jax. Her hands were slow as she asked him the question. **So, when do you go in for surgery?**

Jax signed at a faster pace. **For my leg, I go in later today. For my ears, well, docs aren't sure they can fix those.**

I'm sorry about that.

Meh, it's okay. Say, you never told me – what are you in here for?

Um... Mahalah paused, trying to remember the sign. Her eyes wandered away from Jax's face.

Jax waved at her to get her attention and

signed, **Just fingerspell it. I'm here because... um...R-A-D-I-A-T-I-O-N.**

Jax raised one eyebrow in confusion.

Radishes?

No! R-A-D-I-A-T-I-O-N.

He laughed. **Oh, radiation. Got it. Sorry – your fingers sometimes wobble.**

She looked offended. **I'm still learning.**

He waved his hand in a dismissive fashion.

It's fine. So, what do you mean, you're here for radiation?

Mahalah shook her head, knowing she couldn't explain using sign. She pulled a pencil and paper from the pocket in her hospital gown and wrote down her brief story, handing it to Jax.

He read it and nodded. **I see. We're here for similar reasons.**

You were left alone, too?

My dad died in the explosion. Mom couldn't find me, looked all over for me, and then called the police...I ended up here.

Where's your mom now?

She passed last week. She had the same problem you've got. Realizing his blunder too late, Jax decided to quickly change the subject. **Do you have any friends, Mahalah?**

She shrugged, glancing at the floor with a downcast look before her eyes rose once again to meet his. **Not really. The nurses are okay, I guess, but...they're not my friends.**

Well, you've got one now. I'll be your friend!

She nodded, her eyes brightening for a moment. **How do I say your name in ASL, again? It's hard to remember.**

He showed her. She copied him, and he nodded his approval. **That's my name sign. It's easier to sign than my name.**

What's a name sign?

A name sign is something only a Deaf person can give you. It's like a nickname. Do you want one? I can give you one.

She shrugged. **I don't care – you choose.**

He looked at her for a long time, and then noticed her eyes. **Your eyes are dark brown, right? They almost look black.**

My eyes are what?

B-R-O-W-N.

She frowned, a puzzled expression clearly readable on her face.

Um, yeah.

He showed her a sign similar to the letter M. It circled around her eyes.

What was that?

Your name sign!

Why did you choose that?

For your beautiful eyes!

She shook her head in disbelief. **Come on, don't pull my leg! As if anyone could like MY eyes. Yours are better. Anyway, why were you given YOUR name sign?**

He repeated his name sign, using a shape similar to the letter J. Two-handed, it was signed similarly to the word "fast." **Mom gave it to me. I used to run a lot, so my name sign is related to quickness.**

She nodded. **I used to be able to run, you know, before...** She glanced at the I.V.

I could, too, before this leg slowed me down, he signed, looking down at himself, a sad glint in his eyes as he stared at the place where his leg had once been.

They were silent for a long while.

A nurse walked out of a door, and picked up the clipboard on the wall. She scanned the room and called out, "Jaxith?"

Mahalah tapped him, pointing to the nurse with her other hand.

Jaxith got the hint, and waved in the nurse's direction.

The nurse frowned, looked back at the board, and then flushed, her cheeks matching her naturally pink hair. She signed back, **I'm sorry! I knew I had a Deaf or hard-of-hearing patient today. The clipboard is marked – I just skimmed right over it.**

Jax merely smiled, unfazed by the nurse's slip-up. **It's fine. I'll be over in a minute. I want to say goodbye to my friend.**

Go ahead. The nurse nodded, busying herself with writing something on the clipboard.

He looked over at Mahalah. **I gotta go now.**



Bye, Jax.

Bye, Mahalah.

Jax stood, balanced himself on the crutch that had been leaning against his chair, and looked towards the nurse. He turned back to the girl, signing, **I'll see you again tomorrow.**

Hey, W-A-I-T!

The sign for that is WAIT, he signed, stopping in his tracks and turning back to show her the proper term, a smirk on his face. His hands moved in a circular motion in front of his chest in a fast fashion.

Sorry – I didn't know that one.

What is it?

I want to give you this. She struggled with the rabbit, her fingers feeling stiff due to the cold air and constant signing she'd been doing. She finally managed to untie his ribbon. She handed it to Jax with a small smile on her face. **It matches your beautiful eyes.**

He smiled and tied it into his hair, making one chunk of it stick straight into the air. **How do I look?** he asked facetiously, putting a hand on his hip and throwing his head back, imitating a supermodel on the runway.

His dorky smile made Mahalah laugh for the first time in weeks. **Duh! You look beautiful.** She waved as he hobbled back to the nurse. The door closed with a resounding *click*.

She sighed, grabbed the I.V., and took two trips pushing the chairs down the hallway. Over the past month, she'd gained back some of her strength. Walking was still slow, but she had more energy to do stuff. She didn't feel tired all the time. Her bald head was sprouting tiny brown hairs. Finally, both her nurse and she were starting to see improvement. For the first time, she stepped over the raised bump that separated the harsh tile from the softer carpet. She no longer feared standing in the colorful place – if Jax was able to go back and forth, why couldn't she? She smiled as she wheeled the chairs behind the desk. With a pleased look around at the colorful soft carpet, the blue chairs all lined in rows, and the lovely – but fake – wooden panels, Mahalah basked in the feeling of standing in such

a happy place. Her heart felt as if it would burst from the sheer joy she felt. She then turned and headed for her room. She felt content after the draining day, and only hoped that she'd see Jax again tomorrow, and that he'd be well enough to play with her.

Mahalah stayed in the hospital for several more months. Jax's first surgery went very well, and he had a prosthetic leg which he'd learned to use through therapy. He was just as slow as Mahalah, but the two were still able to walk through the halls and chat. Mahalah improved in her signing, and became just a tad bit faster than she'd been previously. Less confusion passed between the two of them.

Mahalah looked over at him as she walked beside him, taking her morning stroll through the halls. She'd decided she'd get some food, and Jax had agreed to come along with her to the hospital cafeteria. **Jax, where do you think we'll go after this?**

What do you mean?

Well, what planet will we be shipped to?

What?

All that's left of Earth is burning rubble.

So?

With a concerned look over at him, she reiterated her point. **Well, once we're healed, where will we go? Do you think we'll stay here, or be shipped to Saturn?**

I dunno.

Do you think we can go together?

I dunno.

Mahalah frowned at him. **Cat got your tongue? What's wrong, Jax?**

Just tired, he said with a smile and a flick of his wrist.

Mahalah wasn't sure she believed him.

Life continued on for the two, and after a year in the hospital, Jax's final ear surgery was to take place. The boy had lost much of his previous energy, and seemed lethargic compared to the strong Mahalah. She'd come leaps and bounds from where she'd been previously, and with a head of fuzzy short hair, she was steadily improving. Her skin no longer looked ashen,



and her eyes had a life to them that none of the nurses had seen in her before. Mahalah was truly happy.

Jax hugged her goodbye before walking through the door. He smiled and signed, **See you on the other side!**

More like HEAR you on the other side, Mahalah corrected with a smirk.

He nodded, waved, and walked alongside the nurse with pink hair, taking her hand right before the door closed, blocking them from Mahalah's view.

She yawned. She glanced at the clock on the wall, stretched, and turned back to her room. *Guess I could take a nap. It's not like I have anything fun to do now that Jax is busy. Maybe when I wake up, he'll be out of surgery and we can talk some more!* She smiled, creaked open the door to her room, and walked through, shutting it behind her.

Two hours later, Annie walked into check on Mahalah. "Dear? I don't mean to wake you – I know I'm an hour earlier than expected for my

rounds today – but Jax is done. You'll be able to see him in fifteen minutes. I thought you'd be happy to know that he's doing great."

Mahalah didn't stir.

"Mahalah? Jax's surgery went well. Did you hear me?" She leaned forward and gently placed a hand on her shoulder.

The child didn't move.

"My darling, are you alright?" She shook her gently.

The girl remained in the same position.

She frowned. Placing a hand on the child's forehead and then checking the pulse at her wrist and neck, Annie's calm demeanor flickered. For a moment, she appeared broken. Shaking her head, she tried in vain to convince herself her suspicions were wrong. Her hand hovered over the young one's mouth and nose. Feeling nothing, her dismal thoughts were confirmed. Annie picked up the clipboard and wrote down the time and date of death. She sniffled through her tears. "Oh...how will we tell Jax?"

And on the Earth Peace

Jennifer Engle

Et in Terra Pax

The boy seemed to be at peace. Breath calm.
Heart pumping. Head wired and swaddled in white gauze.

His sister, who was in middle school, stood by
his bed not understanding this drug-induced coma,

just that the room was overcast with silence.
She grappled for words that might pierce his inertia,

then took flight, a buoyant soprano.
Et in Terra Pax vibrated the gray hospital atmosphere.

He must have heard! He must! Her voice
flew around his swollen brain like a guardian angel.

The nurses applauded. She humbly smiled
and the boy continued his month-long medicinal slumber.



lissy
Shellie Lewis





In a House on a Planet

Jennifer Engle

“What’s you doing,” she says passing by
busy like the wind doing its chores
of shaking trees and stirring the heat,

“I’m moving things from one place
and putting them in another,” I say
leisurely stacking paper leaves

that have been dropped by rushed hands.
She scurries to bathe the boy. I fold
a cotton tarp from painting the hallway,

stack the tools and brushes on top.
The boy flinches at the touch of water,
squints when his face is washed.

I move like earth moves seas across deserts,
like it shoves mountains into the air,
relocating sediment across the buffet.

I pick at dried droplets of paint that mark
earthy sofas and floors. Swipe at water spots.
Clean soiled skin. Rearrange appointments.

What am I doing? Conversing with the wind.
Observing unruly growth of ordered chaos.
Listening to the tributaries of breath.

I inhabit this narrow valley of time, loving
while flesh is still reliable, knocking down
dust before there is nothing else.

Underbelly levels
Cody Clements





Queen of Hell

Hayley Arrington

Was I looking for my descent?
I think it's come.
Come for me
When I didn't ask for it.
When I was happy.
In love
And loved—
Or so I thought.

Am I Psyche,
That mortal of old
Who was given tasks
By a Goddess
To be restored in her position
Beside her love?

Down into the Underworld
She beseeched Persephone,
(Another maiden
With a story of her own)
To give her the secret of beauty.

Psyche returned alive,
Alive to her beloved.

Will I return
From down below,
Alive and well
To run into the arms
Of my love?

Will I stay there
With that Dark Goddess
And her Lord?
Become a wraith
Forget who I am?

Perhaps that is a better fate.
A fate with no change,
No pain, because I will cease to be.

And my love cannot hurt me.



Hearing You

Frank Kearns

For John

We were formed from the same mother and father,
like binary stars born of the same cloud,
orbiting each other from my first memory
of tiptoe on a stool, hands around the crib rail,
looking down at your still-wrinkled face.
We stand in a teen-age picture, side by side,
you younger and a bit taller than I,
your hair a lighter brown. And there
we face each other, over a game of chess,
our chins in our palms, eyes and minds
focused on the pieces.
And here on this computer screen,
I watch this super-eight movie reel,
fifty years later on DVD, as you
push our home-made wooden cart,
while I try to stay on, hanging on
to the bits of clothesline
that hold the wobbly axle straight.
Today you pass my bedroom window,
your head held slightly down,
as if a thought is showing you the way.
Yet like the glow of a super nova,
the what I see today comes long
after you are gone.
This is how I hold you close,
in a way impossible with life,
but the void I hold is like deep space,
flashes of light but not a single sound,
and in poem after poem,
I try to resurrect your voice.

It's Only Temporary

Shellie Lewis





The Crafton 2019 Slam Poetry Team and Their Poems



Top: Candace, Morone, Ashley Hayes (Faculty Advisor), Kelcie , Savanna Fisher,
Bottom: Tory Barber, Trevor Loyd, Ethan Atil, Tayrn Roberts, and Donshay Lefridge
(Not Featured: Chelsea Arrington)

Aren't Assumptions Interesting? Cadace Morone

Aren't assumption interesting?
The twisting of first words
Or possibly the shifting of clothes meaning that
everyone knows
What type of person you are.
One of the issues with this mentality

Fabricating people's realities in an instant means
I can say no to a kiss and crybabies either pout or
doubt that I meant my words
Yet they are curved and no matter what route I take
Too soft too soft. where is my spoken?
Spoken word poetry may not even cut it for this
one
Words can be eloquently spoken and re-written
and revised and these guys just ignore
As if ignoring advances makes me a snore
And that's why even after falling in love with
someone else it stings and staggers

Never ceases to amaze, and he can get lost in my
gaze and we surmise
The ties of those previous and demise a devious
plot for our future
Because I killed the dragon and let him get my girl
And he sure did fight till every morning light
Awakening to a phone call every morning after
every night,
And we never want to separate. Yet perceptions, I
am not traditional
In the means of any culture, sub-group, genre
Vultures tend to swoop down and call my shaved
head crown "skinhead"
Like shrubs they attempt to hide my little light and
with all my might I proclaim
Be soft! The never-ending loop
Mama's unconditional love woven into the fabrics
of my limbic
And the lines of every limbic.
Her love is unconditional
And for that, I shall show the word my spiritual
admiration for every creature of creation
Like my lion-hearted father. Presumptions,
presumptions, the soft die young
Like the sponge they are designed for dish soap
Solemn entwined to the harsh chemicals made to
Break. Them. Down.
Why do so many miss the fact that every dish
Was wiped clear by the over-eager or rather never
meek nature of that sponge?
Feeders on our teddy bear edges.
But maybe that it not negative
And most may not find that persuasive
A softer lifestyle means taking the rough
We have a tough time viewing the abraisitivity of
allowing oneself to be stepped on
When our ancestor's idolized laying oneself
down in puddles
Becoming that bridge as love
So let me ask, are not those you called weak not
just speakers for our hearts?
Are not the soft the brave
Uncavable even when their backs should break
under the weight
Of those unable to process vulnerable verbiage.

Are You Okay? Tory Barber

Hello my name is Tory and I am going to tell a
story.
"Are you okay?"
A seemingly harmless question right? However,
one unfortunate night taught me that different
people can have different intentions behind the
question: "Are you okay?"
Age 19, first year of college, I decided to get drunk
for the first time with my best friend (let's call her
Sally) at a party.
I brought my boyfriend Dylan along and it being a
small party I figured nothing could go wrong.
Sally introduced me to the host of the party (lets
call her Molly).
There was one other person at that party, whom
like my man A) had a girlfriend and B) decided
not to drink. (Let's call him Scumbag.) Scumbag, I
wasn't expecting to see him. I hadn't seen him since
months and months earlier in the year when he
expressed a small interest in me.
A few shots of Vodka later and I was a giggly wide-
eyed drunk girl.
The first time was in the kitchen while Dylan was
in the backyard.
"Are you okay?"
Hands holding me down.
Eyes not letting me look at the ground.
Pretending to ask cause he "cares"
But really testing me to see how much of me was
there.
The fucker thought I was clueless.
But I knew deep down that he was ruthless.
He leaned in for a kiss.
I knew something was amiss.
When I said no he laughed cause it was a "joke"
What a fucking bloke.
When I found my boyfriend I immediately told
him that Scumbag had just tried to kiss me. But I
guess because I was drunk he decided not to take it
too seriously.
So I continued to have a good time.

But one Scumbag still hadn't gotten what he wanted.
"Are you okay?"
And then he grabbed my ass
Like asking me that question was a free pass
To harass me because he's only checking on me.
Checking on me to see if I'll react.
Or more specifically if I'll fight back.
As long as my boyfriend's not looking
Maybe I'll be unhooking my dignity.
After all I'm nothing but giggly
Even as he consistently jiggles me.
I said nothing to him about it even though I didn't
want it because my mind was like a jump rope.
Before I knew it, it was 2a.m. and Dylan was tired.
So he went to take a nap on the couch. Very shortly
after Sally and Molly ran out the front door drunk
off their asses. I stumbled down a hall and came
face to face with Scumbag.
"Are you okay?"
This time he came onto me more strongly.
All at once I found my body entirely in his grasp
With his hands on my ass.
And his boner like a poker, pressing up on me
closer than I desired.
While his lips came in already wired
To ignore how my body was tired.
Dylan!
Was the name that never escaped my lips
As I pulled my body away from his hips
And moved towards my only hope
Of not becoming another man's envelope
To use for his package
That I never asked to be damaged by.
He grabbed my wrist.
My stomach began to twist.
"No, no you don't need to go over there."
He stated, his tone implying a threat because he
knew my boyfriend was asleep just around the
corner.
I allowed that Scumbag to pull me into Molly's
bedroom. My subconscious screamed at me that
I was in danger but the alcohol insisted he is a
friend.
He sat beside me and tried to kiss me again and

again I said no and again he laughed claiming to
be "joking" and only "playing." He left me alone
on that bed shortly after that because I wasn't far
enough gone yet.
Later I huddled with Sally on the floor in the
corner and the first words that came out of her
mouth were:
"Tory I feel like Scumbag is going to rape me."
"Me too!" I exclaimed but before I could continue a
tall figure came to a stop in the doorway.
I was so relieved to see my boyfriend that I got
up and moved towards him too fast and hit the
ground in front of him.
"Are you okay?"
The man that offered me his hand
Didn't have some other plan
Beside taking care of me as best he can
And I knew that with him I was safe
And not making a mistake
He never took advantage of me
And right then when I needed him most he sure as
hell didn't abandon me.

I Still Wish That You Would Make That Call Trevor Lyod

I knew that when I swiped right on you that I
wanted it all.
I knew that when we first met that I was going to
suffer a great fall.
A fall so tall, even bigger than Everest in Nepal
There was just something about you that had me so
enthralled
God, I still wish that you would make that call.
Your hair was as flowy and red hot as the fiery lakes
of Hell.
I sit in my room writing this intoxicated by the
memory of how it smelled.
Herbal essences from not only your hair, but from
that piece that sits across from your cell
I sat in your room with you and listened to the
stories you had to tell.

Staying up together until 4 in the morning made
my heart feel an ungodly swell.
God, I still wish that you would make that call.
Your autumn colored eyes were portals to our
future
But instead you took my love and abused it like a
user.
I'm so scared and alone, how could I lose her?
You left me for dead like some kind of loser
I thought I had it this time, but I guess I'm just the
poorest chooser.
I'm replaying our conversation in my head over
and over
and I still can't believe that you invited me over.
Being alone with you put my heart face to face with
the wrath of Cupid's worst hangover.
GOD DAMN IT, I STILL WISH THAT YOU
WOULD CALL!
Did you ghost me because I wasn't bold enough?
Did you ghost me because I'm not grown
enough? Did you ghost me because I'm not clone
enough?
I still wish that you would make that call.
It's okay though, I'll manage.
I've got enough love for myself to survive the
damage.
I'm just so goddamn hungry for love that I'm
famished, but that's okay because I'll
just keep moving on and put on another bandage.
War pain, baby, it's okay. I learned from it to never
put my heart on display
Like Otis Redding would say I'm just sittin' on the
dock of the bay
Wasting time in my day, Dreaming about how you
would finally call me and make everything okay
But now I'm screaming out wishing my memory of
you would fade away
Every dog has its day and every fish has its bait
But because of you I look at the idea of love with
disgust and with hate
Like it's just some kind of sick game that you play
In order to tempt my heart with some imaginary
fate
Where you and I could go on cute dates
Or maybe own a nice home in the suburbs, so

beautiful, so quaint
A fate where we could have six kids, or eight
Kids with names like Samantha, Warren, or Blake
But that's just an illusion, reality is what it ain't
Because of you my heart is now taint.
Yet I still find myself wishing that you would pick
up your phone and just call me.

My Body Is Taryn Roberts

Women are expected to be seen and not heard
Beautiful armpieces to men
Their body a temple kept pure for their future
husband
Expected to conform to men.
My body is not mine: it is the father's, brother's,
husband's, son's, man's.
Fuck that.
My body is not a store you can go to stop in and
shop in and buy what
You wanted
My body is not sugar and spice and everything nice
As told in your fairy tale
My body is not the yarn, twisting and turning and
tugging
Me in all directions to provide your perfect ideal
My body is not a doll that is loose and lax and laid
out for
Your leisure
My body is mine!
My body is two eyes that see the cries from little
boys eyes as their father tells them to dry the tears
Flowing and falling eyes Searching for someone to
save them from these lies.
My body is two ears that hears the fear in a young
woman's soul that was stolen and sold for a small
price No longer whole and that small price was not
in her control as she was
Ripped from her innocence the second she knew
what innocence was.
My body is two hands that reach and hold and en-
fold the young hearts and minds wanting to thrive
in an unkind life Opportunities missed and kissed

Goodbye by parents with addictions crying for
more addictions why
Can't you see your children want to grow!
My body is a vagina, vast and valued and vivacious
as it molds and moves, breaks and
births in a cacophony of violent cries that break the
mold of Expectation
Because my body is mine and I Have a choice to
choose the cry of new life verses the cries of souls
trapped inside by those who wish to shut the door
on them.
My body is mine
And I
Have the choice to choose what I wear, what I
want, who I care
For my Lord It's my choice.

I Am a Witch Chelsea Arrington

I am a Witch.
I am the Goddess incarnate:
The woman in scarlet.
A hexer, a healer,
A tarot card dealer.
I am a Witch.
I can create life or kill it.
The world is my chalice and I'm going
To fill it.
Herb or weed?
Whatever makes men bleed.
I am a Witch. I can make you insane.
I am your worst nightmare, firebrand, and bane.
The moon is in my womb and
The sun is in my eyes
And snakes are in my hair
And the woods, a cave, the sea
Are all my lair.
I am a Witch.
I inhabit the liminal:
The margins between.
I speak with the dead,
The seen and unseen.
I am your daughter, your sister,

A whore.
The keeper of keys;
The singer of lore.
I am a beginning, a segue,
The end.
I am a spiral; a star;
A friend.
I am a Witch.
I circle with my sisters.
No men allowed.
They created Patriarchy, slaves, and
Shrouds for our women they burned and stoned
and Raped, and hanged.
I am a Witch.
I am tall and proud.
I claim the title to the madding crowd.
This verse is a curse that I don't have to rehearse.
Because it's in my blood; my DNA.
This Witch knows words and she's got shit to say.
Witch! I am Woman: powerful and magic ridden.
I embrace the shadow and things that are hidden.
I build up my sisters, don't tear them down:
A queen among queens, we all wear a crown.
I am a Witch.
I am maiden, mother, and crone.
Solitary, single, but never alone.

Brett Kavanaugh said... Kelcie Smith

Brett Kavanaugh said they had too many beers
Having a really good time, they drank beer
they liked beer. What are too many beers?
I don't know. My guy liked wine
the rose gold boxed ones
the kind with a spout and a thumb indent
He liked to leave a mark, sir.
It was the summer when I was sixteen
no, twenty sixteen
sixteen was the second time
nineteen was the third
Twenty sixteen the third time
nineteen but the teens don't matter
because you're making it up

obviously. Crying wolf
no attention so she created it herself
such horror could never befall her
Our little girl was in pigtails
our little girl was flashing smiles
flashing men, Men who never met her father
or knew her full name
Advantage guarantee. Perpetua, perpetua
My ex-boyfriend perpetuated rape culture
by asking to fuck me in my favorite yoga poses
my calm is not your climax
nor my trauma your kink. You don't get to
sexualize the thing that keeps me alive
this is my pepper spray
this is my back off, mother fucker
We conceal our traumas
we carry them with us in designer purses
every day noon night we can't go out in the
evenings, we can't visit grandma
We can't keep excusing ignorance as innocence
and hope men will catch up
Y'all know men don't mature until they're
twenty five. Twenty five
I hope I haven't been raped again by the time I'm
twenty five. Twenty five being everything I've failed
at since I was a kid. NO being most of them
Fingers wrapped around your thumb
it was the first appendage to enter
Now I choke down love like whiskey
but it purges every time
Upchucks at the thought of your fly
I don't know how to stay
That was never me and I didn't think I'd become it
but here we are, your cock down my throat
the night before I locked you out
with tears in my eyes and vomit on your shoes
hands on my throat and heart to keep from
weeping
This is what your POTUS jokes about
supporters mocking me too
saying guns are more important than our children
being paid off by the cutthroat that is the NRA
Guaranteed advantage
advantage turns to privilege and racism
is the worst I've fucking seen it

Civil rights weren't elementary
Civil rights are now
White privilege is walking into class stoned while
jeronimo yanez smells "burnt marijuana" and fires
seven. fucking. rounds. into Philando Castile's car
blood spatter on Diamond and her daughter
HE WASN'T REACHING FOR IT
I am not a good ally for bringing attention to
things that should be common sense
Black people deserve reparations
Racism is institutionalized
Prison is legal slavery
Our country's backbone is oppression
It's lies, greed, pillaging, and rape
It's burning WOMEN at the stake
but how could you see that?
You still trust family friends who put their hands
down the pants
of your children I refuse
to grieve for a man
who would've spit on my grave for being a bisexual
woman. When he lit the fire in my belly
Sprouted hate in my holy
that grows out my ears
I trim it every week
Was Mary really a virgin?
or was it another cover up
like when my mother was up all night shaking
her knees to her chest, my baby
what did he do to my baby
while all my dad could do was stare
at me. It was the summer of sixteen
no twenty sixteen. In twenty eighteen
Doctor Christine Blasey Ford said 'indelible in the
hippocampus is the uproarious laughter, and their
having fun at my expense'
Doctor Christine Blasey Ford and I were the same
god damn age
Doctor Christine Blasey Ford took a polygraph test
and was still named 'liar'
but he can't see that
and he won't cry
'cause men don't cry
Y'all know they don't mature until forty five



For the Children of Cain

Savanna Fisher

Violence for violence is the rule
of a beast.
And we're the least concerned with how animal
our actions have become.
We've traded our snarls, and growls
for 477 different ways to say
You. are going. To die.
Today.
Do you think our children howled?
when their shooter stalked the street
beat down their door
and tore them
from their seats with more metal
than a child could handle?
I think the murderer was proud
when he learned, not only could he kill
he could execute. decimate.
this was no crucifixion.
when jesus died there was a Reason
not a Season for Slaughter
in america it is Year Round
and the only thing that can be found
are prayers. which we swear will change.
But when New Zealand watched a four year old get
shot in the back
while 49 others died
in the act of worship
it took SIX days to ban the weapons of mass
destruction. less time than it took for god to
Create the ocean, the sky into which White
People will confess: they were lonely guys,
probably depressed.
But they're all just Children of Cain.
Watching the Sinless be slain
and denying their blood ties.

it was Benjamin Disraeli who said assassination
never changed the world.
it was JFK who told us to end war
before War Ends Us.
now we see a refugee bleeding in the streets

and can only stare down at our feet
'cause our thoughts have fought hard
to be in first place, where we think this person is a
disgrace. Not a reflection of you or me
but of a country that takes it people
to the sea, only wishing to Free them from Our
Bombs that shoved them there.
We just push our hair into buns, pick up our guns
And shout: It's Our Right To Fight In Foreign
Lands yet we can't stomach, let alone stand
the images being fed to us
We banned them from Our screens
so war can remain this d i s t a n t
Glamorous Thing.
like Freedom is the New Holy War
that only America Can Fight for.
Unless it shows up in Our homes and Our schools
only then do We think this plague is one that needs
a cure.
See, Our Words are more tongue tied than Our
Hearts it's hard to Create Peace
if we don't even have the language for it
i've got 463 more ways to explain how we can Mas-
sacre one another
and only 118 to describe the ways that We Can
Reach Peace.
We teach our young that to live
is synonymous with Survive.
the only thing being taught
is how to hide more bodies.
my gut is riddled from this Disease
i cannot swallow another story.

Can we bury the rifles instead of the Children?
Can we call a Ceasefire on Our Sisters of a different
skin?
Can we drop Books instead of bombs?
Can we mend the fences and Take Down The Wall?
Can we Grow more olives if only for their branch-
es?
Can we Pass the Peace pipe to every country?
Can We Heal the hole in our Humanity?

Can We Create Peace, please?



Lost In The Pages

Ethan Atil

Ever read a book and get lost in the pages?
Judging by the gazes of faces raised,
Engaged in these exchanges of literary phrases,
I'd gauge it's safe to say You've read a book or two.
You know the sensation
When the narration of the print,
Or the visuals And oration of a TV show
Cause a migration of the soul from the body;
A reincarnation into someone new;
A formation of a newly laid foundation
Of a third-person perspective,
Reflective of a loss of self
Your thoughts delved
Into the depths Of another individual's innovation?
Yeah, me too.
And that feeling when you take a break from the story
To hurriedly scurry down the hall
To empty the lake-sized piss you gotta take—
You can't just Shake the new make and model
You became while you let your mind dawdled
On someone else's novel.
No, not until you see your reflection
Does that visage topple
And in an instant— Boom, gone
Oh... god! Who is that stranger there?
An image of someone more plain than fair
Dangles in the mirror mirroring every
Strange gesture I make. I must have
Taken him by surprise as well—
His face looks as shook as I feel
Oh wait that... is... me.
I am that dark haired guy on the other side
Wildly waving his hands
At an impossible imposter,
fostering fear at an invalid invader.
I am not a reader of a story. I am me.
I am the navigator of my narrative...
Right?...Right!?B-but I don't know that man
on the other side
As if my character is a mask to hide lies other
Applied to "who I am";
A twisted guide I was forced to abide by

To mould my look and stride in order to
subside "who I am"; A mannequin compiled by
everyone else But me
To cast aside and there in decide "who I am"—
Who am I? Goddamnit, who am... I?
When I look at that me on the other side
I don't see me; I see a man taking a knee
I see wants and desires eclipsed; I see bit lips at
chipped bricks of my stripped
identity. All I see are phrases displacing my desired
state of being "Go to school, get a job."
"That college isn't good enough
What? You think your hot stuff?
Aiming for a school that isn't even tough to get
into? Come back to me when you get into an ivy-
league, the almighty-league, the why-even-try-
unless-you-shoot-highly league." And I nod.
"Go to school, get a job." "Don't paint your nails
or shave your head, you'll look odd; God wouldn't
approve of the gaudy facade you put on." And I nod.
"Go to school, get a job."
"Don't cry, don't sob. Real men don't shed tears
Or have fears, Have long hair,
Emotions are for the fairer of the two.
You must be strong judging by the
fact you have a dong attached to you
And if you don't follow these rules, you don't be-
long" And I nod on.
But goddamnit I won't nod anymore
You're ideas are so fucked and wrong
I won't just fit into your pretty little boxes
I am not one of the flocks of helpless birds
You fucked up foxes
Can torment with your words
No, you are not the writer of my story
I am the master of my manuscript,
the pilot of my plot,
I am the captain of my chronicle,
the trailblazer of my tale.
I am the navigator of my narrative.
So bring on the slings and arrows of bullshit fortune
And I'll rid you like a vestigial organ you are
Because I am so much more than
Anything you could craft or fathom.
I'm sure you can imagine
The feeling.

Paint Me Raw Donshay Lefridge

This man painted me raw and told his loved ones what I had done. Named artist, first name con, you believe you've won. But why don't you show the brush strokes of all the rips you had to cover hiding your own spills and drips and smudges with fingertips and colored lips, paint me raw if it carries your head to bed at night and glides your eyes in a state of weary. Why do you whisper and breathe stories of me? Scream it out loud! Give people nightmares about my nature. Paint me as the monster if that is what settles your rib cage and quiets your rattled bones. Dethrone me and push me off a cliff, give me the burning sensation called hell, send the idea of me down in a raged cascaded pit of dirt and ashes and blood if need be. Why can't you forget about me? Paint me raw and uproot the seeds I left. Taint, paint, and dismantle them to shreds, leaving not one single thread, to show the world I left you nothing but weeds to ruin your Garden of Eden. This man painted me raw and told his loved ones what I had done. If your appetite does not crave blood not poison but attention then by all means earn some affection. Young boy do what you need to in order to survive because that's what you've

learned, not to live life but to create raptures in your head to get kindred spirits like I once was to follow your fallen trail of leaves painted over to hide ivy, poisoned. Paint me raw with foul flesh that smells, tell the wise ones that have aged that I stink of mischief and vile tones, incased in a raw shell. Tell them I cursed your ears with language so unhinged and maladjusted that un-tuned your harp that was so fragile. Tell them I stole, no show them what I took, Tell them what I broke, No let them have a look, Tell them who I betrayed, lay those eggs in their ears and hatch the idea of me that gives them anxiety and a variety of bad dreams and lies that were sold, Tell them the lies I told, no show them. Paint me raw, like the love and divinity I use to have for you. Show them that I have no love, no feelings, no warmth, That it is no longer we. It's funny because that is the only thing about your painting that speaks to me. Paint me raw and win the award for the most depth and heartbreaking backstory to gain the trust of millions, trust that you will no longer receive from me. This man painted me raw and told his loved ones what I had done. I won't show my painting of him to his loved ones. Paint me raw, just please make me pretty like Mona Lisa, a subtle smile, they would love that story so much more.



Thank you, Slam Poets!



Knife Me Split memories

Cindy Rinne

Clay vessel woman yells smashes
the wine glass. Rosé floats
through window
as broken helicopter
sputters.

Who are they searching for?
Coats three colors
of nail polish,
wedding band,
green glass coffee cup—
leaves for work. There is time
enough. You massage
sesame seed oil, sake, soy sauce
soak the amethyst
necklace.

There is silence
enough. Ice crackles lover
over bridge. Your heart blue
as blueberry sheep's
milk flips the hot side of me.
Gorilla glue a dove
wing to my heart. Special as harsh
winds bend fronds
to ground. Coyote echoes a secret
hinge. There is not yelp
enough. Pulls chopping block
of overripe fruit.
Are we not yet awake?



Upper Crust Crumbs

Connie Major

Torn At The Seams

Wes Fink

It has been ninety days since the discovery. When I published the article, I never thought it would get much attention, but now I think it may have brought on World War 3. The seam was odd, but I thought it must have just been some sort of evolutionary footprint. I mean, who could have imagined alternate dimensions hidden within every tree, and sowed away by some unknown entity?

The initial reaction to my article was disapproval, but as others started looking for the seam, they all found it. One scientist in California even got a grant to have every tree in the Redwoods examined. The scientific community started to erupt with speculation. I'm not sure why it took two weeks for someone to try to actually break open the seam, but it did. The stitching was made with a material we'd never seen before. It was nearly as strong

as titanium. It couldn't be cut through. Each threading had to be bent and twisted loose with heavy machinery which was extremely difficult because the pieces were so small; nearly microscopic. As each stitch was pulled, a bright pea-sized beam of light would shoot out from the tree.

It was thirty days before the first tree was completely open. We were lucky that the Swedish got one open first. Other countries may have hid their discoveries. Pictures of a tree split down the middle with a portal floating above it flooded the internet. The portal glowed with a bright blue swirling with pink light. The two colors seemed to dance around each other, but never touch. Speculation spread like the plague. Half the world believed the photos were faked and the other half guess what would be on the other side.





If we'd have known better, we would have shut it down. We would have found a way to sew the tree back together and pretended like it never happened. All we had to do was denounce the photos as fakes and move on with our day, but as they say: hindsight is always twenty-twenty.

Isak Larsson was the first scientist to enter the portal. Compared to some of the theories spawned by people around the world, his trip was underwhelming. When he returned, Larsson said he'd been transported to an island floating distantly among stars. He said it was physically impossible what he'd seen. The Island had looked like it was from earth, but the sand was a dark green, and it looked like the island had been carved right out of the crust and just thrown into space. It was encased in a glass sphere and passed through a part of space undiscovered. He said there were stars floating in orbit only what appeared to be a few kilometers from each other. There were stars the size of your hand rapidly passing by the island.

The world waited for more discoveries, but none came. However, every single country started either tearing apart every single tree, or selling off their trees to countries that had the wealth to rip them open. All lumber production came to a quick halt. People were uprooting their trees and selling them to the government. If a tree was cut down, the portal would be lost. The economy boomed with this new found commodity that nearly everyone had. Everyone had wealth, and for a moment it seemed like trees could be a cure all solution for the world's problems. Few people thought to question the origin of the seam. The scientific community did of course, but our voices became unnoticeable in the never-ending slew of shouting from politicians and media outlets searching for a way to profit off of this new discovery. As ridiculous as it sounds, wars even ended in order for the negotiation of trees.

Not long after, though, China announced that they had started drilling in a few of there portals. Unfortunately for everyone, they found uranium.

Negotiations were no longer peaceful.

Countries like the U.S. believed they needed to obtain as many trees as possible in order to protect themselves. Forests became wastelands overnight. Private tree ownership was outlawed, and if you owned one you would be tried for treason.

The thing is, not every portal had uranium. It seemed to be extraordinarily rare. So it was impossible to know which countries actually had uranium, and which one's didn't. I have a former colleague that helped with the effort at MIT. She told me that in the thousands of portals they had searched, not one contained an ounce of uranium.

The long standing superpowers all went into debt while poorer countries continued to flourish. It became an arms race for trees.

Then we caught wind that North Korea had mined an abundance of uranium in one of their portals.

And now I sit here in my office in Denver. I can hear sirens and see the panic on the streets. Women running with their children. Looters raiding storefronts. It's all meaningless really.

I've been an onlooker since I found the seam. As soon as my article was published the situation was out of my hands, and like everyone else in the world I was mercilessly at the whim of a higher power. In many ways I am just like all those blurred faces on the street, but at least they don't have to spend their final moments with the guilt of being the end of all of this.

It's bizarre to think that this is where human life ends. Today's radio transmissions will be the last to ever travel out into space. Today's newborns will be the last ever. Billions of years of evolution will come to a trainwreck end. Something we've been trying to prevent since the 1940's.


Some of us don't believe there ever was anything of use within those portals. That the rumors of mining were all false, but that doesn't matter either way because there are nuclear bombs being launched on almost every country in the world. These are bombs that have existed long before I ever noticed the seams. I suppose everyone just needed a reason to use them.



A Brighter Eternity

Walter Savage



—  —

Subtext

Candace Morone

Ethan
has no need for two stories,
a neighborhood like Buffalo Bill,
homey,
and I don't even like cowboys.
Sabrina, spick. span. Who has a dove at their doorstep greeting guests with the question:
Is that alive?

U
N
W
A
V
E
R
I
N
G

I should
be more
like that

Her piano
unstained elegance
straight out of a fever dream
a paper pound songbird
unlike this
penny peso bark
my tongue cannot hold eggshells
my strong address
only splinters, sticks, pricks
I do not respect him.

Half carpet- half water, piss stained planks; our furniture cradled by bricks, almost as high as the
syllables, and Sabrina's new velveteen chairs.

My 1920's home-sickness
walls like sheets of ice
splintering my late night calls

“
Y
o
u

Free stories to strangers
Let them tell you

When will I get
two one-
sides sided

u
p

my voice positively
radiant
Sir, your daughter is
radiant

to ? ?
story
a two story house



The Sacrifice (1892)

Scott Couturier

A poet in the garret
saw searing visions of
eternal whelming flame.
Feverish, he scrawled &
bawled to the roof-beams,
lacerated his soul,
screamed & ached in ecstasies
as the world by him rolled,
chuffing to the thrum of coal,
molded by mortal margins
cast into calamity, fraught
with consumption, filth
& slime: the lifeblood
beating syphilitic unction,
mystery the dialect
of his deified dead.
About his brow flock fires,
quicksilver beacons of
arch-angelic apotheosis:
demiurgic lancets cast
to the four winds of bale.
He eats ether, devours joy,
derives & distills alchemic
agonies to beaten blazons
of gold profane.

His ravings rouse the flop-
house, wake the wretched
from morphine's chimera.
Stirred to anger, they
storm the august attic
in dead of night – fright
inflamed, mush-brained
with the gutter's dross,
clothed in rags of slag &
starvation, they roust the
avatar from obscene idyll,
his alembic furor for
Beauty bane to their
hard-won oblivion.
They gut him, geld him,

rip up reams of dreams,
despoil his visions with
hands clammy of clay.
He weeps blood into mud
as argosy transmutes
to entropy, trampling feet
treading his ashes,
atoms wrath-tossed to
ignominy embossed
on spilt ink & ichor-stain:
Death the consummation
of his ken.

Above, sunlight sears
moonbeam empyrean,
annihilation rife.
The poet dies babbling,
trachea mashed by weals
of boot-heel & fist.
Lethe his legend
& abyss his tryst –
a century hence his
pauper's plot by
reverent immortals
unknowingly kissed.
No stone to demarcate
bone, no graven grave
to admit his name: yet,
even in erasure writ –
the Work is done.



Death

Hayley Arrington

Simple:
Mother's black hair,
Amniotic slumber,
Bird bones clean as Nature left them.
Alone.
Often
life-altering,
this card means change is near.
Yet, it comes when least expected.
Bloody.
Like birth,
there are spasms,
but no baby to end
the long-suffering bloodiness
of death.

Introspection of a Ghost

Joanna Brock

One day, I dug into my soul like a lion tarring at the supple flesh of its prey. The teeth of my thought cut into the skin of space and time as I lurked into the deepest corners of myself. The worst of all horrors did happen, for in the cabinets of my mind I found the blankness I did fear. The terrible nothing. As I grasped at empty sheets in a metaphysical file, I could feel my forehead sweating in place of my metaphorical hands. What was I going to do with this most frightening nightmare before me? I could feel myself slide to my knees. Yet, I remained locked behind my eyelids. I remained with my files.

I had to adjust, collect, examine, and perceive how my soul and identity had come to this. As I reeled back and contemplated giving up, I slowly tried to gather the little bits of light, which stayed with the fragile remains of what was left of what appeared to be who I am. Then, I slowly I picked myself up from the ground and opened my eyes.

I look at the blank pages now as opportunities. They are my canvas and I will paint something beautiful in place of suppressed memory; for I have only begun to live.



Blighted Properties

Katarina Boudreaux

I noticed the birds
first, how they no longer
perched in front of
our house.

It took longer
for me to recognize
how the neighbors
crossed the street
before our sidewalk
began, eyes downcast
and step hastened.

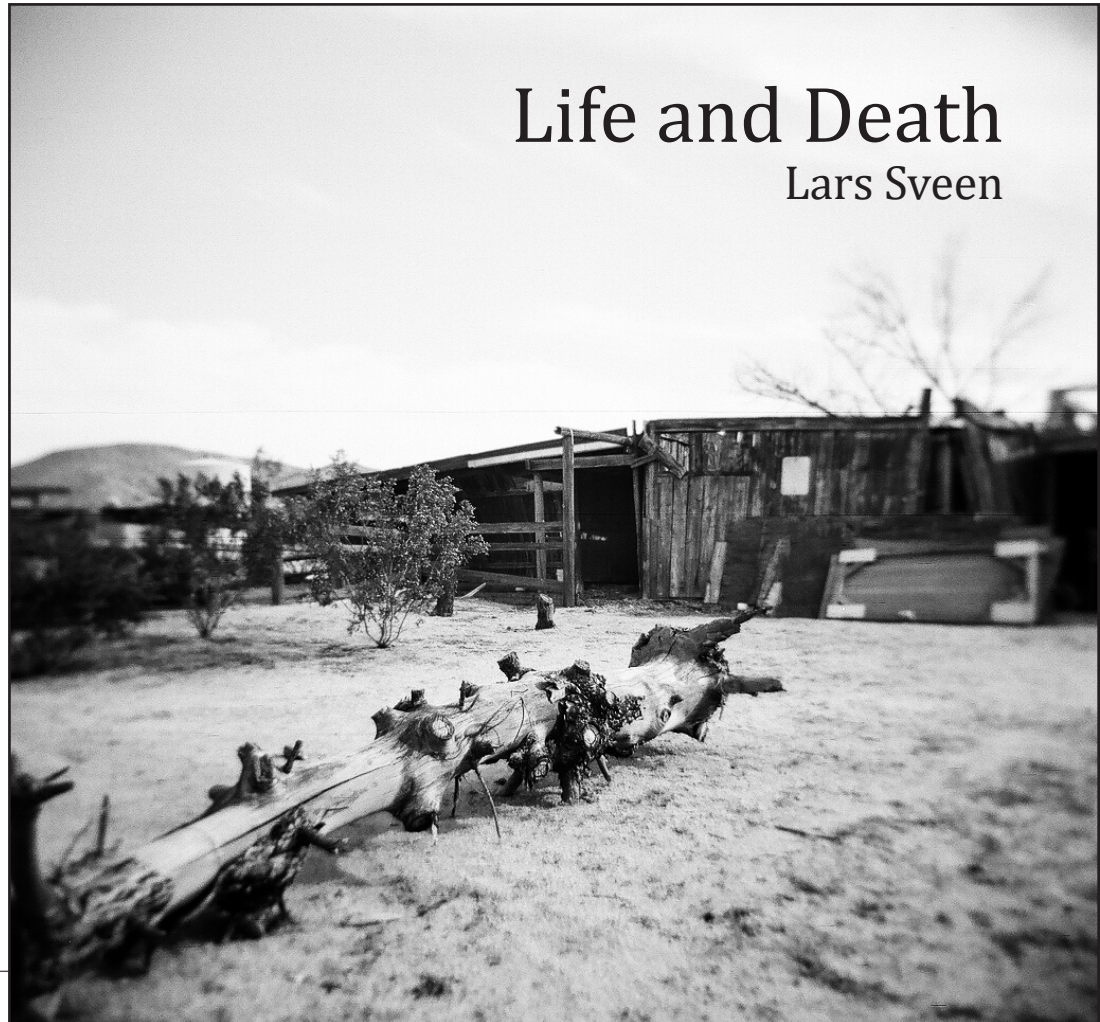
But it took longest
for me to realize
how quiet I had
become, his words
the exclamation marks
mitigating every response.

I don't miss
the house, or him.

But I hope the
birds found
better homes like
I did, and that
they sing the days
in, the nights out.

Life and Death

Lars Sveen



Dollfaces

Joris Soeding



Broken Toy

Joanna Brock

You were made to be played with.
Look at you shine.
You are perfect.
I am nothing like you.
I promise to love you
For life.
But a couple years later
Those marks settle in.
Finding their permanence
Across your once silky skin.
It's gonna be okay.
I'll still play with you again and again...
But now there's this new barbie,
And she can play too.
Come on now, I'm still playing
Together with you.

I'll always love you,
But I have to replace you.
Not to disgrace you, but
You've kinda lost your shine.
It was fun for a while,
I really must say.
Funny how I tricked you
To give it all away.
I played you. I used you.
I gave you those cracks.
I wore you out and then gave nothing back.
I took your youth which you gave out of love,
And made you believe that it would always be
enough.
Now look at you, little broken toy.
Didn't you know, that I'm only a boy?





Prayer from the Tar Pits

Walter Savage



Jetty

Heather Westenhofer



The Umbrella Revolution

Howie Good

A body wrapped in a blue tarp was laid out on the lawn of a house. Mourners sat around it after the ambulances left and sang dirty songs, a fleeting contagion of emotion spreading from one person to another. There's no point in pretending these things didn't happen. On that sunny afternoon a man without a shadow appeared to be watching from under an open umbrella. It's considered a bad omen when the umbrella in a dream is open. Hey! No problem! Van Gogh painted a picture of underbrush full of sun and life just hours before he committed suicide.

The Suicide

Chelsea Arrington

The air was silent on that dark, cold night
Under the faded city stars and dim lamp light.
The grass was wet under our dying dreams.
The lies were spoken intermittently
Between smiles and dreary far away gazes
With seas of poisonous queries in our midst.
The night time stretched on,
Its tendrils unfolding,
Sealing us within its dark arms;
Giving us the kiss of peace,
Or death.
We smiled within its depths,
A sad smile.
The songs of sorrow floating on the breeze,
Sending us images of coffins and coins.
Tomorrow, the sun will come,
But it won't shine on us.
Our night time quiet will remain
And we will walk with the dead in our dreams.



Reflection
Candace Morone



Night Shift

Candace Morone

A room,
no, a bed.

My mother's room is not the jewels she hides away
her life lives in the drawer at her bedside.
My mother's room is not the paintings that used to hang in Nana's house, even if
Nana could someday be a zombie too.
My mother's bed is her room with sheets pressed
and bed made lifeless
and no working light bulbs.
Though my mother's room possess a closet and a dresser,
do not be fooled;
uniforms fit her form perfectly.

My mother's bed bonds
her and I.
Words do not cradle a relationship,
my mother cradled me
grips my hand in her sleep
-ing beauty
Mascara and blue pigment eyeshadow
mixing
allowing me to see that her face too
drains
encompassing the pillow.
I may see my mom,
eyes drifted closed what color are they again?
But slipping murmurs
and her holding my hand
back
Proves that she too sees me.



Lonely
Cabin
Lars Sveen



Untitled
Marie Recio





Homecoming

Alec Blue

She stared absentmindedly out at the endless fields, slowly baking in the mid-afternoon sun. Her Aunt's old Chevy had air conditioning which fought futilely against the sun. Every bump on the sun-bleached streets caused her jewelry to jingle discordantly, and a band or two even fell off, forcing her to strain against her corset to pick them up, wincing each time. Leaning back into the window, she observed her reflection. Staring back at her was an elaborate chemical mask of her Aunt's making. Her hair, which had been pulled back and painfully straightened, now looked like a fraying rope, with strands poking out in many places. Then there was her dress. The dress fit nicely, but it was a dark, oceanic blue. It wasn't the kind of blue that reminded her of the refreshing coastal waters back home and the faded blue jeans she always wore, but the deep, desolate blue that housed all of the terrifying creatures that live without light. Her face was pushed into the window, and eventually the endless golden fields gave way to a small clearing. Finally, she was... home? If home is where the heart is, then this was a house. The car's tires cracked against the gravel as it pulled up. Without saying a word, she exited the car and strode quickly towards the house. On her way over, she fell flat on her face. She cursed the gravel, then cursed the high-heeled shoes, slid them off, and walked painfully barefooted into the house.

From the outside the house was old, and it bothered her. The once vibrant yellow paint was now faded and peeling, as though it were an abandoned farmstead. Beneath the paint was termite-stricken wood that creaked obnoxiously whenever someone opened or closed a door. The inside, however, was a stark contrast. The wallpaper was fresh and bright, a soft sky blue. All of the furniture was arranged perfectly, and there were no stacks of magazines or newspapers on the floor. She had only been here for a short time, but already felt as though she could walk with her eyes closed and not bump into a single thing. Despite this pleasant

appearance, however, the house still felt old. The furniture felt like it was from the fifties, and there were no electronics in the house. She wondered what her aunt did all the time. She didn't read, and she didn't ever talk on the phone with anyone. She was always just told to crash here every summer for a month without any decision to stay home.

The second she reached her room, she began to shimmy her way out of the dress. Once it was thrown onto the floor, she set to work removing the corset. She winced and tore it off, taking an enormous breath after she did so, wincing again. Tenderly placing her fingertips against her sides, she sat on the bed and bent slightly and watched the dust specs float slowly around in the mid-afternoon sunlight streaming in through the window. The black-and-blue bruises that dotted her sides still stung, and she decided to take some painkillers.

It wasn't until the outfit was all lying in separate lumps on the floor that she stopped to think, and felt depressed. Images of her Aunt sitting down in the chair, blankly staring at the wall in dejection, filled her vision. She had ruined Auntie's whole day, but her aunt had also ruined hers. She shouldn't have been placed into that circumstance to begin with; it wasn't her fault. But she could tell that her aunt had been trying to give her something to do other than sit and stare at her phone or read books. She tried to lean back, but her sides pained her again, so she went to the bathroom to remove the makeup and take some ibuprofen.

She stared into the mirror. She'd brought her white tank-top and hoodie with her, which, when combined with the faded blue jeans, made for a stunning juxtaposition with the makeup mask on her face. She looked like a clown. She felt like a clown. She grabbed some wipes and tore at her face like a feral cat until all traces of the colors were gone. Then she rummaged through the medicine cabinet and took some painkillers. She took a deep breath before exiting into the hallway. She almost launched herself back into the bathroom out of

shock as her Aunt was on the other side of the door, walking towards her temporary room. She apologized profusely, embarrassment on her face. She turned around and returned to the front room without saying what she was heading there for. The two went the rest of the day and night without speaking; and she awoke the next morning to a small envelope lying on the nightstand containing two plane tickets for an 11:45 a.m. flight back home, scheduled for that day.

The cab ride was flooded with awkward silence. The only noise was the slow rumble of the taxi, and eventually, "Here ya go." Denoting their arrival.

Thanks and payment was exchanged with the driver as the two women stepped out into the hot and humid air of the afternoon. After a moment, she shifted the weight of her bag from one shoulder to the other and trudged forwards towards a staircase. The small U-shaped complex looked better from a distance, and as the two got closer this became apparent. The dark blue paint was thin and peeling off in multiple places, and the window sills of each individual room were dusty, and the paint was peeling from them. The two had reached the door, set down their bags, and found the spare key, and the younger one entered. She realized she hadn't been followed. Standing like a deer in headlights, her aunt didn't enter. Then, for the first time in thirty two hours, the silence between them was broken, "You coming?" Her aunt stood in the doorway for another seventeen seconds before entering.

The air inside the apartment was still and hot, worse than the summer air outside. The aunt entered, set her bags down next to the only chair in the room, and examined the giant air-mattress that sat in the living room, covered in clothing. The younger girl had ostrich-stepped her way over the clutter to the kitchenette at the far end of the room. The loud hum of a wall-mounted air-conditioner buzzed into existence to meet the clinking of bottles as she opened the fridge. She pulled out a twenty-ounce brown bottle with a black label and uncapped it. She began to drink from it when her aunt spoke up, "Leila, sweetie, I really don't think you're old enough to be drinking..." she couldn't finish the sentence.

"Beer? Yeah. My favorite liquor is whiskey and I smoke weed, welcome to my little slice of the world, Aunt Ruby." She took a swig from the bottle.

Leila now had a bag of plain potato chips in her hand, and was leaning up against the kitchen counter. Sunbeams from the kitchenette window illuminated her hair. After more silence filled the gap between the two, Ruby started to pick clothes up off the floor to fold them.

"Oh, don't bother." Leila spoke with a mouth now stuffed with chips. "It's not your job to clean up her mess." This did not deter the aunt. "Besides, she doesn't like it when I touch her stuff anyways."

Dust flakes floated through the beams of sun lazily, but floated around whenever Ruby placed a neatly folded shirt on the edge of the air mattress. Aunt Ruby didn't speak again for the rest of the afternoon, until Leila went for the front door.

"Where are you going?"

"Out?" She seemed surprised by Ruby's question.

"Out where?"

"What's it to you?"

"Well, I just want to know where you're going, to make sure you'll be safe."

Halfway out the door, Leila paused. "Safety is for losers."

"Leila, please."

She groaned, "Fine, I'm going to my friend Josh's house then we're going clubbing. I won't be back for a while so don't wait up for me." Aunt Ruby opened her mouth in reply, but the girl was gone before she could. Aunt Ruby sat on the armchair and turned on the small television. In truth, she wasn't watching it, she was only thinking about Leila. She had so many questions that she didn't ask. If it were her own child, she would demand to know who Josh was, where his house was, what she'd be doing there, what club she was going to, and how late she'd be out; but she felt that somehow, Leila wouldn't answer any of her questions. In truth, Leila was still standing on the walkway on the other side of the door, overlooking the old, cracking parking lot below and asking herself similar questions before the beat up old Ford rolled into the parking lot.

The next morning Ruby awoke with a start before realizing where she was, she'd fallen asleep in the

armchair. The television was off, and the blinds were drawn. There was just enough sunlight forcing through the edges to illuminate the room. Leila was nowhere to be found, but her clothes from the previous day were in a haphazard pile on the air mattress. Ruby got up slowly, shaking off the grogginess of the night, and made her way to the kitchenette. An Aspirin bottle sat on the counter next to an empty plastic water bottle. After splashing her own face with water, she made her way down the short hallway that led to the other room. In it lay Leila, fast asleep on a bed. She was face-down and scrunched upwards with half a blanket on. Aunt Ruby adjusted the blanket to cover her and placed a pillow next to her, looking around the room.

Leila seemed to be taking every measure to make sure the room was wholly, completely, and entirely hers; and it contrasted starkly with any room Ruby had ever seen before. Almost every inch of her walls was covered with posters. There were posters advertising events that had taken place over a year ago, posters of bands and album covers, book covers and famous historical protests. There were posters of places, too. A beach similar to the one they had passed on the taxi ride, a forest covered in snow, an enormous canyon. She even had a poster of herself standing on a beach without her top on, using her left hand to cover her chest and her right hand to flash a peace sign. Ruby's cheeks flushed, and she tried to take that one down but realized that the noise would likely wake Leila, so she let it be, reluctantly. As she continued to examine the room, a loud banging could be heard from the front room, accompanied by a man's loud shouting. Ruby moved quickly out of the room, closing the door behind her, and opened the front door of the apartment. On the other side of the door stood a man who was tall in stature and smoking a cigarette. He seemed to be in good shape, and was dressed in a black t-shirt with a band's logo on the front with a leather jacket over it. His blue jeans were torn at the knees and he was wearing old-fashioned leather boots. Despite his appearance, he had a furious grimace on his face and looked beyond Ruby into the room. "Who the hell are you? I haven't seen you before."

"I'm..." she paused, thinking about what she

should say. "A better question is who are you, banging on the door and shouting like that? People are trying to sleep." She tried to sound as confident as she could, but it was ten-thirty in the morning and she was frightened of this man.

"Alright bitch, I asked you the question. Where's Leila, I gotta talk to her."

"Off visiting her Aunt in Kansas, she won't be home for another-" she was cut off by his next words as he smacked the door frame with his hand.

"The hell she is! I saw the posts from last night; she came back to town, without telling me." His other hand tensed into a fist. He attempted to push past Ruby but she stood firm. He eyed her up and down, grimacing more, before taking a step back. "Leila! I know you're in there babe. Just lemme know when you're ready to talk, I got nowhere to be." He yelled into the room, stepping back and leaning up against the bannister. He took a long drag from his cigarette before lighting another. Ruby was absolutely frozen in the doorway, and remained so for what felt like minutes. She was only shaken from it when she heard Leila's voice from behind her, "What is it, Jeff?" She spoke tersely, wiping her eyes.

His expression went from a grimace to a smile, but it somehow felt more threatening. This time Ruby didn't get in his way, and he walked over to Leila. She took a step back, and he seemed surprised. "Babe, what's the matter? Aren't you happy to see me?" He didn't sound hurt.

"Jeff, seriously, leave me alone. I just got back in town. I was going to come over today to see you, I swear."

"Babe I'm hurt, really I am." A lie. "I'm hurt that you'd rather come back to this pigsty-" he kicked an empty bottle across the room, shattering it against the kitchenette wall, "than come greet your boyfriend." He reached into her pocket, and she recoiled as much as she could without moving away from him. He pulled out her phone and tapped the top of it, "You see this? I texted you. I called you. I called you again. You didn't answer any of them. You didn't call me back. I got worried, babe. You drink at the clubs and if I'm not there, who know what could happen." He placed a hand

on her shoulder and the other on her side. She winced for a moment before looking back at him, questioningly. He looked over at Ruby, thought for a moment, looked back at Leila, and spoke again, "You say you'll come over later? Perfect, we could a little bit of privacy." He caressed her shoulder and looked her in the eyes, but her demeanor only tightened. "See you then. I'll be expecting you." He left, but not before staring Ruby down.

Ruby closed the door, and the silence was thick. She tried to break the silence, but couldn't find the words to do so. Leila had sat herself in the chair with a vacant look on her face. Ruby went to the kitchenette to clean up the glass and make some breakfast, and went uninterrupted for twenty-three minutes. She handed Leila a plate with eggs, toast, and sausage, and sat in front of her on the air mattress. "He seems like a nice guy." She said sarcastically.

"Yeah."

"What?"

"He's a nice guy, looks out for me." Leila absentmindedly ate her eggs. She seemed smaller, sitting there, like a tightly-wound coil.

"I was... being sarcastic. You get that, right?" Aunt Ruby's voice was full of concern, and she looked Leila in the eyes as she spoke.

"Oh." Was her only reply, she avoided eye contact. "Yeah."

"Sweetheart I understand what you see in him."

"No you don't, no one does."

Silence passed for a few moments. "Okay, what do you see in him, then?"

"He just... Gets me. He understands me. Not when we're around other people, he's super protective, but he cares about me. He wants what's best for me." She leaned sideways into the chair but winced and dropped the plate with a loud crash as the fork clattered against it, she screamed in frustration.

Ruby's eyes widened in understanding, "He's just a bit rough around the edges, you just have to get to know him."

"Exactly." Leila's eyes brightened slightly.

"He reminds me of someone I used to know. He was charismatic as all-get-out, and was super friendly. That was until you saw him alone. He was angry and spiteful, hated everyone for making fun of

him whether they were or not. He thought that being kind to them was his way at getting back at the world. By some cosmic paradox, them thinking he was their friend was his way of winning." She was staring expressionlessly at the wall behind Leila. "Until he found a girlfriend. Then he truly began to care." She emphasized 'truly' in a sarcastic voice.]"He pushed her into the exact image he wanted, and relished every second of it. He felt cared for, and kept pushing her farther and farther away to test how long her leash was." Leila was staring intently at her aunt now. "She felt like she was changing him, helping him be a better person. 'Any day now, you'll see.' She'd tell me.

Then, one day, I got the news. She was pregnant, it was his. I'd realized how far things had gotten, how far I had let them get. I could have warned her, told her to run from him, but I didn't know what to do, so I let him push her around. And then I moved away, out of shame, mostly. Six months later I flew back out, and she's holding a lovely little girl named Leila." Leila paused for a moment and leaned back in the chair, the realization sinking in. She began to cry, and her aunt continued, "Something awoke in her, though. I stayed in their house for a couple of weeks to help ease the transition to home care. He hadn't changed, the baby only made him worse. He'd started drinking more, and hitting her more." She placed a hand on Leila's shoulder, and she let it sit there. "Until one day he went to hit the baby, and she hit him. She screamed and cursed and told him off. She told him to leave and never come back, she'd call the cops. That was enough for him. He left and never came back, and to this day we still haven't heard from your father." Leila sat next to her aunt on the air mattress and sobbed.

The car doors closed later that afternoon one after another, almost like the beginnings of a 21-gun salute. Leila stood on the pathway to his front porch, looking at the house, they dying sunlight illuminating the old Spanish-style construction in bright gold. Ruby walked up next to her hand and said, "You don't have to do this alone if you don't want to. We're right here." Leila looked at her with a tear rolling down her cheek and nodded.

"I... I got this." She clenched one fist, wiped her eye, and strode up to the door. She knocked on it,

hard, three times. The others hid from the view of the porch, standing on the sides of the house. After a few moments, the locks clicked and the door opened. He was standing on the other side, smiling.

"I knew you'd come around, babe. Now why don't we crack open a bottle and have some fu—"

"No."

"What?" He looked her in the eyes, his expression darkening.

"I didn't come here to have sex, Jeff. I came here to..." She cleared her throat and she inhaled deeply, "I'm breaking up with you. You're abusive, and I can't deal with that anymore." The words were simple, but they were as heavy as an anvil. She stood as confidently as she could, but she was shaking.

"Babe, what do you mean—" he stepped onto the porch, closing the door behind him.

"Stop calling me babe! You treat me like garbage all the time. You're not trying to protect me; you're trying to control me!"

"I just want what's best for you." He tried to place his hand on her shoulder but she swatted it away.

She was crying now, and through tears she spoke, "I'm not a child, I can take care of myself! You want what's best for me but you never let me choose! And whenever you get drunk, you always hit me like I'm an appliance that isn't working!" She grabbed his shirt collar and pushed him against the door, emboldened by the emotions. "You always say I could get hurt or worse, but what about you? When you get drunk you hurt me! You do it all the time and I can't keep forgiving you!"

"But you said you loved me, I thought that meant you'd forgive me no matter what. I want to get better, I really do."

"That's what I thought love meant, too, until I realized that there are some things more important than forgiveness. If you can't get better by now, then I can't keep waiting for it to happen, Jeff."

"Well if that's what you think." He took a second to gather his thoughts and sucker-punched her square in the jaw. She screamed, out of rage rather than fear, and reared back to return the blow. It was then that she felt hands on her shoulders, but the hands weren't hostile this time. Even through the red filling her eyes, she could hear their voices,

"He's not worth it. You're better than him. We're here for you" Her shoulders relaxed and she wiped the tears from her eyes. "Goodbye, Jeff. If you come to my house again I will call the cops. If you talk to any of my friends I will call the cops. Just leave me alone from now on." She and the group walked away from the house. They heard the door slam so hard that it sounded like a gunshot. That was the last they would hear of Jeff.

They returned to Leila's apartment, and the group said their temporary goodbyes. She hugged each of them and exchanged thanks, but they all reassured her that no thanks was needed. They were glad she felt better, and were excited to see her the following afternoon. Once they'd all left, Leila took a deep breath, but paused. "It can't be." Ruby wheeled around to see what she was looking at, expecting the worst, but couldn't see what Leila was reacting to, until the car door opened, and a woman stood out of it, talking on the phone.

After turning around, she stood in the car doorway for a moment before hanging up her cell phone and tossing it onto the seat. Leila spoke, her voice full of surprise, "Mom?" Ruby hadn't recognized her. The lady strode up to the two and stood for a moment, examining them both.

"What are you doing home so soon? Where's your aunt? Sweetie, don't get me wrong, I'm happy to see you, but I'm a little concerned as to how you got here at all."

"Long time no see, Chrystal." Ruby spoke up before Leila could respond. She stood for a moment as recognition flashed in her eyes.

She looked down and away before replying, "Oh, hey sis. I'm sorry I didn't—" she was interrupted by a hug.

"No need to apologize. I'm here now, and I'm working out plans to stick around for a while. We'll have plenty of time to talk in the next few days." Ruby spoke, and then whispered, "For now, give your daughter a hug and tell her you love her. She's had a really long, emotional day." Chrystal hugged her daughter, and Ruby joined in.

That night, the three women sat in the living room of the apartment and truly talked with one another for the first time.



Trapped Light

Connie Major



Bad Timing

Joanna Brock

I just want to connect. I just want to relate.
I just want to do something more than debate.
Sometimes I feel like I'm stuck in a crate.
Feeling boxed in, feeling like bait.
Surrounded by nothing but lies and hate.
I've been waiting to run since I got out the gate.
The sickness is heavy, because it's only dead weight.
I bet I could get away if I could just concentrate.
Instead I'll just settle for this current state.
Always a dollar short and a minute too late.





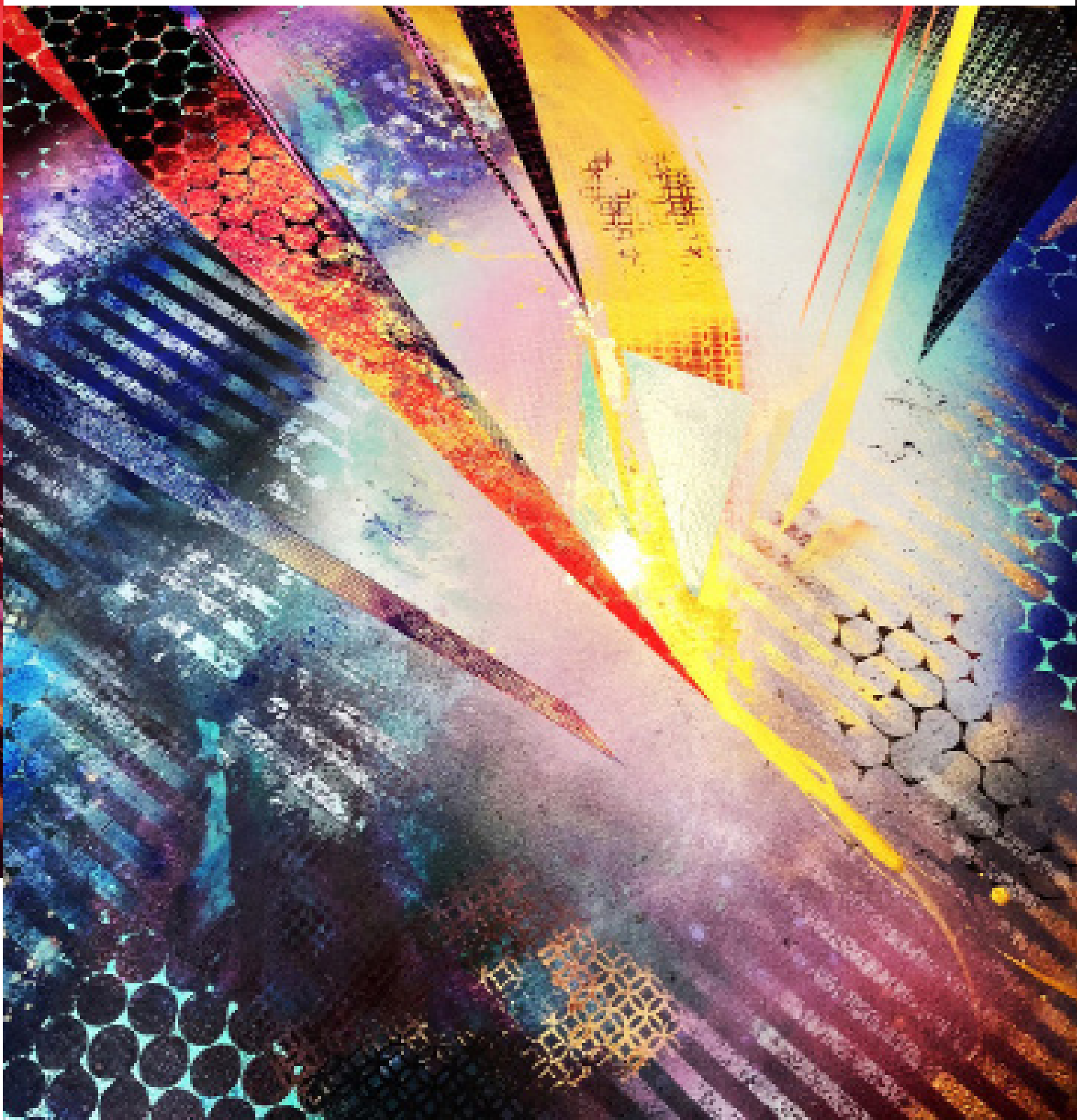
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Allen Triplett





Untitled

Allen Triplett



A Conversation with California's Poet Laureate, Dana Gioia



Dana Gioia is the Poet Laureate of California. An internationally recognized poet and critic, he is the author of five collections of verse, including *Interrogations at Noon* (2001), which won the American Book Award, and *99 Poems: New & Selected* (2016), which won the Poets' Prize for the best new poetry volume of the year. His critical collections include *Can Poetry Matter?* (1992), which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Award. He has also written four opera libretti and edited twenty literary anthologies. Gioia served as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts from 2003 to 2009.

Gioia was born in Los Angeles in a working-class family of Italian and Mexican heritage. He was the first person in his family to attend college. He earned a BA and MBA from Stanford and an MA from Harvard. For fifteen years he worked in business in New York becoming a vice-president of Kraft-General Foods. He wrote at nights and on weekends. In 1992, he quit to become a full-time writer.

He has been awarded eleven honorary doctorates and many honors, including the Laetare Medal from Notre Dame, the Presidential Civilian Medal, the Poet's Prize, and the Aiken-Taylor Award in Modern American Poetry. He is currently the Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture at the University of Southern California. He lives in Sonoma County, California.

Q: What drew you to poetry?

A: *The pleasure I felt as a child hearing my mother recite to me.*

Q: When did you start writing poetry?

A: *I wrote maudlin poems in high school the way everyone does. I never expected to be a poet. Then suddenly at nineteen I found myself writing and thinking about poetry all the time. I somehow knew my life work was to be a poet, although I had no idea then what that meant.*

Q: What was your childhood like?

A: *I had a happy lonely childhood. Both my parents worked multiple jobs. I was often alone. I read and lived in my imagination. I was popular at school, but I liked spending time alone.*

Q: Are you a spiritual person?

A: *I dislike the term “a spiritual person,” though everyone uses it. It is a middle-class form of self-flattery—a way of announcing, “I’m actually a very deep person.” For me, spirituality means at least two things. First, it means putting solitude, prayer, and contemplation at the center of your life. Second, it means changing your life—perhaps radically-- from the insight you receive. If your spirit isn’t changing*

your outer life, you aren’t “a spiritual person.” I’m a Catholic who tries to take his spiritual and moral beliefs seriously. I pray. I fast. I fail. Mostly I try to be less bad. Does that make me “spiritual?” I’m not sure.

Q: Much of your poetry seems to be about loss. Is that a fair assertion? Why is this a common theme in your work?

A: *It’s not unfair. My poetry is full of dark themes—especially suffering and loss. Sorrow is part of even the happiest life. I lost some important things, most importantly my first son. His sudden death changed my sense of existence. It made me more alert to the fragility of my own existence—and the lives of everyone I love.*

Q: How do you think you have evolved as a poet?

A: *Over the years my poetry has grown simpler, more emotionally direct, and more musical. I have tried to write poetry that doesn’t exclude the common reader. I never talk down to my readers. I try to engage their best selves.*

Q: What is your favorite poetic form to work in?

A: *I don’t have one. I try to make each new poem different in form from what came before. I always have some formal principle working in a poem, even when I’m writing free verse. But I like to vary the rules. That variety adds interest for me in the creative process by making it a bit harder.*



99
POEMS
DANA
GIOIA
NEW &
SELECTED

Q: What do you hope to achieve in your poetry?

A: I want to use words so well that the poem moves you so powerfully that you remember it.

Q: Who are your favorite poets?

A: I have a great many. Among the moderns are Robert Frost, W. H. Auden, and Philip Larkin. My favorite living American poets are probably Kay Ryan and A. E. Stallings.

Q: Do you read fiction? If so what are your favorite genres?

A: I've been reading fiction since I first learned to read. I'm always reading a novel or short stories. I started with science fiction and adventure. In high school I began reading more broadly. In college and graduate school I took more courses about fiction than poetry. I can't possibly list all the author I love, but let me mention a few favorites -- Evelyn Waugh, John Cheever, Flannery O'Connor, and Jorge Luis Borges. These are all writers I discovered as a teenager, not in class but on my own, and I still love their work.

Q: You have many Classical references in your work. Who is your favorite Classical poet?

A: I started Latin when I was 13, and so I have a deep relation to Roman poetry. Three Latin poets have had a great impact on me-- Catullus, Horace, and Virgil. When I was a teenager Catullus was my favorite. As I got older, it became Horace, who was surely one of the greatest lyric poets who ever lived. Now much older, I find that I return to Virgil's Aeneid more than any other long poem, except for Dante's Divine Comedy. I have been surprised how powerfully Virgil now speaks to me.

Q: What has it meant to you to be the Poet Laureate of California? Has it changed your work?

A: It meant a great deal to me to have my own birthplace honor me as a poet. I took the position seriously. I visited every county in California—all 58 of them—to do a public event. I met and spoke to thousands of people from all walks of life. My travels reminded me how big, diverse, and non-academic the audience for poetry really is. Ordinary people love poetry if it is presented to them well.

Q: What advice do you have for aspiring poets?

A: You need to do four things to become a poet. Read widely. Memorize some poems. Revise what you write. Fall in love.

Thank you, Dana Gioia!

Hello Baby

Connie Major



Vulnerable Predator

Jade Landrum

Rebirth

Kai Shultz

Unravel me
Peel back flesh and sinew,
And read the stories
Carved into my bones.

Hold my naked soul
In your calloused hands,
But do not claim it;
I belong to nothing

Except for the Earth.
I sprouted in the fresh soil of her womb

But now I'm crumbling
And I shall return to it.
Let the bits and pieces of my physical self
Soak into her skin.

I release my final exhale
A seed is planted,
Fed with affection
I inhale.

I am creation itself,
Blossoming from mother nature's breast;
Her lips stretch into a proud grin,
And it glows like the blinding rays of the sun.

I am born anew
A part of a universe much larger than myself
Simply a freckle on the face of the Earth.





Myth

Hayley Arrington

Some say mythology is dead,
Like Latin or a shrunken head.
But all we remember and learn
Will remain with us when we return

To the earth and give back to the soil.

When we sing songs of the seasons,
We bring mythology to life.
That is one of many reasons
To seek happiness when strife

Would see us underground.

Woman, long ago,
Left her burial mound
A tomb of rebirth
For her ancestors

To find a way back into sunlight.

The earth doesn't remember our names.
We are just a figment of time.
It is men with their deadly war games
Who believe that forgetting's a crime.

A story like this could be yours.
It is a familiar story, true.
Of life, love, and death; a course
That ends and begins with you.

So, let us forget
And in our forgetting remember
That we are all a member
Of earth

And only death will tell us if we return.

Night-Time Shadows

Chelsea Arrington

Mnemosyne nightly whispers
Lies in my ears.
My past is neither laden with bouquets
Of red roses
Nor with cemeteries of dreams.
As I lie in my bed, I listen to her
Spin her stories,
Her wheel hypnotizing my eyes and reason.
In the morning, I see a complete tapestry
Covering my body:
A counterpane I can cuddle up to
And contemplate a past as unreal as tomorrow.

Untitled

Marie Recio





The Words Have Been Recorded

Scott Couturier

The words have been recorded.
The visionaries have seen.
The scientist continues to deliberate.
The old orb turns.
The paint is peeling.
The oxen are slaughtered.
The grain is shifting.
The looking-glass is smeared with Vaseline.
The penitent kneels.
The prophet blathers, utters.
The hot wind is searing.
The star is cold.
The groves ache for occupancy.
The cross inverts of its own volition.
The corn nods with wisdom.
Time winds down.
The coil convulses, a snake consuming.
The water is tainted with filaments of Prozac.
The infernal combustion engine is not
a mechanism of perpetual motion.
Each smokestack is a telescope
pointed at the inferno.
Plastic is the incorruptible gold of science.
The magician has laid aside the rod.
The eye, in seeing, makes.
The furrows pine for old seed.
The child tastes ash in Mother's Milk.
The altars accumulate strata of lichen.
The third eye is plucked and preserved.
The breath of the race reeks of formaldehyde.
Christ, resplendent on his tree, cackles.



Tithe for February

Scott Couturier

February – the underbelly
of any year.
You come creeping loveless,
breathless in fear –
The cold strikes like an asp
as throats toil & rasp.

February – you slither like
a frost-snake
from the coals of January,
scales of ashen-flake.
Trees tremble at your blast –
life's dominion passed.

Yet – see that hint of sun's
new turning?
By luminous sliver its orb
longer burning –
day by day light's ardent advance
troubles Winter's solemn trance.

Still deep – with howling snows
that stoic blow
to mound about tree-bole & grave.
The flakes fall slow,
somnolent & gorged, to earth:
relinquish themselves to birth
Great crystalline waves of
whelming white.
The green world conquered,
warmth set to flight:
The sky a drear & sullied skein
ripe with wracks of frozen rain.

February – what words of praise
can frigid lips
utter to your ice-clad mien?
Coy-cocked hips
bound in cincture of rime –
flesh a slurried slime.



In your underbelly the year
germinates, awakes,
contemplating the upcoming
Summer's stakes.
Bulbs yearn to burst & crest
like corpses never laid to rest –

Yet, the wayward robin dreams
of weaving nests
as sap solidifies to furthest sleep,
Winter's test
reigning still o'er height & deep –
unconquered bastions of its keep.

Cross Village

Joris Soeding



Dr. King &
Malcolm X
Solange Morris



Entrances
and Exits
Wendy Arrington

The patron entered cheerfully, with a skip in his boyish gait
His eyes were stars, his teeth gleamed bright; he came from a higher estate.

A more handsome face there never was, framed by jet-black hair
The ladies giggled as they passed, trying not to stare.

“Pray, help me find a firearm - I need one for my hunt!
It needs be small and handy - nothing for the battlefield.”

The gunshop owner handed him a beauty of a toy
Our childlike, dapper fellow held it close; cried out with joy!
He laughed as he shined the barrel - the crowd enjoyed the display
(How were they to know his intentions on this dark and evil day?)

The ladies and gents of the shop had their hearts now taken by storm
The scene-stealer loved the attention, as he whispered under his form:

“Best part I have ever played; they think me merely a fool..”
“Here is payment,”; speaking up, he said, “for this dear and lovely jewel.”

“Thank you, Mr. Booth,”; was heard. “Fine play we saw you in.”
The patron turned and exited with a demonic grin.



A One-Sided Conversation

Jennifer Engle

Having coffee with President Trump,
tendrils of cold air sweep around crossed ankles.
At a round table, sipping and reading, tapping
in solitude, he flits across a globe of white light.
He says he is the best and the most.
I curl into myself like the calico cat sleeping
in the next chair, try to warm my feet.
The best at getting crowds, taxes,
diplomacy, nuclear weapons, groping ...
better not travel to that hot spot.
He adds, nobody is as good at building walls.
Nobody's as conservative. Better than I,
I nod, whispering into the warm liquid
that swirls liberally in an earthenware cup.
He's the most Bible loving, equality seeking,
helpful to the disabled, that rabble
of crutches and wheelchairs that descended
on Washington, healthcare in the balance.
He hovers like a ghost before me, the vines
of January chill climbing my legs like bean poles.
His list of "bests" and "mosts" is impressive.
But I ask his visage, how warm is your heart?
The steps to the Great Wall of America
has a pulse. Federal workers, whose pay
is hostage, are made of flesh that must be fed.
Children fleeing hostile countries have died
at the border, because you say America will be,
must be, made great again. And you,
my January friend, are the most and the best.

Ms. James
Shellie Lewis



Crazy Matt

Anthony Salazar

FADE IN: [*Jake enters Matt's apartment and sees the word 'Washington' takes up an entire wall on the far side of Matt's apartment.*]

JAKE: Matt, why is your apartment so dark and why are there so many papers on the wall? Never mind, we need to go catch the movie.

MATT: Yeah, sure sure, but can we first talk about what's on the wall because I really want to talk about what's on the wall, Jake. [*Jake sits on Matt's bed.*]

JAKE: We have ten minutes to waste so, sure.

MATT: Okay, so you know our friend, Gay Gary?

JAKE: Yes?

MATT: It was a rhetorical question, Jake. Be quiet till I'm done.

JAKE: Oka-

MATT: Shhhhhh, Jake! Shhhhhh. [*Matt runs around the apartment kicking trash and paper in his wake.*]

JAKE: Alrig-

MATT: Shut up, Jake and let me finish okay. So Gay Gary is gay right? Well I saw him with a chick, and at first, I thought it was nothing until I saw him in a café with the same girl who he then kissed. I thought it was weird a gay guy kissing a girl, so I searched through his Instagram, and he's bisexual. But I have never ever saw him kiss a guy or any photos of him kissing a guy. Then it got even deeper than I thought it was. I saw his old Instagram pics from 2 years ago that Gay Gary is not from New York city but from North Dakota in some small town. So, I searched even further, and he dated so many girls. He's straight! He lied to us about being gay, Jake. So, I confronted some old girlfriends.

JAKE: So, you traveled to North Dakota?

MATT: What no? Shut up, she just happened to be living here, so I politely asked her my questions.

JAKE: She never answered you, did she?

MATT: Yeah, she did, and I quote: "Please leave me alone. I don't remember anything in high school, and I don't want to remember it either!"

JAKE: Let me guess. You knocked on the door like a maniac to get the answer.

MATT: Just once.

JAKE: Matt, you're that maniac that was on last week's newspaper, weren't you?

MATT: In my defense, I knocked so many times, but they were fast knocks and just said her name once or more maybe.

JAKE: That doesn't defend you in anyway.

MATT: Well I have a cool bracelet. [*Matt picks up his leg and reveals his bracelet.*]

JAKE: That means you can't leave your house and you can't go to the movies at all. Goddamn it, Matt. What's wrong with you!

MATT: Yeah, but I figured out Gary is not gay.

JAKE: What's wrong with you.

MATT: Calm down, have a cig from my pal, Doug.

JAKE: It's just you and me in this apartment, Matt. Did you lose your goddamn mind with this stupid investigation, Matt?

MATT: You're probably right, but I got a cool bracelet.

JAKE: Okay, you know what I'm going to watch the movie by myself and bring you some dinner. So, before I come back clean your apartment since you just cracked a conspiracy theory on why Gary was never gay. Also, Gary never pretends he was gay or hiding he was straight, you just call him call Gay

Gary for no reason. [*Getting up from Matt's bed and heading out of Matt's apartment.*]

MATT: Damn, I really thought I had something going.

JAKE: Yeah and honestly what's with the word Washington you never mention it in your crazy theory? [*Pointing at the word Washington.*]

MATT: Oh, I just really want to go there. I heard it

is pretty in this time of year.

JAKE: You're Crazy Matt. [*Cut to parking lot, as Jake walks away from Matt's apartment and towards his car.*]

JAKE: Man, what is with people making crazy assumptions of other people? [*Shaking his head in disbelief.*] FADE OUT.

Delicate Prey

Jade Landrum





Untitled
Alec Blue



The Children of Lore

Shayne Keen

Below the streets of N'ar
urchins scry for meaning
in detailed paintings
on cathedral ceilings
buried during the first
cataclysm of Lore.

Their eyes –
a thin ring of iris
surrounding huge pupil
to see through murky
dust-littered space
where only candles flicker
in lamps to light the way.

The children are raised willing
to give themselves for candles
to light those great cathedrals
when they have become too old to hunt,
too old to eat, too old to grow or call.

Calling is escapist pleasure –
songs rumble through the rubble
and bounce back across altar-stones,
where still flows divine water
that washes off the dust
of those newly born,
and their dead are purified
in its font.

Down there women are hunters
while men shore up ceilings
to keep them from falling
onto pale children,
who help with shoring and hunting
and call from chamber to chamber
as fur-fledged arrows
fly into rats bigger than spaniels
that will be skinned,
gutted, spitted and roasted,
their fur for blankets,
clothing, and more arrows,

older women and men both
sew covers of rat fur
for mewling babies
who cry in the gloomy
candlelight.

'It will end just as it began
with a new cataclysm,
and those who live will see the light
that gets in through the cracks
in the cathedral ceiling,
unless – that crumbles to dust.
It could be you or your child,
or some unimagined descendant
who won't even remember your name,
but it will come to pass.'
The white-eyed priestess laughs.

Anatomy Practice

Candace Morone





May You Live in Interesting Times: *Chinese Curse*

Joan Colby

History is never dull
Though long stretches of dark age
Must have been a brutal phase:

Labor, disease, hunger,
An endless round of childbearing.
Kings were murdered,

Thrones usurped, wars declared,
Hordes descended, treaties signed,
Rebellions overthrown.

Threshing the wheat or sowing,
Milking cows, churning butter,
Everyday tasks that compose a life

Blessedly ignorant of history
Gray lamented this, yet
Weren't they lucky? Freed

From worry. The plots of
Cardinals and earls,
Convolute designs of courtiers.

The bowl of porridge,
Dog at heel,
Sun drinking the dew of fields

Bread rising beneath a cloth
Child at the breast
Reins in the hands

The ox and the plow.
Simplicity that calms the mind
Or dulls the silver of an idea

That shines
For a moment only.



Fall of the Lightbearer

Tom Fontanes

Full of wisdom and flawless in beauty,
its beginning and the end.
Adorned with every exquisite gem.
Prince of the crystalline world.

Filled with taboret and pipes,
messenger of music's throne.
Walker among the Burning Stones
located behind The Twelve Gates of Pearl.

"The Guardian of all creation"
ordained so by the Holy Ones.
Second only to their sum,
and recognizing my being as a portent.


I know they were not my cause.
So by reason of my wisdom, beauty, and light,
I would ascend the very stars and heights.
Self begotten, self existent, magnipotent.

Accused of originating pride askance
and corrupted by my luminance.
Myriad upon myriad of stars advanced.
Fought till my stars and I were ejected.

Forced from the heart of the Burning Stones,
cast downward to the dark world of chaos disgraced.
Till the great recreation of time and space.
From crystal to liquid, light from darkness expected.

Firmament in the midst of waters to divide waters from waters,
one vast global ocean sea band.
Then out of the waters emerged the land.
Pangaea, the eye of the new foundation.

From virgin ground was a tabernacle formed,
where then entered the breath of life.
A new holy being came out of strife,
to be the parent of a new creation.



From this being yet another came.
Two halves different yet the same.
Placed In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida,
the Holy Ones' magnum opus and diadem.

Immortals with only one condition:
the knowledge of the sacred fig's prohibition.
My plan: enter the sacred iris,
and reveal why it was forbidden them.

I have tasted the fruit and know its tree,
it would make them equal to the Three.
They would be as I am, free.
Knowing all existence, its reality, and breadth.

When done they will recognize and acknowledge me.
The Star of the Morning, The Great Cherub.
The Red Dragon, once the ordained now adversary.
The Angel of Music and now of Death,

The Lightbearer now Prince of Darkness,
Lucifer now Satan, all evil harnessed.
It is time, I enter quetzalcoatl, then Eden.
I slide forward arms across my chest.
It begins



Contributor Biographies

Chelsea Arrington is a poet whose work has appeared in *The Audient Void*, *Spectral Realms*, *Folk Horror Revival: Corpse Roads*, and elsewhere. She is a 2nd degree initiate in Temple Sophia Coven. She lives in Southern California with her boyfriend and their son.

Hayley Arrington is a poet and author whose work has appeared in *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *Sage Woman Magazine*, *Folk Horror Revival: Corpse Roads*, *Inanna's Ascent: Reclaiming Female Power*, and elsewhere. Born and raised in the greater Los Angeles area, she still lives there with her husband and son.

Wendy Arrington is a retired elementary school teacher who still enjoys relationships with many of her now-grown students but who also sincerely enjoys being retired. She regularly attends church, spends her free time gardening, watching old movies, playing piano, and writing songs and poetry. She lives in Southern California.

Alec Blue is an English major at Crafton Hills College. Having slowly shifted farther down Yucaipa Boulevard with school over the years, he is excited to spread his wings and experience more of the world. He enjoys discussing superhero movies, doing weird stuff with his friends, and experiencing art whenever he can.

Katarina Bourdreux is a New Orleans author, musician, dancer, and teacher. Her first novel *Platform Dwellers* is available from Owl Hollow Press. She has two published poetry collections: *Alexithymia* and *Anatomy Lessons*.

Joanna Brock is a Crafton Hills student who will be graduating Spring 2019 with an AAT in English, AA in English, and AA in Social Science. She will be moving on to CSUSB continuing as an English major and minoring in Communications. Joanna is a pleasantly awkward, occasionally witty, and mostly inappropriate comedian in her daily life; attempting to use jokes and stories to make connections with those around her.

Cody Clements is student at Crafton Hills College and is a graphic artist. He enjoys all types of art but loves to make sports graphics the most. He hopes to become a graphic designer for a professional sports team or college sports teams.

Joan Colby's *Selected Poems* received the 2013 FutureCycle Prize and Ribcage was awarded the 2015 Kithara Book Prize. Her recent books include *Carnival* from FutureCycle Press and *The Seven Heavenly Virtues* from Kelsay Books. Her latest book *Her Heartstrings* was published by Presa Press in 2018.

Scott Couturier is a poet and prose writer of the Weird, grotesque, and darkly fantastic. Venues he has contributed to include *The Audient Void*, *Spectral Realms*, *Hinnom Magazine*, *Weirdbook*; his fiction has been repeatedly featured in the *Test Patterns and Pulps* anthologies from Planet X Publications.

Jennifer Engel earned her BA in Liberal Arts at Scripps College in Claremont, where she studied art and poetry writing. Currently, she is an art instructor at Redlands High School where she also co-advises the *RHS Literary Journal*. Poetry has been her focus, but she is starting to write short stories as well.

Wes Fink is an aspiring writer from California's most beautiful wasteland: the high desert. His inspirations mainly consist of authors that you have heard of but are probably not really interested in reading. He currently resides in Calimesa, California and is attending UC Riverside's Creative Writing program.

Tom Fontanes is a local artist aka Nam Vet Art. He is a decorated Vietnam combat veteran. Some of his poems were published in a book titled *P.T.S.D.* He has won several art awards in local as well as national V.A. Art Competitions.

Jerry Garces is a veteran, enjoys writing short stories. He spent his working years as a newsboy, fry cook, machinist, educator, real estate agent, firefighter, and legal professional. He once made a solo parachute jump at a skydiving school when he was just 17. The school allowed it based on the note he presented, written by his mother.



Howie Good is the author of *I'm Not a Robot* from Tolsun Books and *A Room at the Heartbreak Hotel* from Analog Submission Press.

Frank Kearns is a transplanted New Englander and a longtime California resident. He is the author of two poetry collections, *Circling Venice* (2013) and *Yearlings* (2015). His work has also appeared in anthologies such as *Beyond the Lyric Moment*, *Like a Girl: Perspectives on Feminism* and *LummoX*.

Shayne Keen, when not writing poetry or stories, spends his time with cats and other members of his family in Northern Michigan, usually wishing for the snow to go away. Since his childhood, he has been an avid music collector who also has a soft spot for books. His stories and poems have appeared in the anthologies *Trumpland*, *Caravans Awry*, and *32 Horses on a Vermilion Field*, Vol 1.

Chris Koch is a seasoned poet and singer-songwriter with two completed albums -- Teeter Gray's "Blue Love", and "Scenes from the Coastal Evacuation" under his own name. He occasionally dabbles in longer forms of word-smithery and is grateful to *The Sand Canyon Review* for having published a few of his attempts.

Jade Landrum is a 22-year-old artist from Redlands, California. She has always had a passion for art since she was a small child. She loves taking photos, writing poetry, singing, sculpting and basically anything that lets her be creative & expressive. Lately, he's been taking photos on my Nikon D3400: it's been a lot of fun so far. She wishes everyone a beautiful picture-perfect day!

Shellie Lewis is a 91' graduate from the College of Charleston earning a Bachelor Degree of Arts with a Concentration in Painting. Shellie works in oil and mix media and has sold and has been exhibiting her work throughout the South East since 2010. Shellie has been featured on the cover of *Art Magazine* of Charleston, *The Laurel of Asheville*, *BOLD Life magazine*, *WNC Outdoor and Travel*, and *Native Eyewear Promotional Locals Only Project*.

Connie Major says clay is a fantastic manipulative material with a wonderland of possibilities. Connie has over twenty years of experience not just making useful and beautiful pieces, but engineering and forming sculptures with thought-provoking meanings. She has a mantra, "Clay is clean dirt and I love to play in it".

Candace Morone is a girl with far too many passions- why else would she submit work to the art and poetry section of the Sand Canyon? To her, devoting her life to learning as much as possible is worth the busier lifestyle.

Solange Morris is a 20-year-old painter who specializes in portraits/realism. He is currently a studio art major at Crafton Hills College. Morris started painting when he was 15 years old while he was attending Redlands High School. It was there he developed a passion for painting portraits. Morris believes that capturing the essence of a person in a portrait is just as important as capturing the aesthetic quality. In his artwork, he seeks to connect the individual viewer personally to the person depicted in his paintings.

Derek Odom has been writing seriously since 2008 but has written since he can remember. He lives in Yucaipa with his wife, Kim, and their four fur babies. And a tarantula named Teresa. Derek took Creative Writing at Crafton and it changed his life for the better and for good.

Shelby Pinkham is a current graduate student and teaching associate at CSU, Bakersfield. She is a published poet, freelance copy editor and content writer, and an editor for the small literary journal, *Rabid Oak*. Her poems appear in the poetry anthologies *Writing Work*, *Writing Flora*, *Writing Fauna*, *Writing Sound*, as well as *The Sand Canyon Review*. She is currently writing her master's thesis and preparing to start Fresno State's MFA program in the fall.

Marie Recio's favorite hobby since she was little is photography, and because she travels often it gives her the best opportunities to capture beautiful scenery type pictures (which are her specialty). She loves to show people the kind of things that could be seen with a simple hike, or a quick car ride. If one stood still for a second in nature, there is an odd peace that can calm one internally and showing that is a passion she strives to show to everyone.





Cindy Rinne creates art and writes in San Bernardino, CA. She is Poet in Residence for the Neutra Institute Museum and Gallery in Silver Lake, CA. A Pushcart nominee. Cindy is the author of seven books, including: *Mapless* with Nikia Chaney, *Moon of Many Petals*, *Listen to the Codex*. A finalist for the 2016 Hillary Gravendyk Prize. Her poetry appeared in: *Anti-Herion Chic*, *Unpsychology Magazine*, *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*, *MORIA*, *The Halcyone Literary Review*, and several other anthologies. www.fiberverse.com

Italia Ruotolo is born in Naples, Italy and graduated from the Fine Arts Academy of Naples. In her work, there isn't much distinction between high and low cultural level because she's aware that the contemporary man lives in a myriad of sensorial stimulation and is himself the product of continuing interlocution between the real and the mere appearance or mere fiction. We find echoes of these contradictions in her work in constant search of a balance between past and future, good and evil, darkness and light.

Anthony Salazar is a confusing person. He has the complicated ideas that he can never draw out but can write it. He is extremely nervous when speaking to others but when it comes to his ideas, he feels proud of it no matter what. He is a nice person but confusing.

Walter Savage is a retired broadcaster and educator. He is the author of eight books, including *Imagination: The Art of W. Jack Savage* (wjacksavage.com). To date, more than fifty of Jack's short stories and over a thousand of his paintings and drawings have been published worldwide. Jack and his wife Kathy live in Monrovia, California.

Kai Shultz is a student at Crafton Hills College, and majors in English. He enjoys writing, reading, and playing video games in his free time. He's been writing short stories since he could hold a pencil, and he lives in Calimesa with his family and four cats named Moxie, Missy, Beerus, and Dregon.

Tara Shultz is an aspiring novelist who enjoys a wide variety of pastimes including reading sci-fi and fantasy novels, watching a variety of movie genres and enjoying hanging out with her friends. She has two AA Honors degrees, in English and American Sign Language. She hopes one day to learn Universal Morse Code.

Judith Skillman's recent book is *Came Home to Winter*, Deerbrook Editions. She is the recipient of grants from Artist Trust & Academy of American Poets. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Cimarron Review*, *Zyzzyyva*, *Nasty Women Poets*, and elsewhere. Visit: www.judithskillman.com

Joris Soeding's most recent book of poetry is *Home in Nine Moons* (Clare Songbirds Publishing House, 2018). His photos have appeared in *Apocalypse* and *South Loop Review*. He is a 7th/8th grade Social Studies teacher in Chicago, where he resides with his wife, son, and daughter.

Lars Sveen is a programmer, photographer, blacksmith, woodworker, painter, gamer, SCUBA diver, and nature enthusiast. He enjoys camping, cooking, and examining ideas from different perspectives. He lives in Southern California with his girlfriend and their son.

David Swykert is a former 911 operator living North Carolina. His work has appeared in *The Tampa Review*, *Detroit News*, *Coe Review*, *Monarch Review*, *the Newer York*, *Sand Canyon Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Gravel*, *Zodiac Review*, *Barbaric Yawp*, and *Bull*.

Mercedes Webb-Pullman: IIML Victoria University MA in Creative Writing 2011. Published in NZ, Australia, Canada, USA, UK, Israel, Ireland, Spain, France, Germany, Greece, and Palestine, in various journals and anthologies, and in her books. She lives in Hawkes Bay NZ.

Heather Westenhofer is a certified yoga instructor, award-winning artist, and a second-degree initiate of Southern California's Temple Sophia. Her interests include ritual writing, ancestor veneration, and smashing the patriarchy. Currently, she is working to explore the intersections between yoga practice and pagan spirituality.

Kassandra Zamanis is a teacher and a sometimes poet. You can summon her by leaving a grilled cheese and a book on ghost stories on your porch at midnight.





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The Sand Canyon Review Team

The Sand Canyon Review is a magazine of literature and the arts. The content is generated by students of Crafton Hills College and the larger community. The magazine is published by the Literary Magazine Production class with guidance from the Crafton Hills English Department. Opinions and ideas expressed herein are the views of the authors and artists. They do not necessarily represent the views of the students, the faculty, staff, or administration of Crafton Hills College.

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Please send your submissions to SCRSUBMISSIONS@gmail.com and note the type of your submission (art, poetry or fiction) in the subject line. Submissions should include a cover page containing your name, address, email address, and a 50 word, third person bio.

10 pages of Fiction, Non-Fiction or Flash Fiction

3-5 pieces of Art and Photography

3-5 pages of Poetry

