



GROWING MALCONTENT









*3moon Magazine*

# ISSUE 7

## *“Growing Malcontent”*

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a Note  
from the  
Editors

2137 MST. THE ARTIST'S STUDIO.  
DENVER, COLORADO.

Thank you all, as always, for picking up this fantastic new issue of 3MOON MAGAZINE. I suppose I should introduce myself.



My name is Sarah Allen Reed, and I'm an underground cartoonist and illustrator. I picked up art direction duties on our last issue, "EVERYTHING IS FINE", and I've been here ever since.



Figured, since this is my second issue with the magazine--and the theme for this issue is very much my wheelhouse--I'd take over the editorial slot this issue and say a few words.



This issue's theme, as you probably picked up on from the cover, is "GROWING MALCONTENT"--a theme that, for me, brought to mind corpses and flowers, overgrowth and consumption, passion and longing. Mine isn't the only interpretation in this issue--in the pages of this magazine, you'll find quite a few more.



Thank you all for lending your harrowing voices to our choir of chills for our seventh issue.

We'll see you at the end of the road,  
and next issue as well..

*The Breakfast Club*

*Sarah, Hannah, Efren, Alyssa, Frankie, Meagan, Augie, And Kid*  
*Growing Malcontent--15*



*Kathrin Freudenberg*

“Unattended Garden”

*Prose*

# *The Turning*

by Amy Wilson

The moon isn't where I left it.

When I'd walked away from the pond it had still been there, and I'd thought perhaps this time the reeds would be enough to hold it in place. Somehow it must have broken free; bobbed up out of the verdant entanglement and floated away.

With the moon gone, it's going to be harder to find my way around. I make for the long shadows that will take me away from the damp, cold area of the partly frozen pond. It's Winter in this part of the garden and there's nothing living here, nothing that I have any wish to encounter anyway. There's no reason to stay.

Somewhere close by I know there will be a man, or at least something that is shaped like a man, watching me. I long to get a good look at him, to watch me the way he watches me. What is it that he sees anyway? Perhaps he had delighted in my enchantment the first time I found this place, the first time I saw the blossoms on the magnolia tree in Spring or the fiery red leaves on the acer in Autumn. But I've grown tired of moving through this place, of making my way through the turning of the

seasons that never shifts, never changes, and won't release me from its spell. What does he see when he watches me now, this man who hides away in the periphery of my gaze? Is he trapped here like me, or is he the reason I'm here?

It's Summer by the topiaries and the air is warm and light. Figures cut into the hedges seem to twist and sway as I pass, and I wonder how many times I have passed this way before. Enough to remember that Summer isn't safe. Anywhere else and I might have stopped, pretended to admire the greenery, and waited to see whether the figure at my back might catch up with me, might speak to me this time; but not here. The garden is most alive in Summer, expanding so quickly that I can almost hear the plants growing, the creaking of branches like miniature hurts, like the small tears in muscles as it strengthens them. The smell of sap hangs in the breeze, oozing from the trees like a wound. The topiaries groan as I rush past them, reaching out their branches to snag my hair, my skin.

As I dash past the last of them, I round a corner and the quality of the air changes, becomes heavier and golden-hued. The cloying scent of dying roses is everywhere. I used to love the smell of roses, but that was before. Back when I knew how to leave. My feet sink into a layer of wet leaves, musky and mildewing, and I can rest for a moment, here in Autumn where the garden takes on

a calmer disposition. I turn and wait for the man but of course I can't see him. No matter which way I turn, he's only ever behind me.

I am so tired. I want to make my bed in the purple heather and rest with the garden. I don't want to drive onwards to Spring; I'm sick of being infected with its relentless hope. Last night (or was it the night before?) I'd thought that perhaps I saw a gate, but when I reached it there was nothing but the smooth obsidian of the wall, stretching endlessly into the sky. Just a trick of the light. It's always just a trick of the light and in Autumn I know that, but in Spring I fall for it every time.

"No more," I say, out loud, and the sound of my own voice startles me. It sounds wrong amidst the near silence of the place. The garden seems almost to shudder, and I wonder for the first time why I have not used my voice before, why I have not realised there is power in it. "I'm not playing your games anymore." I address my words to the man, or whatever he is, to the representative of this place. "Come out and face me."

There is a movement in the shadows, in the space between Autumn and Spring and I take an eager step forward before I realise that I'm being shepherded in the direction the garden wants me to take.

"Fine then. If you won't come out, I won't move on. You'll have to find your entertainment elsewhere."



The rain begins to fall then, soft at first and then a real downpour. I hold my ground while the water runs in rivulets down my face and makes rats tails out of my hair, before pooling in the mulch at my feet. I almost smile. I'm in Autumn, not Winter or even Spring, and the garden has rules. There is still a touch of warmth in the air here and there are worse things than a warm rain shower. The wind picks up, blowing through the trees and dislodging what's left of the leaves hanging there. The mournful howling seems almost to speak; as if the garden is telling me it isn't angry with my choices, just disappointed.

Still, I hold my ground. I've been walking through this garden, watching as the seasons turn, for longer than I can remember and I'm not going to do it anymore. I feel no excitement. Perhaps if I was in Spring I would have felt excitement, but here I feel only resolved, resigned to whatever happens next.

The wind drops. The clouds part and leave me with the clear view of the perpetual sunset. The world is moving towards evening and I catch myself yawning. I lower myself to the ground and sit amongst the heather. It's damp but so am I. What does it matter now? If I close my eyes for a moment, if I gather my strength right at the point when the garden is at its lowest ebb then maybe I'll be in with a chance of escaping.

*Or is that what the garden wants me to think?*

The thought blazes across my mind, but my eyelids are already heavy, the world is sliding slowly, tilting to the right as I feel cool earth under my cheek.

I feel myself start to sink into the soft ground, feel the mulch start to cover me in a slow, heavy wave. I have an impression of something slimy moving over my body, like insects, like worms and I try to scream but my mouth is filling up with loamy dirt. Maybe this is it, maybe this is the only way out of the endless turning seasons, but I don't want to do this anymore, I don't want to stay here in the ground like this.

It's only for a second and then I feel the pressure recede and I sit up and open my eyes. I stand and take a deep breath, brushing the dirt from my knees, as I look around me, frowning.

The moon isn't where I left it.

Amy Wilson is a short story writer from the North East of England, who has written fantasy, horror and pirate-themed tales for short story anthologies. She is currently working on her first full length novel.

You can find her on Twitter @WritesAmy.

# *Growth and Decay*

by Gemma Elliot

The house was falling apart. Crumbling, bit by bit. They had thought that buying newer, a house from this century compared to the subsiding tenement flats that their friends had, would be a safe bet. They'd got the house very cheap. It needed some work done—cosmetic, really, removing dated textured wallpaper, painting over dark wood and faded walls—but the estate agent couldn't explain just why it was quite so inexpensive.

But to afford even this tiny cheap house, they'd had to move out of the city and make a home for themselves somewhere new. The upside to the move was that now they could have a garden and space around them, and their little modern housing estate looked out over the choppy sea.

She had always been green-fingered, cultivating houseplants and herbs, and so the garden should have been her project while he worked on the interior. But nothing would grow. She'd read Derek Jarman's diary, finding inspiration in the colours of Prospect Cottage set against the grey of Dungeness, but it was one thing to scrape up a flourishing garden in the sea winds of mild southern England and quite another to do it on the battering west

coast of Scotland. The garden was soon abandoned to the salty air, to weeds, and to the falling leaves from neighbours' trees.

Inside, the first thing to go was the oven. The chrome knobs simply gave up and refused to turn. They would get a technician out eventually, but for now the microwave and kettle would suffice. Next, the bathroom light was extinguished, and could not be tempted back on with a new bulb. That was added to the list for the electrician, and they were careful to always remember to take their phone for a torch when going to the toilet at night.

They rarely saw the occupants of the neighbouring houses, but eventually came to know the woman who lived next door and her snappy little dog. She said it was nice to have young blood in the estate, and they asked after the previous owners of their house but were met with silence and a shake of the head. The little dog growled.

A few decorating disasters had occurred—raspberry paint dripped over a pale carpet, important furniture screws lost between floor boards, a mirror smashed by an errant ladder—but they were finally starting to feel settled and comfortable when the bad weather arrived. Storms had been forecast all over the country, so it wasn't a surprise, but she worried about her fledgling plants in the garden, the very few that had

survived long enough to grow leaves. Nothing had flowered or borne fruit, that was too much to hope for.

The wind and the rain raged outside, which was bad enough, but it began to seep into the house too. They worried that the sea, visible from the bedroom window upstairs, might rise until it overcame them. Wet patches pooled on the wooden sills, and tiny fungi sprouted along the gaps in the floor boards downstairs. A houseplant, previously rather sad and lifeless in its pot in their old home, doubled and trebled in size overnight, pushing at the walls of the house, begging for more space.

They also found that things had started to go missing without a trace. Inconsequential things, at first, but it was still irritating. A book would disappear, just as they approached the final chapter. A hairbrush, easily replaced but necessary for keeping up appearances, would have vanished from where it had been left.

Unimportant things continued to go astray, and appliances continued to break, but the significance of the problems struck them when his medication disappeared. At first it was thought misplaced, but even a second prescription was gone as soon as it entered the house.

He started to keep it in the car and reorder it frequently just in case. Meanwhile, she couldn't find the mortgage documents, no longer had proof that they owned this frightful home, and was too scared to tell him.

Nothing in the garden had grown, really. Weeds got taller, needed cut down frequently, but were always crisp and dead to the touch. None of her floral dreams had been realised. She dug out every bed and tipped it all into the bin. She was sick of this place.

The next problem was that no one came to empty the garden waste. Their neighbours' bins were all collected promptly, but theirs never was. The local authority helpline rang out with no answer. The heat of Summer came and with it the bin's contents began to break down.

It smelled terrible, a smell that filled the nose with death, and quickly seeped down to the lungs. And so, they chose to ignore it and to use only the rubbish and the recycling bins, all of which were picked up when they should be. They got used to the smell eventually, and managed to convince each other that it had gone, so bravely opened the lid one day for a look. It was filled to the brim with the biggest mushrooms they had ever seen.

Their light brown caps looked so smooth and pleasant that she risked a prod, just to see what would happen. It was a nice feeling, spongy and with a bounce, and really the smell wasn't that bad now, so she pushed further with a flat palm. It felt different this time, like a vacuum was pulling on her arm. Before she could resist, she was elbow deep in the bin, the mushrooms pulling her under.



It felt lovely, warm, and comforting, and like it might have been good to get away from the problems of the house by allowing herself to be swallowed up and given over to the compost heap. He didn't agree, panicked, and pulled her out with a squelch. They never spoke of it again.

When they had managed to clear everything up, had tamed the house, had given in and paved the garden, they visited the local recycling centre to get rid of the excess building materials and finally, finally empty the garden waste.

There were no staff members around to help, and so they grabbed a side of the bin each, which they had wheeled there on foot because it wouldn't fit in the car and tipped it with difficulty into the skip. Out flowed months of composted food waste, piles and piles of dead weeds, a plethora of fungi, and every item they had lost in the house that year.

Gemma Elliott lives in Glasgow, Scotland, and works in local government.

Her publications include short fiction in *The Babel Tower Notice Board*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, and *The Common Breath*. She can be found on Twitter @drgemmaelliott.

*Three Pieces*  
*by Elyssa Tappero*

## *Terroir*

I have swallowed you down so many times, it is a wonder your seed has not taken root within me. I can almost feel it buried within the meat of my left breast, though, nestled safely behind the wall of my ribcage where it may grow in peace. Perhaps that strange twisting sensation I sometimes feel is the first little tendril breaking forth from its shell, tasting and testing the garnet soil of its birth. Soon its vines will go creeping through my flesh and wind around my ribs like ivy on a trellis. I wonder what manner of night-blooming flowers will push their buds out my eyes, or strange fruits ripen alongside my warm organs? I hope, should that day come, you will cut me open and reap your beautiful harvest.

# Winter Solstice

You may be a god, my love, but here on my blade you die like any mortal and here in my forest you rot like any animal. Fear not; I am here with you in your dying, just as I shall be with you in your rotting. I shall be with you when your laboring heart finally spasms and stills (not too long now, you have lost so much blood already). I shall be with you when your cells begin to slowly suffocate en masse, thirty trillion microscopic deaths triggered by your last shallow breath. I shall be with you as your cooling meat begins to spoil. I shall be with you when the coyotes tear at your choicest organs, muzzles stained red and tongues lolling (your godblood tastes so sweet, you know, it is the only drink I have ever hungered for), and the crows bicker over the honor of pecking out your eyes. I shall be with you as your flesh is consumed like holy communion to feed my host of scavengers and decomposers, leaving only your lovely bones behind as grave markers. And I shall be here still when fungi sprout up through the sockets of your whitening skull and wildflowers twine around the bars of your rib cage, nourished on the nutrients of your long forgotten corpse which yet enrich the soil. I am always with you, beloved,

so fear neither the blade nor the breaking down. Death has  
ever been your dearest companion.

## Summer Solstice

...despite the blade, Tanim does not draw away, lets the knife edge remain pressed to his throat, his every breath shifting the honed metal. The moment stretches out, Daren unmoving save for the faint traitorous tremble of his hand, the rise and fall of the blade as Tanim inhales, murmurs on the exhalation, “**Why do you hesitate?**” Black eyes flick, sharp and guarded, to meet his own, and the trembling stills for a breath as the other swears through clenched teeth and the desire to draw back, the need to draw blood, “*I won’t.*” A smile, sad and wry, and an imperceptible twitch of his head presses Tanim’s neck against the blade, razor edge gliding through unresisting flesh; movement just enough to embed the knife’s point in a vein pulsing with each heartbeat. “**We must.**” He holds his companion’s gaze while one hand rises, curls over the elegant fingers wrapped in turn about the hilt, and draws the buried blade across...

Elyssa Tappero is a queer pagan who writes fragments of prose and poetry about mental illness, the gods, the agony of writing, and how it feels to be alive for the end of the world (which is pretty not great) in hopes of touching others who might feel the same. She has several prose pieces in Issue 6 of *3.Moon Magazine*, and you can find more of her work at [www.onlyfragments.com](http://www.onlyfragments.com) and on Twitter at @OnlyFragments.

# *Life Unravelling*

by Tomas Marcantonio

He gazes into the mirror, several small feathers falling out as he runs a hand across his mottled scalp. They drift down, gently succumbing to gravity's pull, tumbling over his shoulders before settling silently on the cold stone floor. Crimson, gold, and lime green, their stark beauty is transformed by their sudden separation from skin.

"Call me Flaw Finder," the mirror whispers. "Age Clock; Truth Seeker; Silent Judgement; The Harsh Truth."

He blinks, and when he opens his eyes, a web of lines appears around them. Deep crevices carved into once smooth skin, time's claws scraping a meaningless tally onto a living canvas. Bags sulk and brood beneath his lower eyelids, dark pouches filled with a scavenger's collection: broken twigs, bruised cotton wool, nail clippings. With each blink he feels the pull, each second dragging his lids down with an extra ballast of weight.

"Call me Glass of Lost Youth," the mirror breathes. "Mobile Portrait; Visual Echo; Life Museum; Unsaved Video."

Tears distort his vision. The mirror clouds over and for a moment he sees himself as a young man, peacock

feathers glistening atop his head, crystals of opportunity sparkling in the depths of his eyes. The reflection smiles back at him, the teeth snow-white and taunting. Then they transform, the clean pearls yellowing with rot. Vines sprout from his ears and trace the wrinkles up his cheeks, settling grimly into cracks. He sticks out his tongue like a summer dog, and watches moss grow across the surface in sickening green buds.

“Call me Window That Failed,” the mirror taunts. “Dimension Portal; Hypocrite Therapist; Jealous Twin; Vanity’s Veil.”

He tries to reply, his parched lips cracking as he attempts to form words. His teeth tumble from purple gums and he spits them onto the dresser, where they turn swiftly into dust. He runs his mossy tongue across his lips and tastes the rusty kiss of blood.

“Take me back,” he mouths, but the only sound that emerges is a harsh, hideous croak from the depths of his throat.

Cracks appear on the glass, splitting into rebellious tributaries, seeking. When they reach the frame, shards begin to fall; one by one, they shatter with riotous screams.

The frame alone remains, now a window into another world, a hole in the universe.



He hurriedly gathers his lost feathers, scoops tooth dust between his fingers. His bones creak as he crawls through the empty frame.

Once his feet disappear through the portal, the shards reform, replacing themselves in the frame. The cracks dissolve and the glass shimmers as new, a crystal-clear reflection of a vacant room.

Tomas Marcantonio is a writer from Brighton, England. His debut novel, *This Ragged, Wastrel Thing*, was published by Storgy Books in 2020, and his short stories have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Tomas is based in Busan, South Korea, where he splits his time between writing, teaching, and getting lost in neon-lit backstreets.



*David Dodd Lee*

“collage sheet 23 PUNK”

David Dodd Lee's collage work was featured in the latest issue of *The Journal*, along with an interview. It has also appeared in *The Hunger*, *Twyckenham Notes*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Pinball*, *Permafrost*, and *The Indianapolis Review*, among other places, and is forthcoming in *Packingtown Review* and *Watershed Review*.

# *Through the Green Bottle-Glass Window*

by Cecily Winter

Fog Alley and its single brick house are visible only on a particular kind of foggy evening. This is that kind of evening.

Inside the cellar, Ivy longs for the misty hours that presage the arrival of Benjamin Franklin's ghost. With his help, she can escape her prison and seize her right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This right appears in the "Declaration of Independence" that she learned about in school when she was alive and still attended school.

To follow Mr. Franklin, Ivy must escape the Gaunt Housewife who once swept the house with a corn broom but now uses a giant vacuum cleaner powered by the energy of germs and decay. She hovers litter, broken bottles, and squatters who sheltered and died under the sagging roof. If the bodies are contagious, she hovers their ghosts too, but she locks the ghosts of the uninfected in the cellar before dumping their leftover bones in the alley to feed the fog.

The Liberty Bell clanks, and bats in the church-spires refuse to hunt when Ben Franklin's ghost slips from his bronze statue in the National Constitutional Center and revisits his Old City haunts. He catalyzes this mix of smog, troubles, and bones into a toxic cloud that hungers for the warmth, moisture, and energy of any living thing. Even wisps of ghost matter.

The fog's fronds seep inside the victim to power its own creeping malevolence. Perhaps it cleaved to Mr. Franklin in Britain when he participated in unholy rites, though science remains vague about the origin of such eldritch phenomena.

Mr. Franklin is otherwise a hero. He signed the "Declaration of Independence" and wrote wise almanacs. All this was long before a gravedigger tossed Ivy, who died of starvation, atop her parents felled by the Spanish Flu. Faded to a sepia tone, her ghost crawled from the grave only to be folded into the apron pocket of the Gaunt Housewife who keeps her in the house on Fog Alley.

Tall enough to gaze through the cellar's green bottle-glass window, Ivy spots Mr. Franklin's life-sized ghost sculling through the fog. In his wake, he leaves narrow patches of clear ground. These are Ivy's stepping stones to liberty. Didn't Mr. Franklin once say that liberty was the most important thing of all?

The window won't raise, but for once the cellar door is open while the Gaunt Housewife tackles a festoon of ceiling spiderwebs. Ivy seizes the chance to rush by and slam the cellar door behind her. Outside, she leaps over the hungry fog and lands on a clear spot. Despite this, tendrils snake around her ankles. Her pace is swift enough to break free.

As well as her putrid burial clothes, Ivy wears a fanny pack snatched from a dead squatter before the Gaunt Housewife hoovered her up, and in this pack is stored her getaway money. Most of the coins tumbled from squatters' pockets, but Ivy grabbed some during last week's test-run with Mr. Franklin. She figures she'll need money to reach the past, where she'll have a chance to enjoy her inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness before death strikes her down again.

She paces behind Mr. Franklin's ghost. The dreary Liberty Bell enhances the blare of ships' tocsins on the shrouded river, and Independence Hall shoulders a mass of gray coils, but, at last, Mr. Franklin turns North.

With Ivy on his heels, he filters himself through the wrought-iron railings where Fifth Street meets Arch Street, a sanctified graveyard groomed daily and nurtured by National Park Rangers. Mr. Franklin and Ivy pause on the flat marble gravestone that covers his long-moldered bones. In his presence, it shines wet and clear, and Ivy sets

to work packing away coins that tourists toss onto it for luck.

To avoid the rising meringue of mist, tourists have stayed indoors, but a boy in a blue-paper mask and torn gray hoodie keeps his shoulder pressed to the fence along Arch Street. With one arm between the railings, he flips coins toward himself. He's unaware that the fog already obscures his shoes, legs, and back.

Mr. Franklin's ghost is infirm with age, so though he covets the coins, they are beyond his reach. He once wrote that a penny saved is a penny earned, and he jigs his knees a little as he gloats over this small fortune. Despite his well-known remarks about the placid sleep of death, his own passing does not let him sleep soundly and awaken refreshed.

Ghost though he is, he is incensed by the boy's thievery and cries, "Little strokes fell big oaks!" With his airy walking stick, he beats the boy's knuckles to demonstrate how small strokes can fell tree trunks and break human bones alike. Crouched low, Ivy scrambles for the remaining pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters. The stick whacks her knuckles, too, but it's a good haul and worth the beating if she escapes the present day.

The absence of noise startles her. It's the Gaunt Housewife absorbing every sound.

She first appeared in colonial Philadelphia in times of illness and epidemic, her job to keep the city clear of infected ghosts and rot. Now she approaches with her giant machine on incorruptible casters. As if she speaks to Mr. Franklin—though Ivy hears nothing—he abruptly gives over the beatings and wafts through the railing to return to his seat at the signers’ table in the National Constitution Center.

On Ivy’s first collecting trip, when she was marooned on the grave at his departure, she was lucky not to be stripped of her afterlife in the voracious fog, its cresting gauze and the long tongues lapping her neck and ears and crawling up her nose, but the Gaunt Housewife intervened and folded her into an apron pocket. That’s not true for the boy, whose soul is infected to the bones, and only his ragged clothes and the odd coin remain on the street.

Ivy huddles under her arms, praying for invisibility.

Satisfied with a brand-new ghost in exchange for Ivy—the pick-pocket of a Founding Father’s grave—the Gaunt Housewife and her machine turn for Fog Alley, and the noise of the city resumes.

At dawn, the police will recruit volunteers to search for the lost boy, but Ivy knows he’ll be peering through the green bottle-glass window for all eternity unless he figures out how to follow Mr. Franklin’s ghost. Alone on

the safe gravestone, Ivy hears the trolley calving the fog as it screeches to a stop on its iron rails. Its wires hum.

She slips between the railings. Dread churns through her empty form. But she must harness her bravery for her final sprint to the trolley. If all goes well, it will deliver her to the time before her ghost emerged, before her parents contracted the Spanish Flu.

Already, she's befogged halfway up her legs. She must not slip or falter on the slick sidewalk.

A giant leap and she grabs the trolley handrails to hoist herself inside. She shakes her coins onto the driver's empty seat, and the trolley jerks into motion backward.

Kneeling on the rear seat to face the past, Ivy realizes that the fog ate her shoes, socks, and maybe her toes. If her toes are forever lost, it's the price she's willing to pay for happiness and freedom. The important thing is to prove that Mr. Franklin got it wrong when he said, "Lost time is never found."

She will find her lost time.

She knows that ghosts are immune from the infections and diseases of the living, but the microbes crawling on her pack will accompany her into the past.

In the wheatfield-and-roses paradise of her reclaimed life, she may discover she's the carrier of a new epidemic that will kill her, her parents, and half the city again.



Always an avid reader, ex-academic Cecily Winter is a now full-time writer. She composes tweets, short stories, and juvenile and adult novels that may, fate willing, find homes in actual book covers and libraries. Join her on Twitter @winter\_cecily and visit her at her website <http://Cecilywinter.com> featuring a writing blog, several online pieces to read for free, and a list of her academic work. Recently established with her husband and pets amid the cranberry bogs of New England, she enjoys the teeming wildlife and the adjacent pond with its spectacular sunrises and a pair of nesting swans.



*David Dodd Lee*

“collage sheet 27 DRIFT”

David Dodd Lee's collage work was featured in the latest issue of *The Journal*, along with an interview. It has also appeared in *The Hunger*, *Twyckenham Notes*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Pinball*, *Permafrost*, and *The Indianapolis Review*, among other places, and is forthcoming in *Packingtown Review* and *Watershed Review*.

# *Downward Spiral*

by Clare O'Brien

I know I'm asleep. I know I really should wake up and get on with it. The day. The emails, the phone calls. Feed the cat. Make a stab at the laundry.

But the door looks so inviting. Slightly wrong, displaced in scale and style, out of place in the plasterboard wall of my bedroom. Too ornate. Too small. I'll have to stoop to get through.

So in I go, in my mind at least, into the dream, lucid and aware. I smell the acrid stuffiness of the flight of spiral stairs behind the open door, feel my way in the half-dark along the corridor with its flaking paint and dusty dado rail.

And I find the rooms, one after another. Cavernous bedrooms, each with its high ceiling, its neglected, once-opulent fittings. The mirrored dressing tables under a veil of dust. The big beds with their satin eiderdowns, the closets full of folded linen, the quilted ottomans, the deep, soft carpets. Heavy curtains, but I don't draw them back. Because how can there be windows down here, under the ground? And if there are, what's on the other side?

There's so much space. So many places I could spend time, exploring, hiding, thinking. Why have I never found this place before? Why don't I use it? I could live in a different room every day. Sleep in a different bed every night. No-one would bother me. No-one could even find me. I could spend the rest of my life here, doing what I like. Pleasing myself.

And then I hear the voices.

Other people are wandering this suite of rooms, whispering and murmuring. Male, female, every age, every accent.

I'VE JUST BEEN AFRAID TO GO IN THERE.  
DON'T SHUT MY DOOR. IT'S LYING ON THE  
FLOOR I CAN'T BEAR.

The words are behind me, moving closer. They'll be here at any moment and I'll have to speak to them.

YOU DON'T WANT THE WRONG MOMENT  
TO CATCH YOU, a woman whispers in my right ear.  
THERE'S A VIOLENCE IN THIS PLACE.

I turn my head and now the voices are ahead of me, rushing away, fading into the walls. Dropping into the space beneath my feet. ALL YOUR PATTERNS HAVE GONE. A hubbub of laughter. HERE TODAY, SHE'S GONE TONIGHT.

The sense of freedom and discovery is ebbing. I've made a fatal error. I can't wake up. I'm stuck in this cushioned underworld, cut off and surrounded. HOT NEW HANDS ON THE GAME. The voices are all around me, fractured, moving closer yet never catching up.

I run back into the musty corridor, but now there are no doors. THE SILENCE IS AMPUTATED. I face the wall. Something brushes the nape of my neck.

I CAUGHT HER EATING HERSELF. A child's voice above my head. SURGICAL ENERGY.

I drop to my knees.

I'M GETTING REFRIGERATED, I say. SINGING SWEET IS SWALLOWING.

IT'S GOOD, FRESH MEAT, they reply.

Originally a Londoner, Clare has worked in teaching, journalism, and PR and now lives with her husband, her wolfhound and her cat on the rugged north-west coast of Scotland. Her recent fiction and poetry credits include *Mslxia*, *Northwords Now*, *The London Reader*, *Lunate*, *The Mechanics' Institute Review*, and *Spelk*, and anthologies from The Emma Press, Hedgehog Poetry, and Unimpatient.one. She's working on a first novel, called *Light Switch*.

# *The Caretaker and the Girl Next Door*

by Anushmita Mohanty

The fairy lights twinkled. He was surprised by just how much these electric fireflies lit up a room. They'd been really cheap, only 30 Rs for a 10 metre string, at the odds-and-ends store across the lane. Though flimsy and diminutive, they had clung on to life for years on end—almost as long as he had. He enjoyed this part of the night, when each of the lights in the house had been turned off. The switches were ancient and heavy, carved from brass. He'd lived in 126/72 so long, he knew exactly which light answered to which switch; you can always tell that someone has lived in a house awhile when the switchboards become instinct. A cup of tea at this point would have been nice, just for company, but the lights would have to do.

This was the hour of truce. They'd come to an understanding, him and the house, and let each other alone as long as the sky was pink. When morning came, he knew he'd have to coax the bungalow into waking up, and in return, it would fling simmering resentments at him. Old houses have a way of keeping the darkness in. And

this one had had more than enough time to sit and stew; decades-long pettiness and grievances had combined into an unwholesome soup. The cracked living room wall, where Sunaina had banged the dresser because Rana scored more than she did in a test. The geyser, in permanent malfunction, because everyone thought it was everyone else's responsibility to get it fixed. And then, of course, they died, having taken their last baths in ice-cold water and sanctimonious satisfaction. It would have been kinder, he knew, to let the house go. Suspended between life and death, daily enacting the soul's rift between sleep and awakening—well, no wonder it was cranky.

Still, it could be a little more grateful, considering he spent all day pottering around, tending to its needs. And it was needy, like all old houses are. He was patient. Each morning, he woke with the first crow, and yanked on the rusty chain attached to the tank until water filled the plastic bucket. He swept the floors—not an easy undertaking in a house with *three* floors—and mopped until his bones creaked. Always there were dead snails in corners, which he scooped up on a dustpan and deposited in the dustbin. “Thanks for the gift, old buddy,” he’d chuckle, and the walls would rumble. After the floors were spick and span, he got to the business of making the beds in each of the rooms; purely out of habit, since they were never unmade anymore. Still, he liked smoothing wrinkles in the bedsheets, admiring their floral patterns, folding

blankets. It was important to him that the house was in order by the time the sun came to visit. Sunlight had to find you at your best, or it wouldn't stick, he knew. So the sun shone on a house with a thousand discontents, and an old skeleton bending tenderly over a rose bush.

He'd moved in with mud-encrusted fingers. They'd both been mourning for the same reason: no one would ever love them again. Grief tasted like bile, and the house knew that he wasn't the caretaker it wanted. Why couldn't he lean out of the windows and trill, "It's the pink house, with maroon windows!" to give directions, why couldn't he invite people over and use up all the blankets, why couldn't he befriend the crows? For days, it asked him these questions, as the lights flickered on-off-on-off-on-off, the water gushed down in bucketfuls or not at all, he slipped and fell in a hundred different places, and more dust accumulated than he knew what to do with. Favourite mugs were hurled from the ceiling, carefully preserved saris disappeared from locked closets, and the old fountain pens in the attic-office splattered ink all over fifty-year old suits.

Love, he often said, was caring about someone else's well being. He'd possessed a determination he couldn't fathom later, and well, he'd always been practical. In the beginning, he'd curl up on the windowsill for days on end, watching ice-cream vendors, cricket-playing children, and pillowsmiths with cotton bales who'd fix up your worn-



out pillows for you. Then, one afternoon, he got up, and began dusting. Earnestly, like everything else he did. He dusted for days, planted lemon and jamun seeds, and scattered egg shells on the kitchen counter to keep lizards away. Each week, he washed the bedsheets with a scented fabric conditioner, re-organised the bookshelves, scrubbed a hundred years of soot from old steel pots. The lemon tree grew into a sapling, producing its first lemon, a tiny portable sun. One day a hundred years later, he found that he had to look up at it. By then, his skin had withered. He was lines of negative space against light, and he couldn't leave.

Crow knows that old houses always have carrion. A bungalow this large in Kolkata had enough cousins and real estate agents circling around it, waiting to swoop in and sacrifice it to the altar of a new shopping mall, even if it was in a lane where the light didn't quite reach. It had been simple enough to fend them off: he'd just buried the deed under the lemon seedling. A house couldn't be sold without it's deed, and the deed had long disintegrated into soil, metamorphosing into bright yellow lemons. The lemon-garden was really the heart of the matter. Wispy stems bearing heavy, blood-tomatoes propped up by little sticks. The scent of jasmine mixing with freshly washed linens, stark white against the purple sky. Marigolds and petunias that survived the hottest of summers, and sensible little beds of cabbage and cauliflower, strategically aided

with fertiliser. The garden ought to grow considering how much time he'd spent wool gathering here in his apron. The garden ought to grow considering how much love he'd buried into the soil. The sickness had been sudden, and he'd wished he could conduct someone else's pain into his own body. If he planted enough seeds into the ground, he knew he could draw out all the flesh it concealed, and a bone body would dance out of the topsoil. From under the rose bushes, where he'd seen her for the last time.

Anushmita Mohanty lives in Ahmedabad, and is a literature student who recently graduated from the University of Oxford. She enjoys reading women's writing, fantasy, and is currently studying the history of print in Odisha.



*David Dodd Lee*

“collage sheet 27 THE LODGER”

David Dodd Lee's collage work was featured in the latest issue of *The Journal*, along with an interview. It has also appeared in *The Hunger*, *Twyckenham Notes*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Pinball*, *Permafrost*, and *The Indianapolis Review*, among other places, and is forthcoming in *Packingtown Review* and *Watershed Review*.

*Growing Malcontent--53*

# *The Malum Within*

by Louise Heywood

The prickly itch upon my skin was the warning that I never saw coming.

Whenever I would climb the stairs into the darkness, you were there waiting to suffocate me. I would awaken in the dead of night no longer in my bed, the walls of the corner of my room growing around me. My sister's petrified eyes are burned into my brain from when I awoke her laughing manically inside her wardrobe—I was your puppet.

A silent scream escaped my mouth when, in the safety of daylight, I looked down upon my slumbering body. I told myself *it's just a dream*, but I felt the cold ceiling pressing against my back and I caught a glimpse of you, the deofol that had latched onto me; an all-consuming shadow as dark as the abyss, seeped into the cracks of my skin.

Infiltrated.

Infested.

Infected.

I gain a moment of clarity as it leers out at the  
crepuscular sky through my eyes. A sudden flash of purple  
illuminates the horizon and I hear a hollow *clack* in the  
middle of my head. I feel your constant scratching and  
tapping across the walls of my mind. I see you,  
Shadowpicth, with your eyes of fire and jagged teeth that  
ooze rotten blood. I see you, and now I have come for you.

Louise is a UK based writer from Manchester, she loves fantasy, horror  
and visual poetry. Louise had her first piece 'DARK' published by  
*Street Cake Magazine* in December 2020—her second piece  
'MONOZYGOTIC' will also be featured in *Street Cake Magazine* in  
their upcoming February 2021 issue.

# *Food Poisoning*

by Kavan P. Stafford

[trigger warning: suicide]

The witch went out on the Tuesday night. It had to be the Tuesday night because the moon was full. A lot of people thought witches were creatures of the night but that wasn't true. They were creatures of the heavens, of heavenly bodies. The moon was just as important as the sun. And just as there were some things which had to be collected sun-warmed, there were others that could only be picked under the rich light of a full moon. Most potions needed both.

Not this one though. This potion only needed the objects of the night. It was a potion to fight the darkness, the sly, whispering voices inside her head. Potions to cure the darkness need to be of the darkness. You fight the thing with the thing itself.

She stepped out into her garden gasping as the icy cold fingers of the moon and the night caressed her naked skin, bringing goosebumps to the surface and turning every breath into streams of steam. She steeled herself against the cold, stepping from bare foot to bare foot on

the dew-damp grass until it was bearable. Any good potion required a sacrifice of some kind, even if it was only a sacrifice of comfort.

When the chill on her body settled into a mild ache, she set about her task, collecting all she needed and depositing it into the plastic bag she carried. A handful of grass, sweet-smelling and charged by the moonlight, twenty thorns from the rose bushes, picked carefully to avoid being pricked. She lifted the stones that lined the house and selected two of the plumpest slugs, squishing and rolling their fleshy bodies between her fingers before depositing them in the bag.

Finally (the cold was almost unbearable now and her breath was coming out in quick little hitches) she went to the corner where the neighbour's cat, a bad tempered tabby, liked to defecate. She found one of the small piles of faeces and sliced a bit off the end of one with her fingernails. She picked it up delicately, struggling to contain her disgust, and placed it in the bag. Then, taking big steps to avoid touching the freezing ground as much as possible, she went to the back door and back inside.

She did not bother redressing. The heat of the house was enough. She left her clothes in the heap on the ground and switched on the kettle. While it boiled she transferred her moon-charged treasures to the measuring jug. She regarded them all piled inside it. They did not look appetising. But medicine never is.

The kettle finished boiling and she added the water to the jug. The mixture immediately went a shade of murky brown. The steam rolled up through the air and warmed her face, making her wrinkle her nose at the smell.

She got a spoon from the drawer and stirred rapidly, clinking it against the edges, making sure that everything that could dissolve—the slugs, the faeces—did so. Then, just like that, it was ready. This potion required no spells. The ingredients alone were powerful enough. She took the measuring jug to her little kitchen table and sat down.

The witch drank her potion slowly, steeling herself against the taste and against the sharp stabs of the thorns going down her throat. She drank it looking out at the moonlit garden and, when she was done, she burped unpleasantly and coughed. The cough brought up something wet and when she touched her lips with her fingertips and brought them up to her eyes she realised it was not phlegm but blood. Blood was okay though. Blood was powerful. At the time of her bleeding she always made the strongest potions.

She sat there, still and serene, until the coughs became more and more frequent and the spots of blood became gouts. After a particularly painful spasm she looked down at the tabletop, dismayed at the puddle of red on the wood. That would leave a stain.



They found her after her work phoned the police to say she hadn't been heard from in days. The autopsy revealed the thorns and the wounds caused by them. The cause of death was ruled a likely suicide but nobody could be sure as she hadn't left a note. She couldn't. A true witch never needs to write anything down. Spells and potions could be dangerous in the wrong hands.

Her mother was interviewed by the local paper but Brexit bumped the story and it was never published. Her mother was pleased by this. She told her friends that her daughter died of food poisoning. After all, hadn't she embarrassed her enough when she was alive? Her friends were sympathetic and, the death fresh in their minds, were especially careful to cook meat all the way through for a few weeks.

Kavan P. Stafford is a 26-year-old author and poet based in Glasgow, Scotland. His work has appeared in *Unpublishable*, *The Common Breath*, *The Sock Drawer*, *Beir Bua*, and others. Most of his work is set in and around his home city. For a day job he works in Glasgow's Mitchell Library



*Hailey Hudak*

“Limbo”

Hailey, 28 years old, from Lynchburg VA, currently living in Long Island  
NY.

3moon--6o

# *Audio Graveyard*

by Blake Rathie

Douglas Moore was a quiet man who lived a quiet life. He valued peace, and above all, silence. After living a long life of hard work, he moved to a spot famous for how soundless it was. This house was miles away from any commonly used road, and as it was geographically located in a walled off ditch, the wisp of a stray wind rarely if ever touched it. The caw from a passing bird never disturbed Douglas's tranquillity, as if nature itself feared this silent spot not so much as a single blade of grass could be seen from Douglas's doorstep.

What is thought of as silence is never really that. In what is generally considered a silent room there are countless tiny sounds—a ceiling fan's rattle, a stray breeze, restless shifting of clothes, light breathing, a snuffle, or far off cars. While it may seem close, it isn't. True silence is an extremely unnatural phenomenon.

Douglas grew up in a family of musicians. Always practising, always playing, rarely stopping; he attributed them to his auditory preferences. Long after moving out of his childhood home, and nearly a decade into his career as a taxation accountant, Douglas stumbled upon the existence of sensory deprivation tanks. The ease and peace

which he found in these spaces created something of an obsession. Believing him to have some sort of kink, the tank workers quickly began to look at him with loathing disgust.

He spent all the time he could in those dark voids: weekends, after work, before work, and on particularly bad days—during his breaks. A session of 30 minutes was all he was allowed at any one time and each cost him more than what he earnt in an hour.

As years and many trips went by, Douglas found that the tanks had stopped seeming as quiet. Floating in darkness, he could hear the water slosh, the muffled chatter of those outside, his own breathing and heartbeat. His frustration reached a peak and a small business lost its greatest patron. Douglas's search for something better led him to the 'Institute of Acoustic Physics.' The researchers in this wonderful place had created rooms so quiet that they came close to reaching negative decibels. He promised to let them run all the experiments they wished if they just let him in.

Within the researchers' foam-covered room, Douglas felt what he had experienced during his first trip into a tank. It was a peace he hadn't had in many years and his eyes began to water. With a smile so wide that it stretched his sagging skin, he sat in the middle of this clinical room and relaxed.

According to these researchers, the longest anyone had stayed in such a room was 45 minutes. Douglas managed hours without even the slightest worry, though he could understand why others were unsettled; this space made past tanks seem as loud as rock concerts. The only thing that drove him from the room was the call of nature and bodily requirements, otherwise he could've spent the rest of his days in there.

After little time in this room, past subjects reported feeling as if they were going crazy. The researchers explained that their brains weren't coping well and responded to the lack of stimuli by creating their own hallucinated sounds. Douglas never reported any such things and continued going to that room until their funding went dry.

Through connections to these researchers, Douglas discovered the spot he would eventually call home. Though before it became his home, he had to work an extra five years to pay off and full furnish that house with the same sound-absorbent foam which lined the researchers' special room.

The star-filled sky was so devoid of light pollution that some nights there was more light than darkness in the sky, and sometimes he swore that he could hear them, burning and exploding an unfathomable distance away.

In the mornings Douglas walked laps around the house and the rest he spent reading. He always read at least three books going. Stacks of them laid in bundled piles throughout the house; a by-product of a lifetime's worth of accumulation which he finally had the time and peace to enjoy.

It wasn't as quiet as the room the researchers had built, but it was quieter for longer. He woke up and went to sleep in silence. Now the most disruptive thing he'd hear were the occasional bouts of rain. What once soothed him to sleep now stood out so violently that on the nights it did storm, he couldn't sleep, especially if there was thunder.

Months passed, and the gap between storms grew until it was apparent that there was a drought. Without any rainfall, the noises he made became the only sounds he heard, and after listening to nothing for such a long time, Douglas thought that he had finally begun to hear the things which had driven others from the researchers' room. A sound deeper than silence.

This unheard noise grew louder as the air grew denser. It wasn't like anything he had ever heard and that terrified him. It was so quiet that he could hear the silence, actually hear it. Douglas had heard something that wasn't meant to be heard, and that's how it began. Just before falling asleep, he'd hear footsteps, and he'd be woken to the sound of rainfall, only to run outside and see a

cloudless sky. A few times he even caught the sound of a power drill and the echoes of music.

Douglas began to ponder: *Where does sound go when it ceases?*

He wondered such things more and more as he continued to be plagued by the faint echoes of sounds once heard. These auditory ghosts grew in number and in volume—his silence had been infected.

A loud cough woke Douglas up, and he knew that it was in fact his own from when he'd been sick three weeks earlier. The closed door creaked open, though it remained closed, rainless raindrops fell, and a weeks' worth of footsteps pattered through the hallways. It seemed to be getting worse, as the impossible noises from the past month were now accompanied by sounds from before he moved in. Sounds of construction rattled and shook the walls and echoed old conversations between builders chattered ceaselessly. They must have feared the silence, as they surely fed it all they could.

Something had burst, and sound had rapidly begun to fill the vacuum created by such an immense silence. Douglas heard screams that must have come from the subjects who the researchers brought to this place. Is this what they heard? He wondered if he was simply going insane. He didn't feel insane, he felt old and frustrated by all the noise. He envied a few of his long dead friends, if he

hadn't been blessed with such good hearing, he could have just turned his hearing aid off.

"When will this end?" Douglas asked a room filled with similarly past asked aloud questions.

Would it end with hearing the sound of the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs? Would his ears drums burst? Would he hear the Big Bang? How far would these echoes go? They seemed to be accelerating. If there is such a being, would he hear the voice of God? Much of what he hadn't believed throughout his life had started to seem much more plausible.

The noise was all around him, and something had changed again. He couldn't see it, but he knew it was there. He would've left then, he would've left much sooner, but this was the house he wanted to die in. He had supplied it with as much food, books, and water that he could possibly consume in the little time he had left on this world. Douglas never wanted to see or hear another person again; all his family and friends were long dead and all he wanted was silence, but he couldn't even have that.

In a room filled with more sound than Douglas had ever heard, he could feel it, not in the noise it made, but in the empty quiet pockets it left. This thing seemed so beautiful to Douglas, it was the personification of silence here to set things right and fix what he had broken. To bring him the peace he wanted so desperately. The room



grew quieter as it crept closer. It ate through more and more layers of sound as it made its way to Douglas, silencing him, and everything else, forever.

Blake Rathie is a 2nd year university student studying at James Cook University, majoring in English and Journalism. Blake is working towards a career in writing and editing though fills his time with an array of projects from soapmaking to birdwatching. Follow his latest projects at [thearcadianprojects](#) on Instagram.

# *At the Edge of the Garden*

by Kathryn Hemmann

When I was ten years old, all my friends had trampolines. I wanted a trampoline too, but my mother was opposed to the idea. One of my cousins decided to jump onto a trampoline from the roof of his house, breaking his arm and becoming a neighborhood hero in the process. My mother used my cousin's behavior as a justification for keeping our yard trampoline-free, but I understood that she didn't want her garden to be invaded.

My family lived on the outskirts of a pine forest bordering a small town to the south of a regional city. The property would later be sold, cleared, and incorporated into a subdivision, but our house was fairly isolated when we lived there. Since I had no one to play with and nothing better to do, I spent the summer roaming the forest with my dog while pretending to be a dinosaur. After a boy was shot in a hunting accident only a mile away from our house, my mother came to the reluctant conclusion that keeping me and the dog in the yard on a trampoline would probably be safer than letting us run wild in the woods.

The trampoline dominated my mother's garden, as she had known it would, but this was more than likely a

relief for her. She had neglected to do any weeding that summer, and the plants had gone feral. The trampoline blocked the view of the overgrown tangle of the rose bushes and ornamental shrubs that she used to keep meticulously maintained. My dog would sometimes disappear into the thistles and milkweed that grew as tall as my waist at the edge of the yard and emerge with his coat covered in burs, and my mother would pretend not to notice.

My parents' marriage had turned sour. They fought after dinner, so I tried to be in the house as little as possible. I would go outside to jump on the trampoline every evening. It was soothing, almost hypnotic. I would position myself in the middle of the black canvas tarp and bounce in place as I watched the sun set over the pine trees standing just beyond the garden. I would hop off the trampoline and head back inside once the sky had gone completely dark, but twilight tends to linger in that part of the world, especially during summer. Sometimes I would be on the trampoline for more than an hour, letting my mind draft into various fantasies of prehistoric life while my dog barked at the rabbits that sniffed around the patch of soil where my mother used to grow carrots.

One evening, just as the sun had begun to sink below the tops of the pines, I saw a figure slink out of the dim forest underbrush. There wasn't enough light to see clearly,

but I was convinced it was a person. My dog was somewhere else, so I was alone with the shadow.

I was struck by a sense of terror, but I couldn't stop jumping on the trampoline. My body moved mechanically as the blob of darkness made its way across the yard. Eventually it halted, raised the stalks of its arms, and slowly waved at me. I kept jumping, and it kept waving. It seemed as though it were trying to get my attention, but I refused to acknowledge its presence. If I looked at it directly, the stalemate would be broken, and I would be eaten. I was only a dinosaur in my mind, after all, and I knew that I was no match for whatever had come out of the trees.

As the sun disappeared, the shadow sank back into the forest. I hopped off the trampoline and ran inside as quickly as my shaking legs could carry me.

The next day, when the sun was fully back in the sky, I ventured out to the line of trees beyond the garden, but I didn't find anything out of the ordinary. The thick mat of pine needles covering the ground lay undisturbed.

Kathryn Hemmann is in love with ancient ruins and forgotten mysteries.

They live inside a maze of bookshelves somewhere in Philadelphia.

You didn't hear this from me, but I think they write a lot of fanfiction.

They also curate a small museum of monsters and flowers on Twitter as @kathrynthehuman.

# *The Clamouring Flock*

by Eleanor Dickenson

At first there was only one.

I moved into the house in the springtime. It was a beautiful little house, even in disrepair, and I crossed my fingers, hoping for good weather. But the rain did come and the roof leaked. Every pan and bowl I possessed collected water. I drew chalk circles around them so that I could show the roof man where the worst leaks were.

I found an abandoned birdbath in the garden, and when the sunshine came I hauled it upright and filled it. Later that day I saw the first rook, perched on the stone rim, shaking drops of water from its pristine black feathers. It drank, and watched me directing tradesmen.

The second one came several days later. I wasn't even sure it was a different bird, until I saw them both perched on a rotten roof beam, cawing to each other. When the roofer's van arrived they took flight, circling the house before vanishing into the woods.

Later that day the roofer finished, and told me the scaffolder would be coming next day to take the tower down. 'Them birds'll have to watch him instead. Five of

them, sitting on the chimney all afternoon watching me. Creepy.' I paid him and he waved as he left.

Next day the scaffolder cursed. Every time he turned round there was another rook perched on the grey poles. He finished the job by lunchtime, his van throwing up a shower of gravel as he took the turning into the road too quickly.

My first night sleeping in the upper bedroom should have been a victory, but my sleep was cut short. The cawing echoing down the chimney woke me at dawn. They were on the roof.

It was summer by then and dawn was early. Rather than being reinvigorated, I became hollow-eyed and pale. I was never allowed to sleep past dawn, and if I went to bed early they would start again.

The last tradesman came in August. It had taken me a long time to find a sweep. He was about sixty, and his grizzled grey hair was cropped short. He wore rimless spectacles, perched on his long nose, and he squinted at the rooks. There must have been thirty of them, some on the roof, others settling on the ladders on the roof of his black van.

'Ah.' He smiled. 'Don't worry, you'll be alright once we've found the missing one.'

He gathered his equipment and, whistling, went to work. In the bedroom chimney his brush dislodged a

cloud of soot and a bird skeleton rattled into the grate, with a few remaining black feathers still clinging to delicate soot-stained bones.

‘You go bury it in the garden, miss. Make sure they see you do it. Then they’ll take care of you. You’ll be one of the flock then, see?’

The rooks were silent whilst I buried the skeleton in the flowerbed. They all watched. That night they let me sleep.

Eleanor is a Yorkshire-based writer. Her interests include gothic fiction and classic murder mysteries, and Greek and Roman myth. Recent credits include the runner-up prize in the Heffers Tales of the Weird competition.

# Scratch

by Shell St. James

There were scratches on the inside of the basement door. Cassie and Mrs. Newman, the realtor, stared down at them in silence for a moment. Deep, raw grooves showed a lighter color in the dark oak door, reaching a height of almost two feet.

Mrs. Newman recovered quickly. “Oh, I guess the previous owners had a large dog...” She tittered in that annoying way she had. Cassie just nodded. *Of course, that’s what it was.*

She buried the incident in the back of her mind, remembering it now as she swung that same door open a month later, as a first-time home owner. She was intent on braving the cellar, which was rustic in a not-so-charming way, possessing stone walls and a dirt floor. A workman was coming out today to install her internet and phone lines, and it seemed prudent to reacquaint herself with the location of the breaker box.

She stared nervously into the gloom. The weak light that filtered in from the cellar’s small windows seemed to be the only source of illumination. She flipped the light switch on and off and on again. Nothing happened. She



had a vague memory of a naked bulb with a pull chain located in the center of the large cellar. *Had it burned out, then? Great.*

Braving the pouring rain, she retrieved a flashlight from her car and returned, standing at the threshold, playing the beam over the shadowy stairs. She'd been down there only once with Mrs. Newman, on a bright, sunny day, and it had seemed much less intimidating. The bulkhead doors located at the far end had been flung wide open, letting in a good bit of natural light. Don't be such a chicken, she scolded herself. *You're a grown woman.*

She took a few steps and reached for the handrail as the wood creaked under her weight, recoiling in disgust as she encountered a spider web. She played the light over the unfinished walls, grimacing at the profusion of webs.

Even more unnerving, the back of the staircase was open, adding a surreal element as her flashlight beam skipped between the treads. The light seemed to reflect a shiny wetness on the dirt beneath the stairs. A leak?

Dismayed, she continued carefully down the stairs. Soon, she noticed a rank odor growing stronger, emanating from the gloomy depths. Something dead... A mental image of a flooded cellar and drowned rats popped into her head and she stopped short, too creeped out to continue.

The doorbell sounded upstairs, followed by heavy pounding, and she quickly turned away, grateful for the excuse to delay investigating. She'd come back down with the workman. It would be less intimidating.

As Cassie climbed the staircase, the flashlight beam bobbed between the treads and she thought she saw movement, there in the mud. An irrational wave of panic overtook her, causing her to stumble and scamper quickly up the stairs

Reaching the top, she slammed the door and leaned against it, consumed with a child-like certainty that something had been chasing her. Catching her breath, she began to feel foolish. *How ridiculous. She was an adult. It was just a dark cellar. Nothing was down there.*

More pounding. She hurried down the hall. A phone company van was parked in the driveway. Opening the door, she found a man wearing a silver-hooded raincoat with green reflective stripes, regarding her with a sour expression on his face.

"Ms. Mullen?" he asked, flashing a lanyard with the phone company logo as rain dripped from his hood.

"Yes," Cassie affirmed, opening the door wide. "I'm sorry, come in out of the rain."

She led him through the kitchen and stopped at the cellar door, suddenly remembering the light didn't work.

“I just noticed the bulb burned out,” she explained, opening the door. “I’ve got—”

The serviceman flipped the light switch, and a weak yellow glow permeated the gloom. Cassie stared, surprised.

“Oh, ok...” she said, frowning. *Maybe a loose wire?* The man started down the stairs. Cassie began to follow him and then realized she’d left the flashlight on the hall table. She hesitated. She’d feel better if she had a flashlight, especially since she wanted to see the extent of the water problem.

“Ah... I’ll be right there to show you the breaker box,” she called.

“No rush,” he replied without stopping. “I can find it.”

Cassie grabbed the flashlight from the hallway table, but then noticed a puddle on the hardwood floor. She detoured to find a towel and mopped it up. Delayed, she hurried back to the basement door, reminding herself not to grab the handrail.

The stairs creaked as she descended. She looked around but didn’t spot the workman. The paltry light left most of the cellar in shadow.

“Hello?” she called, avoiding breathing through her nose. The smell was foul, and she tried not to gag. As she

stepped off the last stair, her foot skidded in the mud, causing her to windmill her arms to keep her balance. She caught herself at the last minute, barely managing to stay on her feet.

The light went out.

Cassie fumbled for her flashlight, switching it on and zigzagging it around, a panicky feeling causing her throat to tighten.

“Hello?” she called louder. “Mr... um... phone company guy?” Her voice held a note of panic. She pointed the flashlight at the wall that held the breaker box, catching it in the beam. The workman was not there. She passed the light once more around the cellar, and something glinted in the far corner...like eyes.

*Screw this.* Cassie quickly turned to climb the steps, grabbing for the handrail, spiderwebs be damned. A voice came out of the darkness.

“Hey there, little lady.”

Shining her light in the direction of the voice, one foot still poised on the bottom tread, she saw the workman, his silver raincoat catching the flashlight beam as he walked out of the shadows.

“I guess your light has a loose wire. I can check it out for you, but I need to ask you about the breaker box.” He stopped, obviously waiting for Cassie to join him.

She hesitated, then stepped back into the cellar, gingerly starting forward. A movement from under the stairs caught in her peripheral vision. She stopped in her tracks, swinging the beam in that direction.

A deep depression was barely discernible in the shadows, the blackness at the center gleaming wetly. The light illuminated the edges of the crater, and she watched, horrified, as it seemed to bubble and ooze. *What the hell was that?*

“It appears you have a water problem,” the voice of the workman sounded, close... too close.

Cassie jumped, swiveling her light back around. The beam hit him square on the chest, the orange reflective stripes on his coat seeming unnaturally bright in the gloom. She backed up a step, her heart hammering. *Didn't his jacket have green stripes?*

The door at the top of the stairs suddenly slammed shut and she whirled around. The creature beside her emitted a chuckle, a strange, guttural sound that ended with a gnashing of teeth like a rabid dog. It froze the blood in her veins.

Spinning back, Cassie darted the beam up at his face, and screamed as it reflected off feral cat eyes, yellow and glowing. He snarled, revealing monstrous teeth, wickedly long and sharp, and knocked the light from her hand, slamming her down into the dirt.

The flashlight rolled and then stopped; the light now fully illuminating the scene beneath the stairs.

The workman's arm extended from the pit, the reflective sleeve of his raincoat spattered with blood, his pale hand seeming to accuse the monster who impersonated him.

Sickened, Cassie saw the dark center of the pit was a swirling pool of carnage; bones gleamed white in the flashlight beam, while black muck sucked everything down in a bubbling quicksand from hell.

With a strength born of sheer terror, Cassie twisted away from the beast, struggling to her feet and racing for the stairs, slipping in the mud, her breath ragged and gasping. She heard the creature laugh behind her, enjoying the chase as she stumbled up the stairs. She fell to her knees and began to crawl frantically.

He hooked her ankle as she reached the top, his claws piercing the leather of her boot, and held her captive, not yet ready to reel her in. Cassie screamed until she was hoarse, pounding and clawing at the door desperately, her nails shredding as she added her own marks to the harrowing testament of past victims.

"...a lovely home... foreclosed...vacant for a while..." Mrs. Newman's voice drifted down to the cellar as high heeled steps clicked on the floor above. The door at the top of the stairs creaked open, followed by a long pause.

“Oh... I guess the previous owners had a large dog.”  
An annoying titter sounded, and the door shut.

The beast waited.

Shell St. James is a Massachusetts native living in an 1895 farmhouse in rural North Carolina, with her musician soulmate, feline muse, and a benevolent ghost. She spends entirely too much time taming a murder of crows with gifts of peanuts. Her work has been published in *La Presa Literary Journal*, *The Periodical Forlorn*, and *The Spectre Review*, with an upcoming story in Scare Street Publishing's new horror anthology, *Night Terrors 12*.. Connect with her on Twitter @shellstjames1 and find out more at [www.shellstjames.com](http://www.shellstjames.com).

# *Becoming*

by Iona Rule

I can smell it. Beneath the foetid stench of historic fear and lust, I smell the tangy musk of its fur. It prowls at the edge of my sight, circling me slowly. The floor is littered with the remnants of those who came before. Their paleness lighting my path as they slide and crack beneath my feet with the fragility of eggshells. The air is dank and the darkness jostles against my body leaving its clammy fingerprints on my exposed skin.

I always knew I'd be one of the chosen. A tradition spanning decades, decreeing that at each full moon a woman is to be given to the creature in the mountains. A chaste maiden, pure and innocent, had been the tithe, but now that doesn't seem to matter. They only give those they wish to lose: the sullied, the trouble makers, those who wouldn't submit, or submitted too soon. I could never hold my tongue and now my words have made the ropes that snare me.

In the gloom, I hear it. The scratching of its claws on the stone floor, scattering my sisters' bones. It stalks towards me, a hulking mass of muscle and fangs. In the dim light, I watch the beads of saliva running down its jowls. With each rasping breath, I can hear the moans and



cries of the others, that have been long since swallowed. It reaches out its paw to caress my thighs and stomach, groaning its desire. The hands are softer than I imagined. I could give in, submit to its hunger and let my body merge with its own. I could let it ravage me and eventually consume my flesh. It would be easy.

But I won't.

I step into the gap between us. The creature expects terror and submission. It doesn't expect this.

As I reach up towards it, I kiss its lips, at the same time as I plunge my knife between its ribs.

The pained howl echoes long after the beast is dead.

My tears wash the guilt away while I skin it, and as the flesh turns to dust. I raise the pelt and throw the bloody cloak around my shoulders. It ripples and pulses, attempting to fuse to my form. The strength pours into me, and savage desires form inky globules shimmering and coalescing across my skin's surface. The darkness is intoxicating, it would be so tempting to surrender and drown in its poisonous depths. I could let it own me. But I fight it. I will be the mistress of my fate and take the power but not become the monster.

I will bide my time and wait for the next moons. They will bring me their daughters, sisters, wives and I will show them how we become free.

Iona Rule lives in the Scottish Highlands and still resents her mother for never letting her attend ballet lessons, as she is sure she'd be a famous ballerina by now. Instead she works as a vet who writes weird stories, some of which can be found in *Funny Pearls*, *Perhappened*, and *Popshot*.





*blume*

“yt-kryllypyn-yt-kryl”

born on the 29th june of 1979 in schrobenhausen, germany; lives in  
augsburg, germany. has studied forestry, specialised in education  
and works in a kindergarten. poetry, on the other hand, is his life and  
love. this determines his everyday living. [www.blumenleere.de](http://www.blumenleere.de)

*Poetry*

# *Two Poems*

by Emma Jean Hermacinski

*hello there*

let me begin by making this much  
most clear to you, dear.  
i have risen up from dozens of ashy, fallen  
peaks adorned with the smiles of betrayers.  
i've faced itemizations, trials upon high  
[switch slide slip bitch it's storytime]  
we sat down to munch on homophobia,  
you told me love is blind because she apologized  
when lady justice gouged out her eyes.  
you acted as if eyes were beads on a necklace,  
tossed and thrifted and questioned  
until they laid eggs as a charity effort,  
a consolation prize to your loneliness.  
we munched on the liminal latency  
of far-too-late realizations  
and the dichotomy of thermometers—  
landlords occupying periodic residencies  
towering above their tax bracket.  
[drop it down story's done silence seals gums up]

sit down with me, my dear,  
and look at my beady baubles  
so that they may perceive you  
in the ways i spectate would impact me  
with a truth far greater than newton's ugliest lie.  
he told me that love is blind, but so am i,  
justly wandering with naught but safety pins  
as excuses for sight.



*look at me*

and tell me your infected critiques  
for i am a woman of marble, too weak  
to wield chisels on her own.  
unravel me in the way you'd bite into a tangerine  
only to realize its smiling skin lied  
for i, in fact, am filled with seeds.  
if you pick at my mouth, you'll feel them pinch,  
poking from my unkempt gums.  
search for meaning behind my knees,  
cradles of mud on field-strolling fridays,  
as if memorization of each muscle holds reasons  
deeper than the warmth of a name.  
find the holy coins within my ears and unleash  
[the part of] me that believes magic's fingers  
trace the outline of your face.  
sit me down for high tea and instruct me,  
without ambiguity,  
that i am of daisy petals and scorpion venom,  
anteaten biscuits and winter waltzes.

draw truths on my shoulder,  
so that they may mark me without shattering  
[my hazy, servile mind]  
so that i may return in partial undress,  
a zoomed-out camera my chosen weapon,  
and learn how to crack elegantly,  
to melt my fragile neurons into a frothy bisque  
of ordinal numbers, washed down with haste  
in favor of cleansing my palate  
with a calculated fracture of confidence.

emma jean hermacinski is a sixteen-year-old new writer from zionsville,  
indiana. she attends school in wallingford, connecticut, where she  
can often be found by the campus's polluted creek scribbling her  
poetry on a board she fished out of there. outside of poetry, emma  
enjoys crusading against capitalization, reading travelogues and  
spanish-language magical realism, and cuddling her cavapoo, lola.

# *Ancient*

by Sarika Jaswani

Finger on  
planchette  
I conjure  
ghost of my Ancient  
Thin as a haunt  
she levitates  
comes to  
sit across an Ouija board  
Mirroring  
Guilt layered in eons  
she slumps heavy a sag on shoulders  
Insightful a spark  
still bright of her oracle wisdom  
Shaking her head  
she places a finger on my lips shushes....me says  
I am still waiting to unburden  
Questions are a burden unwieldy  
Fluidity of life nebulous

to be boxed in alphabets & numbers  
cede a submission  
hand an obedience  
waiver a release to onerous flow  
She fades carrying trunk  
of insecurities  
leaving a promise  
I'll land on my two feet

Sarika Jaswani is a crochet artist, art tutor, writer of children's stories, and philanthropist who passionately reads & writes poetry.

Published poet on 'Tide Rise Tide Falls'

Also on Medium with ACG & Scrittura.

# *Upholden Unhurt*

by Hannah Ingeborg

herzblut

to write something real  
is to twist a finger in your gut  
peel away at the inside  
reach your claws up to  
untangle  
your stringy mess of a brain

wrench the ache from your chest  
punch it out through your pen

juice your heart

drink the pulp

Hannah Ingeborg is an Irish/Danish writer with a fascination for French poetry. She spends her time grappling with the question 'where is home?' and hoping one day she'll wake up and realise she's there.  
You can find her on twitter @hannah\_ingeborg

# *Holy Grail*

by Brian Jerrold Koester

The canopic jar for the heart  
of Satan still in the basement

Will always be empty  
I didn't want it

I tell time by the lilies  
of the valley

It doesn't matter  
if the world ends

Take your strange hand  
off my shoulder

No more fights  
that never end

Let me show you my skill  
at Russian roulette

Across the grain  
of gray teak

Light years run from one line  
to the next

From time out of mind  
I fell through the stars

The blood in the chalice  
is always your own

Brian Jerrold Koester is a Pushcart Prize nominee and a *Best of the Net Anthology* nominee. His collection is titled *What Keeps Me Awake* (Silver Bow Publishing) and his chapbook is called *Bossa Nova* (River Glass Books). His work has appeared in *Agni*, *Streetlight Magazine*, *Delmarva Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Louisiana Literature*, and elsewhere. He lives in Lexington, Massachusetts and has been a freelance cellist.

# *Another Haunted AirBNB*

by Anna E. Fullmer

Last night we brought down the house.  
Night two, I sing *Without You*.

You always drink our luck. Long sleeves  
on a ninety degree Savannah night—why  
argue with you when you're like this?

Talk you into food, set you up in the chair,  
drop your legs on the ottoman.

Find the biggest bowl in the cupboard.  
Like the good old days. We've been doing this  
too long. You're gone. You can't stop

talking—*this town's haunted*.

*There's a ghost on the porch. Sherman  
didn't burn this city to the ground*

*It's still out there under the Spanish moss.*

*The ghost who didn't burn—*

You hand off your fear like it's a bottle to swig  
and pass out. I stare into the courtyard, sipping.



Anna E. Fullmer is a Library Assistant at Cleveland Public Library in the Youth Department, slinging story times and songs about the ABCs.

She sings in a band and misses playing shows. She writes songs, poems, and to-do lists. Her work has appeared in *The Daily Drunk*, *FEED*, and *Not Deer Magazine*. She offers editorial services for *Versification's THE REJECTS*. Twitter @anna\_fullmer

# *A Figure Of Speech*

by J Archer Avary

let the soul-searching begin  
a cleansing ritual wholesome and protracted  
this performative self-autopsy  
buoyant like helium  
you should feel lighter already  
under the weight of this therapeutic embrace

survey these dismal surroundings  
so bereft of life's essence  
pills left un-swallowed on the nightstand  
streaky fingerprints on dusty window panes  
framed photos of the estranged children  
scenes noxious with tangible regret

amass your armies at the gates of the mind  
its depths must be plumbed  
mountaintop removal

a full-scale excavation of memory  
relieve of yourself this cumbersome burden  
pain is the only pathway to health

ignore not these throwaway malapropisms  
death is a figure of speech  
fight it off with tantrum fists  
huff and puff and blow down its house  
harness the bombast inert in you  
a spark to light this briefest of candles

Archer Avary (he/him) lives on a tiny island in the English Channel where  
he edits Sledgehammer Lit. Twitter: @j\_archer\_avary

# *Eve Rewrites Genesis*

by Kirsten Reneau

In the beginning,  
the real beginning,  
we were hungry.

*Want* was the first fully human feeling; it is my birthright  
to desire, to need, to have an open palm,  
a gaping mouth.

I didn't have to be tricked. I wanted it.

You named me "Eve" which is to say  
you named me to live

What is living without this? Let Uriel stand watch.  
Let the thunder come.

If we were always destined to fall,  
at least we fell together.

After we revealed naked in the  
sticky heat of summer –

after we swallowed the newly created heavens whole –  
after we realized the emptiness perfection  
    had created in our stomachs -

His lips tasted like apples and his hands felt  
like a tree where the bark has been scraped off;  
tasted like honeydew sap and spring.

His tongue pressed inside of me like  
Eden was hidden in my legs, no longer lost  
to us and our mortal tendencies

The galaxies dripped  
down his  
lower lip  
down  
his chin,  
the solar system collected in the divot  
    of his neck and I lost myself  
trying to drink the darkness back inside me.  
    We declared it the first black

hole and loved it for its lack,  
the way it could take but was never satisfied

Kirsten Reneau is a writer living in New Orleans. Her work has previously appeared in *The Threepenny Review*, *Hobart*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, and others.



*Fabrice B. Poussin*

“Alone”

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

# *2 Poems*

by Veronica Jarboe



*the sounds of being cursed*

for the first time  
even the sound of my breathing, the air  
going in and out of my lungs  
isn't as comforting as it once was.  
i find myself reminiscing of days  
never had and dreams never held

my mother and i are convinced  
the women in our line are cursed  
never succeeding beyond  
a certain point

maybe if i close my eyes  
perhaps i'll hear the whooshing of  
my blood like the ocean in a shell

is that what feeling cursed sounds like?  
so normal

so *human*

we held each other for a moment,  
my mother and i,  
at least we are fortunate to have this  
always this  
our one constant is one another

we just have to hope and combine together  
what little luck she and i both have  
and make it be enough  
to finally prove ourselves wrong  
how we wish to be wrong

*polaroids*

my grandmother is a faded polaroid,  
my mother a current picture  
and i am a photo that is yet to be taken

and we are all holding hands together  
trying desperately not to let go

Veronica Jarboe is a Northern California resident, and her previously  
published works include "Mattress" published in an anthology of  
collected poems titled Upon Arrival, and "our women" published in  
Re-Side Magazine.

# *The Vessel*

Sam Levy

when the gathering turns for its portrait  
and by sudden trick of alignment and light and  
night, all I see

the same, the same, the same, the same, the same—

*-Frank Bidart, The Second Hour of the Night*

The duplicity of waking  
and again.

The blue planet,  
an infant, hurtling on a path  
at nothing.

Our rotations suggest to us  
careful collisions.

Lunation and solstice,  
marked on paper that dead men

3moon--110

gave life,  
bending around the curve until  
no one can tell  
what is rising and falling.

We have learned to atrophy  
by measuring,  
to divine because  
we remember.

Made and even nightly  
remade, like mud  
shaped by hands or  
the tide, we borrow  
ourselves from our kin,  
tuck and refunnel them  
uncounted times  
as so many selves.

Your grandmother was lent  
the same red-faced howl

and side-eyed smirk  
by blood strangers.

None of us  
belongs to us  
for long.

Meat and might,  
flab and flesh,  
medium and means,  
reconfigured in the sequence.

Patchworks of predecessors,  
we begin,  
a tangle in the loop,  
only revolutions.

Veronica Jarboe is a Northern California resident, and her previously  
published works include "Mattress" published in an anthology of  
collected poems titled Upon Arrival, and "our women" published in  
Re-Side Magazine.

# *"A poem in which I'm a bulldog at night"*

by Sullivan De Poet

tonight i assume the role of a bulldog & i found out  
that everything here is a stranger burglarizing life out of  
my father in blunt doses; i was just too lighthearted to  
picture these abscesses as the true orbits of diabetes. every  
night,

my father shuts his eyes with pride & i settle such  
dignity with the scale of machismo, as though it's not clear  
to me how he rains each night in an attempt to flood the  
thirsty throat of the world. i was only fifteen years

younger than today when sphygmomanometer &  
insulin became the only thing that reads sense into his  
bones, the way barometer gauges pressure: drugs  
standardising his survival. before i retire to bed each night,  
i imagine his bladder flooded, his tummy bloated & the  
whole of his body leaking out like the peak of July surge.

every time i sketch bodies as a penitentiary for souls,  
i draft his own as a torrent drowning his soul. i keep  
hoping & hoping that he floats for long.

Nwuguru Chidiebere Sullivan(he/him) is a keen writer from Ebonyi State, Nigeria. He is a penultimate medical student and a Forward Prize nominee who makes poems from everything he can't stammer through speeches. He has works published or forthcoming at The Shore, Journal Nine, Clay Literary, The Lake, ISE&T, BK Mag and several other places. He can be reached out to on Facebook @Nwuguru Chidiebere Sullivan, on Twitter @wordpottersulll.





*Fabrice B. Poussin*

“Blue Celebration”

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

*Growing Malcontent--115*

*tuesday*

by Isabella Melians

he wears a tuxedo  
with a face painted with foundation skin  
    delicately brushed against silk  
he is  
in a word  
flawless  
i am not fixated on his clothes  
or his face  
i am not fixated on the pretty things  
my attention is drawn  
to his hands  
that shatter the concept of perfect  
a porcelain cross rests  
entangled within sagging skin  
(a vain thing)  
they flush a deep shade of purple an ominous,  
    foreboding shade that threatens  
    our concept of innocence

his fingernails are cut and filed  
but not buffed, allowing  
light to reflect off irregular keratin ridges  
protruding, knotty veins  
however just below waxy skin  
what slender, graceful things  
i sit in a room with a corpse  
whose presence suffocates us and murmurs: "*Imposters*"  
Fake, Fraud, Cheat  
we are  
misery imposed by expectation

Isabella Melians (she/her) is a 16-year-old sophomore attending school in south Florida. She is the vice president of her school's writing club, "The Writer's Circle", and has been published or is forthcoming in *Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine*, *Scholastic Art and Writing Awards*, *The Weight Journal*, *Same Faces Collective*, *The Raindrop Magazine*, *Ice Lolly Review*, *NonBinary Review* and other reviewers. In her free time, she enjoys playing the cello, watercolor painting, and fostering with a local pet rescue. You can reach her on instagram @isabellam\_04.

# *Love in a Peaceful World*

by Matthew Schultz

Free, “Wishing Well”

A woman with a Polaroid camera slung around her neck sat with her feet in the Grand Park fountain in Downtown Los Angeles. She wore a cream-colored tank top that said “Heartbreaker” across the front in deep purple lettering. All around her, people threw coins into the water. A girl riding a skateboard rolled up to the fountain’s edge and slid to a stop. She plunged her hand into her jeans pocket and pulled out a pearl that she tossed into the pool. The woman with the Polaroid camera slung around her neck lifted the viewfinder to her eye and snapped a picture of the girl who stood there watching the pearl sink through the water. The photograph spilled out from the Polaroid camera and the woman shook it impatiently. It was a picture of the girl with her arms around a skeleton that had hair like wildfire. The skeleton held a red rose. The girl held a black rose. They both were smiling. Everything was going to be okay.

Matthew Schultz teaches creative writing at Vassar College where he also directs the Writing Center. Matt is the author of two novels: *On Coventry* and *We, The Wanted*. His recent poems appear in *Rust + Moth*, *Thrush Literary Journal*, and *Juke Joint*.

# THERE IS NO HELL HOTTER THAN MY ANXIETY

by Roseline Mgbodichinma

Before I sweet-talk

Myself out of this bitterness called life

I complain of this vacuum that has taken the shape of  
my soul to my brethren

& they tell me,

Declare warmth

Decree comfort

Call forth that which be not as though it were

As if you can summon a thing without first knowing  
its whereabouts,

My essence suffers from survivors guilt

Because someone I trust took my love up to the  
mountain to butcher it,

Until a lamb begged to take its place

You see,

Every poem I write is penance for all the days I acted  
a script and called it my life

On some mornings my blanket is a  
coffin

& the shower is a deep blue sea washing me into the  
shores of death

& when I manage to make omelettes I might melt  
away like spice for leaving the Gascooker on  
overnight.

*You know,*

There is a thin line between fire & ice

And it is the cloud I look up to when I draw  
maps on my skin

Using moonlight as mirror,

There is no hell hotter than the raging  
anxiety in my bones

No heaven more enchanting than the coolness in my  
lungs

When I decide it's time to breathe my last.

Roseline Mgbodichinma is a Nigerian writer whose works have appeared or are forthcoming in The African writer Magazine, The Hellebore, Serotonin Poetry, West Trestle Review, X-ray lit mag, JFA human rights mag, Serotonin poetry, Indianapolis Review, Artmosterrific, Kalahari review, Blue Marvel Review & elsewhere. She won the Audience Favorite award for the Union Bank Campus writing challenge – Okada books, she is the third prize winner for the PIN food poetry contest and a finalist for the Shuzia Creative writing contest. You can reach her on her blog [www.mgbodichi.com](http://www.mgbodichi.com)



# *Post-Mastectomy*

by Elania Battista-Parsons

It's called a Spirometer, emphasis on the *O*.

Deep breath, as deep as the tote you use  
for the beach,

That god-damn bag where everything  
sinks to the sides

With the gumption of an Italian grandmother.

Hold it and push it...stretch it.

Force the ball to steadily stand on the red line.

Red like your lower chakra.

The only one that's awake right now.

It's called a Spirometer, emphasis on the *O*.

Between 1,000- 3,000 for now.

Combat lung damage,

Ward off bronchial gook,

Knock out pneumonia-bitches

and Bacterial-bullshit..

I spike a fever of 102.5  
My ICU nurses scramble,  
Oh great,  
I'm dying of infection,  
Even though the cancer has been cut,  
B-cups remade from my belly fat.  
They look amazing, so I'll die pretty.

“Probably just an inflammatory response”  
Response? What was the question?

Nurse rubs my head so kindly, like she's done it  
many times before, but still  
For the first time— authentic and full of  
all she's got.  
She gives me the ice I beg for, even though  
I'm not really allowed to have anything.

My nurse had a full breakfast today, washed her hair,  
Kissed her husband or wife goodbye.  
Showed up to  
Take care of me—pale, sallow, and breath like death.  
My face as gluey as March weather.

Nurse's German accent is gentle  
and makes me feel safe.

“Can I please have a cough drop?”

“I'm not allowed, but wait.”

She gives me a tiny hard red candy

Against the rules

From her purse,

For humanity.

Shhhh.

Her purse didn't swallow stuff in the corners.

German grandmas are neat.

Deep breath  
Into the plastic mouthpiece up into the slinky rope,  
Hold it, hold it  
Push, push, steady push.  
1200..."Good, go again!"  
It's called a spirometer, emphasis on the *O*.

Elaina Battista-Parsons is mostly a YA/MG novelist with her YA debut, *Black Licorice*, being published by Inked in Gray in early 2022. She also works as a reading coach for students with disabilities. Elaina loves ice cream, antiques, pop culture, and snow. Elaina's poems and essays have been published by Horse Egg Literary, Vine Leaves Press, Backlash Press, and Burnt Pine Literary Magazine.

# *last call*

by Lina Begiona

you take the shot  
it's the last one left  
honey jack daniels  
is clumsy & awkward  
in your mouth but you  
still swallow it down  
you won't remember  
how you got there,  
but when mama finds  
you / face down / ass  
out / communing with  
the flowers in hopes of  
photosynthesizing / too  
late / still a human &  
you can't run from this  
body / your skin looks  
like rotten figs / plum

bruises / crimson welts  
photographed one / by  
one / in an abandoned  
drawer, there exists a  
photo of you / starved  
beaten / a ghost / someone else's underwear / pussy  
still remembers the pain  
of the machine / checking for cum / skin / anything  
that wasn't scrubbed away you didn't know what  
happ -ened / mama said nothing just lectured /  
how this falls  
on yours shoulders / pressure compounds / there's a  
knot in your back for every moment you felt  
ashamed to be her daughter

lina (they/she) is a filipinx, daydreaming bruha on occupied ramaytush  
ohlone land (san francisco, california). they live with a cat named  
chicken, play electric guitar, and make art in their spare time. their  
favorite food, currently, is tofu banh mi and cannot stop eating it.  
you can find them on instagram and twitter: @linabegonia.

# *already seen?*

by Ty Holter

didn't we spend a life  
somewhere on a rocky shore  
and not this lousy intersection

bias sent the traffic light  
to punctuate an old aggrievement

shimmer words for pre-  
select to read as sevens  
all across

and yet the sentence on your  
tongue is looking thin  
as heaven air

Ty Holter is a writer, welder, and literature student in Denver, Colorado. His work has appeared in Protean Magazine.\* Find him on twitter @tylerleeholter.

# PALACE ARREST

by Mark J. Mitchell

In her palace windows open from one  
room into another. Some glass was smoked  
by sin. Some was shattered, leaded—not  
stained  
but laced—seams held cracked glass like  
rain.  
—  
Her eyes see through it but she cannot look  
—  
Classrooms haunted by mechanical nuns—  
Dry laundries—Broken playrooms.  
Memory  
is her house, littered with blue-dusted guns  
and pages from unwritten books. All  
drains  
are blocked. Air is heavy with words in  
strange  
alphabets. She will (someday) learn to read  
them. She's certain they're prayers and she  
needs



to pray for a road out of memories.  
She's afraid of all the rooms that remain.

Mark J. Mitchell was born in Chicago and grew up in southern California.  
His latest poetry collection, *Roshi San Francisco*, was just published  
by Norfolk Publishing. *Starting from Tu Fu* was recently published  
by Encircle Publications.  
He is very fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Miles Davis, Kafka and Dante.  
He lives in San Francisco with his wife, the activist and  
documentarian, Joan Juster where he made his marginal living  
pointing out pretty things. Now, like everyone else, he's unemployed.  
A primitive web site now exists: <https://mark-j-mitchell.square.site/>

# *Build-a-Cult*

by Pascale P.

listen, i would build a cult around you in a second.  
i've seen the tweets about the documentaries,  
"i would never be that stupid." "why'd they worship  
this man they so believed was a genius?"

they ask it / but i know a genius. i understand the  
thinking almost as much as you understand  
the world. let me drink some of it out of you.

Pascale is Editor-in-Chief of Wrongdoing Magazine and an Editor at a few other publications, including CHEAP POP and Walled Women Magazine. She's also Staff Contributor for The Aurora Journal, Hecate Magazine and The Jupiter Review and has placed further work in Eclectica Magazine, Maudlin House, BlazeVOX, Witch Craft Magazine, The Bitchin' Kitsch, and many others. She has a BAH from Queen's University, and she is currently sending queries about her book series. You can read more about her at [pascalopotvin.com](http://pascalopotvin.com) or [@pascalepalaces](https://twitter.com/pascalepalaces) on Twitter.

# *Pomegranate*

by Olga Bialasik

It is holding  
a carved-up heart in your palms,  
or a bloody moon opened up  
for our desecration. That pinprick  
that reveals beaded rubies

encased in contours, honeycomb  
flesh drained of ichor.

You think

she did not want the chance  
to be something more? You think  
she did not sever its crown  
to take it as her own?

I search for the best way to  
pry it apart.  
Stained or staining.

We are both.

I promise my hands will be gentle—  
or, this is a red canna.

Pascale is Editor-in-Chief of Wrongdoing Magazine and an Editor at a few other publications, including CHEAP POP and Walled Women Magazine. She's also Staff Contributor for The Aurora Journal, Hecate Magazine and The Jupiter Review and has placed further work in Eclectica Magazine, Maudlin House, BlazeVOX, Witch Craft Magazine, The Bitchin' Kitsch, and many others. She has a BAH from Queen's University, and she is currently sending queries about her book series. You can read more about her at [pascalepotvin.com](http://pascalepotvin.com) or [@pascalepalaces](https://twitter.com/pascalepalaces) on Twitter.

# *The Constant Gardener*

by Adam Dodds-Wade

His wife died three years ago,  
She is buried in the back.

For her service he had an abundance of flowers,  
Roses, violets, calla lilies and wisteria.

Three years now, the garden is dead,  
But he doesn't know or notice.

He tills the dry dirt, prunes the thorny brush,  
He digs the holes and plants the seed.

For six years, he planted the seed  
And never did his wife come to bloom.

No legacy left in the yard,  
No legacy left in the house,

Nothing to show,  
Except his labor,  
Except for his sweat  
That wets the barren  
Dead soil.

Adam Michael Dodds-Wade is a writer born again. Living in Florida with his husband, furlough in 2020 lit a light in his soul. After a decade-long hiatus of both finishing school and writing, he has come out full swing writing and is back to both. Adam has poetry in obscure university lit magazines ten years ago and a recent horror story in "The Gates of Chaos-- Stories Written During the Pandemic" anthology.

# *Three Poems*

by Jeana Jorgensen

## *Swan Maiden*

travel-sized toothbrush

travel-sized makeup wipes

travel-sized affairs:

lightweight, single-use, no excess packaging

like the swan maiden herself, giddy-up girl,

feather up, webbed toes turn to talons,

fly away from another life.



## *Fairies' gifts*

Fairies' gifts go beyond grace,  
beauty, and charm;  
I was the child gifted  
justice, a yearning for fairness.

I prefer it to the other gifts  
(who needs charm and grace anyway)  
but I cannot befriend a cop,  
I cannot pass up a protest,  
I cannot look away from cruelty,  
I cannot sleep unless  
exhausted from straining for equity.  
I know others have it worse,  
but wow, my parents must have pissed off that fairy.

## *Half Life of a Mermaid*

You can only tolerate the glassy look in her eyes,  
Failing to understand human meaning,  
For so long before you start leaving hints.

You know that old oiled cloth?  
*I've heard some folks store theirs in a coat closet.*

Honey, doesn't this Netflix documentary about  
fish migration patterns  
Look fascinating? Worth a watch? Honey?

You ask if she would like you to rehang the curtains;  
In the pause that follows, you can tell  
She is translating your airborne words  
into clicks in her mind.

You leave more desperate hints:  
Maps to the beach where you found her,

X marking the spot where you first saw her  
emerge from the spraying waves,  
And where you flung a flannel on her  
ice-cold shoulders.

“Wouldn’t a vacation be nice?” you say, and  
She nods blankly, her damp ringlets bobbing  
(Her hair is always wet, and your wood floors  
Have needed extra care ever since you  
brought her home).

You leave the fish-leather skin around:  
A doorstep one week, a tablecloth another.  
When you host brunch, guests are disturbed  
at the “smelly coat.”  
You cease hosting brunch.

After a particularly difficult week –  
Salt crusting every surface in the house,  
Ruining two antique tables –  
You bundle her up and drive to the coast.

Her nostrils flare like gills as you approach the shore,  
Waving the scaled skin in front of her,  
Flagging a path among the rocks and sand.

“You can stop pretending for me,”  
you say, voice breaking.

“Your home is here, I know it now.”

Her hair glistens in the rising sun as she  
stares over the sea,

And when you drape the skin over her shoulders

It melts into her hair, dribbling down her body

Until her tail emerges where legs once were

With a thump, taking her down to the sand.

She mouths your name –

“Laura” –

Before the waves roll over her.

She does not look back.

You do not wave.

Jeana Jorgensen earned her PhD in folklore from Indiana University. She researches gender and sexuality in fairy tales and fairy-tale retellings, folk narrative more generally, body art, dance, and feminist/queer theory. Her poetry has appeared at *Strange Horizons*, *Quatrain.Fish*, *Liminality*, *Glittership*, and other venues.

# *Legacy*

by Clare O'Brien

Since you died, each note I hear  
stamps its shape into the soft  
cement in my head. The chorus  
looped until I change the record.

Your lands are laid waste, relics  
in a slew of ashes. I say the words  
and keep the faith, signed and sealed,  
image captured, branded, authorised.

They'd make me deal this poison  
until it kills me too. Your phosphor  
shape stalks all my screens, radiating  
pain. Fallout blind, I run for shelter.

Originally a Londoner, Clare has worked in teaching, journalism and PR and now lives with her husband, her wolfhound and her cat on the rugged north-west coast of Scotland. Her recent fiction and poetry credits include *Msexia*, *Northwords Now*, *The London Reader*, *Lunate*, *The Mechanics' Institute Review* and *Spelk*, and anthologies from *The Emma Press*, *Hedgehog Poetry* and *Unimpatient.one*. She's working on a first novel, called 'Light Switch'.

# *Three Poems*

by Lucas Scheelk



*Local Jew forgets that Purim is in two weeks and  
other unfortunate events*

A traumatic reminder of watching the insurrection  
live screams I need to read Holocaust poetry A traumatic  
reminder of watching the impeachment live screams we  
must remember the 6<sup>th</sup>

A traumatic reminder of watching the trial live  
screams why am I not high enough to forget the Camp  
Auschwitz merch

My cannabis dispensary on a silver challah tray  
signals *insert blessing here* chosen heirloom just like my  
names *insert blessing here* Sa'ar Keshet b'nei Avraham  
v'Sarah v'Susan v'Roger B'tzelem Elohim! *insert blessing  
here*

Has the mess hall, or is it the kitchen, always smelled  
like apples?

Am I late for another holiday?

I'm not leaving my bedroom today

*There are worse things  
than losing the Golem's number  
on a Sunday*

*(ex. age never mattered when cost of admission is trauma)*

His ashes became neighbors with his mother's and he  
broke the news about the world she left

## *Their medicine my medicine*

Lidocaine side effect of thinking their insides will  
explode which is an

injury side effect of slipping their skeletal strength  
expiring I absorb their pain which is a

Melancholic side effect of six feet from surrendering  
to Warren facing Olympic which is a

grief side effect of my remaining parent absent parent  
not reaching 65

9 days from heart attack to death

9 days I was left in the dark

9 days I'd have asked what's my name

9 days maybe he'd have called me son

I'm afraid to admit why I didn't commit suicide

My fiancé needed weed to treat their back injury

Lucas Scheelk (they/them) is an autistic queer white Jew with bipolar disorder. They're from the Twin Cities, now in Washington state. They're the author of *THIS IS A CLOTHESPIN* (Damaged Goods Press, 2016) and *HOLMES IS A PERSON AS IS* (self-published, 2016). They have current or forthcoming work in *Assaracus*, *Barking Sycamores*, *QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology*, *Queer Voices: Poetry, Prose, and Pride*, *Stone of Madness Press*, *Pandemic Publications*, *Spoon*

*Knife 5: Liminal, Wizards in Space, and Mollyhouse, among  
others. Twitter: @TC22IBee.*

# *Red Mullet*

by Lorelei Bacht

For two years, I took residence  
Within the colour red. Unafraid  
Of suffering and eager to embrace  
My own demise, I elected  
The deepest, most passionate  
Shade of pain. I went through all  
The crayons in the box within a week,

And that is when the fun really began.  
In the deepest recesses of my soul,  
I found treasures of misery,  
Unbounded fear, a formidable landscape  
Of hatred. I repainted everything:  
The walls, the trees, the children's bed  
And any word my husband ever said.

My plan was to drown everything  
In the most violent crimson, bucket  
After bucket. I was never happier  
Than when menstruating. Then, I felt  
Right, I felt aligned with the correct  
Segment of the divine palette. For food,  
I preferred strawberries and raw meat.

I made daily lists of why I was superbly,  
Flawlessly right and everyone else  
Was way off the mark. I sharpened  
Knives, swearing under my breath  
In the kitchen. I sent the kids to school  
Early, so I could spend the day hating  
Everything, including hatred.

Lorelei Bacht is a European poet living in Asia. When she is not carrying little children around or encouraging them to discover the paintings of Edvard Munch, she can be found collecting bones and failing scientific experiments. Her recent work can be found and/or is forthcoming in OpenDoor Poetry, Litehouse, Visitant, Quail Bell and The Wondrous Real. She is also on Instagram: @lorelei.bacht.writer and @the.cheated.wife.writes

# *To be remembered*

by Helianne Kallio

They were treated as  
a threat; the ones with  
upside-down syndromes

told: *should be controlled!*

Their personal belongings;  
bodies, identities, characters

became movables  
owned by the authorities;

treatment timetables  
ticking backward-clocks –

The ones that rouse the mindset  
by their inside-out presence



are the ones onwards-upwards  
; and will be! ;

the flowers to be watered  
the faces to be framed

Helianne Kallio is a Finnish poet and writer. Their poems have been published in various anthologies and magazines in Finnish and English. They have performed at poetry events and festivals in Finland and in the UK, also with musicians. They have worked as a creative activities instructor and community artist and have been active board member in poetry and literary associations.

# *Mother waiting*

by Pernoste

She watched blackbirds at sunset  
hopping crazily the branches,  
and she smiled, lost in love,  
and the brilliance of his dark mind.

She could almost feel  
the electricity in her blood,  
the pulse of it in her head  
like her husband's cadavers  
in the dim-lit basement,  
flayed and yet moving  
while he implanted with silver  
the bloody nerve and muscle.

Her first child was born  
when the lights flickered, failed,  
and she heard the cries.

Absently rubbing the scars  
crossing her beautiful face,  
she went to her new baby  
in the warmth of darkness  
to take it from the hands of God.



# *A Waiting Period*

by Lauren Zazzara

It's raining and I'm waiting and it's a little chilly so my skin pricks up, the little hairs now standing on end surrounded by goosebumps, and my fingers start to stiffen so that I don't quite know how I'll ever again write a message or play a piano or knead a loaf of bread or any of those other things that require some dexterity.

A church bell in the distance signals that half an hour has gone by and it ding dong dings while I dance dance dance to keep the blood in my toes moving so that it doesn't all just stand still and freeze inside my body, inside paper-thin skin and organs that can start to fail with just one faulty cell mutation. My lower back starts to hurt from standing so I start swaying backwards and forwards to loosen up my spine, my nerves, my bones so they can jangle along freely when someday I become a skeleton roaming the cemetery late at night as if I'm just a Halloween costume but I was a real living person with warm blood and a solidly pumping heart until that one moment in time gone wrong!

When will that moment come, will it be in a few seconds or in a few years or a few decades? And what's the sense in to-do lists which can be burned into ashes that

might someday grow trees or wildflowers instead, or in calendars that depict time that is meaningless when you truly think about what life was like before the existence of mechanized clocks that tell us how to think and feel and act?

My heartbeat flutters for a second like it does every once in a couple of weeks or months or years and I wonder if it is trying to mimic the blue jay that just flew past belatedly heading south for the winter to escape a bitter cold death and find some sort of extension to its life that's cycling in and out of time like a bicyclist taking laps in the park and everything is the same but different each time. But the bicyclist can't notice since he has to keep his eyes on the road ahead of him lest he hit a child or a pothole or a stray thunderbolt and he can't take the moment back just like the handlebars can't hold him back as he flies.

Bio: Lauren Zazzara is a writer and editor living in Buffalo, NY. When she isn't tucked into a book, (loudly) tapping away at her keyboard, or napping, she is likely fawning over her cat, Margaret. Lauren holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from St. Bonaventure University.

# *3 Poems*

by Jeanne Shannon

## *Beginning*

January: Wind claims the afternoon,  
the yellow air  
a singularity

Blue distances  
merge and blur

*All that is alive and full of joy,  
all that is hollowed out by pain*

and Time bends back

Lost civilizations  
drowned cities  
old prophecies of the Maya

Ecuador: Sun going down in Guayaquil  
Mexico: Horses grazing in the August light of  
1965

\*

Woman writing in an alfalfa field

Poems in praise of Meadowsweet  
its almond-scented leaves

and Amaranthus,

Love-Lies-Bleeding, its garnet red

Poems that remember

Snakeweed and Bloodroot and Witch Hazel



She places apple leaves  
between the pages of her journal

\*

Trees succumb to blight and fire  
and are erased

Everything fades and falls away

A time to practice  
the letting go of everything

## *It Was November*

The landscape was a clouded purple.

In southern Africa, sugar birds  
were singing from the quiver trees.

*A mask is better than a ventilator* (the sign read).

Bruised violet light and paper lanterns.  
Quiver tree, a refuge from snakes and jackals.

It was November, and meteors rained down like snow.

*Where will your ashes be scattered?*

The moon was twelve days old,  
and now the comet was inbound toward the sun.  
A cold mist rose along the river.

*Where will your ashes be scattered? Who will know?*

## *Musk, Sandalwood, and Rose*

*“If we could save time in a bottle. . .”*

### *The Fifties*

In our college rooms

*Desert Flower* and *Friendship’s Garden*

*Tweed* and *Chantilly*

*April Violets* and *Bond Street*

And always, always

the honeysuckle of *White Shoulders*

At home, when Avon called

our mothers bought

To a Wild Rose

Cotillion

Here’s My Heart

*The Sixties*

Mornings we wrote in Gregg  
and typed

Lunch hours we spent  
dreaming along the perfume counters

Muguet des Bois  
flowers  
of the French countryside

Give us *Arpège*  
its bergamot and sandalwood  
its rose

*Tigress* with its exotic pelt  
(But were we wild enough  
to wear it?)  
And *Woodhue* in its leafy shawl

fragrance of  
citrus sparkle, jasmine  
and silken musk  
(stanza break here)

*Wind Song* might linger  
on our minds

*L'Aimant* and *Emeraude*,  
Shalimar, Straw Hat, Tabu

Which one would Jackie wear?

### *The Seventies*

Now some brave women dared to shout  
that “perfume stinks!”

While others doused themselves with

*Charlie*

*Halston*

*Opium*

### *The Eighties*

Cosmetic counters filled with

*Poison*

*Giorgio*

*Obsession*

Where had the blossoms gone?

Lily and apple bloom and purple violet?

*The Nineties*

One woman  
speaking no French  
went all alone to Paris  
in search of bottled flowers:

of 1927's  
unforgettable *Bellodgia*

Jeanne Shannon writes poetry, fiction, and memoir pieces and reads the Tarot in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her work has appeared in numerous small-press publications, most recently Cloudbank, Blue Unicorn, and Better Than Starbucks.



*Susan diRende*

"Statue Shroud"



# *Imbolc Sky*

by Patricia Carragon

You rise into the Imbolc sky  
entwine with flames & smoke

Passion searches the ruins   gathers your ashes  
inside a metal box

Blueprints of bone & flesh live in ash

Memories & thoughts linger in scent

My perpetual flame  
needs you more than ever

I open that box   eat the gray dust that was you  
Ingest your topaz eyes   chestnut hair—  
hands & lips that knew mine

Merge with your body & soul—  
                  say I'm sorry   wait for comfort & advice  
offer my ashes in return

Patricia Carragon's latest poetry books from Poets Wear Prada are  
Meowku and The Cupcake Chronicles, and Innocence from  
Finishing Line Press. Her debut novel, Angel Fire, is from Alien Buddha  
Press. Patricia hosts Brownstone Poets and is the editor-in-chief of  
its annual anthology.

She is an executive editor for Home Planet News Online.

# *3 Poems*

by Miriam Gayize

*1. writings on my skin*

i have  
writings on my skin  
blemished and dry  
from the troubles within  
my salted tears on the withered fabric  
of my pillow cases  
fall for a little girl dressed in laces caged in by truths  
she does not know  
caged in by a seed she holds  
but cannot sow  
they fall and fall  
and i scream and scream  
and scratch away at the  
writings on my skin  
to show her the pain she  
must stay away from  
i stare into her soul  
my eyes wilting  
drooping

leaking  
dead  
i stare into her soul  
i see hope  
no rose tinted glasses  
or gold tinted thoughts  
she sees through  
her cage  
she sees through  
the writings on my skin

## *2. oh to be a flower*

a shell of myself  
watches me  
from a leather couch  
wasted away  
by dreams unlived  
i am still fixed on memories of the days  
    where i was a shell of myself  
tears fall  
frustrated by it all  
the sound of static  
filters through the  
musky room  
dust gathers in corners the paint on window frames  
    chewed up by the toxicity of a yesterday  
    i wish to not remember  
pictures  
sometimes hidden by my broken father  
scream this toxicity  
at me  
burning

in my mind  
melted gold  
words & memories  
are engraved  
"i want to feel  
something new."  
it was called  
{quiet}  
saying everything  
except the words  
you need to say:  
"i need to break up with you."  
oh to be a flower  
{death}  
a choice  
when it does  
not agree to the soil it has to live from  
i am wilted by a soul i did not agree to live for

### *3. purple boy*

functioning  
on sleep  
deprivation  
and gin  
questioning  
your morals like  
preachers who sin  
what do you see?  
when i speak of running what do you feel?  
when your head is turning is it me?  
the reason  
you're still crying  
is it me?  
the reason  
you feel like dying  
oh purple boy  
the sun,  
it reflected your joy  
when you lied down



in the dirt  
and you were birthed like a flower from the earth  
oh purple boy  
they broke you  
like a childhood toy  
short-lived  
but your heart  
it still gives  
and your smile  
it still lives  
and your eyes  
give life to dark waters  
and the showers of  
the blood you bled  
were cleansed in the rain  
you spoke of your pain  
every passing day  
and you held on to me  
like i was your last breathe and you told me  
sweet sweet somethings  
i kept you standing

and you walked with your pain with a heavy smile  
on your face hoping i would believe

i was saving you

with a heavy hand in mine you walked with your  
pain wishing your body wasn't broken  
wishing your soul wasn't swollen wishing your  
mind wasn't stolen by this and that condition who  
sneak in every night with the moon as their flight  
and with glasses of your pain they ignite

a monster in you

and

oh purple boy

i knew

i could never save you

no matter how hard i

fought with my own pain so i could listen to yours

no matter how hard i

cried for you to

live another day while still wishing i could die too

Miriam Gayize, also known as Mawizana is a young South African poet who began her writing journey in high school as a coping mechanism. She would describe her writing as a safe space to promote honesty, healing, and storytelling about the human condition and all its layers.

# *Beaver Moon Speaks To Grandma*

by Paul Veracka

Now that you are close to dying, the garden breathes  
heavy  
With lady slippers' heads bowed  
The maidenhair fern, dewy in anticipation  
The very earth beyond  
The solitary, bending trellis  
All loose and lovely,  
Welcoming you for the last of days

Soon you will see  
The garden plot in Germany  
You were forced to leave  
When your first cousin was silently walked to the death  
camps  
(You found out years later there were two he went  
through)  
The fires forever cursed you  
Always beneath your skin,  
Like lava  
The garden remembers you

Touch finds its path back home

I see you near the wrought-iron gate  
The two gardens are the same  
You stroked life from and into their sprigs  
Your sorrow met with only reverence  
They love your quiet eyes against mauve sky

Soon you will see  
As you inaudibly touch at last  
The soft pink petals under my luster  
The whites of your eyes fill  
With my moonlight  
You are safe with me

Soon you will see  
Fire does not burn forever  
And in your beloved, black gardens  
You were always safe with me

Bio: Paul Veracka writes poems in D.C. When he is not running a classroom with very young people, he may be watching old concert footage online.

# *tomato skins*

by Tomas Marcantonio

lay me down and cover me  
in tomato skins  
smother the pulp over my eyelashes  
and bury the seeds in the neat pockets  
between my toes

i'll wash it off  
when i've learned what it means

to

man

up

and i can crush the tomatoes  
in a wooden barrel  
masculine stomps with moisturised feet

until then i'll wait  
in a barrel of my own  
red and silent  
waiting for the world to begin

END

Tomas Marcantonio is a writer from Brighton, England. His debut novel 'This Ragged, Wastrel Thing' was published by Storgy Books in 2020, and his short stories have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Tomas is based in Busan, South Korea, where he splits his time between writing, teaching, and getting lost in neon-lit backstreets.

# *Two Poems*

by Ashley Lopez

## *one blue box*

I still have dreams of empty cupboards  
and the acid snarl of an unfed belly.  
I can taste the hunger imposed on me -  
transcendent and violent  
no escape route  
a hallway with no doors.

---

when I was four, I opened the door  
to a cabinet that held only one box.  
Kraft Macaroni was all I could ask for  
and on nights when the pain  
is too great to bear  
I find myself wanting the same thing again.

---

I had one red Gatorade



to last me all week  
for the gymnastics classes I took  
without ever questioning who paid for them  
I made it last with sugar and water  
because I was a four-year-old  
desperate to live.

---

when I was four,  
I went searching for sustenance;  
I would have taken crumbs if  
they were on offer  
and I remember the taste of my father's beer  
which I drank in the hopes that  
my belly would slow.

---

I am not four and  
I eat till I cry  
till the pain subsides and the tears are dry.  
when you are a child  
and starving

---

the wolf inside you  
that ravenous devourer  
will never let you feel  
that hunger again.

*random acts of depravity.*

I'd rather be fucked than do the fucking myself  
I want to be healed by  
choosing to submit  
after all the times I was forced to.

I want a nameless face between my thighs  
and to never know their name  
not even when I'm done.

I want a man to bite my skin with a hunger and with  
a quickness devour my collarbones and lick the  
tears from my cheeks

I need a man to whisper words of dominance  
in any language but my own make me earn my  
humanity and let me keep it when we're through.

I want to relive those nights when everything I  
thought was mine was taken from me  
but I want to do it differently this time.

I want to erase the violent memories  
and to know that I can choose  
random acts of depravity.

meet ashley lópez (she/hers). she is a fat, queer depressed xicana with  
fourteen years of therapy, seven years of sobriety and a keen sense  
of survival. the real Thirty Years War is her daily fight to keep herself  
alive, even when her own heart & brain try to snuff out her flame.  
this is her first time being published. so please be gentle.

# *Two Poems*

by Marilee Pritchard

## *The Prodigy*

In the half-shuttered room—light slithers  
like a panther on the prow,  
stalking furniture and floors,  
photos of dead relatives  
mounted live in 1955.

I gaze upon your piano bench  
embroidered with a fleur-de-lis  
of butterscotch and rose.

Your mother's sleek fingers  
drove a silver needle  
through ivory woven cloth.

How you struggled to give  
voice to a soaring tenor line  
or descending figured bass  
knowing if you stopped to pace a breath,  
you would hear the downbeat of stiletto heels.  
Words fell from her lips

crashed like an agate paperweight  
purpled a bruise  
which could not bleed and would not heal.

You were the choice bread  
she kneaded to a rise, the spongy dolly  
whose pudgy fingers were stretched into wisdom.  
You were Pinocchio, living out a long-nosed lie,  
while she yanked the strings.  
By her design, you were  
the finest piece of handiwork  
she ever made.

Blinded by the light, you walk the plank,  
stage door to concert bench, a narrow ledge  
so many travel out and back again.  
When you play the *French Suite in G Major*,  
do you feel the trembling of your years?  
Do you remember how you were called  
to mount the stage?

## *Syncopation*

They could see  
legs kicking to be,  
trace the sex  
dot-scattered on  
the ultrasound  
dividing the thighs,  
anticipate the longing  
when thumb first  
found its way to mouth.



But as the doctor bent  
to palpate the hiccup  
of a puppy heart, he  
shuddered at the missed beats,  
the erratic stutter,  
knowing that what compels us  
to dance the rhumba, the samba,  
and the bossa nova  
was incompatible  
with the rhythm of life.

Marilee Pritchard lives in the Chicago suburbs and is a retired RN.  
Previous publications include: Third Wednesday, Poetry Quarterly, One  
Art, Paterson Literary Review, Avalon Literary Review and multiple  
other magazines.

# *Vanishing Garden*

by Erin Quill

Prick my fingers and toes

But life no longer lingers

Craving connection

Lost in the line

The garden between

Binds me in petal chains

Voiceless

A shimmering void

Soon I will dim  
Beyond hope of recognition

What will I be  
When my fade is complete

A forgotten memory  
Clinging

Ms. Quill has been published twice. Once under the title "Flirting with Viking" in the *Of Cottages and Cauldrons* anthology. And a second time under her *erinquill8* Twitter handle in *Crispy Rooftop Conversation Stories* edited by Scott Christopher Beebe.

# *Car Fun of Handjobs Past*

by Alton Melvar MDapanas

- i. You put your finger in his mouth while he drives off of the mall's underground parking lot. He asked for it, part of the role play you agreed on: he's the Grab driver, you're the passenger, *Fake Taxi*-style, except that you're the one with motives, he's the innocent virgin about to be destroyed. For immersion, you watched a lot of clips from XVideos.com—it loads faster than PornHub.

From the way his lips curved, elastic wet muscle, you know he likes sucking something as if he's an infant. (Mommy issues just like yours?) Your therapist warned you about dating guys with the same old issues—bullied as a kid, distant and disciplinarian father, low self-esteem—but you're drawn to routine, to sameness, and this is just a hook up anyway. In his fancy stereo, he plays Bebe Rexha & Cash Cash's "Take Me Home," your favorite sex song since then, your finger still in his mouth.

2. Chubby, facial beard in the jaw, semi-disheveled hair, nerdy, exactly your type. You weren't disappointed. Flabs over abs, someone who could lift you while he pumps hard, you tell a friend when asked about your type. You date everyone but the bigger, taller ones have a special place for you. Some Freudian need for physical security maybe, some deep-seated want to be protected from the cruel, cruel world, you hypothesized.

“Nice ride! Model?” you asked, trying to sound casual. Honda was the only name that registered. Talking about cars is a foreign language. *But the funny thing was*, he was wearing the same thing you wore, except for his glasses, your beanie, and the hoodie of his college you once fancied at the university bookstore: shirt, shorts, slippers, a watch. “We match!” he said as he pulls over near a factory by the highway.

3. He came in your palm as he nibbled your ear, his dick was a little curved on the side. He eyed you with an apologetic look: for coming in your palm or for coming almost five minutes late after you did, you do not know. “No, it’s fine,” you assured him, wiping it with a tissue from the dashboard, “we won’t see each other again anyway,” you said coldly because you’re a heartless bitch, to which he replied, “Yeah, sure,” with a lilt in his voice. None of you will say a single word after that. The role play is over. You pretend to doomscroll on Twitter, a fascist who jokes about rape and admits killing people was going to be president. *You have a troubled relationship with silence.* You think this guy whose dick you wanted to suck might have voted for him.

4. He cups his hand in your lap, some sort of foreclosure, like Canova’s “Theseus and the Minotaur,” as if you were a cloth that needed ironing. *But the funny thing was*, in your language, the gayspeak for handjob is *plantsa*, literally ironing of clothes. You don’t like touch after a hook up. *You have a troubled relationship with touch.* But you let him.

5. The engine whirs. In the dimness, you pass by a few drunkards preening themselves at a roadside karaoke bar, their shirts yanked in their shoulders. Then, it was silent again. Cugman, or the barangay named after the Spanish word for port or the last barangay of the city's border in the west? You do not know much of geography.

He did not offer a stick of cigarette like the others did. You do not know how to speak of this commonplace silence. The road trails behind you like the personal demons gnawing parts of you that you cannot hide. This city is burning.

Alton Melvar MDapanas (them/they) is assistant creative nonfiction editor of London-based [Panorama: The Journal of Intelligent Travel](#) and Iowa-based [Atlas and Alice Literary Magazine](#), as well as an editorial reader for [Creative Nonfiction](#) magazine. They identify as pansexual, nonbinary, and polyamorous. A native of Metro Cagayan de Oro in the Philippine South, they are currently based in Siargao Island, living off-the-grid in between the Pacific Ocean and a mountain range.

# *On some days, I have killed myself at least twice before breakfast*

by Shiksha Dheda

(trigger warning: suicide, depression)

Metaphorically, everyone should kill themselves at least once. It helps dispel the gnawing bugs of suicidal thoughts that feast on my negativity. On some days, I have killed myself at least twice before breakfast. I have killed my vices. Some have died; some have been promptly reborn. Sometimes, I have killed some of my virtues. Virtues sometimes sting just as painfully as vices if captured by the wrong vessel. I have strangled desires, slowly watching them suffocate till they drown. I have shot down goals, aspirations, weaknesses. I have weeded out some pain from my ever-growing garden of wild emotion. I have washed myself away-almost daily, and have remoulded my personality. Sometimes, it grows back just the same. Sometimes, it grows back a little mis-shapen, a little disfigured, a little mutilated. It grows back nonetheless.

I am eternal. I am insoluble. I can't be burnt with fire, nor drowned with water. I am immortal. We are immortal.



Shiksha is a South African of Indian descent. She uses poetry (mostly) to express her internal and external struggles and journeys, inclusive of her OCD and depression roller-coaster ventures. Mostly, however, she writes in the hopes that someday, someone will see her as she is: an incomplete poem.

Her work has been featured (on/forthcoming) in Mixed Mag, Aerodrome journal, Poetry Potion, Visual Verse, The Kalahari Review, Brave Voices, Glitchwords, Neuro Logical, Versification, Dead Fern Press and Resurrections Magazine.

by Elizabeth Galoozis

I only vaguely comprehended,  
at the time, how young that was  
to die. Now, though,  
it knocks me sideways. It lodges  
in my brain like  
a stuck crumb in a back tooth,  
flaring with pain whenever  
it finds me or I find it.  
The street address of  
my first real job. The number of  
the bus I took  
from the Fenway every day one summer  
home to Central Square.  
Waiting to jump me from a clock,  
license plates, Tarot spreads,  
often enough to feel sought out, rather  
than seeking. Than conscious.

It waits for me in a decade –  
with any luck, anyway –  
to be added to. Perhaps even allowed  
to be released then,  
fade unremarkably back into sequences,  
times, measures, and shed  
its emblem of pain.

Elizabeth Galoozis's poems have appeared in *Sundog Lit*, *Faultline*, *Mantis*, *Not Very Quiet*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *in parentheses*, among others. Her poem "Cento: Six Women in Five Parts" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She works as a librarian and lives in southern California with her wife Michelle, cat Stella, and too many fruit trees.

# *Mother Ganesha*

by Sowmya Yalin

When I was 10  
I longed for my mother, to touch, to hold,  
to simply know I am here, still breathing  
in the aftermath of her incontinent breeding.  
Her revulsion for her mother-in-law's hysteria  
and the incongruent siblings lined up in a row  
like runts suckling every last drop from Mama Pig;  
the loathing of the uncivility and barter love  
simmering in the bronze pot reserved  
for the upper castes  
coalesced into an insurgency, adding layer upon layer  
of dark distance each day. 'You have the enemy wrong, ma.  
I am not it.' I did not shout from the rooftops. Without  
my mother, my legs weren't strong enough to carry me to  
the roof.  
'Don't you see this beautiful painting right in front of  
you?' I did not shine a light from my dark corner.

Without my mother, my hands weren't strong enough  
to hold the torch.

'You're the sculptor, don't you recognize your own  
art? How could you be so ignorant?'

I did not make a fuss or cry foul. I did not roll on the  
floor, never threw a tantrum. Without my mother, I did  
not know my mother was mine to fight for. I'm no longer  
ten and I yearn for nothing, fight nothing. Well, not  
nothing. Not really.

I cannot escape the face in the mirror that resembles  
her, the crooked nose, and terrified eyes.

I cannot escape a middle-aged woman battling  
something unseen.

I cannot unsee a lost child in the thick groves of  
adulthood, hiding behind tufts of diffidence and leaves of  
distrust.

I meet my mother on the day of her mother's funeral.  
'Do you wonder what happens to people when they die,  
where they go', she asks.

'Nothing happens, ma. They just disappear, stop  
existing'. I think, but I don't tell her.

I realize I've made a mistake; I don't belong there; I  
shouldn't have come. I don't know how, but even if I did,  
I don't think she wants me to comfort her.

I tell her I must go. I must leave now. I see her eyes  
emptying like a bottomless vessel. I'm only used to seeing  
contempt and derision in those eyes, I almost don't  
recognize the longing and sadness.

She is searching for words, fumbling around in the  
room, pretending to look for my keys.

'I like you so much', she finally says awkwardly.

I feel a rage inside me, a helpless melancholy.

I calm down as I walk past the temple and realize I  
am like the child Goddess Parvati sculpted out of clay.

A spectre, an anomaly, a seed without roots, a child  
borne by a parent but without a mother.

I smile when I realize I must lose my head as well to  
make something of myself. And my mother?

She can continue to melt in the scorching  
motherhood until the end of ether.

I do not have another 40 years. Neither does she.

I am but a mother and a mother I will always be,  
even if I am unlike *my* mother and whether I like it or not,

I am who I am because of her,  
even when everything I am not and everything I  
could have been is also because of her.

I like you too, ma.

Sownya is an educator, writer and parent. She loves to doodle, daydream and binge on books, food and TV. She sketches and writes at [arrhythmya.com](http://arrhythmya.com). Sownya wishes to have one year of nothing-but-reading-and-writing time to work on her classic, all expenses paid. Not unlike Harper Lee.

She's now accepting applications for generous donors

# *a/month/in/autumn*

by Ellie Mulreaney

When she loved me, i felt the world in different ways,  
the sky was brighter and the leaves cast shadows that  
danced in dewy patterns, fingers trailing through the air  
and in the dirt that spelled her name wherever i went, the  
wind blew in gentle puffs in musical notes and laughter  
filled the gaps between my breaths, even the nights seemed  
shorter and less lonely knowing she was waiting in the  
Dawn

When she loved me, her smile that tugged the corners  
of her mouth set my pulse to quicken and mind to quiet,  
while her hands would brush my back and face and hair in  
momentary glimpses into joy and warmth, her voice and  
eyes spoke as one to tell me all the things i knew but  
couldn't say aloud, that i meant something, that i was  
worth something

When she loved me, a simple kiss would open portals  
into worlds i had left behind, poetry and prose and music  
which had forgotten how to reach me suddenly became  
open pathways through thick forests where old memories



stirred, awakening passions and pleasures long set aside  
and all it took was her name, a month in autumn, to  
awaken me

When she loved me, i loved her too, too much in fact,  
too hard and too fast and too intensely so emotions  
became entwined and knotted and blocked, the twists in  
my brain turned in on me and buried themselves deeply,  
where ecstasy flowed now confusion clogged, questions,  
questions with answers i already knew but wouldn't  
accept, questions and demands and expectations unfairly  
arrayed against her weakened body wore her to the bone,  
flayed raw until she saw the true nature of my mind and,  
terrified, ran

When she loved me, she broke my heart by proxy  
knowing it was all the chance she had left to save herself a  
torment she went through anyway and i clung to the  
vestiges of her frayed edges, tattered hope and faith that  
prayer could never stitch together and i tried so hard and  
in the trying and pulling i never even saw how much i was  
pushing until she was out of earshot and i never heard  
anything again

When she loved me, everything was better, and  
nothing i ever do will let her love me again

Ellie Mental is a non-binary trans poet from Edinburgh. Her poems are a deeply personal and introspective view into her life and experiences as a trans woman with autism, cPTSD, dissociative identity disorder and borderline personality disorder. You can read everything she writes for free @elemental\_poems on Twitter.

# *This Lake*

by Rachael Crosbie

*after The Haunting of Bly Manor*

this lake / murky mirror / computer screen / appears  
in dreams / in nighttime / no moonlight / snakeskin for a  
body / the water wallows / in me / when I reach through /  
mud-swallowed starkness / that spits me out / raw and  
green / static from an old tv / swelling in a body / that  
molts / as another

Rachael Crosbie (she/they) tweets things about She-Ra and The Princesses of Power, cats, and her fiance. She has poems forthcoming or published in ALL GUTS NOT GLORY, Pink Plastic House, Wrongdoing Magazine, and others. Also, they have two chapbooks: *swerve* (2021) and *MIXTAPES* (2021).



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