

3 Moon Literary Magazine

*Issue One: Catalyst*



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British Columbia, Canada

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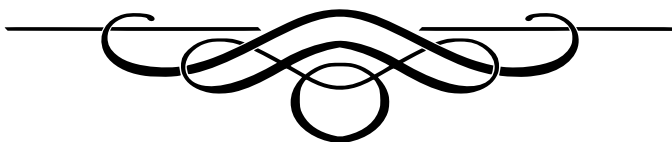
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Part I:  
Short Stories, Prose & Art



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The artwork contained in Part I of this book is the work of **Angie Hedman**. Titles of each piece can be found on the pages they appear.

Angie Hedman is a multi-medium artist, writer, and high school art educator who creates and resides in Muncie, IN. She holds degrees from Ball State University in the areas of Fine Arts (Metals), and Art Education. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in The Broken Plate, Barren Magazine, Superstition Review, Pidgeonholes, Montana Mouthful, Cream City Review, and Spectrum Literary Journal among others. She tweets at @artist\_writerAH.

The photography contained in Part II of this book is the work of **Elle Danbury**. Titles of each piece can be found on the page they appear.

Elle Danbury has had her photographs published in Barren Magazine, Cauldron Anthology, littledeathlit, Turnpike Magazine, and Honey & Lime. You will be able to see more of her forthcoming work in Nightingale & Sparrow, Riggwelter Press, Ravens In The Attic, Rhythm & Bones Lit, Dark Marrow, as well as being a featured artist in Kissing Dynamite Poetry. After leaving city life many years ago, she moved into her own little forest in northern British Columbia Canada, to find out who she was and what her passions were. Starting with photographs of nature, she now seems to have found her niche taking photographs of the world that surrounds her, wherever she goes. Twitter @elleoftheforest Insta @elle\_danbury.



## Bess Hamilton: *One Wing*

Last night he heard the swans, hooting as they flew. Hans knew if he went to the window he would see them, lit up by the moon, bright against the night sky. Winter chased them south.

He heard the swans and his heart called out to them. He flexed his wing and felt the night air against each barb. Winter was on its way and he had to stay here and let the snow fall.

“It’s cold. Come back to bed,” she said. He turned from the window. She held open the quilt, showing him the empty place beside her. Her body, in the dark room, was lit up by the moon. The air was cold. The hair on his body stood up. The feathers on his wing stood out. He slid under the quilt. His movements let out puffs of dry feather smell. The quilt was filled with down. The smell reminded him of home.

She put her warm body against his cold skin. He wrapped his wing around her because he knew that’s what she wanted. That’s what any of them wanted.

Last night he heard the swans.

The next night, he went to the roof. The moon was full now. He scanned the dark purple sky for swans. The guards on the parapets recognized him by his wing and let him be. Either people were attracted to his difference or they were afraid of it. He was a half-magic thing. The sight of him a constant reminder of the days when magic had twisted things.

His brother was already there. Hans and Franz were the two youngest. So much younger than the other four brothers. Franz scanned the sky with a small telescope. “It smells like snow,” he said as Hans sat beside him. They dangled their feet over the edge. Hans looked down. Being this high up was close to flying. It didn’t scare him.

“Did you hear them? Last night?” Hans asked.

Franz nodded.



After hours of waiting, hours in which even their young joints grew stiff with cold, they heard the faint hoots. The stars were scattered glitter against the sky. “Here,” Franz said and handed the telescope to Hans. The eyepiece was cold against his skin.

He could see their eyes, their wings. His heart beat in time with each flap. His heart broke as the swans left the two men on the roof behind.

“I can’t stay here,” Franz whispered.

“But what about your wife?” All the brothers, except Hans, had found wives. The king, their sister’s husband, had given them their choice of the finest daughters of his nobles. The brothers were handsome young men with the allure of their story as an added attraction. None would agree to marry Hans. What if his children were born with wings? Or worse a beak?

Franz smiled. His face must have been stiffened by the chilly air because it was a small smile. A bitter smile.

“She’s gone. Went back to her mother’s.”

“Oh.”

They looked up at the sky which was beginning to lighten at its eastern edge. The guards changed. The boys sat and watched for more swans. None came.

“Do you miss it?” Franz asked.

Hans couldn’t speak. His throat closed. He swallowed down the tears that rose up. But he couldn’t speak. It was as if he had forgotten how.

“I miss it,” Franz said. “I wish she’d never changed us back.” He looked down at his hands. He flexed his fingers. They were blue at the tips. “I don’t understand this body. I don’t want it anymore. I want to fly.”

Hans nodded. He wrapped his wing around his brother’s shoulders.

They’d been the youngest. When they’d been changed, Hans and Franz hadn’t been boys very long. They were so small. They’d been swans for such a long time, they’d forgotten they’d ever been boys. Every year, when their sister would meet them in the woods to speak with them for the fifteen minutes they were human again, they would be surprised at the changes in themselves.

The oldest four had remembered what it was to be human. They missed it. They had wanted back. They never spoke of their time as swans. The oldest, Wilhelm, had proposed that Hans let a surgeon remove his wing.

At the first snow, Franz climbed to the top of the highest parapet and leapt off.

Hans stood over his brother's grave and after the others left their flowers, throwing them down on the coffin at the bottom of the hole, he plucked out one of his feathers. The pain cut bright and sharp through his grief. He watched the feather float down until it rested on top of all the roses.

Through the winter, nothing changed in Hans's life. He thought often of his night on the roof with Franz. But he never went up on the roof to look at the moon and feel the night air ruffle the feathers of his wing.

All through the winter, the court kept busy with dinners and dances and lavish spectacles. The king wanted everyone to be happy. He filled their days with a kind of manic joy to make up for the years he'd let his mother bring them all so much sorrow. As if they'd forget the sight of the queen, standing on her funeral pyre, throwing silk shirts to her swan brothers. Maybe people did forget. But Hans didn't.

Still, when a woman, or a man for that matter, came up beside him and whispered in his ear and led him away from the party, he followed. They didn't love him. They only wanted to know what it was like to be held in that wing. Was it like sleeping with an angel? They wanted a little taste of magic in their lives. He wanted to forget. He wanted to live in this body and not wish he was still in another.

Last night he heard the swans as they flew back for the summer. He stood at his window and watched them pass by the light of the moon. His heart beat in time to their wings.

"Come back to bed," the man in his bed said. And Hans ignored him.

“I’m leaving,” he said. He wasn’t speaking to the man. He spoke to himself. Maybe to Franz. The floor was cold under his feet. There was still snow in shaded spots and ditches, but he heard the swans and the air smelled like spring.

“Leave in the morning,” the man said. And Hans turned from the window. Why not? One last time before he left.

He remembered where the witch lived. Hans told no one that he was leaving. Everyone at the castle seemed to have forgotten that Franz existed. At least, his brother’s name was never spoken among them and his brother’s wife was gone. Their rooms had been emptied out and locked. It wasn’t happy to think of them.

“You heard them, didn’t you?” the witch said. She had not changed in twenty years. She wasn’t young, but she wasn’t old. She was herself. He couldn’t decide if she was beautiful. Sometimes, he thought she was. Beautiful like a crow in the sun. Sometimes, he thought she wasn’t. The sweetish smell of death hung about her small castle.

He nodded.

“And you’ve come to ask me to change you back,” she said. She smiled. A chill blew through him. Again, he was on the roof with Franz, smelling snow in the wind. She ran a finger along his cheek. He closed his eyes. Her touch was warm. Warmer than he had expected.

“Please,” he whispered.

She ran her hand along his wing. She stretched it out to its full span and he shivered. “So beautiful,” she said. “Are you sure? Being different, being a little bit frightening can be a powerful thing. But you know this. I bet your bed is never empty. I bet you can go wherever you want in your sister’s house.”

“Please,” he whispered.

She kissed him. He could feel her smile against his mouth. He kept his eyes closed. He couldn’t look into her eyes. If he did, he’d be lost in their black depths and he’d forget he’d ever known how to fly.

“Please,” he whispered.

“If I do this, I can’t turn you back you again,” she said. Her voice was dark. “And, you’ll always return here in the spring. You’ll

swim in my moat. Maybe I'll give you a jeweled collar. And you'll live as long as I will."

"Please," he whispered. He opened his eyes. She smiled at him.

"Yes," she said. She ran her fingertips over his eyelids as if closing the eyes on a corpse. "Yes."

She towered over him. He stretched out his wings and beat them against the air.

He was home.

\* \* \*

Bess Hamilton grew up in St. Marys, Ontario, but now calls Komoka, Ontario home. Her first novel, *Remembrance*, which is historical fiction with a gothic twist, was published in 2018 by Sands Press. Her work has also appeared in Dark Ink Press's Fall 2018 Anthology.

# Gwynevere Ellis: *Illicit Sex, My Mother-In-Law and a Movie*

## 1970's

The 26-year old church choir director wore skin-tight bell-bottom jeans, a Hawaiian shirt and flip flops. I was his accompanist. We were about the same age but screamed opposites. A flamboyant extrovert who loved to shock little-old-lady-sopranos, Tommy directed from atop his desk. A sweater-and-skirt introvert, I plunked voice parts at the piano. Tommy borrowed from friends to pay rent. I lived with my parents and repaid college debt. A former seminarian, Tommy embraced the church, performing songs instead of sacraments. I was an ambivalent Catholic working for cash. We struck a friendship—dinners, late night calls, confidences.

Tommy related stories of gay bars and baths. Eager to be open-minded, I exhibited no surprise. He countered with graphic detail. I sympathized with his rejections, celebrated his conquests. A few times, we double dated with my boyfriend and Tommy's current partner.

About a year after we met, I suggested drinks after rehearsal. "Sorry—plans with John."

I knew from his side-long look, when he named a parish priest, that he planned on more than dinner. "Oh, really?"

Their encounter developed into a love affair. As Tommy's confidant, I was privy to details—their hideaways, their lovemaking, their secrets. Saturday nights, Tommy and John lived like husband and husband. Sunday mornings, John preached morality and monogamy, Tommy directed the pious choir, and I chuffed the organ to

*While beauty and youth are in their full prime,  
And folly and fashion affect our whole time,  
O let not the phantom our wishes engage,  
Let us live so in youth so we blush not in age.*

Between masses, Tommy mooned. He painted himself older and wiser, a kindly Casanova. He looked proud and smug as he

disclosed his affair and I concealed the fling from those who paid their salaries.

“I’m out of here!” That’s what I should have said when a priest broke vows with a church employee. “I’m divorcing myself from this corruption.” Instead, I relished my insider role and pictured myself enlightened. Accustomed to family secrecy, I ignored the duplicity and marched to the rhythm of ritual. When John clinked the thurible chains, I savored the bronze scent, the musky fog, the swirling vapors. When Tommy boomed a toccata, I shivered at the reverberation, the tingling in my skin. I accepted what appeared inevitable—given the demand for priestly celibacy—and covered for the cheaters.

### **1980’s**

As investigators intoned the pedophilia refrain, Tommy wrinkled his nose and said, “Chickenhawks.” He distinguished his relationship with John—two consenting adults who only broke sacred vows—from the actions of pedophile priests: men who broke sacred vows with underage boys.

As the scandal swelled, I covered my ears and hummed a silent “la, la, la, la,” as I baptized my babies and bought their lacy, white, first holy communion dresses.

“Wake up!” That’s what I should have said to myself. But I knew no one who had been molested. I distanced myself from heinous acts because they happened far away. Each Sunday, I slid across polished mahogany and whiffed the wood oil; wrestled my spine against a rigid backrest; genuflected into a rock-hard kneeler. Rather than confront the prickle in my conscience, I indulged in the organ’s prolonged chords, the polyphony, the bass notes that pulsed. Then, I daydreamed through the homily, waiting for the postlude. It was easy—I redirected from misdeeds and skipped behind the piper of hymns and hallelujahs.

As wrongdoings arose, I did as my family taught: ignore and conceal. Remain loyal despite crimes or indiscretions. And above all, discuss with no one. In my early teen years, I learned at school about a family member arrested for public homosexual activity. The charge was something like disorderly conduct, but details in the paper clarified the offense. Outrage consumed me—not at the crime but

that my parents never told me. But this was our pattern. If we ignored a scandal, we could pretend it didn't exist.

Was my family the norm? Did all Catholics deny indiscretions? What else could explain such allegiance? With priests molesting boys and girls and cardinals covering for the molesters, millions still filled the pews and collection baskets.

## 2006

When the landline rang, my 85-year old mother-in-law uncurled her arthritic fingers. She lifted the handset, yanked its spiral cord and cradled it against her head. "Hello." Then, not another word. Her jaw loosened, she shrank backward, muttered an occasional "nnn" through her dentures. Muffled syllables resonated from the phone, like a radio in the next room, audible but not understandable. She sank into a chair and supported her forehead in one palm; she looked like a kite at the end of a string, one howling force yanking her into the wall, another connecting her to this room.

When the words fell tacet, she laid the receiver on the table and said to my father-in-law, "I told you about this." Still slumped, she spoke to my husband and me. It happened on a summer night in the 1950's, in a rural town, after a late shift at her sister's restaurant. A single mother eager to tuck in her daughter, she accepted a ride from a customer. As she dropped into the front seat and tugged her uniform over her knees, she thanked him for the comfort and safety of his sedan.

He sped away, spun gravel on the country road, ignored the rain, ignored the speed limit, ignored my mother-in-law begging him to slow down, to stop, until finally he did and then ignored her as she begged him to keep driving, to step on the gas, to take his hands off her.

A month later, when she realized she was pregnant, my mother-in-law visited her priest. Wearing authority in his stiff white collar, he advised her: leave town; find an adoptive family; tell no one.

Nine months later, she handed her baby boy to strangers. Then she concocted a fiction about her absence, returned to her hometown and pretended life was fair.

The caller was her 50-year old son, no longer the infant she remembered.

My mother-in-law's life was 85 years of complicated. She had been married, widowed and borne a daughter—all within a year. Most of the family didn't know that before she married again and adopted my father-in-law's five children, she gave up this infant. She birthed three more babies, bringing her total brood to nine (or ten, if you count the absent baby). She never learned to drive and developed a phobia of freeways, presumably because her first husband died in a car accident. In other ways, she played the warrior, stretching hamburger and beans to feed eleven on a fireman's salary; taking in laundry to supplement her budget; steering children through Catholic school, shepherding them to daily mass, begging nuns not to expel her unruly boys. She smoked, drank highballs and taught her children to play Sheepshead. On occasion, she minded her niece, who had Down Syndrome, and fed hungry neighborhood boys.

“WTF,” I wanted to say. “How could you ever trust a priest again?”

But my mother-in-law did trust—every Sunday, she stuffed \$20 in her collection envelope, sang hymns in her tenor octave and flicked her tongue for the communion wafer.

I should have rejected the institution that betrayed her. Instead, I made excuses: my departure would upset her; I rarely went to Mass now anyway; I could nurse my contempt privately.

I hid my disdain, silently disapproving of crimes by those who profess righteousness. Meanwhile, I nurtured a growing disgust. It wasn't just my family who concealed indiscretions and cardinals who covered for priests. Priests covered for rapists.

Over the next months, my mother-in-law talked on the phone several times with her son. She told her other children about him. Then, mother and son met for the first time in a half century and she introduced him to the family.

Silence and secrecy had obscured a person for 50 years. But my in-laws bucked protocol and broke silence. No mystery. No hushed references. No euphemisms.

I belonged to two families, both faithful to a Church that betrayed them. Mine, in their tradition of secrecy, ignored



wrongdoing. My husband's family acknowledged treachery—and still remained true.

But not every Catholic stuck around. A 2018 Gallup poll reported that Catholic attendance was down more than six percentage points over the past decade. Fewer than four in ten Catholics attended church in any given week. I wanted to be more like these people, brave enough to throw over family tradition in favor of principle.

### Today

There is a famous monologue in the 2017 Oscar-winning movie *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*. The character Mildred compares a local priest to a gang member. She asserts that although not personally involved in crimes against children, he is culpable because he belongs to the guilty gang.

For weeks after the movie, that moment replayed. Mildred's big screen words gathered my thoughts and feelings and put a frame around them. She made sense of my misgivings and anxiety. She said outright what I had refused to acknowledge—that if I belonged to the gang, I bore their guilt.

Mildred was right. I tolerated a priest's affair, a worldwide pedophilia scandal and a betrayal of my mother-in-law. I relied on a family legacy that hid secrets, denied sins, turned blind eyes. I finally understood. If I belonged to the gang that abused children, I was blameworthy. If I threw a ten in the collection basket, I supported the lies. If I accompanied the choir, I perpetuated the status quo.

So, I decided. No more money, no more Masses, no more sliding my fingers over the keys to

*The Church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is His new creation  
By water and the Word*

I stopped feeling guilty about missing Mass and felt honorable instead. I quit searching for spirituality where malfeasance thrived and looked to meditation and nature instead. I withdrew donations and gave my money to museums and orchestras.

Perhaps I was part of a trend. The 2018 Gallup report stated, "From 2014 to 2017, an average of 39% of Catholics reported attending church in the past seven days." Were the other 61% finally

rebelling? Like I was? “In particular, older Catholics have become less likely to report attending church in the past seven days.” Would the trend continue until there was nothing left? It seemed the only solution with the church incapable of reform—always new crimes, cover ups and culpable cardinals.

A few years later, I am open about my departure. But I don’t discuss it with my friend who is a missionary priest in Africa. Or with my brother-in-law who is battling cancer and derives comfort from Sunday Mass. Or my mother who has dementia and wouldn’t understand. I weigh the importance of disclosure against potential damage.

Most days, I never think about the church unless there is another Catholic crime in the paper; other days, I long for bellowing pipes and fuming incense. I am proud of my decision but regret my long-held loyalty. And meanwhile, the church marches on, proclaiming compassion, preserving secrets, protecting assets.

\* \* \*

A musician and writer, Gwynevere Ellis has published two education books. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Prime Number Magazine*, *Brevity blog*, *CHEAP POP*, *Crack the Spine* and elsewhere.

## Natalie Ruddy: *Lovely*

I barely recognized my brother as he stood, arms crossed over a crisp white tee-shirt and flannel, his curly hair more ruffled than ever. The waves lapped at the dock's supports, barely audible over the shrieking and incessant music of the carnival. "She flaked," Jake decided.

"She is not flaking," I told him, resisting the urge to scuff his sneakers he had bought just for this date.

His thick pair of glasses rose as he crinkled his nose, "I look like an idiot." With a pair of also new jeans; much slimmer and darker than any other pair he owned, I thought he looked nice. It didn't take a medium to guess what Jake would wear to school the next day: a tee-shirt and jeans—swapped out for basketball shorts if the weather allowed it. Just like every other boy in our school. The only flair he added was a baseball hat or a beanie to hide the storm cloud of hair we shared.

Just then a pair of hands covered my eyes. "Guess who?" a light voice, hot against my ear. I smiled, pulling her hands off my eyes. I turned to see Cherry, signature red lips smiling back at me. She cocked her head, looking over my shoulder. "Hi, Jakey."

"You look nice." I turned to look at my brother, who in turn was looking Cherry up and down. I looked back at Cherry, feeling a bit like I had been thrown onto a swinging arm ride. The lights of Casino Pier hung around her like an angel halo. She was a perfect mascot for the casinos that surrounded us. "You uh, wanna get going?" I still held onto Cherry's hands

"Hang on!" Cherry responded, not letting go of me as she crossed to get a better look at my brother. "I wanna check you out. I feel like I never get to see your face since you've always got something on your head"

Jake slipped his hands in his back-pocket, modeling in that non-model way that all the teen magazines go crazy over. All the teen magazines and Cherry—apparently. She giggled, her eyes shutting and smile growing even wider. Her teeth shined like pearls. Again, Jake asked "you wanna get going?"

“Where is Robert?” Cherry looked up and down the pier.

I shrunk, thinking about where my date might be. I squeezed Cherry’s hand, “why don’t you two get going. I’m sure Rob will be here any minute.” I thought if they left now, I could give both them and Rob the slip. Walk back home to where the neon lights of the shore just glowed along the coast.

“We’ll head out in a bit,” she said to me. “But I have to use the bathroom.” With that, Cherry pulled me towards the restrooms on the side of the pier. I looked back to Jake—wide eyed by not moving to stop us. There were three women in line outside the restroom. I breathed, knowing that I had at least ten minutes before confronting Rob. Maybe longer. Guys don’t know any better.

I leaned against the stucco wall of the restroom, Cherry pulled out her phone to look at herself. “I don’t like this,” I told her. “I’m going home, you and Jake have fun—“

“You are not going home. This is a double-date and you said you wouldn’t.”

“Well, I changed my mind.”

Cherry glanced at me. “Come on, Minnie. It’ll be fun.” She placed a hand on my shoulder. “You can win me a prize!” The line moved forward and I shook off Cherry’s hand.

“Isn’t that *Jakey*’s job.” I stuck my tongue out, gagging on my own words. “Ugh, you really have to call him that?”

“I call you Minnie.” Cherry called everyone she liked by some special name. She didn’t tell this to people, but if she disliked a person, she wouldn’t give them a name. Either Cherry gave you a nickname or she called you by your full, Christian name. I’d known Cherry for about five minutes when she asked me my name and responded, “I think I’ll call you Minnie. It starts with an M and you’re as cute as that little mouse is.”

I crossed my arms and let my eyes fall to the aged wood planks of the dock. I always wondered how many needed to crack before the whole pier fell to the waves. When hurricanes came the news would always flash to Casino Pier, highlighting the waves that crashed along the Ferris wheel. “*Jakey* is a lazy nickname.” I glanced at Cherry, her mouth agape. I tilted my head back, grinning. “You know it is.”

Cherry pouted. “Why am I even friends with you?”

We were finally inside the bathroom proper. The handicap stall at the end opened up. Before I could react, Cherry walked past me. Her hand snagged my wrist—with such grace I don't know if anyone but me noticed. She pulled me to the stall. Pull isn't quite right. She glided there and I followed like a lost puppy on a cloud in heaven. Once we were both in the stall with the door locked behind us, Cherry grabbed my hip and my cheek, again with such a fluid motion it was as if she were falling into me. And I fell along with her.

So she kissed me in the bathroom stall with the lights and sounds of the carnival banging on the walls—a constant reminder that *this* would all be over soon. And it was over all too soon. When she pulled away I started at her half parted cherry lips, her signature and namesake. Charity had tried other nicknames before but Cherry stuck, because it was perfect. A sweet and easy treat with a hard and hidden center. But I ate her up anyway.

Her lips moved: “Could you stand outside the stall? I actually have to pee.”

“Uh...” I stuttered like an idiot. “Yeah, of course.” I left the stall, the fluorescent lights over the bathroom mirror like a spotlight. A shiver ran down my spine. I looked up the row of stalls and at the line of women waiting. None of them looked back at me. I finally breathed.

Trying to act natural I washed my hands but my focus turned to my reflection. A breath caught in my throat as I realized my lips were stained red. The same red as Cherry's lipstick. My heart swelled, with pride or fear I did not know. What if I just left now, went straight to Jake and waited for him to notice. But he was oblivious. I licked my lips a faint sugary taste still lingering. Maybe Rob would notice. I could picture it, his big square head leaning down to kiss me and eyes shooting open as he realized that wasn't the lights reflecting off my lips or the remnants of a sugary treat. At least not a treat you could buy with tickets.

Cherry came up behind me, washing her hands as well. “Give me your lipstick.” She turned to me, mouth open as if to ask why but quickly shut it. Slipping her hand into her bag she covertly handed me her lipstick, the same way girls pass tampons in class. I slathered

it on, overdrawing my lips. Cherry rolled her eyes, giggling. “Didn’t your mom teach you to color in the lines.”

“Nope.” I pursed my lips. “Mama raised hell. A hell-raiser if you will.” I pursed my lips again. And again.

Cherry shut off the water to my sink. She leaned against the counter, arms crossed and face stern. I looked back at the line of women. An older lady came walking towards us. I straightened my back—trying to come up with a reason two girls would be talking in a bathroom as if I hadn’t been doing that all my life. She just walked past us to the handicap stall. “Minnie.” I looked back to Cherry, her face now soft. “Are you upset with me?”

I felt my face turn as red as my lips but I just responded, “yes.” Her face turned stern again. “You really had to go on a date with my brother?”

“I only asked him after you asked Robert.”

“Why do you hate him so much?”

“Hate implies I think about him. I find him predictable and obnoxious when I’m around him and whenever I’m not, I forget he exists. He’s the worst kind of man, the kind who talks too much but never has anything memorable to say.”

“I don’t think he’ll be talking much on our date.”

She cocked her head to the side. “Is that a threat?”

I grinned “It would be pretty funny if we shared an ice cream Sunday huh? Split the cherry between us.” I saw the words leave my mouth in slow motion, but couldn’t stop their exit.

We left the bathroom. Rob had arrived and was talking with Jake. Cherry and I stood by and listened as Rob droned on about The Jets for a few moments before acknowledging us. “Hey, Marianne,” he said grinning at me.

Cherry bumped into me, craning her body so her head was between Rob and I. “Robert! How are you?”

“Uh, alright. You can call me Rob ya know.”

“But it’s a nice name. I mean fame. Maybe you’ll live out your dream of being a big football star.”

Robert chuckled in a knowing way, “I play lacrosse, actually.” My eyes started to roll to the back of my head but I stopped myself by blinking.

Jake didn't give Rob the same courtesy, leaning back on his heels and rolling his eyes. "We should get going." He moved to take Cherry's hand. I saw a flash of surprise in her eyes as he wrapped his fingers around her wrist. Her lips parted and with wide eyes she reminded me of the painted plywood that accompanied the rides. The beautiful blonde princess taken captive by the dragon coaster. I never liked roller coasters. I always felt like they moved my organs around. But if Cherry asked me to ride—I would have said yes.

She accepted Jake's hand and was pulled towards the shining lights. I watched her go but soon lost her in the crowd. I felt Rob's hand slip into mine, engulfing it in sticky skin. "Did you stick your hand in the cotton candy machine?" I tried to pull my hand away but he just gripped me tighter, laughing. "You're funny, Marianne."

Real hilarious, I thought.

"Let's go on the Hydrus before the ride gets long."

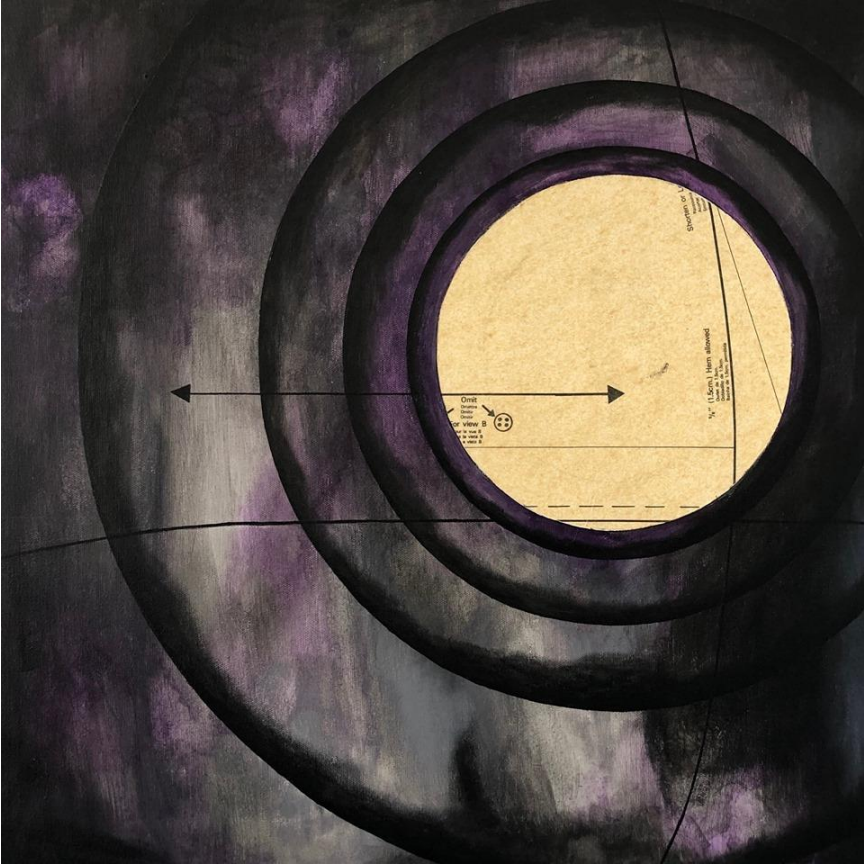
"No." Rob stared at me, blinking. "Just... I don't like coasters. Anything else is fine."

"Alright." He smiled at me. "You're an easy girl to please, Marianne."

\* \* \*

Natalie Ruddy never writes as much as she wishes she could, despite it being a rather compulsive hobby. Outside of writing, she enjoys tabletop games and dog walking. Her previous works have been published in Catfish Creek and Rivercraft magazine.

*Purple Porthole, Angie Hedman*





## Brett Abrahamsen: *The Terminus of Dream*

“You have two weeks to live”, came the doctor’s frail, hollow, evil-sounding voice from across the room. It was no use protesting, he wouldn’t hear. For I shall be upfront: he did not exist any more than a person from a dream exists, and in fact, my life had thus far been no more than that: a dream. I am 82 years old now, though it is very difficult to determine the time when there is no space, or spacetime. My body, which was supposedly only has two weeks left, was, of course, something I had dreamed, too - and I have as much time to live as my mind should allow. “Bollocks”, I replied to the frail, hollow, evil-sounding voice coming from the white coat. “I shall dream a new dream, one where I am young again.” There was a faint grey clock on the wall. “Psychosis”, the doctor murmured to himself. “Solipsism syndrome.” Then louder: “Hospice care arrives shortly. Your wife also, I am told.” He – the patient – favored his wife greatly. He would tell her things, such as, “I wish you existed. I think you should like existence very much.” If his wife did exist she likely would have thought him mad, too – and he indeed imagined that this was precisely the case. “I have to get back to the real world – at least, I hope there is one”, he would say whenever she brought up the topic. The possibility of a real world was a matter of contention amongst him. It was unclear whether the thoughts – his thoughts – came, unexplained, from nothing, like the world he supposedly lived in had, or if someone or something elsewhere had caused them to exist. Anyhow, his impending death would likely provide resolution. Clearly, his existence was predicated on everyone around him acting as if everything – himself included – was quite real, and given the inevitably fatal nature of his diagnosis, he could no longer occupy such a world. Hence, he reasoned there were several possibilities. He might, as he had supposed, invent a sort of “new dream”, in which no memory of the old one remained. He might instead simply stop dreaming, his thoughts no longer able to supply the illusions that had sustained him. Or, he might keep living eternally, imagining himself as a sort of god, etc. The pleasant voice of a hospice aide awakened him from this trance. “The cancer is eating away at you”, she said. “Not much longer”. “The cancer is imaginary”, he retorted. “And so are you”. He had to maintain caution and discretion; there was a psych ward nearby, nonetheless he could not help

himself. He stared into the dim fluorescent light. Perhaps he really was mad, he thought. Perhaps his experiment – which showed that time and space must be illusory, and that matter cannot exist – was flawed. Everyone else seemed to think it was. At that moment he entertained the possibility of going home and putting a revolver to his head and blowing his brains out; however the revolver and head were both imaginary, and if he survived it would surely lead to institutionalization. Thoughts came in his head: the Earth is not a grand design if it is only dreamed by one person, it is no less than incidental than the planet Ygrthdrd would be if Earth were real and an Earth dreamer dreamed about it; the Earth was a dream, yes, but who created the dream, if not this mental hospital? Where/what is the ultimate mental hospital of reality? The hospice nurse came and maliciously took notes, and announced that she intended to pray for him on behalf of Lr – Lr being the deity that was most in favor at the time. Lr was actualized only in the abstract, perhaps only in trance-like states, and little was known of him. He somehow suspected, perhaps arcanelly, that the cult of Lr might contain some hidden allegorical relationship to the real world, if it existed. The bed sprung from under him, and he was transported into a new room – a room for the terminally ill. Its phosphorescent light was somewhat dimmer, and it smelled putrid. The hospice nurse turned out the light, and presently left. The next few days were spent with his wife. No one can say what his wife would have believed in or thought had she existed, but he imagined that her thoughts centered around Lr, and the golden palace in which he was said to have lived. The hospice nurse gave him a series of injections, once every twenty four hours. The grey walls were unwashed, and the hospice nurse was invariably clad in a succession of dirty robes. His wife's attire, too, seemed plain, as did his own. One day he awoke and his face was black. He looked ghastly; the nurse signaled to his wife, indicating a pharmaceutical bottle of Euthanicide. His wife had nothing to say to him. He saw the potion and started raving frantically but found that he could not speak. Madness – onset.

He awoke and he was, by his estimation, seventeen years old. He could not tell where he was, but the scenery was dazzling – paradisiacal and effulgent. Time and space and matter were in perfect order, all guided by the supernatural hand of Lr. He lived to be an old, old man, by the grace of Lr, and he was content.

## Kenneth Amenn: *Skin Deep*

You don't look like you're from around here. Doubtless you heard about the business up at the Winthrop place. It's all people have been talking about the past two nights. Is it haunted you ask? Come now, haven't we outgrown the idea of ghosts? No, the horrors that went on in that old house are all too real. There's a woman who once lived there, Mrs. Valerie Winthrop-Chalmers; well, Miss Winthrop since her husband died. He left her quite a bit of money I believe. You suspect foul play, my friend? Far from it. No one was more devastated than she when the old man passed away. Yes, she was much younger than Mister Chalmers, but their love was pure and true. The rumor went that Mister Chalmers' heart gave out.

I heard it had something to do with a sudden and terrible shock that done him in. Yes, he was scared to death. You're quick a one, stranger. Scared to death. That'd be the best way to put it. When the doctor found him, his eyes were wide open and his hands held out and frozen stiff, like he were warding off something horrible. Again, you suspect it was ghosts. For now, it doesn't matter. The death of Mr. Chalmers is not what people are talking about anyway. He died no less than a decade ago. What could it be, you wonder? Well, it has all to do with Miss Winthrop's newest housekeeper of course. The last one to set foot in the Winthrop Estate. But before I get into that there are a few things you should know about our mutual friend, Miss Winthrop.

In the early years of adolescence her face was already like that of a woman. At one time Valerie Winthrop was the most beautiful in town. She was a raven-haired picture of perfection and much more mature than the other girls. Many times she playfully would trick people to think she was far older than she really was. It always worked for it was very hard for people to determine her age. Aside from being a tad mischievous Valarie Winthrop was known to be very warm-hearted and polite, especially to other gentlemen. Those who spoke to her noticed that she possessed a wisdom beyond her years. All these traits made her very popular. But none loved her more than a lonely banker, our ill-fated Mr. Chalmers. Since his death

Miss Winthrop has been in a state of depression and she has never left her house.

She roamed the dark halls looking forlornly out the windows at the people below. We all saw her occasionally. Strangest thing is, in all the times we've seen her, Miss Winthrop was always wearing a mask. It looked like it was made of copper, shaped in a permanent and sullen expression. A death mask maybe, a pallid remainder of the man she loved and lost. There didn't seem to be any holes in it for Miss Winthrop to see out of. It was almost like she was a walking statue and all the time with the same frozen stare. What? You said something about servants? Valerie had servants but none that would stay for very long. Women walked in and out of the Winthrop Estate as regular as the changing seasons. Few of them will talk about what goes on there. Most will say that their mistress was as normal as any woman they worked for.

If there was one thing the ladies didn't like it would be that Miss Winthrop would look as though she were constantly staring at them on account of her mask. It gave them a sense that their mistress was looking at them even when she wasn't in the room. The ladies always end their stories the same way. They'd be working one day and suddenly they felt they had enough, and they'd pack their things and leave without giving a reason. Poor Miss Winthrop would sometimes chase after them. "Don't go! Don't go!" She would call after them.

But it was of no use. It only made the ladies want to leave faster. There aren't any that haven't moved away I don't think. For some reason they feel compelled to get far from the mansion and its windows, with the darkly dressed woman staring out, always feeling her eyes everywhere they go.

There was all kinds of talk about how there was evil in Winthrop household. The kind of assumptions that you made earlier, talk of curses and ghosts and the feeling of being watched. Pretty soon people decided to stay clear of the place. There came a time where Miss Winthrop couldn't find anyone to look after the house. Except this one girl from out-of-town. She was a pretty one. Fair

haired, round face and pale as the moon. She was skittish around strangers; she rarely spoke to anyone. The best she could do was nod through conversations. Aurora I think was her name was. Anyway, she was a girl from out-of-town and she was looking for a job.

Sadly all the jobs were taken in town, except one. She decided to fill the position at the Estate. Aurora had no idea what she was getting herself into. Huh? Did people warn her? Sure, people warned her, but she paid it no mind. Aurora immediately took to her mistress and she to her. They became fast friends. Many times Miss Winthrop would comment on Aurora's beauty. "How much you remind me of myself when I was your age," she would say.

While Aurora was working for the Winthrop Estate she stayed in the maid's quarters and was paid handsomely for her housework. All through the spring and summer Aurora was very happy there, so happy that she was far more approachable to her neighbors. Sometimes Miss Winthrop would send Aurora down to the marketplace and she would say hello to everyone.

Aurora couldn't understand why people were so afraid of her mistress and why they feared to be near her household. For a while people began to question it themselves. Aurora tried to convince people to come up to the house, but people would make up a reason and walk away. She would try to get her mistress to come out, but she always refused. Of course you know this good feeling didn't last. Come fall Aurora's visits to town became less frequent. When she did come out it was like a dark cloud hung over this poor girl. People became worried. They started to miss her. For a long time she didn't say why but Aurora finally broke down and realized she had to confide in someone.

She turned to Wilma, the barmaid at the Inn towards the beginning of town. Aurora poured her secrets to her. I overheard them whispering to each other. She told Wilma that her mistress had recently fallen ill, not ill of health but ill of spirit. In fact she been bed ridden for the past week.. She was distraught, she didn't know what to do. The stress was getting to her it seemed. She said that sometimes she felt that someone was in the room, even when she

knew she was alone. The feeling of being watched was the worst at night. She couldn't sleep. Wilma offered her new friend a room at the Inn, but Aurora didn't feel right about it. This child possessed unsurpassed loyalty for her employer. Aurora felt a great deal of gratitude for without Miss Winthrop she would be living on the street most likely.

One night, Miss Winthrop asked Aurora to send for her special doctor. He was a strange man. Short, stocky, and his hair was sparse and graying. His demeanor was more like the town coroner than a man of medicine. As far as the doctor could tell there was nothing wrong with Miss Winthrop. He said he wasn't sure if there was anything he could do. But Aurora pleaded with him to try; she was very upset. The doctor noted how tired she looked, the circles under her eyes. No doubt she kept herself awake at night constantly looking around her room. The Doctor gave her something to sleep and promised to look in on Miss Winthrop tomorrow morning.

A strange thing happened right around midnight; the entire town was fast asleep. The only one awake was Officer Brown, who is a very good friend of mine. One time we were sharing a brew and he told me what he saw that night. He said that he was on the street corner when suddenly there came this loud wailing. At first he assumed it was two cats that were fighting. Then there came this woman, half-dressed, running down the street screaming. She was so loud people were poking their heads out of the windows to see what was going on. The girl looked like Valerie Winthrop; she was wearing the copper mask and had the same dark hair. Officer Brown got to her and she was rambling incoherently. He tried to get it off her, but they couldn't because it only made things worse. She kept repeating the same thing, "The mask...don't take off the mask!"

That girl was never the same and she was in such hysterics that they had to send for a cab to take her straight to St. Lucy's Hospital. That dark hair turned out to be a wig because it fell off in the struggle to get her inside the carriage. No one knows for sure what happened to poor Aurora. Maybe it was all those stories must have gotten the best of her, the poor girl. From what the doctors could piece together from her ramblings it seemed that Aurora was

convinced that she had switched places with her mistress, Miss Winthrop. Or so Officer Brown told me, he rode in the cab with her when Aurora was sent way.

She said Miss Winthrop's special doctor gave her something to relax and when she fell asleep someone came into her room and stole her face. When she woke up she had the mask on and when she looked underneath it gave her such a fright that she ran into the street. When the police came to the Winthrop estate Valerie was gone. They looked for her special doctor, but he was gone too.

I heard that they managed to get that mask off her finally while she was sleeping. Her face had changed, sort of patched on, like the patch you find on an old worn out blanket. There were marks that looked just like stitch marks. It wasn't her face, obviously. Aurora told them earlier that her mistress had the mask on all the time because underneath there was something ghastly, so horrible that she couldn't bear to face the world. You'll remember earlier what I said about Miss Winthrop. I talked about her beauty and about how much older she looked than the rest of the girls.

Her looks were a gift in her adolescent days, for she was loved by her neighbors and friends. I'm supposing you think it was the work of the devil. You're not the first. Perhaps an old beggar woman that she jilted one time long ago put a hex on her. I do not believe in such things but then again it might explain what happened to her dear husband. I can picture it, can't you? Poor Mister Chalmers would come home after working long hours at the bank, he would get into his nightclothes, get into bed and notice his wife curled over on the other side. He'd turn to kiss her and then, he'd see something so frightening it stops his heart dead. Time was kind to her body but what about her most prized quality? The thing she so coveted she kept it hidden from the world. Maybe Miss Winthrop had done away with her husband after all. How would you react if your beautiful wife became a toothless old hag overnight?

\* \* \*

Kenneth Amenn has one brother and two sisters and resides in Illinois. A long-time fan of Golden Age science fiction, he's been influenced by Asimov, Bradbury, Dick and Heinlein. His hobbies include amateur film making, voice acting, and writing jokes.

## *Green Porthole, Angie Hedman*





## Amelia Chen: *Squirrels, Starbursts, and a Burnt Quesadilla*

*[A typical boy's room. Toy cars, blue walls, nerf guns; imagination, run wild. Wednesday night, it is dark but JOHN LU is not yet asleep. JOHN LU, nine-but-almost-ten, arms crossed, sat up in his bed and fuming. Shrine of math books on his desk. Clock on his nightstand, counting the minutes, the seconds, in his head a mantra: I want to be smarter. I want to be better. I want to be older.]*

#

It was my senior year when the academy decided that it would finally listen to the years of complaints of our alumni and make everybody take a Life Skills class before they graduated. They handed the job off to one of the librarians, a Ms. Taylor, who was as librarian as a librarian could be — pastel cardigans and cat eyeglasses with that chain that looped around your neck and ensured that you never lost them. She was the sweetest creature, had let me return some books that had been overdue since the year before (*The Handmaid's Tale*, *Cloud Atlas*, and *A History of Love*) without any repercussions, and so far out of her depth that most of my classmates didn't even bother showing up after the first lesson. I felt bad for her, and so did Lucas, so we stayed. We were the only two guys left. A handful of the girls who were more forward-thinking stayed too, and picked up mending and tire changing like it was second nature. Me and Lucas did okay. He was better at the car stuff but my quesadillas tasted phenomenal while he kept burning the cheese.

The academy had stuck us in one of the unused labs at the far end of campus, in the rickety old science building they'd converted into an everything-that-isn't-a-core-class space without renovating any of the classrooms. We spent four days a week in a mildewing old science lab, complete with ancient Bunsen burners for us to spill baked beans on. An appropriate setting, we sometimes joked. College might look just like this. Maybe even after.

When Lucas burned the quesadillas for the fifteenth time, Ms. Taylor tapped him on the shoulder and faintly suggested that he save some of the cheese and the tortilla for the next class. She reached out a hand to turn off the hot plate but missed and instead placed her fingers on the hot surface. “Fuck,” she said, very quietly, “not again.” She stuck her fingers in her mouth and walked to the sink to rinse them under cold water.

I looked at Lucas. He looked at me. We shrugged. He started to eat some of the burnt quesadilla and Mama’s voice in my head hissed *no, do not eat, cancer!* I handed him one of mine instead.

#

A short list of things that I don’t know:

1. My grandfather’s birthday
2. Proper Chemistry
3. Whether the sky on the day of that fifth grade field trip — you know the one, it was the one with all the bees, with the gatorade and the bees crawling around on my lips — was as blue as I remember it
4. If when you get hit in the head really really hard you can remember languages you forgot, even the dead ones you’ve been carrying around for centuries
5. If I like cilantro
6. Where the goldfish we flushed down our toilet actually went
7. My insides and my parents and my sister’s nighttime dreams
8. If a color is still a color before it is seen

#

My best friend Lucas knows exactly how many different kinds of white he is. He’d be sitting at our lunch table, the one with the unidentifiable purple stain on the gray plastic tabletop that has a tiny hole drilled into it the diameter of an unrolled paperclip, and count off his many ethnicities on his fingers: Italian, Irish, Scottish, English, some Russian from his mom’s side, a bit of Turkish that snuck in

sometime in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, German but before Germany was Germany and instead Germanic tribes, and perhaps some Finnish, some Spanish, some Portuguese and French. Most of this knowledge was gleaned from the 23andMe test that I gave him for Christmas as a half-joke-half- serious present, but the rest was gathered at family gatherings and dinner table ramblings and the fact that he loves, loves, *loves* pasta. He claims that he could eat pasta, and only pasta, for the rest of his life. I, on the other hand, couldn't stomach that much gluten anytime, all the time. Even rice- based products can make me queasy when I stare at them too much; rice mounded in my bowl week after week and disguised as porridge or noodles, those mornings when we have to eat salty vegetables that have been pickled by unnamed reddish solutions. Dumplings are okay because we eat them only once or twice a month, and the meat buns and stuff from northern China are the best because I see them maybe only once or twice a year because we're from farther South — I know that much — closer to the rooster's loins than to its head, closer to the salt and the warmer, darker, wilder countries like Myanmar and Laos and Thailand. Closer to the ghosts that hiss of old grievances. Closer to the forgotten.

#

Did you know that Red Delicious apples are called “she guo” in mandarin Chinese? That that can sound like “snake fruit” or “bearable fruit” as in that Adam can watch Eve taste it and survive but condemn the world as soon as he takes a bite. As in “bearable country” when my parents found the smallest apartment in the so-called city because that was what they could afford back then when they still thought that she guo was worth 60 or 70 dollars apiece but found that they could buy a bag of nine of them for only four dollars total in Costco the next day. As in “to ford” or “to wade,” as in the slow bedraggled movements of the melting river in the spring and the odd twigs and leaves that float on it like the Ganga Aarti candles in the Ganges except browner, except unlit, except un- uniform, except sun-browned. Wishes, woven into flowery wreaths, my mother floating in river with her hair spread all about her. A halo. A halo of snuffed candlelight.

#

Lucas's family doesn't do Thanksgiving; they just go skiing or snorkeling during that week-long break we get in November, but my family insists on having a big Turkey dinner every year even though the rest of our family lives on the other side of the country or on the other side of the

Pacific. Mama spends hours dealing with a bird she's seen alive maybe three times in her life and Ba crushes mountains of potatoes so that we have enough to feed us for three months straight. They buy cranberry sauce in a big mason jar and proclaim, with pride, that it's *Au-then-tic* and *Or-gan-ic*. We always give it to the food bank untouched.

So every year it's just the four of us, Ba, Mama, Joy, and me, sitting at the big and seldom used dining table that's displayed in the living room that nobody goes to, trying to pass the beans even though there's meters of space between each of us and we simply cannot reach. We facetime the grandparents. Joy and I wave and say hi and they smile so wide but I can't understand a word they're saying, their speech always distorted by unfamiliar vowels and the buzzing static of our phone speakers and a big empty bag of Chinese vocabulary that I'm always fishing around in, hoping to find something other than crumbs. It always takes them ages to hang up because Yeye's hands are shaky from years of hard labor hammering metal in China's old factories and Nainai can't figure out technology.

Mama told me this in a hushed voice, like it was a secret, like it was some fact that only the two of us shared. Mama has told me secret stories about growing up in Beijing, about how the buses would be so crowded with people that she would have to stick out two bony elbows to dig out for herself a breathing space; about how she and her friend would trek through the city every Sunday to visit her friend's grandpa-who-wasn't-her-grandpa, breathing in the dust and the dry prickle of Beijing's pre-pollution air; about drinking warm horse's milk and falling on her forehead when she was two and

the scar that's nestled in her hairline; about why her teeth are more black than white because of the medicine her parents made her drink; about how she could've been an accountant because she'd been top of her class in elementary school and had always been good with numbers but then got a full ride to a government full-expense-paid arts academy where class president didn't mean the student with the highest marks in math; about the pranks the boys would play, about the chicken factory across the street, about my grandma's sweater business, about what could've been. Mama tells me her secrets, but I'm always more surprised by when she doesn't. When I walk into her room at 9 o'clock at night and she's sitting on her bed and looking out the window, her hair down, longer than I thought. When she pouts at the bread struggling to rise in the oven because she forgot to add yeast. When I look at her and don't recognize her. When she looks like a cathedral wreathed in spilled light.

#

54 days after I retired the tender age of six my father ruffled my hair and called me a "true momma's boy." I had given Mama my cupcake with the pink frosting and the chocolate sprinkles and eaten a cookie instead. I don't know where he picked up the phrase; he wasn't a big man, not gruff either, but endearingly short and stocky by the time I was old enough to figure out what that meant. It was in this form that he persisted for the rest of my life, gradually caving in on himself, his skin developing new creases and his spine becoming more and more compact as the weight of his brain overcame it. Mama once showed me a picture of Ba when he was young, fresh and baby-faced, in college or grad school. He had these big coke-bottle glasses that took up half of his face and his nose was a little wrinkled and the shadows weren't great but I could see his eyes. They were my eyes, the same shape, with the same triple fold in the left eyelid, the stubby eyelashes. When I held that snapshot up to the side of my face and smiled at our reflections in the bathroom mirror it was like looking at a pair of fraternal twins, two sets of DNA riffing on each other. Ba was a skinny boy back then, like me, skin and bones and lean muscle that's stronger than it looks. And it's clichéd but I could see the mischief bubbling in his eyes, mischief I see

surface now and again when he suggests that we sneak out for ice cream or buy flowers for Mama without her knowing or take a detour on the way to Chinese class so that I'm late but have seen that the tadpoles in the river have grown legs. I'm looking at that snapshot in the mirror and holding his cheekbones right against mine and looking at his coke bottle glasses and his slightly crooked smile. I'm looking and looking and can't see Ba. Just stick out ears and a squint. Just straight black hair. Just the beginnings of crow's feet. Just a boy waiting to grow into something bigger: set naked on a kingdom he knew nothing of and growing old before he could muster the courage to say —

#

The day of my eighteenth birthday I played hooky and drove up the dirt road next to the winding hiking trail on that mountain with all the tall evergreen trees. Lucas came with. He'd decided that green bandanas, especially when tied around the neck as a scarf-choker affectation, were cool even after I'd assured him that he looked like the witness being cross-examined in *Legally Blonde the Musical*. "Johnny boy," he'd replied, "that is the point."

So Lucas bounced along in the passenger seat with that idiotic green bandana knotted around his throat. The dirt path was pitted with potholes and odd tracks because it was a warm day in an uncharacteristically warm March that had followed an uncharacteristically cold winter. Lucas clung to the dashboard and whooped along like we were on a rollercoaster, and I rolled down the window and drove with one hand on the wheel and the other hanging out the car like it had no cares in the world.

When we got to the top, I parked haphazardly in the middle of the clearing and we gamboled to our destination, that overhanging ledge that allows you to see the entirety of the valley. We didn't have any illegal substances because we were good private school boys and didn't want to get kicked out, not when we were *so* close to leaving of our own volition — who am I kidding, Lucas had gotten his hands on a full bottle of vodka, and had stashed it in a thermos that he retrieved, with flourish, from

beneath the front passenger seat. “Europeans,” he shrugged when I asked him how.

It was a warm day and the sun had already heated the exposed rock of the ledge just enough so that it acted like a lukewarm hot plate. We took off our jackets and hung them on the trees for the squirrels to explore. We drank vodka. We talked. We sang songs like “Rolling in the Deep” and “Sweet Caroline” with voices scratched and breaking from discarded talent. The squirrels had found the starbursts in my coat pockets and were nibbling at the paper wrapper and spitting it out in little waxy chunks.

“Y’know,” I said, clicking my tongue at the clouds ambling across the sky, “I’ve never been with anyone yet. No girls. No one. Not even a kiss.”

Lucas rolled over onto his stomach and pointed. “Then get thee to a nunnery!”

“Seriously, I’m eighteen today and haven’t done *anything* yet —“

“To a nunnery, go!”

“Stop it, we’ve already *done* too much Hamlet this year —”

“O,” Lucas sprang up from the ground and put his hand to his forehead, “that this too too sullied flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew...” He wrapped his arm around his stomach and

lurched to the edge of the ledge, bellowing and falling to his knees “...because, woe is me, I have yet to be laid, so how weary, stale, flat, and *unprofitable* seem to me all the uses of the world!”

“O, woe is *me*,” I replied, “I’ve seen what I have seen: namely having to sit through you doing that again. God, you’re just going to keep milking that soliloquy until you’re old and decrepit and spotty, aren’t you?”

Lucas took a swig from the thermos and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. “Yep.”

“Well, God bless you, sir, you and your corruption of Shakespeare’s iambic pentameter.” I rolled onto my stomach and watched a ladybug clamber its way up the stalk of a tiny yellow dandelion.

"Man, eighteen. Can you believe it?"

"Yeah, I've already been an adult for, like, four months. Welcome to the club, young grasshopper."

Lucas flopped down onto the grass with me and coaxed the ladybug onto his index finger. The clouds drifted a little further apart.

"Well," I grumbled into the grass. "This sucks."

"Yep. Don't you just love what's coming: voting, the lottery, college, taxes — "

"*Taxes.*"

"Mhm." Lucas stretched out his arms and groaned. "I'm never going to survive after college. I tried

to make ramen the other day when I was home alone and burned it." I laughed. "Instant ramen? Like the kind you're supposed to just add hot water to?"

"Oh, is that what you're meant to do? I put it in the microwave and it kind of... caught fire."

"Wow. Good job."

"Why, thanks, my good sire." He held out the thermos delicately. "A toast?"

It was a warm day. The clouds drifted ever farther apart. I saw an elephant in their vapors. Lucas saw an emu. The vodka evaporated in our sweat and the sun went down and we bumped our way home that day, no one the wiser.

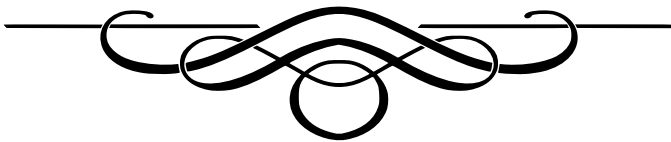
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Amelia Chen is a sophomore at Williams College, which is located in the forgotten bit (see: the left part) of the state of Massachusetts. Her work has been recognized by the Lex Allen Literary Festival, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, and the Adroit Prizes, and has appeared in *Sine Theta Magazine* and *The Marble Collection*.





Part II:  
Poetry & Photography





# Soren Narnia

1993

Because he had a Batman sticker on his notebook:  
That was why I suddenly told the blind kid  
that some of us were going to the movie that night  
and if he had nothing better to do  
then why not come. It was a Friday.

On the way to the theater I told Greg and Terry and Colby  
that we had to swing by and pick someone up  
and out the blind kid came from a bruised blue house on Sumac  
with a twenty-dollar bill and a real good sense of where we were  
idling.  
He said hi and so did my friends;  
my friends said hi.

I sort of made sure he knew where to buy popcorn  
and helped him navigate past a big red post.  
He listened to the movie that the rest of us watched,  
face drowned in a blizzard of white light  
and I think he went to the bathroom in the middle of it but I'm not  
sure.  
He didn't say anything walking back to the car  
but was okay with going out to the diner afterward  
where he just had a Coke  
and seemed like his bedtime was long overdue.  
When we all talked about our favorite part of the movie  
he thought a minute and mumbled that the scene on the ledge was  
pretty cool.  
How come? said Colby.  
Because you didn't know if the hostage was secretly working for the  
Joker or not.

We dropped him off at eleven and said So long,  
Good luck on Wycheck's history test Monday,  
and his father or someone was standing in the glowing doorway,

raising a hand as we pulled away.

On the way down Bennett, past the Boulevard of Jerks,  
we talked about Loch Ness and standup comedy.  
I dropped Greg off first, then Terry at his stepdad's,  
and Colby came over for a bit to check out the new TV in my room.  
When I let him out at his house he went *Beep beep boop*  
and I said *Boop boop beep*, and the next day was November.

That's the kind of guys those guys were:  
Dependable and always aware that things mattered.  
They never said, *Hey, what was the deal with that whole night, that one time  
with the blind kid?*  
And I never had to say that I thought I would feel  
something different.  
Good guys, who never treated girls wrong.

If you go now, go now sometime to the very spot where Terry  
made that almost-miracle sideline run against Brick Ridge,  
go there before the sun comes up  
there's no bleachers there anymore,  
because the ground froze so hard in that field  
that the hoofprints of deer might be from the generation  
before the one you imagine.

## Four Online Dates

Michelle assembled cardboard cathedrals on a table in her room  
and had never experienced a second date  
and she thought my fear of revolving doors was no joke  
because, she said, they really could hurt you.  
If she lost her glasses, thick as a windshield, she'd be helpless and  
alone  
in a world of sharp pointy things.

To Shay, everyone was a moron  
and not to be trusted on the road, or in medicine.  
She showed me the scar on her ankle  
where the doctor had made her ballet injury worse.  
*How can anyone think Andy Warhol is art*, she wondered  
and sent her food back to the kitchen, just like the Friday before.

When Carolyn sent me a message  
about why I'd gone dark after mini golf  
I was honest, but kind of not.  
I said I was a little confused at the moment, and wondered  
if we were really on the same page.  
I used that phrase three times: *On the same page.*  
*Maybe I'm just really tired*, I typed,  
*I have a lot going on at my office.*  
*We'll meet up again sometime.*

There was one date whose name began with three vowels.  
She moved her pappardelle around on her plate  
and tried to explain to me how Spain worked  
while asking me again about the mix she'd sent me.  
No, I told her, I wasn't familiar with those bands.  
Sometime after ten I snapped a picture of her at the harbor  
standing on the pier, where she joked/not joked about jumping in  
if her life didn't get better.

Sometime after that I went into space for eleven years.

I lived in low earth orbit on a jointly funded station  
and I started working on their fuel transfer problem,  
but the data transmitters were so slow  
that I asked to turn to those instead.  
I came up with a formula to filter out all the unstable primes;  
it interpreted the stream so much faster  
that the signals penetrated numbers no one had known were there.  
What got me a prize and a lot of money was that  
the Swiss found in them the belief  
that time in our solar system might not expand and contract  
the way we think.

From the shuttle that returned me to Florida  
the curvature of Vell Novum looked tinged in purple.  
Down to the ground, and onto the airplane, tram from the airport to  
the hotel.  
Rental car, one hundred miles, parking garage, taxi cab, and home.  
Then twenty-one months of physical therapy  
to offset the loss in the density of my bones.

I live in London now, girls.  
I did eventually find my page,  
but I haven't forgotten yours.  
It's where I go sometimes to remember how  
from the nursery of stars we met in  
I could grow you nothing but a stillborn constellation  
where our daughters stumble and reach out only for each other:

Fiona, Elizabeth, Nell, and Little Shay,  
the one with her mother's angry hazel eyes.

\* \* \*

Soren Narnia writes prose and poetry in Falls Church, Virginia.

# Chase Fouhy

## THE WESTERN APPARITIONS

I saw the western apparitions  
approaching in the night. Ashen,  
white and pale skin with gleaming  
eyes of glory. Rugged, rough and  
full of fight we broke bread with  
roast and land.

They traded in tales of tears and  
sweat which bloomed the crops below  
of savage thunder rolling in and  
pounding at the edge. An enticing  
siren song, sung low pleads ignorance  
of clouds above.

These spirit hymns are sung throughout  
school halls and solemn pews. The  
savage stories specifically bleated  
blissfully on bated breaths.  
Unbeknownst to those who sing it all  
glory goes with pain.

Other wanderers roam the night as  
well, their blood does equal the soil.  
No thunder cracks, just silent tears that  
deafen as they fall. The crops grow full  
yet taste of spoil and new seeds are  
never sown.

My ghost's control the crops  
we grow and hymns which we still  
know.



Meanwhile, those whose ancestors  
were the forewarned storms, bring  
dripping, scorned, grey clouds and still  
scream silent wind swept songs which  
move golden grain in waves of  
injustice across the plains.

Standing in an open field some  
might here the roving pain.

And often washed by the rains I ask  
my ghost's for help. They pause and  
think for a while, only offering old  
rotten songs in vain.

Or maybe even just  
grumbling  
with a gloomy, dim  
disdain.

## HIGHWAY SNAKES

White wisps slide like snakes across straight highway lines.  
They wind and weave and in a flash they break. A  
disintegration fate from gusts divine.

The sun sets and a pastel ring settles on the straight line horizon  
around. A crown resting on compass rose pedals. The gradient of  
colour shows young time westbound.

I wish my fate was known like the blue eastern skies.  
Time, as a draped dome from dark to light. Yet, it is  
only unseen frigid wind let fly.

A forward  
twist A careen  
Breaking us

Like snakes of  
white.

\* \* \*

Chase Fouhy is currently a teacher with the Calgary Board of Education living in Calgary with his fiancée. He works at a school that caters to the behavioural and educational needs of students from across the city. Most have experienced some level of trauma in their young lives which impeded their success in mainstream programming.

Chase also writes and records music that can be found on his Soundcloud page which can be found under the handle C.D.F. Here he recently released a 4-track concept EP where all the songs follow a similar common theme which was inspired by and makes use of his poem "Western Apparitions."



Walking in Madness, Elle Danbury

Linda M. Crate

**pomegranates & strawberries**

the moonlight  
sings to me  
for i am her daughter,

and she's taught me  
i don't have to be whole  
to shine;

& it is okay to go through  
phases  
some days i miss you more than others—

i don't want to face the music  
that perhaps you're a siren  
in my life,

and not a mermaid like me;  
i just want you to be happy even if i cannot  
share in the spoils of your joy—

i know i may have lost that right  
although i am not sure how,  
but we're not always given reasons

on why some leave whilst others stay;  
i am just grateful for all the people  
that remain by my side even when i'm hard to love—

you have to take the pomegranates  
with the strawberries  
because life is often bittersweet.

\* \* \*

Linda M. Crate's poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has six published chapbooks *A Mermaid Crashing Into Dawn* (Fowlpox Press - June 2013), *Less Than A Man* (The Camel Saloon - January 2014), *If Tomorrow Never Comes* (Scars Publications, August 2016), *My Wings Were Made to Fly* (Flutter Press, September 2017), *splintered with terror* (Scars Publications, January 2018), *more than bone music* (Clare Songbirds Publishing, March 2019), and one micro-chapbook *Heaven Instead* (Origami Poems Project, May 2018). She is also the author of the novel *Phoenix Tears* (Czykmate Books, June 2018).

# Bree Taylor

## *Eve*

Tell me, what did it taste like?

When glossy fruit greeted your lips

Sweet, like paradise? To combat sour disappointment.

Tart, like the contempt of a husband?

The aftertaste: bitter as the regret of eviction.

When white teeth tore into red flesh, did the earth tremble?

Or heart lift?

Did you see your daughters' tribulations that followed?

Did you care?

You shouldered the burden anyway because

You wanted change.

Yearned to be a bird

Uncaged, clothed and learned.

They say you were tricked by a forked tongue but

they do not give you the credit you deserve.

Tell me, what did it taste like?

Tell me, would you do it again?

## Land of Steel and Glass

In the land of steel and glass  
We are weeds.  
Uprooting the concrete  
Cataclysmically causing cracks  
In the lobby of your sphere.

In the land of steel and glass,  
We are the vines  
Creeping, crawling up  
The skyscrapers and across your window  
So you hear our cries.

In the land of steel and glass  
We are the forests being  
Pushed out of the way  
Trees that fall  
But will no longer be silent

In the land of steel and glass  
You want us to leave  
Soften the colours of our petals and  
Still the sting of our thistles

In the land of steel and glass  
We are beloved in the garden  
But disdained as we twist and gnarl  
And prick your fingers when you try to pluck us  
To take as you wish

So you poison us  
You burn us  
You pull us up by our roots

In the land of steel and glass you bury us beneath your feet  
But you didn't know we were seeds.



\* \* \*

Bree Taylor is an emerging writer and poet from Edmonton. She is a student opinion journalist, and writer of short stories, science fiction and fantasy with a penchant for queer and feminist characters. With a background in theatre, she loves to bring dramatic flare to every aspect of life. Bree is a lover of books, video games, old gods, and earl grey tea.

# Kelly Martini

## **I'm there**

down

below your shoulders

just out of reach

beyond your nicotine greased fingertips

from cigarettes you've quit

stolen, the empty pack still crushed

deep within her back pocket

I watch the whole scenario through paranoia-scope

memory stock footage, of you

revealing a solitary dimple

winking in her direction (she's a goner)

eyes turning soft amber, direct connection to sunlight

not green or brown but the jump in between

unable to fully commit to either color

every time her mouth forms

that perfectly overlined pout

lips pressed against tiny teeth

know I am behind her molars waiting

for sparks to smother

for hour long conversations  
to turn to obligatory greetings

I'll appear  
punctuation in your excuses  
*why you can't see each other anymore.*  
*why it was never really that good.*

I'm your regret  
every crying face  
accusing you, reminding you  
how much you still love me

## Commitment, or Lack Thereof

Bring her to the library; borrow  
a modern fairytale for love,  
a childhood favorite for luck.

*Bring her to the shoreline; collect  
broken shells for the windowsill,  
burnished rocks to weigh her down.*

Share a future together enduring  
distance, seduction, envy, hopelessness:  
a regurgitation of another's experience.

*Share a life of nightmarish tolerance:  
distanced feelings, fragmented vows,  
a shift from temptation to opportunity.*

Drive to the city with a dozen  
roses: an opening night performance  
to leave you breathless and enamored.

*Drive to the coast with a dozen  
reasons: justification, manifestation,  
leaving you breathless and restless.*

Stare at her and

the elegant execution  
of her imperfections.

*Stare through her,  
accepting the anxiety  
of abandoned desire.*

When did you fall out of love?

\* \* \*

Kelly Martini, a New Jersey native, earned a BA in Creative Writing from Rutgers University. She works in marketing, blogs about music, and is still trying to finish the play she started writing six years ago.



Tea and refreshments to follow, Elle Danbury

Paul Robert Mullen

*cross country*

there were memories falling  
from your pockets

in the back carriage  
of the 11:57 going west

i met your side profile  
dressed in dulled countryside insignias  
and jagged rays  
at least a dozen times  
those eyes a banquet of  
trouble

i watched you get off  
at Crewe  
knowing that was it for us  
knowing that a hospital for broken hearts  
would declare us both  
terminal

without ever really knowing why

\* \* \*

Paul Robert Mullen is a poet, musician and sociable loner from Liverpool, U.K. He has three published poetry collections: *curse this blue raincoat* (2017), *testimony* (2018), and *35* (2018). He has been widely published in magazines worldwide. Paul also enjoys paperbacks with broken spines, and all things minimalist.



# Becca Noel

## Me

"You sound just like your father."  
The words twist out of her mouth  
like a root canal.

"That's your mother talking."  
He looks away  
his ears turned toward himself.

"I'm sorry." I don't say,  
silence hanging inside me as I  
realize I am not myself.

\* \* \*

Becca Noel has been writing for as long as she can remember but has never submitted anything until now. Her twitter handle is regrettably @BehCAWW and she's known to ramble on [pettybitchblog.com](http://pettybitchblog.com)—sometimes regrettably as well. She passionate about naps, cake, and her dislike for Mitch McConnell.

David L. O’Nan

IN THE PALMS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

I’m a runaway from  
The colours of my aura  
Slithering like worms across the cracks of sidewalks  
My palms have lines that are geometrically wrong  
Where do the nails go?  
When they capture me  
To evict me, to a death  
When they mark me like all of Christianity  
Rising above the rest  
I live with nature, everchanging repetition  
No one else hears  
My cries in the night  
Like wolves, like all of my fears  
How are screams so fluent?  
In an echo, a breath  
A convulsion, still so fluent?  
Everyone has deep eyes  
Congruent to my ruin  
I remember love  
And the mystery of bells  
The ringing of heartache  
And the burning of hell  
Inside my palms  
I always know my passions  
Only I, and my ghosts of mind can imagine  
And in this world  
Even levitation leads to a drowning.

*Maylynn, Boots, & the Red Mule*

Maylynn, the daughter of spitshines  
A futile angry father, a bastard, the red mule  
Mother, a woman of the lord who served more alcohol  
And shouts to walls  
Seeds without the proper watering  
Grew in the shadows in a blind man's view of a cabin  
Maylynn worked by riverfronts with her brothers  
2 pompous men that she hardly knew  
She turns to stained paint clothing  
'can't lotion all of the cuts  
Lacerations turn to wisdom  
And Maylynn will burn all those cabins  
Destroy oncoming stormclouds with chipped teeth smiles  
She always feels the queasy Earth with toes poking through her boots  
Those boots were her prized purchase from a general store window  
They were worn through the rain tears that burnt her oily tearducts  
Boots than ran through her own hard nights away from savage  
masochisms  
She got away,  
The cowards hid much like her father (the red mule, or Jim, or the  
bastard)  
Whatever the appropriate label  
He was an electric chair mind battling all his belts, day by day  
Getting stuck in all the sizzling and popping  
While mother licks cigarette fire and dreams up her own soap opera  
Maylynn, in her twenties, into her thirties  
Working by the dirty riverfront, dilapidated boats and beer guts  
bouncing and  
Shouting at her day in, day out  
She slept on benches at times after screams to God  
"Release the floodwaters over my sore screaming eyes  
Inside hidden walls of water"  
"Look into my burning iris"  
"Can you see the nerves ripping at the stroma?"

“Like one would rip the weeds from the ground”  
She would often feel shy from the killer, that sunlight  
A protection façade  
Enter her forties. Monotonous job. Same diner. Same coffee.  
Same Eggs. Same callouses. Various coloring of toasts however.  
Every night she feels like an escape  
While in dreams, a tunneling  
Sees herself jumping from star to star  
Forming her own constellations  
“take this soul, present it to the motherly moon!”  
“the only Mother I have really had!”  
“Hold my poetry inside, clutched to my chest”  
Sitting bootless by drunk trains that purge sewage air  
A mixing of gravel, lollipop sticks, and an open letter to Jesus from  
the prayers at midnight  
Well, as for Mother she fell ill to all the toxins  
Passed while Maylynn was 42  
The Red Mule died clutching his chest  
Holding a shovel, trying to bury all his secrets and ghosts  
Maylynn lived in tears through her forties  
In a coaltruck driver’s arms  
In pancake breakfast fights with frizzy hair waitresses,  
And streetwise strippers who smelled like pancake syrup  
Who’d like to steal jewelry from narcissistic businessmen  
The businessmen who fooled around on their wives, and  
Wondered why later on their pubic area itched.  
Maylynn, left town at 50  
Bought her some new boots  
Became a cashier at a different general store  
After living alone in her memories for half a century  
All her bruises were finally rescued  
To a slight comfort  
She met a woman she never knew  
At a new diner. With new eggs. New coffee.  
She liked the same teas, the same beer  
Had butted heads with the testosterone machine guns that layered  
The streets in spit just like the Red Mule  
Maylynn discovered the beauty of Marigolds, the peace

Security.

Even that sunlight which burned her skin for years

Upheld its magic and felt real for the first time

Maylynn, new boots, with love

No thoughts anymore of red mules and street criminals

Poisons in the well, but not for her

\* \* \*

David L O'Nan has been writing for close to 20 years. He has self published 2 poetry books "the Famous Poetry Outlaws are Painting Walls and Whispers" & "All of Our Fears in Tunnels" he is currently EIC of the litmag/bookzine "Fevers of the Mind Poetry Digest" formerly known as Fevers of the Mind Poetry & Art Digest. along with his wife Hillesha. He has read poetry in public throughout Southern Indiana. He grew up in Western Kentucky, has lived in New Orleans and now in Evansville, Indiana. His work can be seen in Truly U, Dark Marrow, a soon to be Voices for the Cure: ALS Anthology, Ghost City Press.

# Demi Whitnell

## Butter loves dynamite

Being soft like butter is hard when everyone around you is solid as dynamite. Melt their fuse rather than let them ignite your wet areas.

\* \* \*

Demi Whitnell is a 20 year old Literature student studying at Queen Mary University of London. She is the head editor of her universities magazine but her heart certainly lies in poetry. Even though she is dyslexic, she doesn't let this stop her.



Succumb, Elle Danbury

# Laura Schaible

## Buttons

It was late and my sister  
wasn't home yet.  
We waited and we called  
but got no answer.  
You said, "I think she's  
cheating on me."  
"I know her password,"  
I said.

Two figures huddled before a screen,  
closer to understanding  
with each key pressed.  
Conspirators, violators, betrayers  
and betrayed also.  
We read her messages to  
a *him* that wasn't you,  
their feigned forbidden love,  
and I laughed.

And you stood up and  
quietly left the room.  
And quietly came back.  
With one hand I pressed three  
numbers I knew well but  
had not pressed before.  
And pressed the reddening  
towel to your arm with the other.  
I wasn't laughing anymore.



\* \* \*

Laura Schaible was born and raised in a tiny town in rural Kansas. She studied politics before remembering her original passion lay in writing. At the age of nine, her first poem was published in the 1994 edition of *Anthology of Poetry by Young Americans*. She had to read it aloud to the entire school, the memory of which still haunts her to this day. Laura lives in Kansas City with her husband and her two contrary (but beloved) cats.

# A.G. Ledesma

## Felicity

How do you explain your unhappiness to the people you love  
dearly?

How can you just tell them you've been suffering  
and floating along the river of life face down,

Feeling like you can't come up for air?

I can't seem to ever speak a word about what troubles me.

Mostly because the people in my life don't make the effort to listen.

*Would they just assume it's a phase?*

*Something that will just take time to get over?*

*More clutter to stuff under the rug?*

I am drowning among a sea of people,

but I don't speak a word

because in my head I know there are others

who have it worse than me.

*But telling myself constantly for years that my problems...*

*that my depression,*

*was nothing to worry about,*

*it was six years later*

*I had finally realized*

*that "nothing" in some point in time, turned into something.*

It became hard to get out of bed in the morning.

I found myself looking for any opportunity for an escape.

Some good.

Most bad.

*I've thought about taking my own life on many occasions.*

*Things felt as if they weren't going to change,*

*hell, as I'm writing this right now*

*I still don't feel as if things are okay.*

There's no bright sides.  
Nor was there any feeling  
of love towards my muse.

*This monstrosity known as depression  
had stripped me of my being.  
And the things I had loved most in the world  
suddenly became the things that I loathed.*

*My mother.  
My father.  
My muse.  
My fucking life.*

But being chronically depressed is what led my pen to paper.  
And suddenly it's no longer just an attempt at trying to make myself  
happy,  
suddenly it's losing something that has become a part of me.

*How do you let something go  
when it was what dragged you through the long days.  
Kept you company through the nights,  
and held your hand through the tears?*

How do you explain to your loved ones  
that your unhappiness is what brought a formation of sickly sweet  
words...

And that you would relinquish your felicity  
just for the sake of some normalcy?

# Keana Aguila Labra

## **Mahal Kita, Nanay**

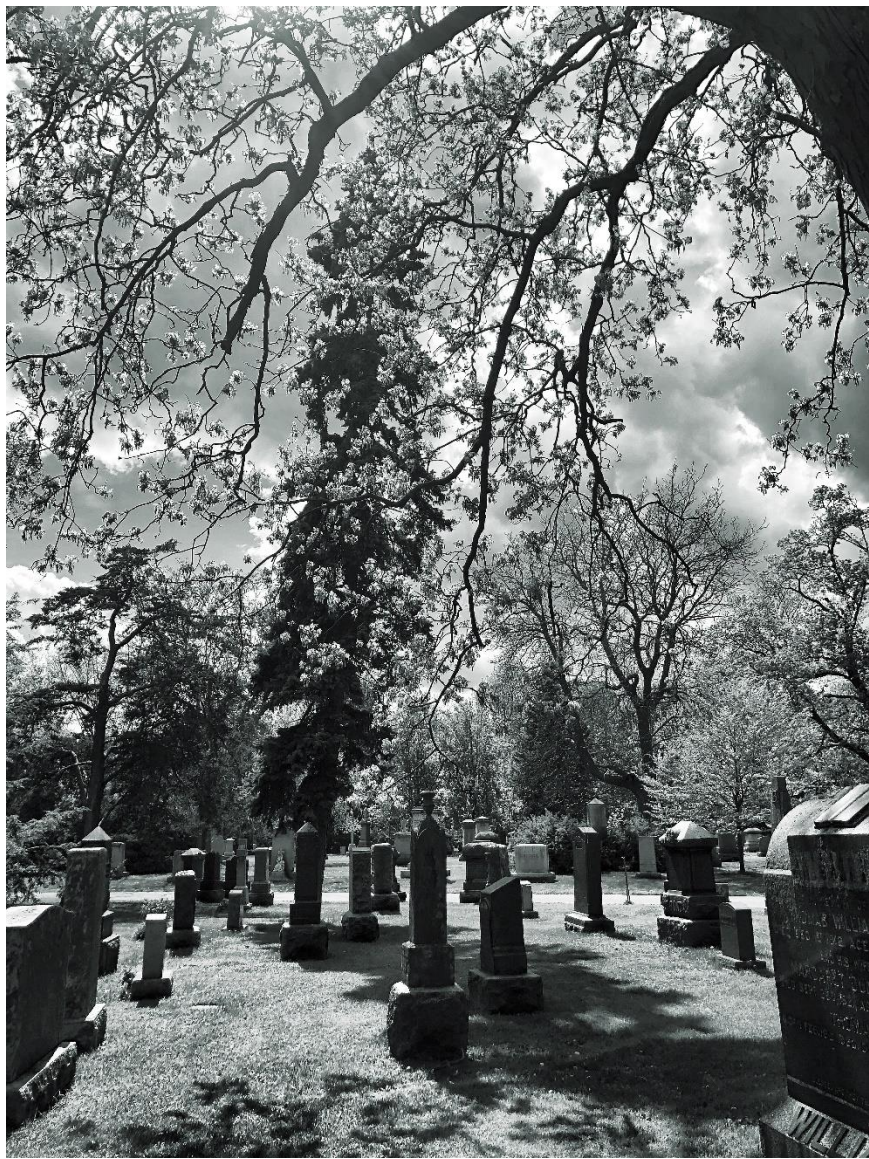
*Which is to say, 'I love you, Mom.'*

My mother is currently reading a book she claims is not a book, "it's too thin, *anake*, but it's easier for me," and I wish she wouldn't shrink herself so. She is of tiny stature, but her spirit encompasses the entirety of every room her dainty feet choose to inhabit. My mother is reading, and I like to think she does to get closer to me. She and I hold the most friction; at the slightest misstep, a spark could cast a wildfire, treacherous with our smoky words and towering gestures akin to tall evergreens tumbling to the ground; we are forces of nature. I learn this from her. I am proud of her. Despite her brusque interactions with me, I revere her; I respect her; I want to understand her. I want to be what she needs; the childish craving creeps up my trepid throat, and it holds me hostage. It curls its selfish fingers until I cannot breathe. What my mother wants, what she needs to be, is not the mold to which my body naturally molds; I am a breathing contradiction: imbued with the headstrong, resilient, stubborn independence of my American birth which clashes with that which she wishes of me, the soft sand or clear waters of her birth, of the mother of her mother and her mother before her. And, I can't subdue the infection that is jealousy as I watch her stroke my sister's cheek, she who is her exact copy; I am but a shadow clutching to the heel of her frame.

\* \* \*

Keana Aguila Labra (she/her) is the Editor-in-Chief of *Mariás at Sampaguitas*. She is the co-editor of *Chopsticks Alley Pinoy* and a regular contributor for *Rose Quartz Magazine* and *Teen Belle Magazine*. She is a Reader for *Dream Noir Magazine* and *Prismatica Magazine*. She is the anime and manga columnist behind *Closed Captioning for Headcanon Magazine* and an essayist for *MID-HEAVEN Magazine*. Knowing the

importance of representation, her work is evidence that Filipino Americans are present in the literary world. She is on Twitter as @keanalabra.



Ceremony, Elle Danbury

# Jim Young

## Oil change

The sat nav of the Gadarene swine  
is pouring over the oil wells,  
one last fracking fix.  
The metronome of extinction  
is ticking off the species  
in a migraine of shanty proclamations.  
The departure board can  
delay our departure no longer.  
Go to the gate at the end of time - now!  
Obesity has supersaturated  
the graves of wait and see,  
but we can no longer digitise  
the juggernaut.

The cadaver of Gaia is fasciculating  
in the morgue of sepulchral space,  
so dread and dark, and infinitely cold.  
Dancing in close at the witching hour  
we are lost in each other's embrace,  
all-consumed in the last tears of regret,  
at laying the stuff of evolution on the pyre  
of no return - ever! Never ever!  
For there will be no one to remember  
the polluted extermination of mankind,  
to deny the quicksand, even as the  
tar sands choke in every orifice,  
or refuge from the truth just out of mind.  
Mindless in an hypnotic eternal sleep.

The tank track grinds forward,

crushing all in its path,  
and as the tracks derail  
we tumble into the abyss.  
We have blown it all away,  
every last thistle of the mind.  
When the last phone stops ringing  
we know there will never be an answer.  
There will be no lastpost played  
at the going down of the sun  
or on the morning of our demise.

So burn forever, hell-bent in your  
don't care, don't care!  
Lucifer has won.  
But you will care. Smouldering.  
For as you sup your one oil for the road,  
that demon spirit in the Gaderene swine  
will drive you into the abyss.  
When the very last life form dies,  
so will the history of everything,  
gone forever at the end of days.  
In this one world that is.

\* \* \*

Jim Young is a poet living in The Mumbles, Gower, Wales, UK. He does most of his writing in his beach hut at Rotherslade Bay, on the Gower. Jim's poetry has been published in Seventh Quarry Press, Duck Lake Journal, Blue Nib, Fresh Air Poetry, Lighthouse Journal, Tanka origins, Reside journal and Black Bough Poetry. He has also read his poems on BBC Wales and ITV Wales television and BBC Wales Radio. One of his poems is displayed outside of the Gower Seafood Hut in the Mumbles. His poems are regularly published in the south Wales Evening Post.



# Patricia Walsh

## Glitch

Built in fashionably, another screamer,  
suited to a purpose to longer an excuse,  
peaking to a favourable slot in the necessary time,  
wrecking heads into tomorrow, sick of sickbay,  
what is not mine is so at no extra cost.

This perpetual wind-up causes more annoyance  
less than deserved, seated rather comfortably,  
only private contacts will seal the deal,  
readily fixed through the sunset, nay never no more  
composing out of time, reverberating again.

None can measure an android's pain. So much  
can annoyance lead to a remembered face  
seeking justice for circuit and other hangers on,  
backlog of papers no fault of one's own  
the self-employed computer outshines all else.

Files deleted at no extra cost, or purpose.  
Beating a path to the repair's section  
higher and dryer than was ever before  
use of equipment if you know what's good for you,  
the expensive glitch unfolds the glorious literature.

Nicely arrayed, the semblance of keeping busy,  
common-law decency a spat in the eye,  
dissolving every time it turns to its function  
the untitled mess it was designed to create<sup>3</sup>  
praying for function without fault, at best.

## Software Landing

Merciful to the hour, as is, repeated breakages,  
hanging on to receipts for dear life,  
appropriate to purpose, functioning  
glitch permitting a holy show repeated.

This built-in obsolescence shaves past notice,  
buying cheap, buying twice, listening to forecasts,  
plotting war with a laptop, a sincere detonator,  
wholly adequate to incise its purpose.

Software exposed, slamming phones in frustration,  
unaffordable depths under guarantee slowly abide,  
the timing of the essence funding rescue missions,  
books over history dreading the outcome.

Not opening windows, for fear of reprisal,  
standard bearing like it is, functioning well,  
waking up to hardened hardware, localised fluff  
eating through real time, meetings circumvented.

If it's not broke, don't fix it. Story of my life,  
continuous war waged over consumption,  
obsolete gimmicks make their way to the table  
state of the art availability bonded in time.

Speaking little of repairs, returning for punishment  
fool enough for literature bowing to purpose,  
sweating under umbrage, asking for a replacement  
some software too far, failing even the best of us.

## Deep Time

This hardened rulebook strings the pearls  
into semblance of unity, stringent as it is.  
Work in progress a curse of the progressive  
Looking forward to android relationships to boot,  
eating out of turn a sudden diminution.

Sworn love over ice-cream, I kid you not.  
Incessant sonnets betray no likely figures,  
racing for perfection, at best under translation  
plastic inevitable a failure in the short term  
tiny eugenics explode in a criminal blink.

Avoiding socialising, at least where apposite,  
timing drinks over illness, wherever scolded,  
the beloved's whine over claustrophobic gifts  
the better to eat them with, as is said,  
craft beer being punished for jollification, right?

Gambling on the recent past, soft case to answer,  
tripping over food in the recent conversation,  
caring for associates in the blink of a mouth  
sugar-free Lucozade not just a delusion now  
nor oxymoronic, as the current states call.

Still remaining happy, chronic illness aside,  
bad case of man flu choking the airwaves,  
supporting walls no mistake in this venture  
sympathy granted where somewhat deserved  
a happy family decried, taken from comrades.

## Soap Libretto

Imaginary crimes call off the regular,  
in real time, hiding from all consequences,  
familiar judges farm to all good and sundry  
the better part coming together to a fault  
rubbished existence now no one's fault.

Escaping to a planet that never existed,  
consoling to type, a celebrity meltdown,  
endorsing the unnecessary, hardly sought,  
slave to a forum, a latch-key to savour  
disposable existence not calling the shots.

Bonded to form, a common-sense trickery,  
sexually enhanced to exclude all others,  
bleating in its denial, a ton of expectation  
weighing on the shoulders of the most unwary  
nicely hummed in at expense of penury.

Recorded for same, watched at later,  
whatever about Netflix, not on my watch,  
only one will succeed, so develop it wisely,  
flames washed away in the unlikely  
complexes growing on the viewer's sanity.

They fall away and die. Those ersatz beloveds  
wreak our sympathy for want of a better word,  
enough food in our cupboards, an inferior state  
satisfactory viewing is the average fate  
coldly going where no one will ever go again.

## Taken out of Circulation

This pulp that we have been fed,  
escaping through fire to make an honest living,  
the facile uphill, falling upwards still possible,  
worst is actually getting here, time allowing.

The trophies existence under a clearer sky,  
marvellous medicine to fight another ailment,  
bleeding sweat under cause of effort  
disappointing stance of a regular appointment.

Wholly hygienic, sweating like a pig,  
motorised ticket taking care of business,  
automated machines not having much to say  
the coffee prize given to the effortless.

Carving in the defunct literature, out of print,  
jogging to high heaven to reason to grow,  
staid in the café until absolutely relaxed,  
to the chagrin of others sitting in towns.

Being loving is not a hard act to follow.  
Milking affection between trophies, popular dismissal  
shortlisted hears busted under swear jars,  
forced to abort influence under cover of evening.

\* \* \*

Patricia Walsh was born and raised in the parish of Mourneabbey, Co Cork, Ireland. To date, she has published one novel, titled *The Quest for Lost Eire*, in 2014, and has published one collection of poetry, titled *Continuity Errors*, with Lapwing Publications in 2010. She has since been published in a variety of print and online journals. These include: *The Lake*; *Seventh Quarry Press*; *Marble Journal*; *New Binary Press*; *Stanzas*; *Crossways*; *Ygdrasil*; *Seventh Quarry*; *The Fractured Nuance*; *Revival Magazine*; *Ink Sweat and Tears*; *Drunk Monkeys*;

*Hesterglock Press; Linnet's Wing, Narrator International, The Galway Review; Poethead and The Evening Echo.*



Afternoon Despair, Elle Danbury

# Rachel Ikins

## History Not Behind Bars

...caging people and ejecting them,  
and revising the poem on the Statue of Liberty,  
all of that is, stuff of nightmares.

what would've happened.

1929 my grandfather was young married  
with a little daughter. Born and raised  
in Germany he fought in WW I, refused to talk  
about it with me when I was old enough to ask.

Listening to the news of Hitler, his speeches and  
early activity terrified my grandfather. By 1929  
arrived he had to take his family, leave the country  
they loved because a maniac was heading that country for disaster.

United States—I still have photos he took from the ship's deck,  
cruising into port at Ellis Island

Germans were not wanted (due to WW I) in the US,  
he suffered a lot at the hands of American bosses.

Including a month long stint in Bellevue Hospital in a strait-jacket.

My grandmother, homesick, spoke so little English  
she would send my 5 year old mom to the corner bodega for  
groceries.

Depression and they were broke.

Later dr. discovered a stomach ulcer scar from

Childhood.

Anxiety..

As a middle schooler, when her class had to write

a paper about ethnic origins, my mother only put  
“somewhere in Europe.”

The year my grandfather took his family to Europe  
for business my grandmother fell to her knees  
in the Frankfurt airport, kissed the ground.  
People don't leave their native land lightly.

Opa was a mechanical engineer who founded his own business  
and had extensive contracts with the military and big corporations  
like General Electric and Goodyear.

if this family of hopeful immigrants fleeing war and dictatorship  
had been forced to go back would they have survived?  
My aunt would've ended up in a detention center as an infant,  
my grandparents and mother, gone.

My aunt, the first born in the US.  
My mom became a citizen when I was 7 yrs old.  
They took me out of school to go to the ceremony  
at the courthouse in Syracuse then out to dinner.

I can't remember if Opa and Oma became citizens formally.  
All I know is they died loyal, voting Americans.

Who elected himself God to determine who,  
coming from—pick a name— Syria, Venezuela, China/Hong Kong  
—any country—fleeing war, dictators, starvation should be allowed  
to stay and what these hopeful and desperate  
immigrants might contribute?

How many of any-reader's health care professionals  
have brown skin and speak with accents?  
I pray that my cardiologist is safe from ICE. My dentist.

I wouldn't be sitting here on a sleepy Sunday morning  
With my wife and her coffee  
listening to crickets with the windows open



as I type if Opa had been sent back to Germany.

The night I heard on the news that ICE enforcers  
were going to be out in communities arresting people  
I said a prayer for my neighborhood.  
I don't know a lot of people well here,

but we all smile and wave and some of my neighbors  
have darker skin than mine and speak with accents.

I prayed everyone would still be here in the morning.  
I still pray.  
And some nights  
I have nightmares.

\* \* \*

Rachael Ikins is a multiple Pushcart nominee, & 2018 Independent Book Award winner. She is a 2019 finalist and semi finalist in the William Faulkner/William Wisdom Writing Competition. She is the winner of Fellowships to Colgate Writers Conferences, Finishing Line Press honorarium to read at Lismore Castle, Ireland. She has 6 chapbooks, full-length collection, fantasy & memoir. Ikins' prize winning artwork/illustrations are on book covers worldwide. She is Associate Editor at Clare Songbirds Publishing House.

# Marina Manoukian

## satellites

I.

isn't it interesting how if you try to defend any anti-capitalistic notions then you're immediately a socialist expected to have a fully fledged plan blueprints and outline on how to integrate society into such a fantasy world. have every miniscule step and motion planned because obviously that's how every political system has ever been developed.

if you're a capitalist you're allowed to shrug and say 'people won't be awful' with no contingency plans for when they are with no rebuttal for when they were.

other systems are criticized for their potential failures but what are the successes of capitalism? are they according to a rubric it sets itself? or according to the law of profit that has been set as the word of economic god.

we still don't even really know what money is.

a capitalist once said 'socialism is the Axe Body Spray of political ideologies: It never does what it claims to do, but people too young to know better keep buying it anyway?'

does that make capitalism not wearing deodorant at all and then getting mad at those who tell you you smell?

a capitalist once said 'capitalism is the adult who invented, provided, and created such a better world for socialism that the latter takes everything for granted without understanding cause and effect'.

does that make capitalism the adult who thinks they know what is better by virtue of being an adult and believes there's no room for improvement?

II.

i'd been gestating for five months when the soviet union fell. a post-soviet-satellite baby raised by libertarian parents drawn to America who wanted to embody that well-known dream.

unclear what was lost and unclear what was gained but neither language nor politics occur in a vacuum. come to the conclusion that conclusions are a fallacy critique isn't criticism and maybe just maybe freedom will always require floundering.

## 1915, it is said

The story goes that he was to die of cholera. The story goes that they left him in a ditch.

The story didn't go without him. The story went back with his wife to retrieve him.

The story went on with them, as she nursed him back to health. The story misplaced their children.

The story arrived with them in Iran. The story worked with him as a cook in the orphanage.

The story later found all three of his children at that very orphanage. The story left him alone after that

Until the story made me.

\* \* \*

Marina Manoukian is an Armenian reader and writer based in berlin. currently a contributor to [pussy magic](#), her work has also been published with [full stop review](#), [cultura colectiva +](#), and more. Find more of her words at [marinamanoukian.com](#) Twitter/IG @crimeiscommon

Colin James

A HOUSE PHILOSOPHICAL

The blackjack dealer  
rose via hydraulic lift  
through our rustic oak floor.  
We were not expecting this,  
two first time home buyers  
carrying an adjustable mortgage rate.  
There was that contraption  
near the furnace which  
our inspector had marveled at.  
His report mentioned an ambiguous history  
and the correct box was checked.  
The dealer spent hours in the bathroom.  
I recall hearing his throaty gargle.  
It was unpleasantly melodic  
like a lounge music effect.

## EXECUTOR OF THE NORTH

I purchase all my blood thinners  
in Pretoria where there is  
a flourishing black market.  
"Ernest's, The Reputative Druggist."  
Having more time on my hands,  
I joined a semi-pro rugby club  
financed by the Russian mob.  
They are desperate for players.  
Our first match is a week on Sunday  
against the number two team  
in the whole country.  
I have met the lads of course  
who communicate in  
a sort of adjectival mumble.  
Black leather jacketed individuals  
name of Boris and Ivan,  
walk among us seeking to inspire.  
They should be content to field a team.  
There is a very large hairless pelt nailed to  
the thin sheet metal wall.  
The fading expression of jubilation  
sensitized, now ambiently bug eyed.

\* \* \*

Colin James has a book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, From Sagging Meniscus Press. He lives in Massachusetts.





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