

RHYTHM BONES

OCTOBER 2018 | ISSUE TWO

FEATURING:

16 POEMS

2 HYBRIDS

12 FLASH/FICTION
PIECES

2 CREATIVE NON-
FICTION PIECES

15 WORKS OF ART/
PHOTOGRAPHY

CREATIVE STUDY BY
ROBIN SMITH

EXCLUSIVE BONUS:

INTERVIEW WITH

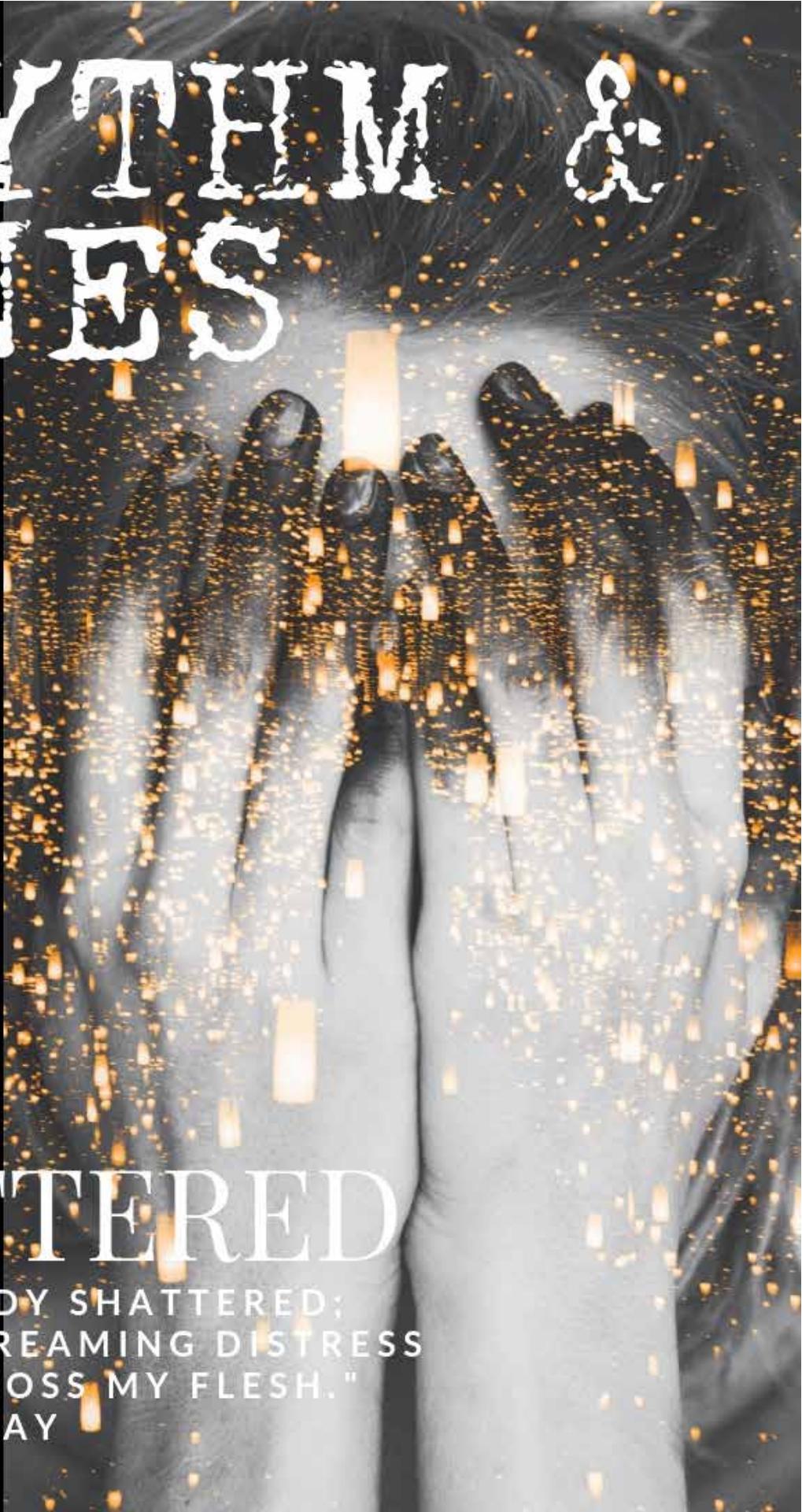
SCI-FI NOVELIST

ANDERS CAHILL

SHATTERED

"I AM ALREADY SHATTERED;
FISSURES SCREAMING DISTRESS
SIGNALS ACROSS MY FLESH."

- MARIE MCKAY



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Brought to you by:

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers, Creators and Supporters,

The last few months have been an absolute thrill! When we first began Rhythm & Bones, we didn't exactly know what would happen - we started it with our own burning passion and a lot of love poured in, and the response we have received well overtook our expectations. We have plans to continue expanding and hope you will all remain behind us in these endeavors.

Now, we are beyond pleased and proud to bring you this October edition, Issue Two: "Shattered." This is a compilation of immense talent, undeniable emotion, thrilling tales to tell in the dark. Just in time for the Hallow's Eve celebrations, we made sure to pack this issue with some extra-chilling tales - so prepare yourselves before you enter.

Much like our first Issue and due to the nature of the most of the work we like to publish (beautiful darkness and trauma-turned-art) - mixed with a dash of good-natured stories - we would also like to begin with a TRIGGER WARNING: We ask you, please be gentle with yourself as you venture inside our issue. These stories need to be told, this pain needs to be shared, but if you find yourself unable to continue reading please step back, take deep breaths, and know we love you, we feel you, we share your pain.

Warmly,

Tianna

Editor-in-chief
Rhythm & Bones Lit



The Routine.

by Marie McKay

My feet on the cold tiles are making me shiver. I am washing with my eyes closed; my body feeling like a dirty sink.

My reluctant hands move over clumsy, awkward shapes that could break into pieces to lie fierce and sharp beneath murky waters.

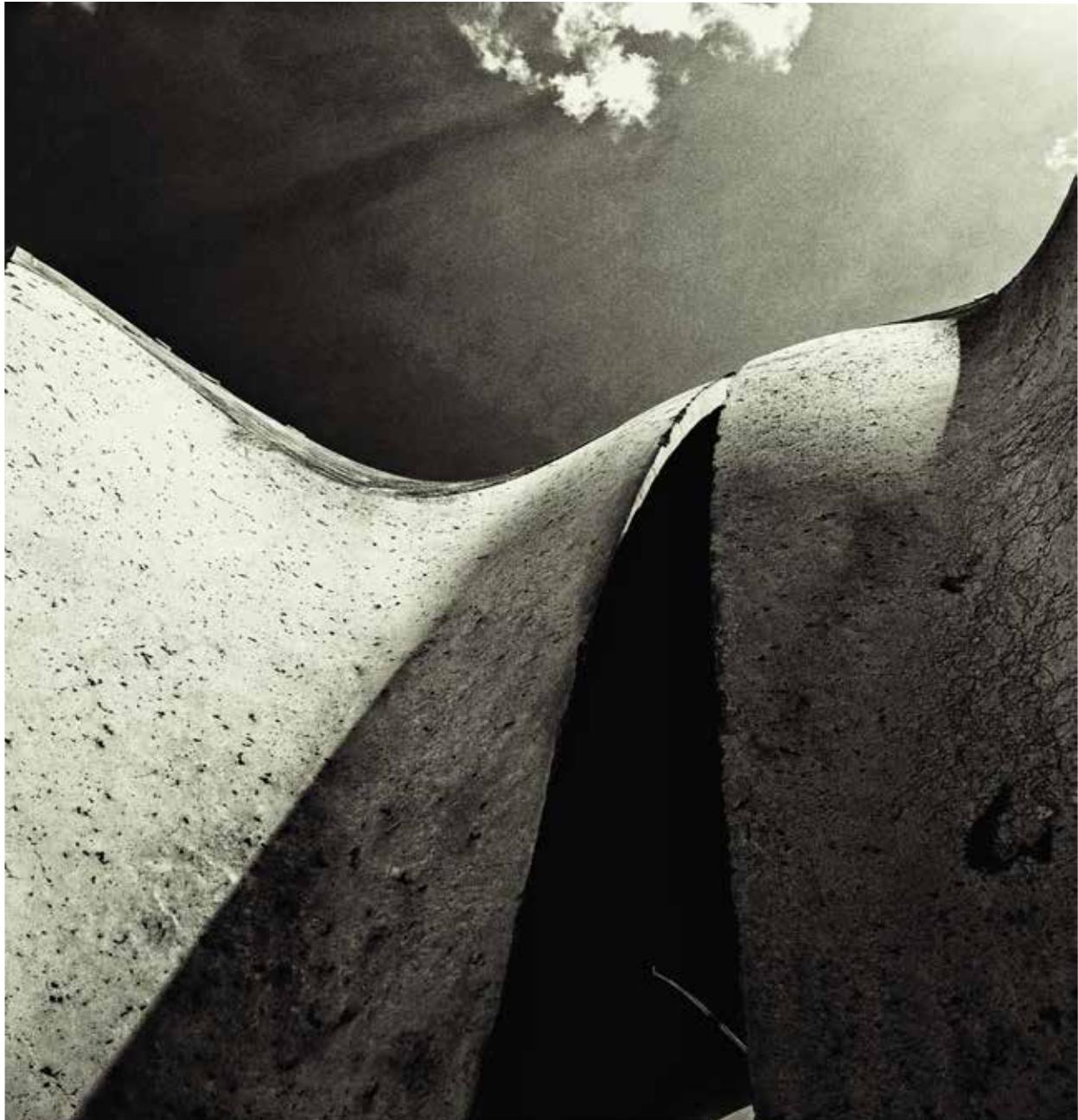
A lair. Layer. Liar. Skeletons beneath my skeleton.

But I am already shattered; fissures screaming distress signals across my flesh: semaphore flagged up on skin.

With fingertips I read the clutter; it tells me I am faulty and makes me nauseous.

Like always I keep my eyes closed, until I am dried and dressed.

Marie McKay lives in Scotland with her husband and four kids. She was an English teacher before becoming a carer for her disabled daughter. She has had stories published in various magazines including, 100 word story, Bending Genres and Literary Orphans.



“Confluence 3” by Stephen Briseño

I Imagine My Rejected Poems as Ghosts

by Stephen Briseño

When rejection drops
by for his routine visit,
the ghosts rattle
my coffee cups that hang
in the kitchen, hide
all my good pens between
the couch cushions, fashion
a makeshift tinderbox
from broken pencil nubs.
At night when I attempt
to sleep, I hear them thumb
through the leaves
of my journal, like lonely
thrushes striking wings
against the branches, rip out
stacks of scribbled pages,
light them on fire,
and weep from the smoke.

Stephen Briseño is a poet and middle school English teacher. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Mentor Mixtapes, 8Poems, formercactus, Riddled with Arrows, and Right Hand Pointing. He lives in San Antonio, TX with his wife and daughter, where you can usually find them lounging at a coffee shop. Follow him on Twitter: @stephen_briseno



Red Wine-Red Whines

by Bridget Kathleen

Pair my wine with the time
The later the night, the deeper the taste
From the bottom of that barrel, aged not to waste
I can sense the warmth before it touches my tongue
Wanting to drink enough to fill just one lung
Simply making myself comfortably miserable

Bridget Dixon lives in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. She works on campus at the University of Southeast Missouri State, where she studies English: creative writing. Between balancing school and work she likes to spend time with her roommates, three ill-mannered cats and her best friend. She has publications at her school's magazine called *Journey*, eclipse chapbook of 2017 titled *The Path of Totality*, and featured in *Philosopher's Stone Poetry Co.'s* that's based out of L.A. - 2017 edition, *The Third Eye: Poetry and Prose*. She's currently interning as lead editor for Lemon Star Magazine's weekly blogs.



“Under Pressure” by Matthew Yates

Fragments
by Tim Duffy

He knew the first day would be the hardest to get through. After years of struggling, begging, they had finally told him it was time go.

The first thing he knew he would have to do is remind himself that he was a body. Still, a body, even if every thought would ache with the memory of this failure.

He would shower first. Hoping to melt away like honey into the drain. He might remark on how hairy and large he had become over the years, a mammalian spectacle. He would debate selling all his books and deleting every email.

He will tell everyone he is not available for drinks. They will think something is wrong, but he won’t tell them exactly what.

The email says clearly he had been given every chance. He knows what he has wasted. He wonders if he will ever be happy again, if the waves of panic will ever subside.

“We gave you permission to proceed to the doctoral program and you have not met expectations,” the email says. “We wish you the best of luck on your future endeavors, even though we regret you cannot continue here.”

He will burn one book. To show that he can. He will close his computer forever to not look at the dissertation he never wrote. He will burn another book. On a grill. The neighbors will think he is barbecuing ineptly.

What else have I done ineptly? He thinks.

He remembers when he drank with Seth and hugged him shirtless. They both were breathing a bit too hard. He

moved away to pursue a post-baccalaureate pre-med program and left him alone. He went on with his life.

He will have to go on with his. Maybe call Stephanie? She had gone through a disaster like this last year after the Dean fucked up her Title IX complaint. A worse disaster.

He must call Stephanie. He will soon.

When he was a graduate student studying Petrarch, he thought of the old Italian poet weeping over his manuscripts, shocked that in 1348 his love Laura and a third of Europe had died.

Remembering this, he burned so many of his papers except for a few Latin letters and Italian poems.

I will burn one book, he thinks. I will call Stephanie. I will text Seth. I will learn to love a body without a future, my body, my nothing of a future.

Seth had asked him once if he knew of a lake in the mountains. They drove there for over an hour and a half. When Seth removed all his clothes, he did the same and plunged into the cold water. Seth hugged him and the trees of the mountains swirled around him. He knew then what it was to be a body.

I can be a body again. I can be a body that burns books.

He will never burn a book. He will box them up and keep out only the ones that remind him of a different life from the one he had been working to make.

Stephanie will come over and they will drink three bottles of wine.

In the morning, he will still be a body, slightly more broken, slightly hungover. He will mix eggs, milk, and flour. He will pray to the skillet. He will monitor the motions of the sun.

He thinks of the gods of money and cries out “all you do is keep the flour and eggs and milk and fridge and walls and bed and wine together.” He smiles.

Can I be just a body?

You always were.

Exhale. Open the door. Your phone is in your pocket.

Tim Duffy is a writer, poet, and teacher living in Connecticut. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Longleaf Review, Cotton Xenomorph, Entropy, Rain Taxi, and elsewhere. He is the founder and editor of 8 Poems Journal.

You can follow him at @Tim_Duffy_PhD.

Matthew Yates is an artist & poet from western KY. His work can be found in Memoir Mixtapes.



“Keys to Nowhere” by Angie Hedman

THINGS I WISH I NEVER KNEW

by Ailey O’Toole

Depression is a gatekeeper who you will spend years trying to sneak past. When you finally do, it will not feel like healing. There is no map to this starting over. Not eating is never as glamorous as you think it's going to be. Your sparsely portioned meals are mocking you for eating at all and when you faint in the checkout line at Walmart, you will hear the saltine crackers laughing at you from inside their packaging. Everyone is expecting you to act like you have it together all the time. Do not, under any circumstance, ever forget to put on mascara, because then they will know. You cannot use other people to smooth the fissures in your bones. Love is not meant to be a process of filling and emptying. You will have to do this rebuilding on your own.

Everything gets darker before the breakthrough. You never know how far you have to fall. You never know if you can get back up. But you have no other choice.

Ailey O'Toole is a queer poet and bartender who writes about feminism, empathy, and pain. She hopes everyone who reads her poems feels less alone in their struggle. Her work has previously appeared in *The Broke Bohemian*, *After the Pause*, *Ghost City Review*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, and others. She tweets at @ms_ocoole.

Angie Hedman is an artist, writer, gallery director/curator, and high school art educator who resides in Muncie, IN. She holds degrees from Ball State University in the areas of Fine Arts (Metals), and Art Education. Her art has been recently published or is forthcoming in *Gravel*, *The Broken Plate*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Montana Mouthful*, *805 Lit+Art*, and *Pidgeonholes*. Her poetry can be found in *Ink to Paper*, *Three Line Poetry*, and *Celestial Musings: Poems Inspired by the Night Sky*.



Flammability Limits

by Kate Garrett

Close July / more a creature than a month
chased me indoors / under water / secure
against the blast of county fair tractor pulls
cherry bombs / sunburn on lakeshore sand

I'd float up to my neck in the murk
bluegills stalking ankles / the sun
dropping low into the monster's mouth

These days when anger

torches gentle English

mornings / I daydream specks of old summer
beneath maple trees / gravel tracks seething
in the heat / skin cooled inside out by salted

watermelon / timewasting on a blanket
grass-itch legs / near nightfall primed to nail
a string of M80s to the post / spark the fuse
stand close / swallow each chest-pop explosion

Kate Garrett is the founding/managing editor of four online journals, including Picaroon Poetry. Her own work most recently appears or is forthcoming in *formercactus*, *Riggwelter*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Allegro Poetry*, and *Gyroscope Review*, and her latest pamphlets are *You've never seen a doomsday like it* (*Indigo Dreams*, 2017) and *Losing interest in the sound of petrichor* (*The Black Light Engine Room*, 2018). She was born and raised in southern Ohio, but moved to the UK in 1999, where she lives happily/grumpily ever after (depending on the day) in Sheffield with her husband, five children, and a sleepy cat.



"Edge of Things" by Matthew Yates

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Matthew Yates is an artist & poet from western KY. His work can be found in *Memoir Mixtapes*.

WAVES

by Nessma A. Elssawy

The quiet waves outside my window seem more marvelous than usual tonight. Like a beautiful stranger, approaching after a long night of self-absorbance and disappointment.

From my skin to my shoes, I'm made of nature, yet I've failed to become one with it. Something keeps pushing me away, like the current that won't let me touch this bed of sand.

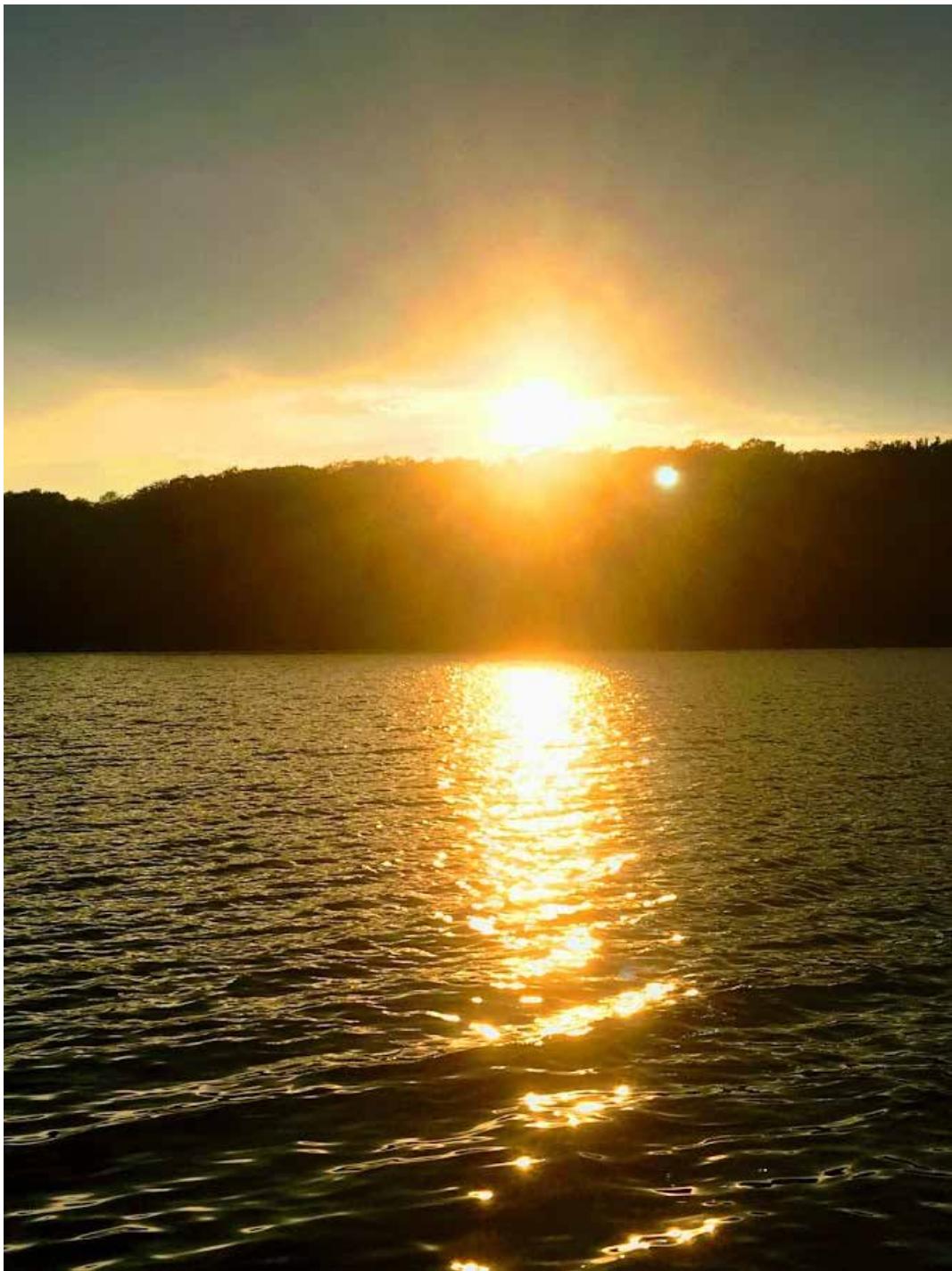
I envy nature. I envy its beautiful features that don't depend on my catastrophes to function, that keep on going despite my sins.

I envy the colors of the universe that fascinate me, and at the same time, drag me to my world where sin is the sun. Where pain never ceases to visit.

Sometimes disguised in a message or a call. Other times, the shameless visitor has a face.

Any minute now, all my aches will erupt, and the beauty of the waves will soon be veiled.

Nessma A. Elssawy was born in Alexandria, Egypt. She had an unpleasant childhood, which drove her to write one of her own where adventures and fantasies seemed possible. Her first series of adventure short stories were published in her school's journal and a local magazine after. Her passion for writing has never ceased to grow ever since. As a teenager, she participated in her school's drama club as a writer and lead actress. Her writing career began in online journalism while she taught English all over the world. She experimented with different writing genres such as mystery, MG adventure, YA, speculative fiction, romance and literary fiction. Her work can be found in several anthologies and literary magazines both in English and Arabic. When she's not writing, she's traveling the world with Leo, her German Shepherd.



“Sunset Reflection” by Sulyn Godsey

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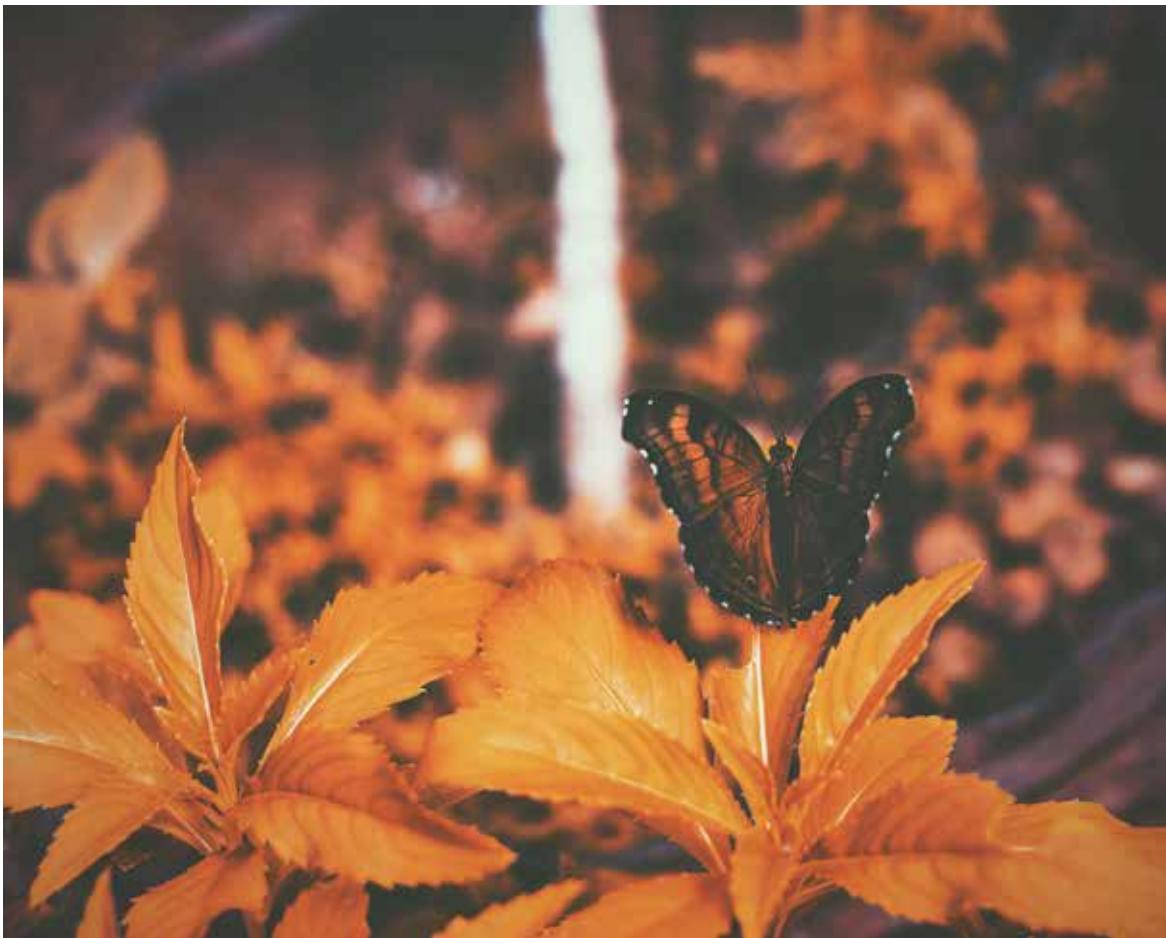
Sulyn Godsey has been writing poetry since she was very young. She has recently begun to enjoy photography as well. She is happily married and is the mother of 2 grown daughters. She works as a Student Assistance Liaison, assessing students of all ages for mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues. She and her husband own a small farm in Pennsylvania where they have a large garden, fruit trees, berry bushes, and raise their own pigs for food.

The Sun is Yours

a girl you once loved tells you to fetch her the sun, but only when it's at its ripest / now you sit in darkness with the great orb in your hands / outside the earth is filled / with the ear-splitting shrieks of plants / the shudders of the oceans as they freeze over / it's funny how / the sun becomes small as a tennis ball in your hands / just like you, it'll do whatever she says / but just like her, it still burns your skin to a crisp.

~ Wanda Deglane

Wanda Deglane is a night-blooming desert flower from Arizona. She is the daughter of Peruvian immigrants and attends Arizona State University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology and family & human development. Her poetry has been published or forthcoming from Rust + Moth, Glass Poetry, L'Ephemere Review, and Former Cactus, among other lovely places. Wanda is the author of Rainlily (2018) and Lady Saturn (Rhythm & Bones, 2019).



Emilie

by Samantha Ryce Curreli

My cat Harlem and I sat on the front porch, waiting for little monsters to come begging for candy. I liked to dole out the snacks and watch their apprehensive smiles illuminate on my porch—a stranger’s porch. I used to tell myself that I would never have children. Always slobbering, laughing, crying—shooting snot out of their slimy noses.

They made me sick—figuratively and literally.

I would study the parents’ watchful eyes follow their kids like invisible leashes. If the kids ran too far ahead in search for more sugar, they would screech to a halt and turn to find their parents far behind—but they could oh, so clearly see the glares restricting another step.

However, for the two years I’d lived in Willport, Emilie walked the streets alone. No one acknowledged her, although she would smile shyly at the children who shoved past her, laughing, joking.

I’d lived here for two years, this was my third Halloween, and I would watch her steadily climb the hill and visit each house; no parents in sight. Two years in a row, she was a butterfly. This year was no different. Harlem and I remained on the porch until the steady flow of sweaty children slowed to a trickle.

I checked my watch: It was after eight and I was worried.

“Where do you think Emilie is, Harlem?”

He mewed and twitched his tail just as I saw the pink, shimmering butterfly costume round the corner. The glittery wings fluttered in the breeze and she skipped out into Bloomfield Ave.

The bus didn’t stop.

I screamed and stood, knocking Harlem to the wooden planks on the porch and ran down the steps, only to see little Emilie just make it to the other side of the street. The door across the street shrieked open and Bette stepped out and down to the curb, blue curlers bouncing in her white hair.

“What happened?” Bette asked, stepping onto the curb.

“The little girl in the butterfly suit—I thought there was an accident. She crossed the street and then a bus came—I thought she was hit,” I said, walking down my steps, Harlem at my heels.

“What little girl?”

“The one in the butterfly costume. Emilie. That’s the name on her candy bag.”

“I guess she skips my house. I can’t blame her—all I give are pennies,” she said, adjusting a lopsided curl.

“No. She goes to all the houses. I saw her last year. I keep an eye on her because she’s always alone.” I turned and watched the girl skip to the house next door, reach into a bowl of candy and return to the sidewalk. She danced over to my walkway and as she passed me, she began to hum.

“Emilie,” I said.

“What are you looking at?” Bette asked, trying to follow my gaze.

I watched the girl skip up my steps, Harlem following, and ring the doorbell. She reached up as though she were grabbing something, then turned and skipped back down the steps, continuing her trick-or-treating, her plastic Jack-O-Lantern candy basket swinging in her small hand. I shivered and turned back to face a frowning Bette.

“Well,” she said, her face tight. “Happy Halloween.” And she retreated back into her house.

I watched her dark silhouette disappear into the shadows of her home, then turned to watch the little girl skip up the hill. Her iridescent butterfly wings fluttered in the late October breeze. I blinked, listening to the dead, dry leaves scamper across the sidewalk—and she was gone.

Back on the porch, Harlem and I sat, indulging in the leftover Halloween candy. Crickets chirped softly, lulling the wind to sleep. I closed my eyes, leaning my head against the back of the wicker chair. A bus whizzed by the street below and a faint giggle followed, ringing through the final hours of Halloween night.

Samantha is a recent MFA graduate from Arcadia University and a journalist for The Aquarian Weekly, a music magazine based in New Jersey. When she's not buried in a new album or drowning in her coffee, she can usually be found at her piano or hiding in a good horror novel. You can find more of her fiction in Humor Press Anthology, Witch Works Magazine, Ginger Collect, and Jotters United.



I Am Connemara

Lightning's digital signal pulses on, off. On. Off. The sun hangs in gauzes through cygnet clouds, asks the rainbow to come back, come back, and he does: a stooping giant with seven colours in his cobweb skin. Life is too little to hold this. I rattle the car along strange roads, peaks, ragged valleys. When I see water, it carries acres of impulsive sky. I descend into a village. Park among stones outside a stout-chimneyed cottage. Her cottage. Somewhere, I have breathed in a moth – it flits from organ to organ. Her sister, my aunt, opens the door, opens her arms. I, motherless, need the weight of her. She fits into my glass mosaic, then leads me towards the kitchen: there are other aunts in there, slicing barmbrack, and uncles against worksurfaces, cousins and second cousins around the table – all with my crab apple wrist bones and dark, tiny wishing trees in their eyes. An old man stares as if he lost me once. You must have something to drink. I don't drink alcohol. They laugh. Neither do we at four o'clock, darlin'. Tea? Twenty years are an aerial puppet show between us as shadows eavesdrop in the nooks. They talk about Mummy. Before babies. Before Daddy. The girl who ran across the mountains, who went out at dusk to meet lads who put field roses in her hair. She sang while writing poetry; put on forbidden lipstick while she gave each little one a piggy back in turn. She stayed awake, hoarding moonlight. She was the lulls and crescendos in the weather. She is a Gaelic myth. The faery story none of us could catch. You're like her when you cry, they say.

~ Olivia Tuck

Olivia Tuck has had poems and prose published in literary journals and webzines, including *The Interpreter's House*, *Lighthouse*, *Amaryllis* and *Three Drops from a Cauldron*. Her work also featured in *Please Hear What I'm Not Saying*, a charity poetry anthology on the subject of mental health, and she has been Highly Commended and shortlisted in one or two story competitions. She is due to start at Bath Spa University this autumn, to study for a BA in Creative Writing. Find her on Twitter: @livtuckwrites



Plaid Kitten

by Kristin Garth

A kitten written wanton, bad but smiles
so meek in skirts of plaid. Charcoal, crimson
intersects a schoolgirl demeanor, wiles
with kinky sex. Blue black outlined yellow sun,
shy smiles inside the darkness done. In cream
criss-cross on mottled sage, she pouts, a pig-
tailed Betty Page. Turquoise gingham, daydream
pristine, a freckled cheek, deceitful gig
obscene. A tartan twirl to thrill in twill,
stileto crawl towards the tallest stack
of bills — a dollhouse, alone, tattersall,
flared skirt so small, your heart attacked
is bitten, smitten; across a lap, she purrs
a ruby clawed outlaw, pervert demure.

Kristin Garth is a poet from Pensacola and a sonnet stalker. Her sonnets have stalked magazines like Glass, Luna Luna, Oculum, Anti-Heroin Chic, Drunk Monkeys, Ghost City Review and many more. Her chapbook Pink Plastic House is available through maverickduckpress.com, and she has more forthcoming: Pensacola Girls (Bone & Ink Press), Shakespeare for Socio-paths (The Hedgehog Poetry Press, Jan 2019), Puritan U (Rhythm & Bones Lit, March 2019), and Candy Cigarette (Hedgehog Poetry Press, March 2019). Follow her on Twitter: @lolaandjolie



Backseat Cynic

by Alex Olson

New Year's like every new year, so fresh and dope that it's exactly like every other. It's 12:02am and you're already saying, "Well, at least I tried." The same people at the same party - smudged versions of their past avatars. You don't really recognize them. Nobody is in accordance to their profile pictures, and you rarely see these people in real life.

Carmen, the hottest girl in your feed - in your entire social circle - is muffin-topping over tight black jeans. The waistband cuts into her pale, white flesh. You're a cruel, bitter person, so your inner monologue starts saying: "Mozzarella hips! Mozzarella hips!" in a sing-song voice. She looks nothing like the laughing I'm-just-a-normal-girl-who-loves-her-best-friend banner on her page, making matching peace signs and kissy faces in a bikini, skin tanned and taut.

Ryan, the cutest guy in your feed is here, too, and you don't know what happened to him. Rumor is he got into DJing and drugs, but probably in reverse. He used to be a trim, blonde-surfer haired Hollister model three years ago with casually ripped jeans and bulging arm muscles. Now he looks homeless with a thin beard stretching down to his stained t-shirt and those arms have become stringy and weak.

Your profile picture is you from two years ago, trying your hardest to avoid having folds in your neck as you look at the camera. You don't possess a friend you can stand long enough to capture a best friends/best bros pic, and you can't figure out if that's a good thing.

Panorama, 360 spin, and you see Oliver. Oliver is the only person you know who possesses as big a chip on his shoulder as you do. Oliver's chip might a chunk missing from his metaphorical shoulder, a big pitbull bite out of the meat. Can't say that to him, though. The moment you get to the pitbull analogy, people will appear out of the blue to tell you that:

A: Pitbull's are sweet dogs and you shouldn't stereotype. Here's picture of my dumb kid laying on a pitbull.

B: Pitbulls are actual demons who murder children at will, here are the stats from pitbulsmurder.com

Standing next to him is Lionel, who reposts Bernie Sanders once every 23 minutes, so you're going to avoid him for the rest of Bernie's life.

Arms folded and glaring at Lionel is Stephanie. She posts Donald Trump statements so you're going to stay far away from that.

Everyone seems to be laughing. Laughing at the passing year, glad it's over. Laughing because everyone else is laughing. Their gaping maws won't close, they keep hee-hawing until your chest starts to tighten. It sounds like nervous laughter. Probably because, despite the resolutions and revelations and the realizations, your aging 20-something friends are feeling mortal and scared. We've got five decades left before we start dying! School is over or ending and now we're realizing why Dad was a tired, ornery sonofabitch because working week after week for peanuts turns you vaguely homicidal.

To your left there's a commotion, a slight raising of voices, laughter that's faker than before. Someone says loudly, "Well, I could never have kids."

You rub your eyes like you're activating a zoom function, and look at the huddle of people. Polly is a young, single mother, and while you don't really care about that, her tendency to push parenthood on everyone she comes in contact with is agitating.

Procreation is the name of a deadly virus. It wriggles into your bloodstream and alters your brain chemistry, making you devoted to a smaller version of yourself that (fingers crossed!) won't be a failure like its parents.

Polly used to be a go-getter. She'd post pictures of big office buildings and #WorkClothes. She'd been dating one of the Ryan's of the world, a high school celebrity trying desperately to get his new TV series "I'm Still Relevant" off the ground. He got her pregnant and disappeared. Polly said he joined the Marines. Your cynical little mind can't help but wonder if he joined to have an excuse not to raise the kid. Deadbeat Dad, meet Noble Deadbeat Dad, you can't say anything bad about him because he's serving his country and we all worship anyone in camo.

Polly's clutching the arm of Chrissa, a willow-thin, dark haired girl you only vaguely know. Chrissa shares new-age feminist stuff, real inspiring, but damn! There's that cynicism again, and boy howdy, you'd bet money if someone had just asked her to prom and performed cunnilingus on her, she wouldn't be on her third tour in the great War Against Men.

You watch the two titans of mediocrity circle each other like gladiators, bristling to defend their life choices. You find it disappointing that this isn't happening online. They don't have their arsenals of articles, memes and quotes!

"10 Ways Being a Mom Made Me Stronger"

"I'm Not Having Kids, and That's Okay"

"We're Both Lonely, Sad and Worried about Our Futures - Someone Please Tell Us We Made the Right Call"

Three examples are probably enough.

Polly starts off by saying how life means so much more to her now, and Chrissa counters with a quip about being able to afford food. Polly takes that as an attack toward her reliance on food stamps. She replies, "Well, not all of us are fortunate in life." Chrissa has no choice but to parry. "I've worked for everything I have."

And that's when you pull away; you don't care about bootstraps or who pulled themselves up by them. They

could hang themselves by those bootstraps, that'd be okay with you.

But then Polly is discussing names for her kid. You aim your ears back, because your master's thesis is about how unaccomplished adults give their children more unique names.

That's probably why you went to school with a girl named "Chrissa."

"For a boy, I was thinking Draco, Alonzo, Perceval, Patrick-James—"

Woops, you zoned out there. That's okay, though. Whatever the kid turns out to be, it will have an 11 to 17-letter first name, and anywhere from two to four middle names. If your name sounds like the name of a lawyer or doctor, logically you'll become that thing, right?

Your thesis is now a case study.

You're out of beer-wine, so you push through the clusters of people, reaching the dirty counter where a selection of cheap alcohol has been lined up and massacred. Every bottle is nearly empty, the blue-green punch looks like Kool-Aid vomit, and nobody bothered to put the beer in a cooler. Still, it's not all bad because you just spotted a dog.

It's lying by the washing machine that's stuffed in a closet, branching off from the kitchen. It's a big ol' sad dog, some sort of Labrador. His head is on his paws, but his ears perk up slightly when you walk over.

You sit cross-legged next to Dog and start stroking his fur. Four people at the kitchen table are talking. You're tired and sad, but that need to cut down and destroy people has not been quenched. It wrenches your focus from Dog and aims it at them - Paul, Bob, Roy and Jason. They're dressed in office clothes; slacks, ties, dress shoes that gleam.

"Looking to move up, Jason?"

"Yeah, I have an interview next week. Polished my resume, should be good to go. You?"

"I'm actually starting my own company with Roy."

"No shit. What kind?"

"Multimedia. Movies, music, video games. We're starting with a website. Bob is handling the layout designs, I'm marketing and outreach, and Roy is our content mill."

It goes on and on, they're like alcoholics playing Keno in a liquor store, plotting what they would do with their imaginary winnings. Someone cackles, and you look down at the dog, but that sound came from you.

The media moguls stare at you.

"Hey," says Paul. "What about you?"

Yeah, what about you?

You, the backseat cynic. You've seen Fight Club 57 times and agree with every word of it, people do need to wake up and take control of their lives.

Still, though, you find yourself hoping that someone or something will swoop in and take that whole conundrum off your hands. Winning the metaphorical lottery, a job that is both fulfilling and provides health insurance. Or winning the literal lottery, so you can roll around in stacks of cash and stuff your face with Hostess cakes. Let those other people go forth and take chances, you'll sit in the corner and make fun of them.

So, what about you?

Spitting acid at anything that comes too close or dares to be too bright, too shiny. Seeing people stand tall on their own legs and wanting to take an aluminum bat to their ankles.

The backseat cynic, saying to the world: “Hey, you mind not hitting the potholes?”

But when the world finally turns around and asks if you want to drive, you just fold your arms and glare out the window.

Alex is from Port Huron, Michigan. He writes about squid-gods, dying millenials, and moms who won't stay dead. His debut novel, Erosion, is available on Amazon. You can also find a metric ton of his writing on his website, squidthroatonline.com



“Bent Teeth” by Stephen Briseño

* *

Stephen Briseño is a poet and middle school English teacher. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Mentor Mixtapes, 8Poems, formercactus, Riddled with Arrows, and Right Hand Pointing. He lives in San Antonio, TX with his wife and daughter, where you can usually find them lounging at a coffee shop. Follow him on Twitter: @stephen_briseno

The Pale Man's Eyes Never Leave the Horizon
by Jack B. Bedell

—Lake Champlain

When a wave rolls up out of nowhere,
do not look down. It is my body
shifting under the surface.

I will be there in the shallows
to hear the people of the woods
warn you not to disturb me.

My eyes, the size of white perch,
will roll back into their sockets
at the sound of your laughter.

Whenever your children come to the shore
aching to disappear into my calm lake,
I will grab them by their ankles,

draw them into the deep water
with their last breaths still captive
in their lungs. For each beating heart

I devour, each of your barges
full of tree trunks I sink, you
will cry a slow prayer toward

the dying light. There is no lesson
in this pain for you, no
road you can build long enough

to escape my reach, the teeth
I sharpen each night, waiting
for the crunch of bones you are.

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 *Bone-Hollow, True: New & Selected Poems* (Texas Review Press, 2013). He has recently been appointed by Governor John Bel Edwards to serve as Louisiana Poet Laureate 2017-2019.



In sickness and dishonesty

by Charley Barnes

‘He thinks it was a miscarriage.’

It’s the first time that I’ve said this out loud. The room is so quiet that I can hear the nurse breathing and I can’t bring myself to open my eyes. When I hear her moving around – over-turning papers, opening a drawer – I crack my right eye open, and follow it with my left. She’s sitting on the stool opposite the bed on which I’m perched. My legs are still spread open, the sheet is covering my midriff – as though the exposure of my soft stomach is what makes this experience immodest.

‘Can you try and relax for me, please?’ she asks.

I spread my legs a little wider but make a conscious effort to keep the soles of my feet pressed together, as instructed. I close my eyes and imagine my husband in the waiting room; waiting to make sure that there is no permanent damage, waiting to hear whether we can try again, and how soon.

‘You’ll feel a sharp scratch,’ she says, but it came seconds ago when she took the first sample. That’s when I know that she heard what I said, even though she isn’t, even though she won’t, acknowledge it. She pulls the speculum out too slowly without winding it shut. I recognise this as a special type of female violence.

C.S. Barnes is a Worcester based author and poet who has recently finished her Doctorate degree in Creative Writing, and now spends her days wondering what to do with it. Her debut prose collection, *The Women You Were Warned About*, was published in May 2017 by Black Pear Press, and her debut poetry pamphlet, *A Z-hearted Guide to Heartache*, is forthcoming with V. Press (July 2018).



“Clouds” by Stephen Briseño

Steady Blues

caffeinated riffs
at 7 am
old R&B
in the background
while ma smokes
 a last last
cigarette window cracked
 tunes seep
seeping out into sky
so blue so blue
 this is how
 we keep it
 so blue

~ *Mary Hanrahan*

Mary is a writer and artist living in the middle of Michigan. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and an MA in Counseling. Her work is forthcoming in Sugar House Review, Artful Dodge, tinywords, formercactus, and elsewhere. Follow her on Twitter @marybhanrahan



“Welcoming Tide” by Sulyn Godsey

The sea

is a seeker

coves crevices

fissures

familiar shores.

Moon glow

sun sparkle
evening shimmer
sepulchre grey.

Sucks you in like depression
or love

surrounds
entombs.

Casts you on the rocks
 bleeds you raw
keeps you
 in depths.

Try to float
 let it carry you.

Close your eyes
 imagine
you're a pearl.

Rona Fitzgerald has poems in UK, Scottish, Irish and US publications both in print and online. Originally from Dublin, she now lives in Glasgow. Most recent publications are Poems for Grenfell Tower, Onslaught Press 2018, and #Me Too, Fair Acre Press, 2018.



Quetiapine, 550mg

by Olivia Tuck

The lifeline dissects my palm. Two white seeds sit across it. Swallow: swallow, with day-old water. I'll wait until my vertebrae stop holding my head.

It's the longest day. I should be running barefoot through the witching hour beneath the strawberry moon. Boys and girls lie on hillsides, in fields, in glades, waiting for the sun to come back. The smoke they breathe lets them touch storybook dustcovers. Faery people fly past in their hosts, astride moths and bumble bees. They hang bunting from the old willows crying over the stream. Their song pulls the mortals to their feet, and they dance together in the light of the will o' the wisps, forming a ring, bending, leaping, until the stars have gone and bodies are burnt to the ground.

Inside my thicket, a fog falls. It might be midwinter. I hide under the quilt.

I swap that trip for this one.

*Olivia Tuck has had poems and prose published in literary journals and webzines, including *The Interpreter's House*, *Lighthouse*, *Amaryllis* and *Three Drops from a Cauldron*. Her work also featured in *Please Hear What I'm Not Saying*, a charity poetry anthology on the subject of mental health, and she has been Highly Commended and shortlisted in one or two story competitions. She is due to start at Bath Spa University this autumn, to study for a BA in Creative Writing. Find her on Twitter: @livtuckwrites*



"The First Warning" by Elizabeth Dickinson

Heed The Warnings Of The Natural World

(Creative Nonfiction)

by Elizabeth Dickinson

The ocean's roiling waves were in a fury, angry beats on fields of sand, the sand caving into itself like a boxer's stomach after a bloody punch. The fight went on as I watched, taking pictures of high, heavy pounding. An electric sky exploded, lightbulbs shattered, the sound on delay. High season had ended in Cabo Polonio, Uruguay and the elements delivered warnings to the few tourists still coming for a visit. The remote beach wanted to sleep without interruptions from laughing weed and stumbling wine.

Ignoring the threats, I sat with other drifters drinking wine that was only a few hours from becoming vinegar. The guy from Italy took particular offense, but as that was the only option in a virtually barren market, he filled his plastic cup. Our small crew gathered in a dank living room, seated on moldy, sunken furniture. Water slid through cracks in the hostel's slatted roof. We drank and talked and listened to the girl from Slovenia educate us with her knowledge of dicks around the world and what continent was identified as the dirtiest. Her conclusive research selected Europe, given a common lack of circumcision and not washing oneself after urinating. As the booze and conversation dried, a gradual fade drew people to their mildewed mattresses.

Since my rogue life through South America had begun, I hadn't met up with so many adolescent late thirty-somethings. With the Slovenian girl lecturing about foreskin, and the poor Brazilian in chasms over an ex-boyfriend, I had spent most of the evening hanging from a depressed roof, a bat trying to swat sound from its ears. Left alone with the Italian, we chatted about home and away. I gasped when a tiny drop landed on my

face and smiled as he wiped it with the back of his finger. We laughed about our cracked Spanish, the roll of the tongue stopping short. He admired my legs with his hands, humid from the storm-fired sauna, and opened buttons in steady sequence.

I was bare-assed on a wet couch, an Italian on top, condom applied only to be removed about 45 seconds later. His drab apology was suffocated by my bell-ringing disbelief. I hadn't finished yanking up damp jean shorts before he was off to the dorm. My atheist roots encouraged not to forgive but to forget. The tempered wind grumbled as a torrent of endless water pounded the small village by the sea.

Morning came, sun slipping through the same cracks rain had found the night before and I stepped from my bunk bed into a foot or so of the ocean's anger and the sky's disappointment. The storm had bogged a hostel that was built for summer. Each of us sloshed out to reception receiving gifts of large plastic cups, mis-matched soup bowls, and beer-soaked water pitchers. I got the aluminum pan I'd used to prepare pasta with marinara the night before. We all helped fill the kitchen wares with the flood, tossing water on the front lawn scattered with lakes and streams and slicks of mud. I was grateful for the work, averting eyes that could turn a truly strange morning into an awkwardly polite one. The owner arranged 4x4's to take everyone to their respective buses, and we left him the task of mopping up heartbreak, discarded continents, and some dignity. Italy went to Montevideo, and I, to Buenos Aires. His goodbye seemed a bit smug considering he could fill a condom in the time it takes me to fill a seat. There was little consolation save my own encouragement. It was a night of bad sex. You've survived worse, and now know to keep an eye out for Middle Eastern men, whom you have been told, on good authority, are very clean. What certainly awaited me on the other side of Rio Plata was the passionate tango and some brilliant wine.

In Buenos Aires, there was a kiss on each cheek as a greeting, charming and charming again. There were proper drunks from flirty wine, and mounds of gelato. There were lurid tangos with romantic lifts, and fitful rejections. With each embrace, crows scratched at backs, and despondent turns of the head quickly became reuniting stares. Every pass of the foot, smooth of the cheek with a careful hand, and dip, head almost touching the ground, leg kicked up as an offering to devour, I thought, Yes, that.

Coffee and medialunas became an afternoon ritual, and while enjoying one al fresco, I received a message from Italy on What's App. In my vinegared haze, I had given him my number. He was in town. Dinner? I poured more excuses onto his shortcoming, and promptly cursed the tango. Jealous for an enthusiastic dip of my own, I agreed.

We had steak and ripped the flesh from the bone. Pasta twirled in spoons, the last bits pulled through puckered lips. We sipped wine. He caught my eye over the lip of his glass. The waiter brought out a thick chocolate cake with dulce de leche filling. Each bite was sliced with the side of a fork, cake falling on top, filling dripping off, finger catching it. The meal was clearly an attempt to assure me that Uruguay was five hours behind the Italian Time Zone. We walked together to his hotel. With dulce crystals still falling from my fingertips, and covered in a sheet, I watched him remove a condom and take it to the bathroom. He returned to the bed, and lay with hands behind his head, wearing that arrogant smirk.

Turning to look at me as though we were chatting in a saturated Uruguayan hostel, he asked, "Have you ever tried BASE jumping?"

"No. I never would. It's the most dangerous sport in the world, with the highest death toll."

He laughed. "No, you have to do it. It's incredible. The most amazing feeling I've ever had."

"So, when you're looking over the edge, it's like you encompass power and powerlessness being there. The adrenaline makes your heart beat like an attack is seizing your body. The beginning feels crazy." He was sucking air through his teeth and smacking his chest with his palms. "You need a minute to catch your breath," he smiled looking at me. "Inhale, exhale", mimicking his words by sucking air through his teeth again, closing his eyes. "One final look out at the distance and jump! And then you're just diving. Fuckin' free fall." He began pumping his legs, knees spread to the sides, and panting. "In flight the wind presses hard and you know in a split second it could turn and smash you into the side of a cliff, a building, whatever, and you're...," and he snapped his fingers.

Legs still pumping, he covered his face and uncovered another smile. "It's like the Earth is daring you to survive and I'm screaming, "I'm king of the world, the most powerful. I own my destiny!" He was actually screaming, standing on the bed with an erection, arms outstretched. "When I land," he said looking down on me, "and look up at what I did, to beat the odds, I know my life is the most important." The last line was delivered through gritted teeth, almost growling. The panting continued, and his body had stiffened, but his erection had softened. He had finished.

I sat motionless, the sheet wrapping me in a cocoon, while he described in vivid detail his exchange of a natural ecstasy for an unnatural one. I realized then, his odd, discomfiting smirk wasn't pride in his attractiveness or potency. It said, "Your life means nothing."

Elizabeth York Dickinson received her MFA in Writing from Sarah Lawrence College. She has work published or forthcoming in Eunoia Review, Drunk Monkeys, Picaroon Poetry and Riggwelter among others. She currently resides in Evanston, Illinois.



“Nature’s Lace” by Sulyn Godsey

The Cimmerian

by Kristin Garth

A sterling steeple, Cimmerian sky,
transfixing temple twinkle nigh. In
clouds
charcoal your crucifix eclipse belies
anhedonia of atheists. Found
devotion, beams below — recumbent peeks
a thousand flickers' glow melts hearts, wax doll
dissolving urchin, urgent underneath
to taste the sacrament of sight, in thrall,
with timid teeth. Divinity bequeaths
a lust bereft regret. Genuflected,
repentant child, adorned ashen lace, wreath
of fauna wild my first dawn collected.
Obeisance heathens never understand.

My god is light, illuminated man.

Kristin Garth is a poet from Pensacola and a sonnet stalker. Her sonnets have stalked magazines like Glass, Luna Luna, Oculum, Anti-Heroin Chic, Drunk Monkeys, Ghost City Review and many more. Her chapbook Pink Plastic House is available through maverickduckpress.com, and she has more forthcoming: Pensacola Girls (Bone & Ink Press), Shakespeare for Sociopaths (The Hedgehog Poetry Press, Jan 2019), Puritan U (Rhythm & Bones Lit, March 2019), and Candy Cigarettes (The Hedgehog Poetry Press, April 2019). Follow her on Twitter: @lolaandjolie.



Palmistry

by Kali Rose Schmidt

The graveyard was the ideal room for
walking to think,
or
thinking to walk.

The moon hung full in the blackness above and
fallen rain drenched every blade of grass below.

The bodies beneath were getting an au naturel moisturizing treatment.
Organic sheen-like mist on their milk white bones.

A crumbly stone
drew my eye.
I can't say why,
but it appeared to me
as if the moonlight shone on this stone like a soliloquy
in a dark and doomed theatre.

The name was illegible,
the date even more so,
but it was broken in half, cracked down the middle,
and the hairs on my arms stood up and I began to think perhaps
this was the work of a magnificent bolt of lightening
like a flash
from a wand or a gasp

from an oracle when she sees a coffin in your tea leaves.
Perhaps it was more cursed than we already tend to be.

But there was, too, a smell –
rotting flesh and chewed up fingernails.
Nothing so obscene to sway me away,
only a reminder of our short stay.

I squatted down, hovering above the damp graveyard grass,
and leaned in to examine the ominous stone with precision,
my heart fluttering nervously in my chest like it does during revisions.

It was then I saw, underneath a waterlogged branch,
innocuous enough,
a hand.

Pale with long slender fingers, death blue nails, severed cleanly at the wrist.
A silver ring encircled the index finger.

If I had to guess,
only if I was pressed,
I would say the hand was female.
Women have a way of rising from the dirt like that.

In the distance,
I could feel the echolocation
of a bat's vocation
and it seemed
to me
as if he was delivering a warning –
to stay away,
leave the palm in peace.
Bats know this type of midnight
moonlight
toiling well,
I gave him the benefit that the creatures of the night should get,
and with a nod to the beautiful, body-less hand,
I stood,
and continued to circle the cemetery.

Aware now that bodies separate off into limbs sometimes among the dead
in the same way that minds separate sometimes from bodies in the living.

We all have our own way of handling the graveyards.

Kali Rose Schmidt is a writer and mother from North Carolina, living in Toronto, often mistaken for being Australian when she speaks. She has work published in Moonchild Magazine, as well as publications with HuffPost, Scary Mommy, and Romper. Her first chapbook, about feminism and family, entitled All That She Can, debuted in August of 2018 from The Poetry Box.



“47 Steps” by Angie Hedman

The Staircase

by Monica Kagan

A sharp noise slices into Megan's consciousness. She jerks awake. Wipes her eyes.

“Who’s there?”

Skin itching, she switches on the lamp. Nothing stirs, save for the dust motes infiltrating her pores.

Agreeing to do the repairs in this ramshackle house is one thing, but sleeping over... What was she thinking? She reaches for her mobile. No, it’s probably nothing. Just my imagination. She clutches the baseball bat. Insurance.

Scrape... Scrape... A howl.

She looks outside the window. A dog? No.

A shout. Droplets of perspiration erupt on her palms.

Upstairs? She flips the light switch at the bottom of the staircase.

“Fuck.”

The globe’s blown again. She retrieves her torch. Amorphous shapes shift in the darkness shrouding the halogen light.

“Hello?”

A prickle on the nape of her neck. Blood rushes to her brain. She jumps.

Just a spider. She brushes it off. It scuttles away.

She grips her baseball bat and edges up the stairs.

Creak...

She stops. Goosebumps ripple across her arms.

“Hello?”

She continues up the spiral staircase.

Reaches the attic door. She twists the handle. It doesn’t budge. No key. She knocks.

Squealing. Flapping of wings.

Pigeons.

She shakes her head. Steady now.

“Anybody in there?”

Silence.

She moves away.

A penetrating scream. Her pupils dilate, her insides congeal.

She almost drops the bat.

“Hello? Is... Is anybody there?”

Nothing.

She swings the bat at the door, pieces of wood splitting with each blow.

A rush of stale, musty air. She coughs.

Drops the flash light. Thud. Thud. Crouches down, gropes around in the dark.

Feels something metallic.

A shiver.

Switches the torch on. An enormous freezer stands against the wall.

Beckoning...

In spite of herself, she wrenches open the lid.

She chokes, a freezing, suffocating odour penetrates her nose, burns the back of her throat.

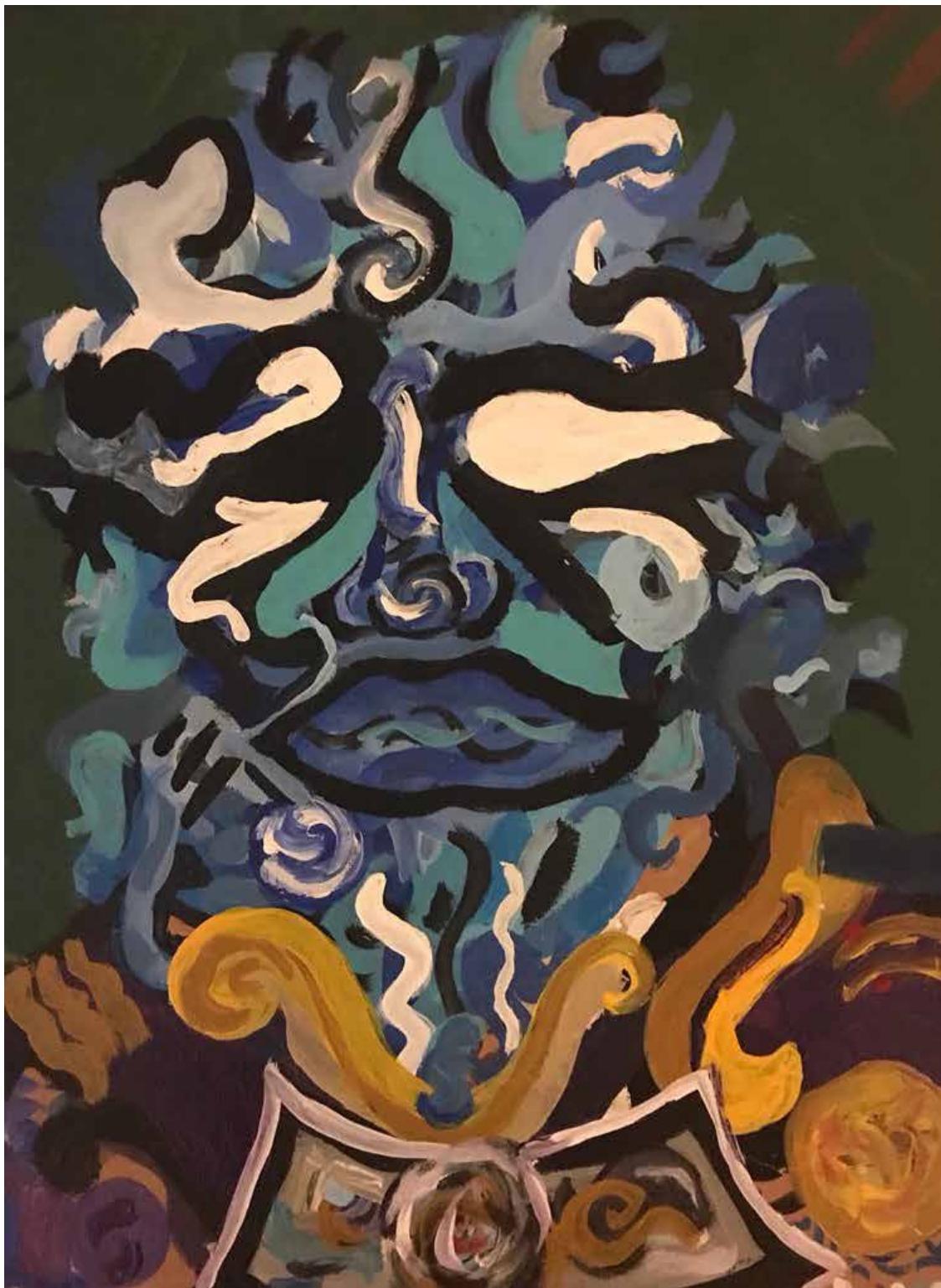
Her eyes narrow, peering into the bowels of the beast:

Sinews, blood vessels trail from the severed head like bruised tentacles in the liquid.

A man’s mouth. Twisted:

Frozen in a silent scream...

Monica Kagan lives by the sea in beautiful Cape Town, South Africa with her wonderful cat. She enjoys bewitching words. Her work appears in Fourth & Sycamore (USA), Slim Volume: This Body I Live In anthology of poetry and flash fiction (Pank-hearst, UK), Bonnie's Crew webzine (UK), and at FICTION on the WEB (UK), among others. Twitter: @MonicaOFAH



“Poseidon” by Matthew Yates

our god sleeps

by Paul Brookes

with his gob open.
When he opens his gob
It could be dawn, noon or midday.
whenever we must awake
to work in the mountains.
The mountains of god's tongue.

They shake and gust blows.
We must find
our balance.
Hunt for food
on the undulations.

Never know
when god will close his mouth
for night to fall, again.

Sometimes night is short.

Folk say there is life
over the mountains
in god's teeth.

None have returned.

*Paul Brookes is a shop asst. who lives in a cat house full of teddy bears. His chapbooks are *The Fabulous Invention Of Barnsley*, (Dearne Community Arts, 1993). *The Headpoke and Firewedding* (Alien Buddha Press, 2017), *A World Where and She Needs That Edge* (Nixes Mate Press, 2017, 2018) *The Spermbot Blues* (OpPRESS, 2017), *Port Of Souls* (Alien Buddha Press, 2018) *Forthcoming Stubborn Sod*, illustrated by Marcel Herms (Alien Buddha Press, 2018).*



Time

by Maddie M. White

Seconds ticked by on the clock. One, two, three... After sixty, it started over. In less than sixty seconds I saw her look up from the book she was reading. Her eyes met mine and changed me forever. She cracked a smile and looked back at the words on the page.

Minutes went slower. It took minutes to gather my courage to walk over. My feet shuffled across the floor and I counted seventeen steps it took to reach her. She looked up again and placed *On the Road* face down in her lap.

“Hi,” she said. Two letters, one word, the sound of her perfect voice. A minute I’d never forget.

Hours flew by. We sat together under a willow tree on a plaid blanket, a basket of sandwiches and sliced cheese scattered across it. She talked about becoming a world-traveling journalist and I saw her golden-brown eyes beam when she talked about having a family someday. My heart felt full when I held her.

Days lingered until the moment I was back with her. At work, I watched the clock between drafting plans for a new skyscraper. Watching each second, minute, hour tick on, tapping anxiously on my desk. No matter how many times I told myself not to look, time seemed to move slower.

Months took no time to pass. We sat in our apartment watching green turn brown in trees and the ground become white with snow. I saw excitement in her as she marked off time on the calendar until our big day. I had never been happier than each day I spent with her. We married that next spring when the flowers were bright pink. That summer she came to me with a white stick showing two blue lines.

Years went by without realizing it. Our children moved out and gray became more evident in her hair. Her eyes twinkled like they did the first moment I saw her. One day, she looked at me with tired wrinkles and trembling hands.

"I think something is wrong," she said. I'll never forget that moment, when time sped up even more.

Months marked off on our calendar again. The treatments were brutal and stripped the gleam from her eyes. Her hair fell out in chunks and she was unable to eat anything she once enjoyed. Soon she would be well again; we could take the trip we had always said we would. I held her hand each day and felt it become frailer. But she had to get better. I couldn't imagine life without her.

Days. That's what the doctor said she had left. I prayed time would move as slowly as they did on the days my eyes wouldn't leave the clock. She was at peace, but I was more broken than I ever knew a person could be. Our children stayed with us and spent as much time with her as they could.

Hours before she drew her final breath, things started looking up. "Look at how well she's doing! She's going to be okay!" I exclaimed. My daughter wrapped me in her arms and cried.

"She's not got much longer," she whispered.

I sat next to my beautiful wife of so long and stroked her cooling hand.

Minutes remained in her hourglass. She made me promise I would take our trip and take lots of pictures. That was the sort of thing I'd always forgotten to do and grateful now for every time she stopped over the years to take a snapshot - it was the only time when time stood still. The only time you could freeze a moment and live in it forever.

"I have loved you every second, of every minute, of every hour that I've known you," I told her. Her smile was small, and she closed her eyes.

Seconds once again grew slow. She opened her eyes once more - they met mine and took me back to the moment our eyes met for the first time. It seemed like only days ago even though it had been forty years. Her breathing slowed, and my heart shattered.

When she took her last breath, I was sure time stopped. I couldn't imagine the world continuing and time spinning forward. I felt certain my next breath would be my last.

But time waits nor stops for no one.

Maddie M. White is a writer and mental health advocate. Her words have been seen in Flash Fiction Magazine, Rhythm and Bones, Mojave Heart Review, Stigma Fighter, and several other online magazines. She has a monthly column called Joined Journeys in NECROPOLIS, an online literary magazine, where she interviews people living with mental illness. Maddie married her best friend and high school sweetheart, Shawn. She inspires her readers by creating a safe space in her books where they can learn to better themselves and follow their dreams. She is currently working on her first novel.



“Multiple Stops, Endless Possibilities”
by Neel Trivedi

Neel Trivedi is a freelance journalist and in the advertising business in Dallas, TX. His work has been featured Drabblez Magazine, Mojave Heart Review, Chronos Anthology and the upcoming Drabbledark II Anthology. He his currently working on his first novel. He can be reached on Twitter @Neelt2001.

Without Fences

by Mary Hanrahan

we are the want of the calf for milk

hungry for a place to roam

an oven full of bread

dough kneading
between the maker's hands

honey in the deepest hue

amber

light along the shoreline

the distance between
 where you are now
and where you long to be

Mary is a writer and artist living in the middle of Michigan. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and an MA in Counseling. Her work is forthcoming in Sugar House Review, Artful Dodge, tinywords, formercactus, and elsewhere. Follow her on Twitter @marybhanrahan



Interstate

by Wanda Deglane

the passenger seat is noticeably empty
as we drive west on the I-10 in search
of water. my tia jabbers on about
how cheap it is to live here, but the rest
of us sit in sweltering silence. we know
by now that no one wants to live in hell.
my brother hears the wails of my mother's
disintegration all the way from san jose.
he notices her gaping absence like
a limb newly ripped from his body. we patch
the wound with a butterfly bandage,
pretend like it helps at all, pretend like this
silence doesn't already have our hearts
in its shark mouth. there's nothing to look at
as the yellow earth moans its scorched
song. nowhere for our minds to run.
we give names to the clouds in our
boredom, ourselves faceless. the corpses
of creosote bushes wave their bone-white
arms in the wind, like they're frantically
flagging us down for help, like one

endless cemetery. we don't slow down
for two hundred miles, until the saguaros
bleed into weeping trees. here, the rest stops
are shrouded in more green than my eyes
can handle. here, I trace the interstate, find
wildflowers exploding out of its sides,
powder-blue like drops of bleeding sky. here,
life creeps from the edges of decades-old
cinder block, watches our dust-coated, broken
bodies with childlike curiosity. we drop to
our knees, sink into miles of jade-green
grass, gratefully give up our tears for rent
as the earth slowly swallows us
into its cool, pulsing heart.

Wanda Deglane is a night-blooming desert flower from Arizona. She is the daughter of Peruvian immigrants and attends Arizona State University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology and family & human development. Her poetry has been published or forthcoming from Rust + Moth, Glass Poetry, L'Ephemere Review, and Former Cactus, among other lovely places. Wanda self published her first poetry book, Rainlily, in 2018.



Pearl

(*Creative Nonfiction*)
by Merril D. Smith

“DOUBLE CRIME, Pittston Man Shot Scranton Girl, Then Committed Suicide.”
Wilkes-Barre Record, September 13, 1909, p. 5

In my mind, I see her, Pearl, walking on the bridge, a factory girl in her Saturday night finery. The days are still warm in early September, but the violet evening skies hint that summer is dying and autumn is on its way. She stops and stands for a moment looking at Jesse; her long skirt twitches in the breeze. She is alive and vital at fifteen years old, on the cusp of womanhood.

It is 1909, the Progressive Era, a time of immigration, strikes, social work, and lynching. Distant news arrives in telegrams. Railroads crisscross the country, and a few people even have motorcars. Pearl’s siblings will live through two world wars; live to see telephones and airplanes, the Great Depression, shorter skirts, bobbed hair on women, Bobby-soxers, Elvis, and the beginning of the civil rights movement. Pearl will never see these things.

But the complexity of human emotions is a constant in every era. Love and hate can tangle tighter than any sailor’s knots.

Jesse was twenty-eight, infatuated and jealous—insanely so, some said. His friends insisted he was sober and industrious, as in shock—they later reported what they knew—that he had threatened to do “something awful,” if Pearl refused to be his wife. Jesse had argued with her because she had kept company with other men. Still, his friends all claimed to be surprised by his “rash act.”

Yet, Jesse had planned carefully. He took a pistol to the meeting on the bridge, and he shot Pearl, firing first at her heart, then to her brain, as if to destroy feeling and thought, body and soul. "Homicide," the coroner wrote in his official report. Just the facts, one human killed another. But there is no word for the broken hearts that still beat in traitorous lub dubs, surviving even when fragmented. No word for the unnatural grief of parents burying their children.

Jesse also brought carbolic acid in a bottle that he pulled from his pocket, after he killed Pearl, and drank it before anyone could stop him. Bystanders carried him to the police station. He died there, never regaining consciousness. "Suicide," according to the official report--the what without the whys.

Jesse ran a motor in a mine; Pearl worked in a silk mill, six-day weeks for little pay.

She agreed to that Saturday night meeting with Jesse, wanting to say, according to her friend, that she wouldn't marry him. She wanted to make it plain—again—there and then on that Scranton bridge, where now the blood is washed away, the bodies gone, and the events forgotten, a crime of passion from long ago.

Still, I am obsessed by this crime and this young woman, my husband's ancestor, haunted by what could have been. This woman-girl, a pearl not fully formed, was dead at fifteen, killed, murdered. Her blood dripped from that railroad bridge, and it sank deep into the soil of Pennsylvania coal country. One more woman killed by a jealous man. Their ghosts glimmer in the hills, rusty diamonds formed from compressed rage and fear. But that was then, in a time long past—when things, of course, were different.

I'm sure they offered thoughts and prayers. I offer her story, brief, like her life.

Pearl V. Rought (1894-1909)

Merril D. Smith is a writer, editor, and poet. She has a Ph.D. in American history and is the author/editor of several books of history, gender, and sexuality. She lives in New Jersey, near Philadelphia, with her husband and cats. She shares poetry and random thoughts on her blog, <https://merrildsmith.wordpress.com/>



“Fallen Petals” by Stephen Briseño

To the Discarded Corn Husks Lying on the Kitchen Table After Christmas Dinner
by Stephen Briseño

You are *el jefe*
of items important

yet overlooked:
the snapped bones

of chopsticks left
in the phở bowl,

the butcher paper,

muted blood red,
soaking up the grease
a fatty brisket gives,
the bright cap
of a Topo Chico.

Then there's you.

You are tamale's girdle,
cinching just tight enough,
promising:
"Hold in there--

the steam *es solo un momento*;
y'all will be glorious once we're done!"

In time before,
you were womb

to the ear
which, after drying,
soaking, then grinding

is now reborn within your veil.

Tonight, you are Christmas wrapping,
hiding gifts we've already peeked at

but relish shucking
open nonetheless.

Just how the living room,
confettied with shards of paper

and love, is a sign of the season,
so are you,

your scattered remains
of tradition on the table,
marinated in generations
of guelitas and tías with knobby
hands mixing masa, cinching
nuestra familia together

in the ferocious
steam of another year,
promising: "Hold in there--
y'all will be glorious once we're done!"

Stephen Briseño is a poet and middle school English teacher. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Mentor Mixtapes, 8Poems, formercactus, Riddled with Arrows, and Right Hand Pointing. He lives in San Antonio, TX with his wife and daughter, where you can usually find them lounging at a coffee shop. Follow him on Twitter: @stephen_briseno



Storm
by Olivia Tuck

I don't like the dark.

November is a smoky month, what with people setting fire to things for fun. Shadows clog each day's arteries and my lamplight is too yellow, too dim, to be an antidote.

My room's damp. The old wallpaper bubbles. The plastic styling head I got for my seventh Christmas leers at us, its lips parted in mutism. I pretend I don't mind.

Storm has dyed her hair again. It's changed from will o' the wisp white to a migraine in pink purple blue, like the Milky Way. Usually people being perfectly matched with their names only happens in books, but her moods are gale-force. She smells of the void thunder leaves after passing by.

Now, she's hanging off my bed, the galaxy pouring onto the carpet. She says, 'Dan fancies you.' I say, 'No he doesn't.' She says, 'He does too.' I say, 'Lads don't like me.'

'Dan does,' she assures me. 'He's a lad.'

I snort. She's talking crap. I am fat to her slender-yet-shapely. I am rice pudding to her half-Turkish baklava skin.

Besides, Storm likes Dan. 'Hed be more inclined to fancy you,' I say.

‘Oh, I’m nothing to him.’ She loops a streak of solar system around her finger.

I look at her. ‘I find that hard to believe.’

‘Nah,’ she murmurs. ‘I don’t think he knows I’m alive.’

The quiet is a dialing tone. It spins through the ears at a pitch higher than what could be considered comfortable. I feel Storm’s chest twitch. Twitch. Twitch. She wipes her eyes with her wrist, leaving lash soot marks. Stains. The world is all over stains. I see the grubbiness on everything. The meds generate their own grime. But it’s okay. My vision was too clean before. I felt a screw turn in my ribs every time I moved, and the shadows had – literally – the Devil in them.

Storm uncoils. The smoke is hiding her, smearing the watercolour features down her face.

‘Stay still,’ I whisper. ‘I can hardly see you.’

I know she’s grinning as she scrabbles across the skin of rubble that covers the floor. She holds up whatever she’s found. ‘Lay off these.’ Her voice is leaves, falling. I realise she’s seized a blister pack of pills when I hear it bend in her grip. ‘Then you’ll see me clearly.’

She springs over the windowsill. I watch the shape of her run through the night’s blowing cinders, to the mulberry tree. She’s laughing. So impulsive. I choke on her beauty. Without staring back at the sleet coming from my tear ducts, she picks fruit that shouldn’t be there at this time of year.

Bites into it.

The sky breaks.

Olivia Tuck has had poems and prose published in literary journals and webzines, including The Interpreter’s House, Light-house, Amaryllis and Three Drops from a Cauldron. Her work also featured in Please Hear What I’m Not Saying, a charity poetry anthology on the subject of mental health, and she has been Highly Commended and shortlisted in one or two story competitions. She is due to start at Bath Spa University this autumn, to study for a BA in Creative Writing. Find her on Twitter: @livtuckwrites



Bottomless

by Ailey O'Toole

The bottle calls to me
from its spot behind
the milk. The bar whispers
my name from the corner
it calls home. The liquor
store pulls at my teeth,
arms stretching miles
to my hungry mouth.

Some say it's an itch you can't
scratch. I say it's the hand and
the flame, a desire to know what
might hurt me, how far I will go,
how deep I can sink.

I think there is a message
for me at the bottom of every
bottle. I consume and consume,
looking for clarity or comfort
or companionship. My body
revolts against me, but the hunger
is unending. There is nothing

in the world loud enough
to drown it out.

I pick up new habits, hoping they will
cancel out, but I am still searching
for that answer. The bottle calls. The bar
whispers. The liquor store pulls.
I still come running.

Ailey O'Toole is a queer poet and bartender who writes about feminism, empathy, and pain. She hopes everyone who reads her poems feels less alone in their struggle. Her work has previously appeared in The Broke Bohemian, After the Pause, Ghost City Review, Rising Phoenix Review, and others. She tweets at @ms_ocoole.



Self-Portrait of the Writer

by Charley Barnes

Naked, I stand in front of my floor to ceiling mirror. There is a chair wedged beneath the handle of my bedroom door, so I know that we won't be disturbed.

In red lipstick, I write 'Bingo wing' along the inside of my outstretched arm's reflection. I follow the line of too-obvious veins across my chest, up to my clavicles, and I use this as a guide to write 'Not obvious enough' along both collar bones. Around each breast I draw a bright red circle and sketch 'Too saggy now' beneath them, along my sternum; I've heard that this is where all the girls are getting their tattoos now.

Edging closer to my stomach – smaller than it was but stretched beyond repair – with my lipstick I outline old stretchmarks until lines dance across my belly, as though my skin has been licked by thin flames. In a smaller font I add a collage of insults – 'fat', 'chubby', 'squishy' – until my abdomen is a mass of words. I move down to my legs...

When the work is finished I put my clothes back on, turn on the overhead light, and read everything that I have said about myself, borrowed from mouths of strangers. I've re-moulded their insults into body-hate and I'll sit with this version of myself for hours before I finally leave to find the makeup wipes.

C.S. Barnes is a Worcester based author and poet who has recently finished her Doctorate degree in Creative Writing, and now spends her days wondering what to do with it. Her debut prose collection, *The Women You Were Warned About*, was published in May 2017 by Black Pear Press, and her debut poetry pamphlet, *A Z-hearted Guide to Heartache*, is forthcoming with V. Press (July 2018).



“agora” by Matthew Yates

Panic....Attacks

It comes with the shivers, goosebumps hairs stand up, already rising, demanding my attention, on my skin, so familiar, feeling the invincible onset simmering, my torment returns, loudly like a kettle boiling over the stove, too late to catch my heaving breath, my throat clenches, restlessness invades me, unable to sit, still...gasping in blasts of hyperventilation there is no shelter, give me some refuge from this invisible guided missile landing inside my chest. My once beating heart now faintly pulses defeated by my inner explosions, with all these exhales, trying to grasp this unshakable terror, faceless gripping my circadian is out of rhythm as this constant worry becomes my monster leaving teeth marks, chewing calmness, devouring serenity out of my skull. This anxiety lives for biting scars that keep screaming Goblins, leaving so many demons like dragon fires gusting my wheezing breath, so many screams inside, feeling the burning of worse than the devil in hades, seething more fear underneath my flesh, even when I try to fight off this Evil, with the flashback of these lightbulbs keep shattering scorched thoughts shadowing me, as I try turn off these intense little frantic voiced suggestions that sparks reignition of devastation, ideas keep coming back, return within my inner temple always haunted with more waves of sweats, drowning my voice, swimming inside this sea of darkness always leave me dousing in pain. In the dark, all those cackling echoes always surround, my panic keeps attacking setting off implosions, leaves me beaten, reliving all the faces, lost within unshakeable places, tracing my failures, storming the return of these unstoppable tears reawakens all my doubts that I've suppressed, as I try diving under these sheets, there is no cover for this endless

ruination, I believe this agony will last forever, my chattering breath prays for some kind of salvation from my gripping chest, under my covers these cursing shadow always feels worse than death.

Adrian Ernesto Cepeda

Adrian Ernesto Cepeda is the author of the full-length poetry collection Flashbacks & Verses... Becoming Attractions from Unsolicited Press and the poetry chapbook So Many Flowers, So Little Time from Red Mare Press. His poetry has been featured in The Yellow Chair Review, poeticdiversity, The Wild Word, The Fem, Rigorous, Palette Poetry, The Yellow Chair Review and Lunch Ticket's Special Issue: Celebrating 20 Years of Antioch University Los Angeles MFA in Creative Writing. One of his poems was named the winner of Subterranean Blue Poetry's 2016 "The Children of Orpheus" Anthology Contest and two of his poems "Buzz Me" and "Estranged Fruit" were nominated for Best of the Net in 2015 and 2016. Adrian is an LA Poet who has a BA from the University of Texas at San Antonio and he is also a graduate of the MFA program at Antioch University in Los Angeles where he lives with his wife and their cat Woody Gold. You can connect with Adrian on his website: <http://www.adrianernestocepeda.com/>

Matthew Yates is an artist & poet from western KY. His work can be found in Memoir Mixtapes.



Nurse Abigail's New Patient

by Jack Somers

A little after four in the afternoon, two frizzy-haired, mud-spattered boys carried in a young black man, and together we laid him on a cot in the back of the tent. He looked too thin with hips as narrow as a child's and a bony, hairless chest the color of cream coffee. His clothing was wild, but no wilder than anything else I'd seen over the past three days—a white leather jacket with beaded fringe and blue velvet pants that hugged the thighs and flared out at the bottom. His eyes were closed.

"What's wrong with him?" I asked the boys. "Is he on drugs?" All of these kids seemed to be on drugs. Of the five other kids in the tent, four of them were recovering from bad trips. Two of the bad trippers had been completely hysterical when their friends brought them in. Blessedly, every patient was asleep at the moment. Prior to the new arrival, I had actually been able to enjoy about twenty minutes of relative quiet.

"I think he's just worn out," said the taller boy on the left. "He collapsed as we were getting out of the truck."

"Before he passed out, he told me that he hadn't slept in three days," added the boy on the right.

"Okay," I said. "I'll take a look at him."

"Thank you, ma'am," they said, almost in unison. They backed away and ducked out of the tent.

I turned to the patient and looked him over again. Despite his gauntness, he was quite handsome. There was something regal about his neatly trimmed mustache, his high cheekbones, his strong, angular jaw. In my thirty years of nursing, I couldn't recall ever encountering a patient who looked quite so dignified in repose.

Kneeling over him, I checked his pulse and listened to his heartbeat. I detected nothing that gave me cause for concern, so I would just let him rest. If he were still sleeping in an hour, I would rouse him and give him some fluids. I pulled a chair up to his cot and sat down with a grimy paperback one of the kids had left in the tent yesterday—some book called *Siddhartha*. I was on page forty-five. I wasn't particularly enjoying the book, but there

was nothing else to do during my downtime.

About three minutes after I began reading, the man started to move. His big hands twitched. He coughed hoarsely. His wide-set eyes flickered open. I put down my book and leaned over him.

“Hello there,” I whispered. “How are you?”

The man raised himself up on his elbows. “Where am I?” he asked. His voice was deep and soft—a rich, gentle wash of sound. “What day is it?”

“It’s Sunday,” I said. “You’re in a medical tent at the Woodstock Music Festival.”

“What time is it?” he asked.

“About four in the afternoon.”

He seemed to relax. He laid back on the cot and folded his hands across his chest.

“Are you feeling okay?” I asked him.

“I’m all right,” he said. “Just a little run-down is all. Maybe I’ll just rest here a little longer, and then I’ll be on my way.”

“You can stay as long as you like,” I said.

It began to rain again, the fat drops slapping against the top of the tent. The music outside stopped. Whether it was because the band had finished or the rain had interfered with the performance, I couldn’t say.

“This rain is a real drag,” sighed the man.

“Most of the kids don’t seem to mind,” I said. I’d seen a dozen of them sliding down a muddy hill on their bellies that morning, roaring with laughter the whole way down.

“The musicians do,” said the man.

“Are you a musician?”

“You could say that.”

One of the other patients started to stir—a shirtless, bearded boy in frayed blue jeans, one of the bad trippers. “Nurse,” he groaned without looking up. “Could I have some water, please?”

“I’ll be right there, darling,” I said.

“You know,” said the musician, staring up at the tent ceiling. “When I first opened my eyes, I thought maybe I was dead. I thought maybe you were an angel sent down from heaven.”

“I’m no angel.” I laughed, standing up. “Just an old nurse.”

“What’s your name?”

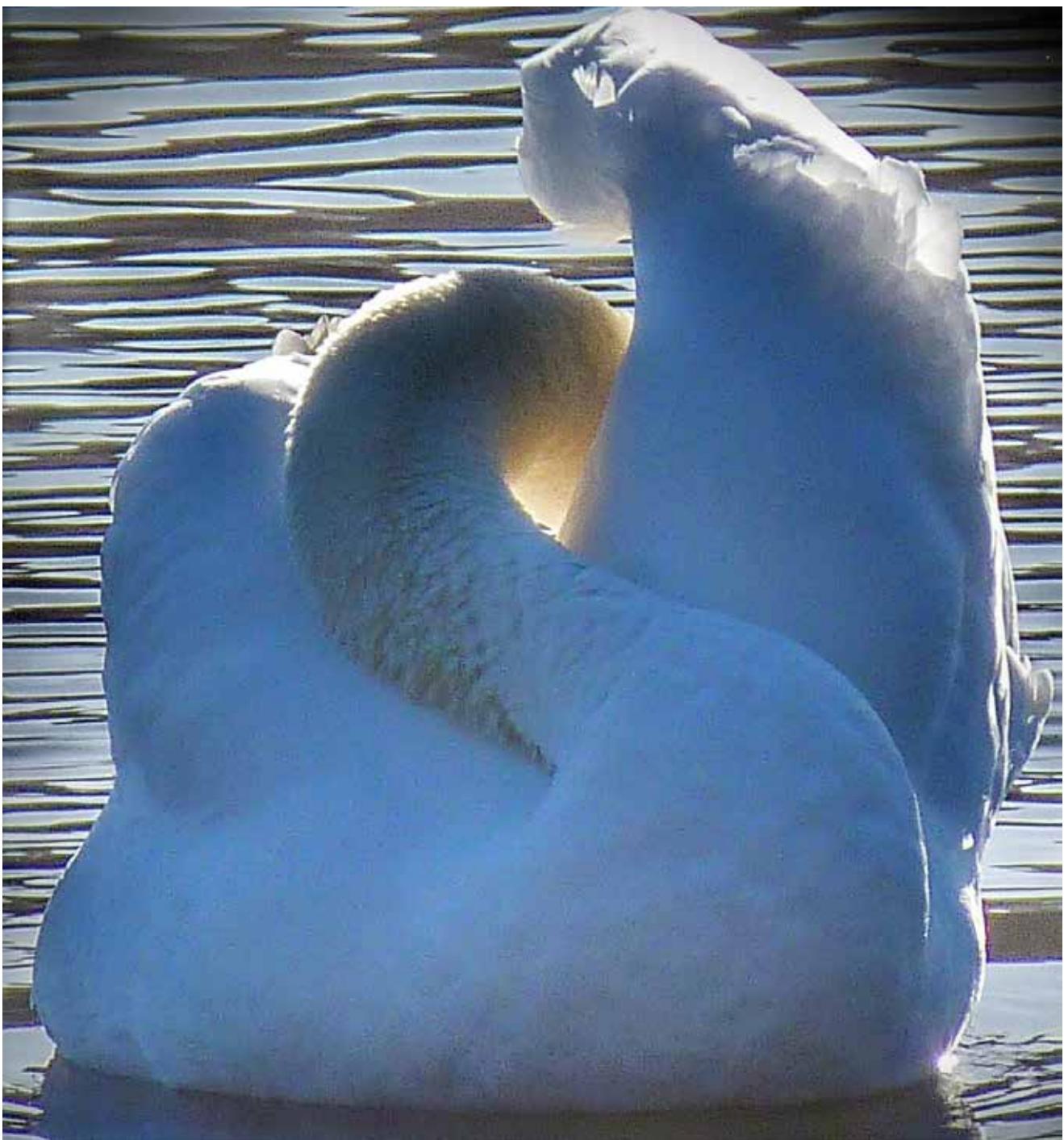
“Abigail,” I said. “What’s yours?”

“Jimi,” he said.

“Well it’s nice to know you, Jimi,” I said.

The man smiled and closed his eyes, and I went to get the water pitcher from the table in the center of the tent.

Jack Somers’ work has appeared in WhiskeyPaper, Literary Orphans, Jellyfish Review, The Molotov Cocktail, and a number of other publications. He lives in Cleveland with his wife and their three children. You can find him on Twitter @jsomers530 or visit him at www.jacksomerswriter.com.



“Yoga for Swans” by Penny Sharman

Bella

by Penny Sharman

All night incoming waves roll pebbles
on the storm beach as the girl struggles with fear,
her sweat, lack of breath, the drums in her heart
and screaming mind.

All night the incoming waves pummel
the oyster shells on Llanddona sands
where emptiness echoes in the girl's ears,
not one giving an answer to her plea for peace.

All night the girl searches for just one pearl
to hold in her hand, to calm her in the driving seat,
to be the passenger, to leave control under a gravestone
at St. Dona's church.

All night the lost witches rumble spells
through the glazed glass and washed
floor boards inside Gorphwysa, a place of rest,
where each window sees Red Wharf bay.

All night she walks down the hill in dreams:
it's easy to paddle in the shallow ocean,
it's easy to place worries in a paper boat,
to sail them to somewhere out of her white room.

Penny has been writing poetry for over 10 years and has an MA in Creative Writing from Edge Hill University. Penny has been published in various magazines and anthologies such as The Interpreters House, Obsessed with Pipework, Poetry Quarterly, Outburst, Picaroon, Strix and Marble and also Beautiful Dragons Anthologies. Penny is an artist, photographer and therapist with an eye for the lens and music for the words. She loves to dance when her ageing joints allow.

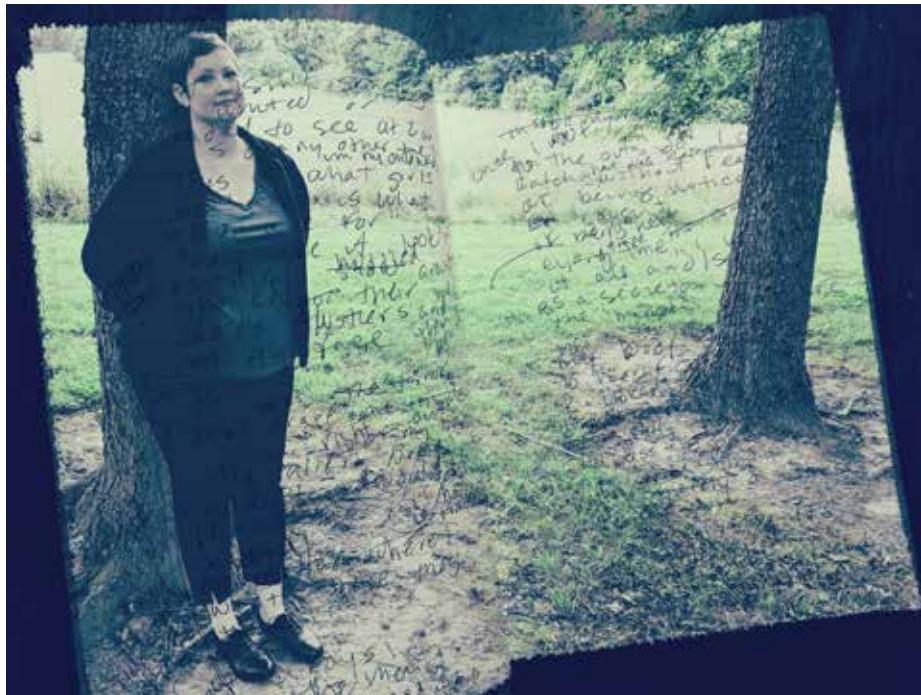
Hybrid haibun & new perspectives

A Creative Study: Robin Anna Smith

Artist's Statement:

I write both poetry and prose, often hybrids, such as haibun*. My compositions are written plainly, the way I speak, because I want my stories to feel the way I do when I'm telling them verbally. As a person who has lived with a dissociative disorder since early childhood, I'm able to maintain a distance from my stories, while still being in the midst of them. When writing, I try to leave enough white space to allow a reader to come into my world and interpret things from their own vantage point and possibly come away with a new perspective. Sometimes, I'm told people are unsettled or disturbed by my work. While I don't purposely write to shock, I do attempt to reflect on subjects that people would often prefer to ignore, as well as highlight contradictions in everyday life.

**haibun is a prosimetric literary form originating in Japan, combining prose and haiku. The range of haibun is broad and frequently includes autobiography, diary, essay, prose poem, short story and travel journal.*



*Robin Anna Smith is a non-binary, disabled writer and visual artist, currently residing in Wilmington, Delaware. She began writing when she became bed-bound and acquired aphasia due to illness. Through writing, she has had significant recovery in her communication skills. Her work appears in a variety of international online and print journals, and in *Unsealing Our Secrets: A Short Poem Anthology About Sexual Abuse*. More of her work can be found at her website robinannasmith.com and Twitter @robinannasmith.*



The Quilt

torture games
he convinces me to comply

It's been a year since my long-time friend-turned-boyfriend-turned-ex began stalking and threatening me. He would show up at my school and work regularly to intimidate. Eventually, he graduated to breaking into my home at night. My parents, friends, and teachers probed me for information about my change in mood. I was evasive.

people full of assumptions
pregnant teen

One of the best and worst days of my life was the day I gave birth. It signaled the beginning of the end of his obsession with me, but also of an indescribable emptiness. Though finally able to reclaim my body, it's not the same as before him.

adopted daughter
I wonder what her name is



Handlebar

borrowing a car we take Amtrak to the suburbs

Windows down on the highway in your mom's Impala. We're making our way down I-90, toward Indiana. It's offensively hot, but we don't mind. Happy to be getting out of the city for a few days. "Don't Stop Believin'" blares from the radio and we're belting it out.

I'm riding shotgun and from the corner of my eye, I notice a motorcycle. Absorbed in song, I don't pay much attention. It creeps back up again and then falls back. Still singing, I make note of the biker's face. A few moments later, the same guy is coming up on the driver's side.

Suddenly you shout "Oh my God!" and swerve. He's flicking his tongue at us like Gene Simmons. His pants are unzipped and he's beating off, balls flapping in the wind. We scream, roll up the windows, and try to pull away. He speeds up next to us, never slowing down the activity of his hand.

Miles pass, as we try to think of other deterrents, none of which would work. We are panicking. Should we get off at the next exit? What if he follows us? We should throw something at him. But what if he crashes and dies? Will we go to jail?

He abruptly veers away onto an exit ramp, smiling and nodding at us with satisfaction. Dick in hand—still going...

Chicago 'L' train stars follow me home from the platform



Mural

red unicycles
the white space between memories

I open my eyes to a creepy clown face staring down at me. No idea where I am. Glancing around, I come to realize this is a hospital. Don't know how I got here or why I'm in a pediatric room. Shifting in bed, I feel my body is crusted with something. Touching my hair, dark flakes come off into my hand. When I get up to use the bathroom, I can better see what's all over me. It's vomit, feces, and oil paint. Shortly after returning to bed, people start filtering in, asking questions. I don't know what to tell them.

After a lecture, from my Commander, I'm given a referral to the base shrink. I shower and dress, then I'm discharged from the hospital. My training partner gives me a ride back to the barracks. Anticipating a mess I'm surprised to see my room is spotless. Friends who broke in, and called the ambulance last night, come to check on me. They give a play-by-play of everything that happened.

a handful of pills
I overdose on negative thoughts



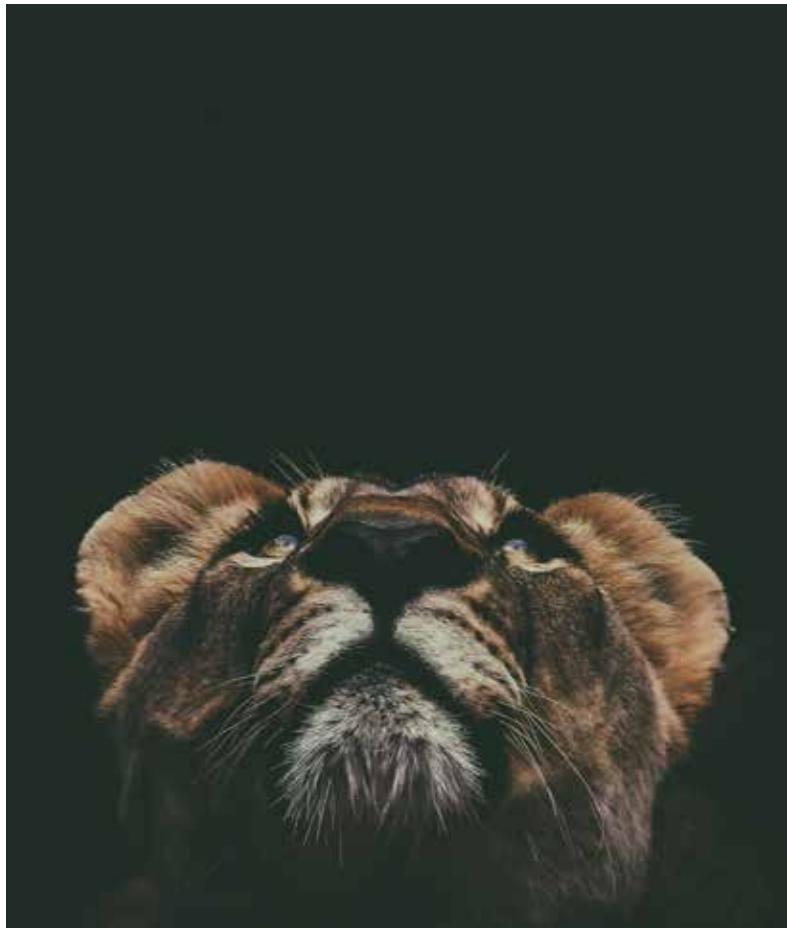
Sugar Daddy

I'm at a bar when a friend of a friend starts flirting with me. Brooks Brothers suit, Johnny Depp cheekbones. He buys me a couple cocktails and we talk for a while. He shakes a small pouch from his pocket and asks if I want to go to the ladies' room with him.

No one seems to mind as we shove our way to the back stall. A few lines later, I expect him to make a move on me but he doesn't. Must be a nicer guy than I'm used to. When we return to the table, we see that our group has left. One more drink, then he offers to drive me home.

We sit in his BMW outside my apartment. He says a beautiful woman like me deserves nice things and should be treated like a queen. Wouldn't I like that? Of course, I would.

mixed messages
he offers me a job
as a call girl



Immortality

the lion paces the fence line canned hunt

I can see my hand shaking out of the corner of my eye. You're sifting through your bag. I look you over. Dark greasy tendrils of hair. Sharp angles of a jaw and nose. Tall, gangly body that you slouch one minute and puff up the next, like an overcorrection.

white flag the deer scents a wolf

I can feel you hovering over me. The look in your drugged-up eyes, the smell of cigarettes, cheap booze, and ether, the drips of sweat from your face pressed into me. I feel my body giving way as you throw me onto the floor, your hands on my throat, ready to crush out my life like a roach under your boot.

field sport the shooter claims his trophy

Guilt, as I think about the others you probably hurt after me—events which could have been prevented if I'd spoken up sooner. You should have been in jail. Even after you left me alone, I couldn't process those events, let alone talk about them with someone else.

an antelope escapes the cheetah endurance race

It's been thirty years since you stopped stalking me. Every few years, I spend hours checking the internet for any signs of you. This is despite having read the police report about your death over twenty years ago. Part of my brain knows you can't harm me now. Other parts will always be watching for you.



Against My Will

72-hour hold/a danger to whom

“How you doin’ this morning?” a nurse awakens me.

“Uh... Okay,” I say, too sedated to reflect on how I really feel.

“Are you still hearing the voices today?”

I search my brain for an answer and find it’s completely empty. “No.”

I should feel relieved, but it just makes me feel lonely.

“Good! That means the medicine is working. I’m gonna help you get up and moved into your room soon. Okay for me to unbuckle you?”

“Yeah...”

Confused, I look down and then around.

Gurney with straps for ankles and wrists. Stark white walls. Video camera mounted in the corner. Twelve-by-twelve-inch reinforced window on a locked door.

I’ve seen this in movies but this is a different perspective.

blank stares/inmates turn up the silence

She takes me to my room, there’s a girl curled in a ball. She introduces us but the ball doesn’t move or make a

sound. I follow suit on my own bed. Over the next hour or so my roommate spends most of her time in the bathroom getting sick.

They say she's detoxing and not to worry, but this is disturbing.

Someone pops their head in the doorway and tells me to come eat breakfast. I'm not hungry, but it's opportunity to get away from the noise.

Breakfast is pancakes, which I never thought could be bad, but they managed. I drink my juice and coffee, and leave the rest.

Soon it's time for group therapy. Mandatory. The room is filled with maybe a dozen or so people. All with the same face but different stories. All equally upsetting.

I feel as if the earth will part and swallow us.

A burst of adrenaline rushes through me. I jump up and run out of the room. Weaving and stumbling down the halls, I get lost. Two orderlies corral me in a corner and I crumple to the floor.

“What’s wrong? Why did you leave group? Where are you going?”

I rock back and forth, crying and repeating, “I can’t. I just can’t.”

searching for a place to hide/my empathy

They allow me to go back to my room for a bit to calm down. One brings a pill for me to take and walks by my room every 15 minutes to check if I’m still agitated.

It’s time for lunch and I’m herded with the others into the cafeteria. I don’t want to eat; I just want to go back to bed. After a few bites, I push my food around my plate. As I wait to be dismissed, I look around at the other zombie-people, poking at their food.

Soft, mushy, flavorless. Even the food here is “safe.”

After we clean up, it’s art therapy time.

Finally, something I can enjoy.

I grab some crayons and paper, and start drawing an idealized picture of the hospital’s exterior. Flowers. Trees. Little furry animals. I’m reminded how lucky I am to have my imagination as an escape.

shade of a banyan tree/squirrels eat raisins from my hand

After I pretend to socialize a nurse calls me in to see the doctor. Condescending middle-aged guy with a God complex. He explains how life is hard and I obviously can’t handle it. My sedation is wearing off again and my anger and frustration are growing.

I came here to keep from killing someone yet it’s making me want to kill everyone in this place.

I head to the common room and they're starting a coping skills class. It's your typical twelve-step program.

They could have given handouts for this and let us go back to bed.

When the class is over we're allowed free time, but we have to remain in the common room. I decide to write some poems to block out the noise.

socks, socks, in a box
bring me the bagels—I want some lox
I used to have the chicken pox
but all the chickens were really cocks

...and something else about pancakes and how they could also be used as a trampoline for Tigger if you stacked them up.

When I'm manic, my brain goes all Dr. Seuss on Froot Loops. I hate this damn medicine for slowing things down.

the opera singer's vocal acrobatics/mood swings

It's already time to eat again and they're serving the same food but in different colors. The exception is there are cookies and instead of being mush, they are hard as rocks. Again, I have my drinks and move the food around to look like there is less of it.

I head back to the common room with everyone. Some of these people are talking non-stop—to each other, to themselves, to God—and it is raking my nerves. I really need some quiet and privacy.

Time for evening pills. Finally, I get to go to bed!

We line up single-file in the hallway. I watch each person as they step up to the nurse's window. Each person questions what is in their tiny cup. Each person is told to swallow it or lose "privileges." When I make it to the window, I grab my cup, toss them back, and swallow.

The sooner I get out of here, the better.

I go to my room to get ready for bed and see that I have a new roommate.

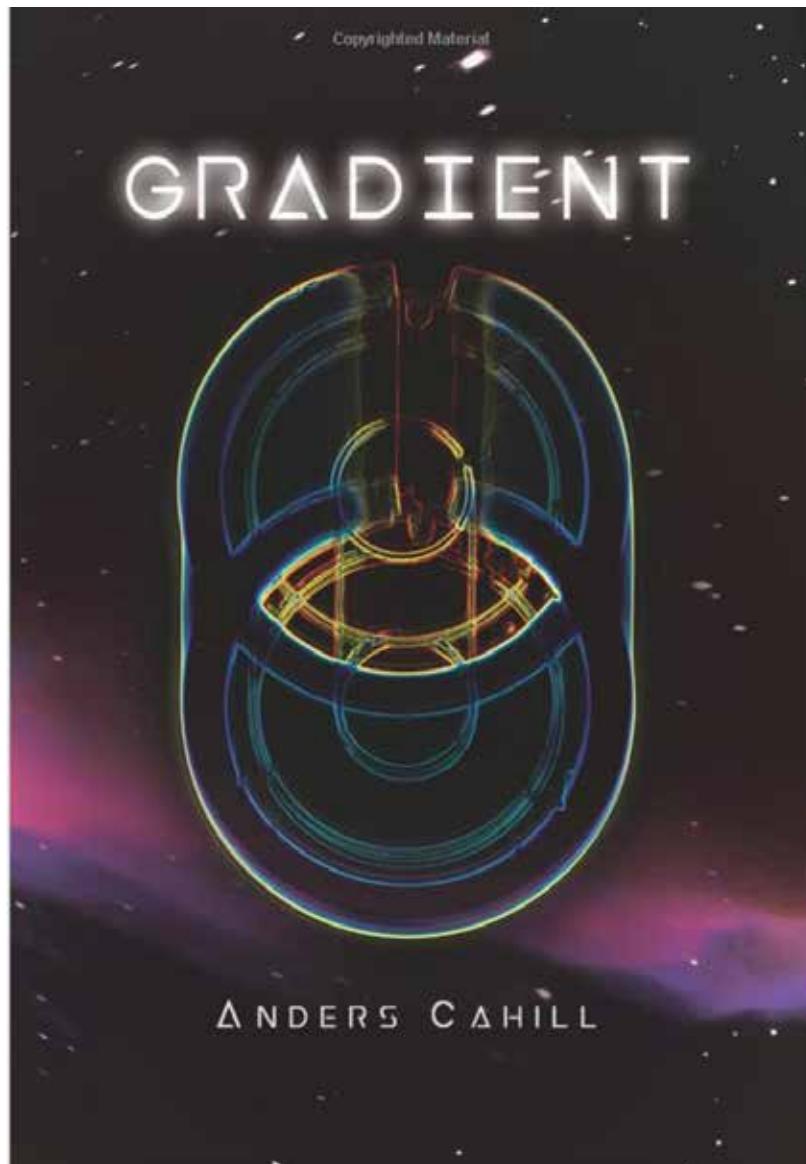
Already?

This one is talking a lot. All I want to do is finally rest. She starts telling me about her abusive husband and how she claims to be suicidal to escape him by being committed. From all she says, I get the feeling she really does contemplate suicide.

Her husband is the one who should be locked up—not her.

Lights out. She continues at a whisper. I listen until she finally slows down and seems to have gotten out what she needed to share. We agree that we both need some rest. She seems to fall asleep and I lie awake, thinking of how to kill her husband.

the crack of a baseball bat/his thick skull



EXCLUSIVE: Interview with Anders Cahill

Our esteemed editor Charlie Allison was lucky enough to sit down (via skype) with sci-fi author Anders Cahill. His first novel, *Gradient*, a sprawling and ambitious story set across multiple eras and worlds, debuted last year. We discussed the writing process(es), Star Wars, and the alien-nature of culture.

Charlie Allison: Right, lets get to it. We talk relatively frequently—but I still don't get a sense of how you write yet. Are you more stream of consciousness or I've planned it out to this degree and the charts say betrayal needs to happen here?

Anders Cahill: You know, I wish I were in the latter category because I've probably wasted—well wasted isn't the right word—so much time and energy exploring pathways that turn out to be dead ends. The way I find myself most productive as a writer is to sit my butt in a chair and throw an idea or a situation at a character and see how they react. Once I get some momentum going, that seems to drive me towards a more creative state. So its very stream of consciousness, so what I try and do is generate as much as I can till I run out of steam then I circle back and I work my way through. I really edit a lot as I go, which means my pace can be a bit plodding but

doing that allows me to get a feel for the world that my characters inhabit, and that I'm trying to inhabit, and as I pull through I generate ideas about what direction things are going to go. I managed to successfully finish a novel doing that, and I'm hoping to successfully finish future novels using this approach. At some point I find it easier to cut things out, move things around in the book. As I go on, I hope it gets easier to cut and rearrange parts in the story—because at least in the beginning, that's very hard for me.

I don't know if you're familiar with the author Hugh Howey and his WOOL series of science fiction novels?

CA: I haven't read him, but I know the name.

AC: You should check him out, you might dig it. I haven't read all of his work, but the series he's most famous for WOOL, starts with the post-apocalyptic dystopian future thing with a very interesting twist. In an interview, he talks about 'writing as you go' and planning ahead are really just two ends of one large spectrum. If you're writing as you go, you're essentially just outlining at the most detailed possible level, and if you're outline and plan ahead you're writing at the most macro-type level.

CA: Oh, nice! I like that quite a bit.

AC: Yeah, that was really helpful for me, realizing that I don't have to pick one or the other, that I can move along that spectrum. But day to day I still find myself drifting towards that stream of consciousness style of writing.

CA: Got it. The way you're talking about sit your ass in the chair writing and situations, it reminds me of Raymond Chandler's advice when you're stuck is to have a man with a gun kick down the door.

AC: Totally true. Yeah, one of the people in my writing group talks about dropping "bombs," on characters and seeing what happens. I enjoy dialogue and getting into my characters heads—I'm not worried about pacing—but I find that if I need to generate some excitement for myself as a writer, throwing that bomb or having a person run in with a gun because characters are going to react differently. As you get to know your characters, you realize they all react differently—some run, some fight, some hide, some freeze, but every reaction is different. One of my favorite things to do as a writer is to take common situations and to take them and make something uncommon about them. Everyone's written a clever character before, but oftentimes that character falls into certain archetypes—I love mixing and matching characteristics from archetypes in new ways.

CA: What writers do you find helpful for research? For sheer reading pleasure? Is there a difference? I'm thinking about authors like Inga Clendinnen, Diane Ackerman who writes about nature the way most people write about their first loves and Julian Jaynes, who contributed a lot to their respective fields (anthropology and cultural studies) while being moving and entertaining writers.

AC: I'm glad you mentioned Ackerman. She's one of my favorite writers--I actually got to meet her in person at a poetry reading in New York. The reading was called 'Universe in Verse'. It was run by Maria Popova, she's got a blog that you should check out if you get a chance. She's this wonderful polymath who reads so much and distills so much across everything--she's an omnivorous reader and produces these readings and reflections that are wonderful to hear. Anyway, she organized this reading and Ackerman shows up to read one of her poems. For

me, at least, Ackerman was hugely influential--a lot of the nature scenes by the way, in my novel, Gradient, were influenced by Ackerman. For example:

What would it be like to see earth with fresh eyes, as if it wasn't every day for us? A great example of this is to just go a hundred miles in any direction and look at how different everything is, ecologically. It's just mind-blowing. And you can be awestruck just traveling from traveling down the Eastern seaboard seeing the world change, or even going across the country East-to-West, from our kind of New England forest to the massive redwood forests of the west coast. So what Ackerman brings is the ability to see things with fresh eyes--so that was really fun to apply in a sci-fi context. I didn't have to make up that much stuff--I just had to think about an earth-like planet through the eyes of someone who has never seen that sort of tree before or an animal like that before and describe it as they would describe it. That naturalist nature writer piece is a big part of what I love to do.

We were at Readercon together, and I know that Max Gladstone, who we both look up to a bit, was on a panel about worldbuilding. He talked about what JK ROWLING does, for better or worse with her worldbuilding--he calls it "ocular worldbuilding." If you look through the eyes of the main character, the world makes a lot of sense--but if you zoom out, start asking questions like "Is there just one street of shops in all of Britain and where do they get their bread? Is this all there is of the wizarding world?"

CA: Right, where's the magical infrastructure to support this?

AC: Yeah, and questions like "What does the Ministry of Magic do?" and "Is there a whole system of magical schools?" All these questions that in later books Rowling starts to play with, but you can see her laying the ground work for in the early titles. I'm very much an ocular worldbuilder--so if I invent something, I have to go back in my work and find out whether I can make it plausible. Plausibility is a spectrum, afterall. In my novel, there's this element called Terranium that essentially fuels the voyager ships that allows for near-light-speed travel, but not faster than light, near-light-speed travel. Ok, I said to myself, if I'm making this element, it needs to be an integral part of this world I'm building so it feels consistent.

Then, along the way, as I'm researching, I fall into another rabbit hole.

There's another part of the book that's very much influenced by Sumerian and Akkadian cultures--you know, lets go 5000 years or so ago into the past. I went down that particular rabbit hole because it looked interesting, as opposed to knowing that I was going to use a particular source--pre-planning it, in a word. It was more organic--I realized as I was writing that Sumer/Akkad inspired parts that I needed to do more research to make it convincing and interesting to both myself and the readers.

CA: There's also that wonderful--it's kinda, well, I was going to say 'incestuous' but what I actually mean is circular, or circularity. To bring it back to the beginning of the question, you said, we can go to the redwood forests and have our minds blown--and those are in our current time, on our planet. Particularly, the Akkadian and Mesopotamian cultures, they're on our planet, their in our (relatively) recent historical past, but they feel alien to us. So you get this actual literal alien force coming down [in Gradient], and we empathize with the extra-planetary figures more than we do with people who were modeled after our own past.

AC: That wasn't intentional, but it was a great contrast. The way to imagine a culture clash is to just imagine our future selves, or our near-future selves, or even our current selves meeting ourselves five thousand years ago. And this speed at which culture and society evolved from then until now is just ripe with possibility. And so that's why I went there [in Gradient]. Rather than invent some pre-biblical type culture from whole cloth, I again, just like i can look out at this elm tree outside my window and describe it as if I've never seen it before, I can look at

Sumerian culture and describe it through the eyes of someone setting foot on the planet for the first time. In so doing, it kind of takes on a life of its own and it was really fun to write.

CA: Do different kinds of writing use different styles of preparation for you—I.E., does a long novel like GRADIENT happen in a catch-as-catch-can kind of way, or does all writing you do—long and short, have the same origin point and process? Not to put too fine a point on it, do you use a different process for ‘smaller game’ like short stories or novellas than for something like GRADIENT?

AC: That’s a great question. I think I started at the same place. I think the process was similar. I think the advantage of applying that stream of consciousness approach to short stories is that there is this feeling or instinct that the end is just over the horizon as opposed to at some interminable point in the future that you’re not ever certain to reach. There’s a sense of ‘if I generate a few thousand words, I’ll have an idea of the stakes of the story and who the character is’. The puzzle to solve is how to resolve it, in either a quote-unquote happy ending or in a way that produces something fun or interesting for me but isn’t fun for the character but leads to an important realization of some kind. It’s an interesting process, because the shape is more clearly visible a few thousand words in--you get the sense that in a few days or weeks, you could be done with it and that’s really motivating.

CA: That sense of imminent resolution, it both adds and relieves pressure, I would imagine.

AC : You referenced my Star Wars stuff, right--if anyone wants to check that out it’s on my website. That’s so fun because the biggest risk I’m taking with that is that I’m going to play in the Star Wars sandbox and some super fan is gonna get pissed about it. The upside is I love Star Wars--the universe is rich with vocabulary--people understand the iconography, the characters, they understand the tropes and its so fun to play in that sandbox. I feel less pressure for my characters to--I’m not sure how to put this--I just not as worried that my characters aren’t “original” its just really fun. Like I said, its fun to play in someone else’s sandbox, seeing what creates tension or reduces tension--the pressure is off to come up with as deep a character. Like, I can introduce a character more quickly this way that plays to certain archetypes, and the readers will say “Ok, I got it.” Like, the bounty hunter, chancellor, smuggler archetypes among others--they exist in the collective expectations and consciousness of the readership. When you write sci-fi, you realize that Star Wars eats into a lot of vocabulary--if you read my novel, Gradient, you’ll definitely see that influence in vocabulary choice. I feel like Star Wars fanfic allows for us to put our own spin on old stories we already know--the master/student dynamic of Yoda and Luke etc.

You can find Anders on his website or his twitter @cahillaguerilla

*You can find Charlie Allison at his twitter:
@cballison421*

We hope you enjoyed this second installment of Rhythm & Bones Lit. Please share the work you have enjoyed widely and don't hesitate to reach out to the amazing authors, artists, photographers, etc. in this issue and let them know you enjoyed their work!

Thanks for reading and we look forward to having much more in store for you with our Issue Three, upcoming in January 2019.

xxx

Rhythm & Bones team