

CRUCIFIX

DARK MARROW

III

edited by Paul Rowe
& Tianna G. Hansen

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DARK MARROW

ISSUE III:

CRUCIFIX

curated by Paul Rowe & Tianna G. Hansen

dark & moody poetry

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Ghost Fractures

Amanda Crum

There's twang
tangled in my roots,
but it only unspools
inside loss.
Grief rolls syllables
across my tongue,
transforms *ain't* into
a lullabye. Language
fractured by ghosts.
I can almost hear
the trailer park girl I was,
spinning circles in her room.
I wonder
when she became so afraid
to let her bloodline
tumble from her mouth.
Maybe it was the first time
Death stood in her doorway,
rolling a cigarette for someone
she loved. That girl
wanted grease-spattered comfort,
husky Appalachian pronunciations
and dropped g's,
and all she got was
more loss.
Now I cling tightly to my accent,
a connection to my beginnings
that can only be
put away
rather than
stolen.

Blister

Kendall A. Bell

The blister is the comeback,
the shrill voice on loop,
an anchor in shallow water.
Here, you follow the sound
each dying note, the death
rattle in your throat. The
blister is leaking, is the
crescendo of a converging
melody of panic, of hearts
becoming the slowest metronome.
The blister reminds you that
all pieces of you are dirty,
are damaged, that affliction
will always hold your hand.
The blister is the last sign
of passion's cessation.

BODY NECROPOLIS

Courtney Leigh

We're mudded to the funerary ground, our mouths mourn
shreds of ourselves we're losing, tongues caught amongst barbed limbs
splicing & integrating with one another. Mermaid tails in transmutation
pale snake bodies pushing through the slick of blood & phosphorescent flowers.
We are bodacious creatures radiant in the furrow, our violent hearts
passionate & cruel. The Blood Moon fixates my eyes—I reach
toward the surface, thorns resonating my knees, the pearls below
now redded too. Cravings blister my hands, I am thirsty for breath. I am hungry
for animus sex. I look beyond the ash snow to find the demon gas masked
& holding tight a glass jar with the beating heart I've come to reclaim.

P.V. O'Neill's Grave

Jack B. Bedell

—Oakland Cemetery, Shreveport, LA

An oak tree has left its ghost
on this plot with crumbled
marble and mangled wrought iron

bent all around the tombstone.
The psalm engraved below
O'Neill's name failed

to offer any peace against
the weight of that trunk,
calm breeze and cool water

or not. Today, the grass is cut tight
at the site, and all the bits of stone
have been stacked neatly

inside what remains of the fence.
No roots left from the falling, though,
and even fewer signs it matters.



“Succession” by Elle Danbury

corpse

Claire L. Smith

Trapped within the reflective coffin,
A rotting corpse lulling
Beneath a distorted veil.

Centipedes' tiny feet jab,
Marking the unwelcome parts,
Gathering the rotting sacks of grey flesh.

Worms curl beneath prickling skin,
Wriggling like overflown intestines,
Growling with needle teeth.

Swollen yet starved,
Blindfolded with bubble goggles
Skin stretching to meet wide emptiness.

Sunken cheeks and pigeon chest
Hide behind a chipmunk grin
And a heavy jacket.

Beneath the worn flesh
Lies a war of organs,
Of polarizing hungers.

“happy anniversary”

Cassandra Bumford

when you leave / don't remember his friends / or how they blame you / who drove him to attempt /
then drove him to the hospital / he loves you / tries to lose himself over the bridge / bridges ice first / you
gasp / grab / 60 to 0 in 3.5 / slip into the wrong lane / one hand on your steering wheel / the other tied
up in his flannel sleeve / down Route 9 / through three roundabouts / across the parking lot holding on /
you didn't lock the car / you once found him locked in his car / knife in wrist / you took it out / it's still
in your center console / when you leave / don't remember how you said forever / how 'always' rolled
around on your tongue like a marble / dropped out of your mouth and fell onto the floor / how you left
anyway / how do you stay when he shows regression? / who else do you tell after your therapist / his
therapist / his parents / his friends / your friends / the state trooper / the ER doctor / who tells you to
take him home / words won't come / you try to say you can't stay / that's why you're both here in this
hospital bed / when you leave / don't remember / how you wound up elbow deep in a box of tissues /
trying to tell the secretary his birthdate / is he medicated? / has this happened before? / how do you take
a chance that he won't kill himself if you leave? / how do you take the chance that you won't kill yourself
if you stay?

Subterranean Spelunx

Nikkin Rader

When you delve into the roots beneath your shield surfaces,
the repressed feelings of rotten childhood you bring up
is enough to suffocate a mob.

It is the same reason I mean myself when I refer to you,
a sort of talking to the lost child inside this agency error.

The remnants not seen are still tasted in each action as adult
making our memories punch-holes in a time wage card
that keeps missing the happy moments, the things our mother swears
we're forgetting, the nice times I can't recall.

Is it because carcass of deep sea embodied me and no other?
Or do we all spool in toward capsized repression, this reservoir tapped only
in commemorating the misery that left mind scars like hiding in closet terror from
bloodied-elbow door-striking monsters? Running to neighbor's yards was still no solace.

We cannot shake what clings, folding still into the morrow's makings
like maggots in the flourbags we can't sift out.

Other people can recollect with endurance I find transgressive, mine but bleached spots in mind
both there and absent at the same time.

I would take the dead into mouth, engulfed by tides of idle cycles,
churning and thrashing to choir screams from missing things,
impressions left behind of what was felt or taken from the body.

No longer worth its uncertainties.
Left to dissociate in the spaces left between was and to be.
Instead, what isn't: stalling us
into microcosms of deluded froth at the cusp.

It is difficult to differentiate between what was real or dream, both as faded campfire
I couldn't help but douse out. Smelling seasalt instead of sulfur, coast trips instead of burning—

Lips apart in want of
to slip inside
if only a little while
sit in my orifice and linger
seldom stir as you're curbed by the ache
spat upon spurning toward our wakened moon
encrusted in its myths, made for
isolation, for
mysticism, for
the weathered rage within your belly.

–My mother has a cesarean scar more crescent than the moon but even that doesn't stop the story of birth, how she and I both almost died at the cusp of my beginning, or partially did. My coming causing a sever that became all body deformation. How my father screamed, watching sports on the hospital T.V. screen, distracting the male nurse who over-drugged my laboring mother, forced to be cut open on sterile bedding, spliced into life–

Disgorged and left to sun bake until what once was us lies buried,
present palms unearthing their forgotten.

Disheveled soothsayer meant to dethread our cords, once coalescent.
Or was it the wanton sea witch idling at the entry.

What is remembered or regurgitated similar to the histories my mother orated to me, the bathtub a place for learning about genocide, age four and asking why chambers were for gassing out secrets.

I will soak on the way to phrase my willing gaps, writing in the language of the fear maker and violent strike of match, covering these severed moments with sheets, incomprehensible mouths and blue eyes made live and marked mind by our weighted rains–

When you left, what seeps from me?

Home Recovery in the Countryside

December Lace

My fever still hasn't broken.
Crows stare at me from my whitewashed porch
while the pitcher of milk sits on the sideboard,
a towel draped neatly at its side.

They haven't moved from the paint chipped railings in days-
they're bunched in clusters- *murders*- thick amounts of
swollen chests, huddled hearts, and sharp beaks.
Twitchy, squat droplets of ink that rove around on this barren landscape
stretching their claws upwards, pointing at the sky, accusing it.

There isn't a mailbox for miles.
Their onyx eyes like rosary beads
 follow
paired in fidgety feathered beasts.
They were sent to watch me
 -and they want in!-
they can see under my bandages,
gossamer wrapped around me mummy style
guarding against the flies, the infection, the air.

My tongue moves in shifts, thick like marbles,
the enamel of my teeth turning to water
dripping down my throat
downing me
 -I can't breathe!-

but they haven't made a sound.

They want my throat.
They want to peck at the holes
 in the back of my raw throat
so they can get to my soul.

They can smell the stitches.



“Foreboding” by Elle Danbury

One sip of saltwine

Kate Garrett

Soak the night-bloom petals in blood
and drop them in the water – watch
the waves froth a sunset pink.

The tide determines the strength
of your resolve. Cup your hands
around the ocean, rinse the years-old

bonfire smudge from your mouth; salvage
the flotsam and jetsam washed up around
you. This is how pain, set free, swims toward

the horizon – with the silvergold of pulling
shark teeth out of silt, a balm on the bite
marks that punctured your faded tattoo.

bloodflowers

Mela Blust

from the prison of skin;
a bitter pill.
unexpected bloodflowers
bursting the soil.

backwards/a time when we
wrested joy from the wind
now the knife,
a love-shaped gift.

Love & Metaxa

Christina Strigas

I tasted you at sixteen
when my cousin died of cancer,
everyone had hollow eyes
like the depth of
empty jars.

Months, years. Uncle G
was the one who didn't speak.
He swallowed too much death
in his ancient bloodline
before the age of twenty-three,
silent death. I tried you—

Funeral one, you said *hello*
from the bottom
of a tiny shot glass,
while film reeled at your wake.

Dead first cousin,
first of firsts in the coffin,
yellow copper skin
tubes and ICU rooms
I cannot drink away—
Metaxa

I embraced you while dancing Greek
knees dirty on the ground
wild hands in the air
mouth around your home,
clapping beats
in the air—

You warmed me up
made all the pain dissipate;
seconds—Minutes—Heat
waves took deep rooted hurt away.

go go go
put your lips on me, girl

I lifted you
brown neck exposed,
silent paths to
your taste
flooding down, spinning barefoot
your entrance,

a secret winter lover.

One lucid party after another,
a memorial
one wedding, the Zorba dance,
one more mechanical shot—
Forty more days of customary darkness.

Never cheers at a Greek funeral,
there are crystal rules.
Knowing when to appear;
your ancient ghosts
kissing dried cheeks
and charming nights as lovers do,

An imaginary friend,
comforting me and
making me sick.
I vomited you up, and backed out away—
Until I dreamt of it more
to bring back our dead
in one more shot.

go go go...



by C. Aloysius Mariotti

modern pip, fragmented

C. Aloysius Mariotti

I

the circle stopped spinning at 7:03 am,
when I first slid into the world
bald and tiny and trembling,
and reaching to go back. but such is birth.

my mother held me close to her breast;
she kissed my fevered forehead and named me
philip pirrip. my bitty hands were curled,
clutching for her long brown hair,
and with a singular murmur,
I intimated to the world that I was here.
yeah – I was here indeed. because what choice had I?

if I could quote latin then, I'd have entered the world
a scholar, a philosopher, a story they'd all remember:
"annus mirabilis – hic puer est stultissimus omnium!"
of course, I knew no language
but that of moans and sobs. but why not?
it's the language of lovers and the youth.

because the wonder years of an american youth begin when we stop breathing that symbiotic life of
cramped home. and they end when we stop to understand those moments that led us to where we are.

II

I'd watch her aglow beneath Phoenician moons,
on countless nights,
as she danced between gravestones to clutch god
from skin embraces, atop tombs
of the sexless dead.

rum in her belly, rum on her lips, bruise on her hips,
she was the girl after whom to
sleep sleep sleep
and bathe in the river Lethe
so I wont remember what she will,
those punches
and pounds
and moans
oh the moans, to be treated unlike the neighbor girl
with the pretty picket fence and geraniums on the porch
and pigtails and corduroy.

we met and held hands past the bus stop. we rambled on to that spot as teenagers, to that empty lot, to
kiss and profess mad young love until I waited and waited for her to come to me again.

estella,
she moved like a comet, her traces
left in that empty lot
that became a damn graveyard of bones and memories.

III

he thought she tasted like rain and pears and
a thousand past lovers. they slid into his mouth
to unravel the invincible days
now whirling in space and memory, the tatterings of nights
in empty parks and bathroom stalls,
the yellowed snapshots of moonlit howlings wrapped in earth,
of roiled knees and bruised woman-sheath,
of spoiled prudence and no-way-backs.

he thought she sounded like a whale on the beach,
clamoring for the water of her mother's womb,
the tight and unharmed spot rejecting ingress
and burden and heartbreak.

and he wondered why she came to him, while she moaned against his ears,
as she shook like a blade of grass
right before the cut.

IV

but we were good old mates we were – estella and me,
two coins in the pocket of the earth.

and I think about that spot where we were, then we werent.
and this one wound up here
as that one wound up there after the scatter.
and I linger on the line
that angles toward infinity,
distant from our point of singularity.

and though our new towns have the same strip malls and exxon stations and sad eyes of the streets, the
familiarity gets scratched enough to show a scar unique to the separate faces we put on each morning in
the different towns alike.

and the one we once knew together, before the collapse
of the gravity holding us to our shared living star,
is now long ashed and floating
to a faraway halt.

V

estella would sneak through the cellar door to lay in the cherry orchard behind her uncle's farmhouse,
where she'd stare into the myriad opulent stars and smell the delicious purple blossoms,

and bury her tired fingers into the dirt
that tucked her parents beneath her trembling bones to loathe.

and the short sharp shocks to her heartsick dithers
would be to remember their faces
against the rounded hilltop before the tumbles.

and the push, and the crash, and the lull, and the end.

and scream is the soaking echo
like in the hollow of a cobbled water well.
it is the sound and howl
that pushed through the earth and vibrated
at the tips of her curled fingers
as she would reach down to touch her parents once more
beneath the tilted moon.

VI

what a distant ballet she danced entangled in the mess of skin and moan through ohio all blurred to rub
past windows darkly moon-hued and fogged because to stop would be to forgive would be to shudder
would be to die beneath paler thoughts than hers from the push and carry.

don't go, he mouthed. but her eyes obeyed
only the goodbyes littered down
by stars from towns dull and orange in thick still dusk
and the motionless forgotten.
and onward she roved and onward she burned
through the scores of lost and longer faces.

VII

moving inside sheets electric to let it out
and falling into place
with stroke and undulation and pausing
to the morning thereafter
behind the bending sun
and collapsing the dark spots between
hello and goodbye.

VIII

estella spoke
to the salt and the sea,
as the machine crushed lilies into floating hearts
and foam and smoke and metal
and mermaids who fell
toward languorous hollows.

and dizzy was the spiral, to enchant
the slumbering of purple days adrift voluminous waves
without song or rum
for the delicate and heartsick shipwrecked,
cold from the drowning moonlight
to bathe lost skin in the velvet tomorrows of estella,
but curves with shut eyes to tripping beats of time,
and again it will start.

IX

the drunk recrudesced from still quiescence
 naked
and feeling a bit tawdry and lost
from disconnect of the star
in gloaming to the east.

so I sipped and stretched dirty fingers and indecorous tongue
toward the dullard shines
that only traced the spaces near me,
floating opposite my mania
like an ocean too shallow to drown.

but then I stumbled over a seashell that was lovely, delicate, one of a kind. and I wondered the things I
would learn if I pressed my muddled ears against its heart. and so I slept on the beach to dream of stars
rising again in the sober east beneath a windless morning that was like every other.

X

the mission bell rung lonesome,
crushing the noiseless winter horizon of the desert
where she used to suck her skins
and smoke her bones
while chewing datura seeds, to collapse beneath large saguaros
and rave at the chilling moon.

what pauses she overlooked, like thin breath fogging glass,
leaving markers but small proof of the slips and swallows and dark sand
in the corners of her chapped mouth.

those nights when crooked earth was mattress and scuffed legs
eased penetrations, none of which she would cull as unforced
but often were sought from the break of
cold mornings in the suburbs.

but she seemed to always furl toward the sloping of low horizon,
saying pull me under, pull me under,
 break me asunder.

XI

to sleep

 from drinking the sun
that belongs in our blood and breath
will not let us forget because our fragments become one.

they turn whole because of the scatter,
and the madness, and the forgotten,
and the resurrected, and the remembered.

we see and own our lots in this life beneath stars,
amidst seas and hills, between love and sex and death,
between arizona and ohio
and places otherwise.

XII

 that empty lot.

I'd pass it like a sozzled russian poet,
stumbling, screaming how I saw beauty
in the hash of stone & metal & broken rubble,
raw and exposed, the very nature
of life demolished, ready for rebirth.

and I hoped to capture the transition.
or I hoped to capture perhaps the dirge it hummed
of life no longer astir.

because what wonder it held to others was the wonder it held to me,
as I passed it.

 that empty lot.



by C. Aloysius Mariotti

pool deck

Cassandra Bumford

i'm in a bad season again
been getting in bed
with dirty feet, only
showering in smoke.
as if that'll save me.

the other night
i pulled apart a
disposable razor
with my teeth,
bled away some guilt
down the shower drain.

i'm painting my nails
3 times a week.
i keep scraping polish off
during panic attacks.
the acetone has chipped
at my chitin. my cuticles
are dismantling and my hair
keeps changing color.

i never knew balance
and at this point
stability seems only
imaginary to me.

Revival

Kate Garrett

Summer is a climb, a pilgrimage of gold
and green, and in these honey blossoms
is your goddess gift of well-earned rest
before the amble down to mulch and snow.
Woodbine twines around my ankles, knees
and infinite harvested sunbeams quiver
in the grass, hug the soles of feet aching
with a week of unknown sorrow, legs
heavy from sparring with the devil's
kin. Brushing dirt from my hands I hear
a whisper of 'this too shall pass' – an
ancestor's wisdom held close, her words
a warm hand at the base of my neck.

The children who die in custody have names

Gustavo Barahona-López

Children are being separated from their families Children are dying at the border Children are waking up in dirt tents in the desert Children are living in a former WWII Japanese internment camp Children includes babies Children includes toddlers in tender age shelters Children are not being processed quickly Children are not being medically screened properly Children are not receiving adequate medical care Children are being treated like criminals Children are forgetting who their parents are Children are rejecting the parents who were powerless to prevent separation Children are screaming “You are not my mother!” Children are dying in ICE custody Children are dying in Border Patrol custody Children are generating profit for private prisons Children are being lost in the system Children are being sexually abused Children are slipping through cracks Children are being held in cages Children are being targeted to create a living hell for immigrants Children are dying at the border Children are dying die Children are the future

The children who die in our custody have names, not just ages, not just countries.

7-year-old migrant girl taken into Border Patrol custody dies of dehydration, exhaustion

Jakelin Caal Maquin

Rest in Peace

8-Year-Old Migrant Boy Dies In Government Custody In New Mexico Hospital

Felipe Gomez Alonso

Rest in Power

‘He Went Seeking Life But Found Death.’ How a Guatemalan Teen Fleeing Climate Change Ended Up Dying in a U.S. Detention Center

Juan de Leon Gutierrez

Rest in Peace

Toddler apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border dies after weeks in hospital

Rest in Power

16-year-old migrant boy dies in U.S. custody, 5th child to die since December

Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez

Rest in Peace

[REDACTED]

Rest in Power

ROSE BUD

Courtney Leigh

I'm afraid of what I'll become when
I'm no longer myself, drifting in a swirl
of deathly cosmos, the fragrant euphoria
of floras burning up my throat a hue
of yesterday's bad turndown.
I take a hard drag of a cigarette
losing time in the ash
of a body & a naked moon.

When I'm a child, I'm buried
in a pile of dirty laundry. I'm looking
for a dark hole as wet & as lucid as mine.
I mount the hard side of a dream
pretend I'm not as real as my body
seems, let the lining sink in.
I'm quieted by the pleasure.
I'm romanced by my own insatiable lips
puckering at the back of my hand.

When I'm a teenager, I kiss
the bathroom mirrors
it's like kissing my own corpse
cold & flat & lying against the wall
perspiring with bathwater heat
wonder what it would be like to kiss
something other than a figment
of my own spirit. I lie back
on the sheets of my four-post bed
watch my corpse alight along the ceiling.
She mimics my hands, moving along
our tempered skin & assures me
with her hum grin.

I become time
travelling the distance between reality
& a dream, in a mosaic of eyes
winking winking winking glossy
at my covetous self.

Ghost

Chad W. Lutz

the wind howls
as the strait jacket
strangles his body

cops telling the mother
this is standard protocol

mouth foaming
head rocking
legs kicking
heart racing

hear the chains
hear the wails
hear the moaning

fall asleep
& dream till
morning of
a young boy
lost all hope

wake up before the sun
& see the image
of a young man

picture
no longer
hanging on
the wall

they've got
medicine
for a haunt
like this

two with dinner
& food

may cause drowsiness
may cause dizziness



by C. Aloysius Mariotti

Basement

Lily Forrest

When I was 22 I ran into the ocean.

Full of poison, feeling like void—I swear
you could have popped me cleanly with a needle—
I wouldn't have bled, I'd have vaporized.
Collapsed into air.

Travel with me to 22.
See the dead balloon dance!
A peculiar exhilaration,
spitting your plastic guts all over the room.

Sink with me into the gray, into the damp.
The rusted pipes and broken bottles. See me wobble,
giggle, chainsmoke
like yellowing plaster,
like singe. And soot.

Like I wanted to fill my body
with fire
When I was 22

I drew a menthol to viscid bubblegum lips
until my voice was only a croak
in the night.

You know,
a friend of mine once said that
he was certain
the place was haunted.
I don't believe in that stuff, but
the air was ripe those nights
with the suggestion of
unreality.

I couldn't exist there without a chemical excursion,
So Jesse and Big Mike
drove to Sunset Liquors
and I did too many shots
to count
in
the
dripping

Basement Oblivion
where my ankles knocked against the pool table, where

I grinned into a compact mirror. My teeth
were sharp as arrowheads. My skin
had never gleamed so ghostly,
slick with so much

wet.

Where tidal wave, crescendo

Jesse

in a leather vest

saying

Come to me, cupcake

Somewhere he is still saying

*You look like butterscotch, cheerleader. I
look like a felon.*

The old house still purses its lips,

clucks its tongue

to the tune of

tick-tock

tick-tock, Party Girl.

I say

Okay,

but I won't fuck you.

Jesse,

I couldn't say no

to the flashing-eyed queens of the fourth grade

asking

to copy my homework,

to the pallid shuffle of the 2nd shift leader

asking

Would I work another double?

To the frat boy declaration:

Chicks aren't allowed

to wear panties in this apartment. Just for fun.

At 19, at 22

I said no, Jesse

and I have combed the half-lit rooms,

for years I have wandered the moments.

I said it once. I could not say it again.

Choice

disappeared from

all the dictionaries

overnight.

And you know, they don't tell you

When I sat in lamp-light

with my uncle

and they had the assembly at school,

When my uncle said
Shit just happens to girls who party,
said
Bad shit happens to balloon girls
in the dark

They don't tell you
that basement air is hazy, dense.
The couch leaves a film on your skin

but it doesn't hurt!
in red-painted squalor
piping leakage saltwater
--doesn't hurt—

tastes like copper.
feels like counting the seconds
in a vacuum,
water filling lungs.

Jesse! you took a human being like medicine!
like Saturday night,
like *just because*

and me? I took years
I couldn't look my father in the eye
where I stood waterlogged
and weeping,
could not rinse you from my skin

I went back to your house, Jesse!
I wanted you to like me!
fetal on the basement floor.

coughing smoke signals, ashes.
S.O.S.

Felt like anything but a woman
in your boneyard hands.

1-800-how-the-fuck-do-I-get-out

Vanessa Maki

we could survive in the abyss

(but you want to get out)

we could live off each other's

fears & self loathing

(but you want to get out)

we could survive for a while

(but you want to get out)

until you dial the hotline

1-800-how-the-fuck-do-I-get-out

& we go right back to you

leaving me



“The Comforts of Ritual” by Elle Danbury

STAR~DARK

Catherine Garbinsky

Tonight I am a rabbit resting
by the cool water —
shivering ghost.

An empty moon falls on bitter roots.
I have bent my cauldron around your face
to look through your eyes.

Tomorrow I will be a bird in flight,
feet curled in
against my downy soft.

death toll climbs

James P. Roberts

what do you say
to a person
who thinks of life

in numbers

and bullets

who measures everything
with buckets of blood

who denies
the charity of others

the forgiveness
so needed

what can you tell them
when there is only
the fuzzy image

cracking their shell

the violence
which is the only language

they now understand

a grave
of flowers

the rising sun

t e n d e r

Cassandra Bumford

the security of a willow tree,
how the low, thin, branches lay
against the backs of little girls
seeking shelter beneath them.

they are lost in their homes,
always looking for walls built
out of glass, loving how it moves
invisibly slow. feeling invisible,

invincible, beneath the tree.
leaves falling around above,
and if you catch one softly,
between index finger and thumb,

make a wish on it. ask the wind
for what you want and watch
as the branches use the breeze
to braid themselves into your hair
and keep you.

the tender way of a heart chopped
down by an axe on her 13th birthday.
the tender way of building her into
a house only made of brick walls.

Shapeless

Delvon T. Mattingly

I sink nearly every day,
afraid of feebly returning.

Sometimes I open my eyes
at recurrent cardiac arrests,

dangerous surgeries away from
sheltering an amorphous heart.

Hope and deprivation holding
what's left of me together

by frail threads, a grotesque
reconstruction of the moribund.

I tell myself: A heart is never
perfectly shaped to begin with,

and attacks carved in its chamber
accumulate to a freedom pined.

Curtain Call

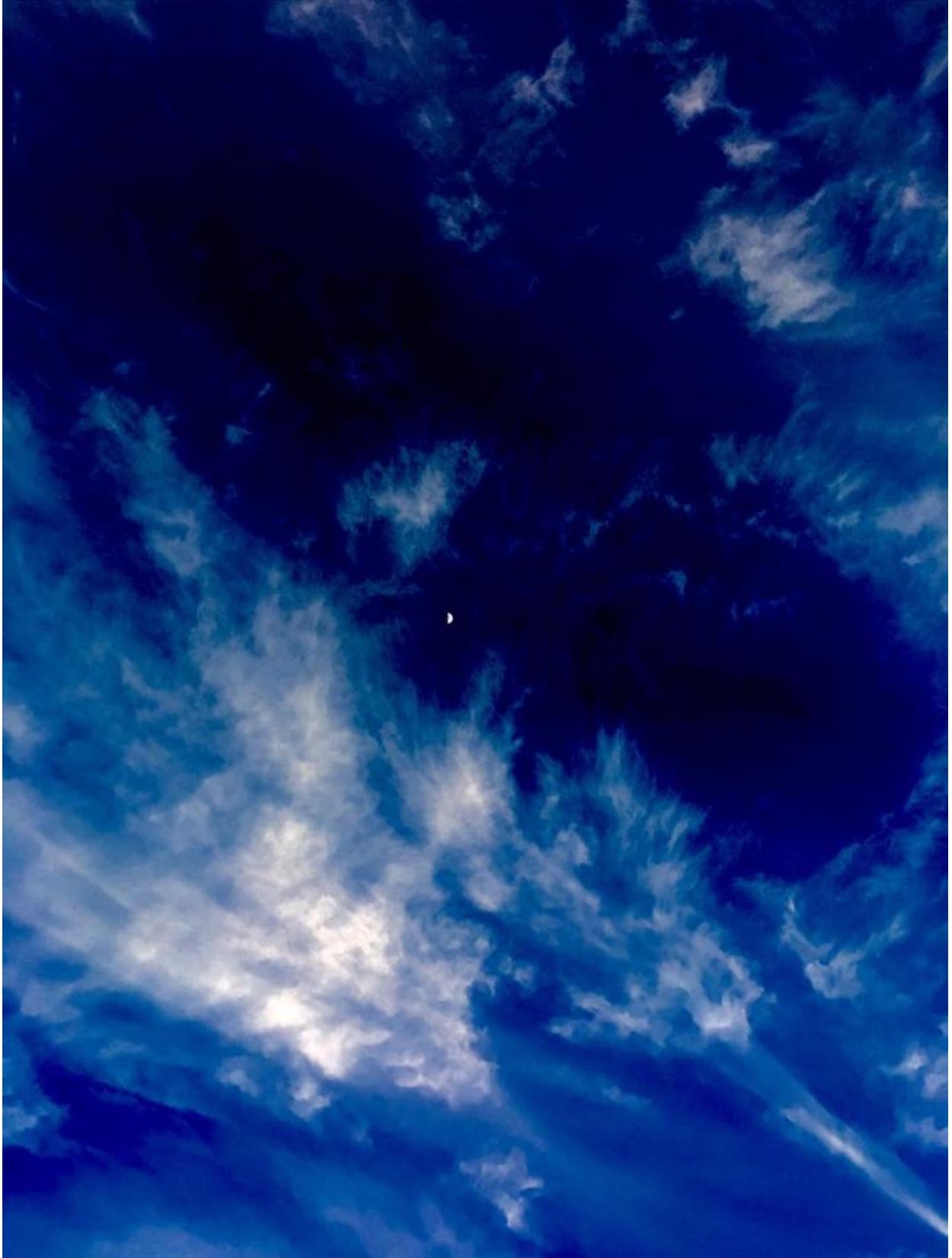
Josie Thornhill

The bottle rattles into my empty palm,
and I close my fingers on air, tossing back nothing.
My descent takes a few days, but I have to see them
one more time, taste the illusion on my tongue, sharp
and cold like metal. Dangerous enough to slice me in half.

Martha appears first, her brown curls shooting out of her skull,
wrinkled skin and black robes rolling off her skin like lake water.
Her knobby white fingers are almost translucent as she mutters spells
to send me to Hell. And Tom— just his head, bobbing up and down
on the bookshelf, his gray lips shouting a warning that I could never make out.

When the full cast emerges—Killer Clown, Giant Spider,
even Jack Nicholson's celebrity appearance—I look them over
and nod before closing the curtains and swallowing my Seroquel.
It is enough to know they exist somewhere, in some frame
of mind. Casting spells on me, knife to neck, pincers behind my ear.

Now I am painting my white picket fence, rinsing myself of this
desire and dread because that nine to five has got to be enough.
Saving weekends for barbecues and building tree houses
with nieces and nephews, not ghosts
stuck in The Ethereal Plane.



by C. Aloysius Mariotti

Omega

Colette Bennett

Angels of the Silences
How slow you can be in coming.
How crestfallen I am
when you arrive.
The colors of your wings
aren't the ones I dreamt about.

How can I tell you
that I wanted you to descend to me
with my every fulfilled wish
in the quick shadows of your faces?
I wanted worship more sightless
than the stares of a thousand dead men
I wanted the blind reassurance
that my mother taught me
to expect.
I did not crave this
image of real life,
gentle wrinkles in your supposedly perfect faces,
eyes lacking that fabled sparkle,
wings cracking and lackluster.

You open your mouths and breathe a breath
much like that of every human being:
hesitant, fallible,
and slightly unsure
whether or not to emerge.

I life my face to find in yours
my childhood, ending.

Kallio, the sunken village

Gustavo Barahona-López

I walk into a ghost village.

Water half covers, lives in buildings
that once recorded

the transitory. For you see,
for all its movement,
even a man-made
lake holds onto eternity
like it is a coin begging to be flipped.

I stare in emerald, waves
swaddle piles of stones
that perhaps once made a wall,
perhaps a home. Now
a rearticulated sand.

At what point does a lake
cease to be artificial?
When is it purely (water) body?

The permanent
recalls a launch
into itself.

Cerulean cloud
chastens me.

I make out sets of five petals
surrounding a golden halo.

I bite my tongue.
Atonement made tangible.

My blood outgrows
my body, becomes water.

It spatters on green rock,
disappears. How do I
taste? I wonder

why so many gods
chose to make us out of clay,
mud to be breathed
into being. After all,
even stones have a half-life.

How to disappear

Kendall A. Bell

Start deleting phone numbers backwards to A, forget how to answer the phone. Deactivate every social media account. Save your voice only for singing in the car, speak to no one at work, listen to how many times your name comes up. (It will be none.) Unscrew every CFL lightbulb and donate them to Goodwill. Invest in black curtains, for every room. Leave your dog inside someone else's fenced in yard - the one with big tires on the grass. Throw your mailbox into the street. Wear a hoodie. All the time. Never, never make eye contact. Go for your walk, abandon your route, blend into trees, into sidewalks and streetlights.

The doll I was given but never wanted

Kate Garrett

She's just a pretty face on the outside: a smile meets chin and cheeks in dimples on a strange ageless thing shaped from porcelain, a lilac crochet dress, golden curls that could be human (*what we don't know might hurt us, but it's all the same to her*). Inside a buried unseen heart is hard and bloodless. Accidents have a way of happening – mirrors break and fuses blow. The cat's fur crackles and sparks; it avoids the door of her room. We keep her in a case, a pristine antique, choosing to focus on the beauty, the craft, the curve of painted lip, the shine of glittering eye – anything but the air thick with hate, an aura of embers.



“Song of the Inaudible” by Elle Danbury

contributors

Rachael Ikins is an award winning author and visual artist. Primarily a poet she has 7 chapbooks, a full length collection, a memoir with poetry, illustrations & recipes as well as an illustrated fantasy, released with multiple publishers.

Amanda Crum is a writer and artist whose work has appeared in publications such as Barren Magazine and Eastern Iowa Review and in several anthologies, including *Beyond The Hill* and *Two Eyes Open*. She is the author of two novels, *The Fireman's Daughter* and *Ghosts Of The Imperial*. Her first chapbook of horror-inspired poetry, *The Madness In Our Marrow*, was shortlisted for a Bram Stoker Award nomination in 2015; her story "A Shimmer In The Parlor" was a finalist for the J.F. Powers Prize in Short Fiction in 2019. Amanda's middle-grade fiction book, *The Darkened Mirror*, will be published in the summer of 2019 by Riversong Books. She currently lives in Kentucky with her husband and two children.

Kendall A. Bell's poetry has been most recently published in *Constellate Literary Journal* and *Paper Trains Literary Journal*. He was nominated for Sundress Publications' Best of the Net collection in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2018. His first full length collection, "The Roads Don't Love You", was published in August 2018, and he has released 24 chapbooks. He is the founder and co-editor of the online journal *Chantarelle's Notebook* and publisher/editor of *Maverick Duck Press*. His chapbooks are available through *Maverick Duck Press*. He lives in Southern New Jersey.

Courtney Leigh is the author of "the unrequited love of red riding hood & her lycan lover" (*Dancing Girl Press*, 2016). She is The Bowhunter of White Stag Publishing & Kitchen Witch for *Crimson Sage Apothecary*.

Jack B. Bedell is Professor of English and Coordinator of Creative Writing at Southeastern Louisiana University where he also edits *Louisiana Literature* and directs the Louisiana Literature Press. His latest collections are *Elliptic* (Yellow Flag Press, 2016), *Revenant* (Blue Horse Press, 2016), and *No Brother, This Storm* (Mercer University Press, fall 2018). He is currently serving as Louisiana Poet Laureate 2017-2019.

Elle Danbury has had her photographs published in *Barren Magazine*, *Cauldron Anthology*, *Turnpike Magazine*, and has been a featured artist in *littledeathlit*. You will be able to see more of her forthcoming work in *Nightingale & Sparrow*, *Riggwelter Press*, *Ravens In The Attic*, *Honey & Lime*, 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 a niche taking photographs of the world that surrounds her, wherever she goes. Twitter @elleoftheforest / IG @elle_danbury

Claire L. Smith is an Australian author and filmmaker. Her work has been featured in *The Horror Tree*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *Peculiars Magazine*, *Luna Luna Magazine*, *Death and The*

Maiden and more. She is also a film critic with *Morbidly Beautiful* and a poetry/fiction editor at *Peculiar Magazine*. Her website is clairelsmith.com and her Twitter is @clairelsmxth.

Cassandra Bumford is a 20 year old from Upstate New York. She currently holds a Bachelors Degree in Psychology, but has plans to pursue a career as a writer. She has one self published collection, called "To The Left."

Nikkin Rader is in the rat house deep in the heart or tending to her dying plants among mountains, in between states and elapsing in time. She has degrees in anthropology, philosophy, gender and sexuality, poetry, and other humanities and social science. Other works of hers can be found in *Occulum*, *Pussy Magic*, the *Mojave Heart Review*, *littleddeath lit*, *peculiar magazine*, the *Cauldron Anthology*, the *Mystic Blue Review*, *Awkward Mermaid*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, and elsewhere. You can engage her twitter or insta @wecreepoodeep

December Lace (@TheMissDecember) is a former professional wrestler and pinup model from Chicago. She has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Molotov Cocktail*, *Pussy Magic Lit*, *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Twist in Time*, *Dark Marrow*, and *Rhythm & Bones YANYR Anthology*, among others. She loves Batman, burlesque, cats, and horror movies.

Kate Garrett writes and edits. Her work is widely published, most recently in *After the Pause*, *Déraciné Magazine*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, and *Sad Girl Review*, among others, and has been nominated for Best of the Net and a Pushcart Prize. She is the author of six chapbooks, and a seventh, *To Feed My Woodland Bones*, will be published by *Animal Heart Press* in September 2019. Her first full-length collection *The saint of milk and flames* was published by *Rhythm & Bones Press* in April 2019. Born and raised in rural southern Ohio, Kate moved to the UK in 1999, where she still lives in Sheffield with her husband, five children, and a sleepy cat.

Mela Blust is a moonchild, and has always had an affinity for the darkness. She has been writing poetry since she was a child. Her work has appeared in *The Bitter Oleander*, *The Sierra Nevada Review*, *Isacoustic*, *Rust+Moth*, *Anti Heroin Chic*, *Califragile*, *Rhythm & Bones Lit*, *The Stray Branch*, *South Broadway Ghost Society*, and many more. Her debut poetry collection, *Skeleton Parade*, is forthcoming with *Apep Publications* in 2019. She is the social media coordinator for *Animal Heart Press*, as well as a poetry reader for *The Rise Up Review*. She can be followed at Twitter @melablust.

Christina Strigas is a trilingual poet, raised by Greek immigrants, and has written three poetry books. Her latest, *Love & Vodka*, has been featured by *CBC Books* in, "Your Ultimate Canadian Poetry List: 68 Poetry Collections Recommended by you." She is currently working on her fourth upcoming poetry book, *Love & Metaxa*. In her spare time, Christina enjoys foreign cinema, reading the classics, and cooking traditional Greek recipes that have been handed down from her grandmother. Twitter: @christinastriga / Instagram : @c.strigasSexyasspoet / Facebook: Christina Strigas Author

C. Aloysius Mariotti was born in Pennsylvania and raised in Arizona. He studied creative writing at the University of Arizona in Tucson, where he listened to a lot of Rush, Radiohead, and PJ Harvey. His work has been featured in *Black Bough Poetry*, *Marias at Sampaguitas*,

Boston Accent Lit, and Burning House Press, among others. He resides in Massachusetts with his wife Kristen and Westie Bella Francine. He once recorded a stoner rock album, and he's finishing his first novel, Collapse the Light into Earth.

Gustavo Barahona-López is a poet and educator from the San Francisco Bay Area. In his writing, Barahona-López draws from his experience growing up in a Mexican immigrant household. His work can be found or is forthcoming in Rattle's Poets Respond, PALABRITAS, Cutthroat journal, Puerto del Sol, The Acentos Review, among other publications. When Barahona-López is not teaching you can find him re-discovering the world with his son.

Chad W. Lutz is a human born in Akron, Ohio, in 1986, and raised in the neighboring suburb of Stow. Alumna of Kent State University's English program, Chad earned an MFA in Creative Writing at Mills College and currently serves as an associate editor for Pretty Owl Poetry. Their writing has been featured in KYSO Flash, Foliate Oak Literary Magazine, Gold Man Review, and Haunted Waters Press, was awarded the 2017 prize in literary fiction by Bacopa Review, and was a nominee for the 2017 Pushcart in poetry.

Born and raised in Cincinnati, OH, **Lily Forrest** is a 28-year-old with a desk job, a psychology degree, a chihuahua, and a passion for language. An avid reader and writer of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction, Lily is active in Cincinnati's literary and spoken-word scenes. Lily's work has appeared in 'All the Sins'.

Vanessa Maki is a queer writer, artist, & blk feminist. Her work has appeared or will appear in many places. She has self-published a handful of chapbooks & currently has two forthcoming in 2020: *sweet like limes* (Bone & Ink Press) & the chosen one (Animal Heart Press). Find her on [twitter](#) (@theblackbuffy), [instagram](#) (@sharplikeknives) & visit her [site](#).

Catherine Garbinksy is a writer living in Northern California. She holds a degree in The Poetics of Transformation: Creative Writing, Religion, and Social Justice from the University of Redlands. Catherine is the author of *All Spells Are Strong Here* (Ghost City Press, 2018) and *Even Curses End* (Animal Heart Press, 2019). Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Flypaper Magazine*, *Occulum Journal*, and others.

James P. Roberts is the author of 15 books in the fields of fantasy & science fiction, poetry, literary biography and baseball history. Recent work has been published in *Weirdbook*, *Rosebud*, *Mirror Dance*, *The Sand Canyon Review* and *Zingara Poetry Review*. He lives in Madison, Wisconsin where he haunts Little Free Libraries and has a passion for women's flat-track roller derby.

Delvon T. Mattingly, who also goes by D.T. Mattingly, is a writer from Louisville, Kentucky and a PhD student in epidemiology at the University of Michigan. He currently lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with his two cats, Liam and Tsuki. Learn more about his work at <http://delvonmattingly.com/>.

Josie Thornhill is a freelance writer working on her first book. She enjoys writing about mental health, personal development, and relationships. She is also passionate about supporting other writers with mental illness and/or neurodivergence. You can find her on Twitter @ThornhillJosie.

Colette Bennet is a journalist with ten years of experience in storytelling and a particular passion for fantastical worlds. Colette's previous work can be found on CNN, HLN, The Daily Dot, Colourlovers, Gamasutra and Engadget. Colette's essays and fiction have appeared in NonBinary Review and Corona Books' recent sci-fi anthology. Colette is also at work on a first full-length novel, *Chasing the Ema*.

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Paul Rowe is video games editor at Queen Mob's Tea House, contributing editor at Pen and Anvil Press, co-editor of Dark Marrow, and editor of the upcoming Boston anthology in Dostoyevsky Wannabe's Cities series. Paul writes literary criticism, book reviews, feature articles, and poems.

Tianna G. Hansen has been writing her whole life. Her debut poetry collection 'Undone, Still Whole' (APEP) came out May 2019 followed by a three-poet collaboration 'A Victorian Dollhousing Ceremony' (Rhythm & Bones Press) in June. She is the founder/EIC of Rhythm & Bones (rhythmnbone.com) and her published work can be found at creativetianna.com. Follow her: Twitter @tiannag92 / IG @tgghansen24 / FB @tiannaghansen.