

HORROR ISSUE

October 2015

Yellow Chair Review

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Horror Issue- October 2015

Editor: Sarah Frances Moran

Assistant Editor: Kiera Collins

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ISSN: 2380-7091

YCR NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Submissions are currently open for Issue #5. They will remain open until October 15th or until the issue fills up.
- Our Poetry Chapbook Contest is taking submissions until November 15th. There is a \$5 fee. The winner will receive 25 copies of their book and a \$200 cash prize.
- As always Rock The Chair challenge poems are accepted always.
- For more details regarding all of these calls please visit www.yellowchairreview.com.

Thank you for reading and for supporting small presses. YCR greatly appreciates you!

Sarah Frances Moran

Editor-In-Chief

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La Llorona Comes Over For Dinner

Jennifer Givhan

*Yo soy como el chile verde, Llorona
Picante pero sabroso. —Chavela Vargas*

Sea salt & ache
I've invited her in

as one invites
a distance, a dead

relative slow-
loved, slow to let go—

I've asked her
to wipe

the arroyo water gurgling
from her skirts

hook-eyed, fishnet
sinking.

My children look
away, uneasy

as if they understand
how long

I've longed
for redemption.

~

We've found a recipe for mole (pronounce it mol-ay like olé except móle—
make your mouth like you're about to suck an egg, dyed or white, boiled or raw)

Oaxaca-style, tongue-burnt dark chocolate, for pouring on poultry

& she tells me how she visits the Midwest now myth has scattered her
like crushed chipotle

like dried thyme & stone-gray ash—
she tells me how a twister picks up the smell of everything it snatches
—what people were cooking, chicken grease & garlic
(her children loved allspice, sticks of cinnamon, they'd line up

like straws, or wishbones, & split)—then that twister, aromatic, belly-
full, swollen as a tick, when it sets each object down,

leaves itself on everything. *But it was nothing until it swept us up*, she says.
It marks us for each other.

I pour us each a drink.

~

Mothers were daughters
overflowing yet skinflint
blossoms on the bare bark
our bodies brackish
turtle shells
our underbellies without that tepid padding
those babies who'd sink us young
held like ribcages
& water turning.
I tell the woman slicing
tomatoes & spooning white
sugar *I've brought home your*
babies, I've fed them, I've showered them —
their ears filled with fresh cut
flowers, their chest bones
stemmed & thorned. She throws me in the river
with her eyes, she casts me
into the mother water, drowning.
I'm her rancid darling
& she's become the ancient mother
I've daughtered against
the years—heavy in our bellies
as stones.

~

While I blacken
on the dry comal
guajillo chiles, ancho chiles, chipotle—

she toasts the dinner rolls
 & tortilla strips
until they're golden.

Together we pour
our mixtures, allowing them
to soak, fully submerged,
in simmering chicken broth.

Our talk turns to bedtime stories.
She can't believe
what they're calling her

(babykiller monstermother
nightterror witch)

so we set aside our wooden spoons

to Google search &
she covers her eyes
 with her braids, the lace-white

sleeve of her once best dress.

~

When I was a girl

 something terrible.

~

We decide our favorite picture depicts her
like a Calavera Catrina for Día de Los Muertos,

dancing with small skeletons who wear paper party hats,
boat-shaped beside the río.

The trees are bright & though the artist hasn't shown them,
we imagine piñatas hanging

from their branches, braced for the children's sticks.
In the sky, a colorful angel carrying a rainbowed plaster pig.

Maybe that's why we thought of piñatas.
La Llorona laughs.

 It's been too long since I heard that sound.

~

I admit
how she's stalked ditchbanks
wrapped in shadows
children in her rebozo

how some men compare her
with Malinali

our first country's
mother they call

puta traitor whore
like my ex called me

or the neverborns
I lent to the water.

Nights I screamed
at the children

they still ran to me
in fear, the monster

they sought comfort in—
She understands it's tedious

living up to a legend.
We set the table. Say grace.

Night Monsters

-on a line from Frost

Jessica Barksdale

I have been acquainted with the night.
That's when the night monsters come in,
pounding down like storm clouds, hissing '*night*
as they splay their nasty nightly claws.
Night is full of echoes. Renewed doubt, remembered pain.
Your sister's and father's deaths. Later, nightmares in the children's bedroom,
dark night horses steaming in with hard hooves, dragging
in dreams of metal maniacs or hollowed trees with night eyes.
Night is when the body aches with grief, with spleen,
with sorrow. Night is when everyone is disappeared,
abandoning you and you alone for other night pursuits, fine wines, sweet songs.
Night is cold and deep and forever. Night is when life is backward, upside down,
a funhouse mirror. You ache for night to crack open in a split of light,
night slinking off like a spurned vampire. Day rounds the edges, less longing, less fright.



Evil Pointman

Scanner

Volodymyr Bilyk

After The Party

Caitlan Rossi

My dress was starting to smell under the arms
as I sat in the passenger seat of our parked car.
I had told him I would be right up—
he was in his robe, drinking grappa
in our bed, keen to heave my starched skirt aside
and breathe hard into the diamond earrings
he bought me, so big they looked fake.

Sore from posing, my mouth gnashed
into a frown when I wiped off my lipstick,
a tickled pink, into a dirty cocktail napkin.
My forehead leaned against the tinted window
and left a greasy smooch as I took in the garage:
oversized even for two hunky sedans
and a red convertible. A broad window
on the back wall was closed, giving out
to the golf course's wide ridge
of dummy grass.

I got out of the car to toy with the tools
on a too-tall shelf: screwdrivers, drills, nuts
and bolts that wouldn't fix anything.
I saw the axe's blunt blade, its grip robust
and irresistible, and yo-yoed it over my shoulder
before opening the kitchen door and marching
up the dark staircase to our bedroom.

I took his breath away when he saw me,
him stiff against the mahogany headboard,
looking more and more gone
on me as I thrust the axe again and again
into his proud belly, hard and fast
with my high heels standing over his head.
Red flashed rich like a million rubies
on the damask walls and stucco ceiling,
beautiful.

I lay next to him after,
when I had taken off
the dress
and the diamonds
and he was still,
small and bloody.

Crafted and Consumed

Benjamin Ditmars

all we ever
hoped to be
were sugar skulls
and marigolds

sweet egg bread
crafted and consumed
before an altar with
memories of guns

makers of *real*
skeletons, erased
with celebration.

The Shedding Blade

Alex Vigue

She carried the unborn child in one hand and a shedding blade in the other. She took the corpse and laid it in the water trough. Carefully, she dragged the loop blade along the thin dead fur of the horse child. I could not tell if she was crying. I could not tell if she was preparing the child for a proper burial or taking its fur so that it would not go to waste.

The barn was wet with breath. The lights were on but they were covered in spider webs and fly bodies. The birth had been gruesome, the mother mare had died. The filly-child died as well. The hay floors were covered in birth and blood. The barn cats licked at the mess.

The father-doctor emerged from the birthing stall. His horse face was long and wet with tears. His narrow black eyes shinned at me. His biped legs shook but took him to another stall. I followed him.

This stall was clinical white with smooth walls. Salon chairs dotted the floor inside. The stallion father took a seat in one of the salon chairs. A man I recognized came up to the horse man and showed him a collection of cosmetics in large nail polish bottles. The stallion chose a clear one. I recognized the salon man as a former professor of mine.

The stallion in the salon who had just lost his child and mate sat and cried in silence as my former professor applied the clear coat to his hooves. The polish cemented him; stopped his change, finished it. He would never feel again.

“Rough day sir?” the professor-salon attendant asked.

“It was a nightmare.”

The Doña Shares a Recipe

Marci Ameluxen

El mono makes men virile, *fuerte*, says Doña Louisa, soothsayer of the colonia. She parses the virtues of monkey meat and other animal flesh, recites favorite recipes with her parrot-cackle of laughter. We tell of the day's village market trip, the truck bed of hissing iguanas, small hands and feet bound as if in prayer, men and women lifting writhing nightmares into burlap. The Doña's mouth forms 'O' in pleasure as she stories the cooking of lizard, hands making the motions of a butcher, conjuring green skin hissing when dropped to hammered skillet, scales that crackle and spit as they kiss the hot oil, claws turned tender, curling as if to climb, the jaws working, crunching their imagined hibiscus blossoms.

Back Demon

Ashlie Allen

My back doesn't like it when I have anxiety attacks and cancel plans with friends. When I prostrate myself against the floor and weep, it stabs my nerves until I cry out like a ghost feeling its mortal body rotting. If I talk to someone, the ache goes away. If I make a phone call and don't stutter, the stiffness leaves. I don't want to communicate most of the time, but the demon in my back hurts me if I stay silent and hide.

Before the demon collided with my spine, we used to get along. We would watch TV together and dust crumbs off each other's chest. "I enjoy you." he used to say. "Don't ever make me angry." I had three friends which I spoke to four days a week when I was a teenager. They made me happy. Just being around them I felt like I had a purpose, like the anxiety I suffered was unimportant and silly. They made me feel like my disorders were imaginary.

One night after spending time with them, I came home and had a breakdown. I stammered through the house, semi-conscious, my hands knocking things down as I felt the devastation of panic and shame. I had made a stupid joke and no one laughed. I had also spilled my water across the dinner table. The embarrassment was so overwhelming I wanted to cry, pinch my arms or jerk out my hair. I spent hours reimagining how I could have done things differently. I imagined I didn't have anything to drink. I imagined I stayed quiet and didn't bore anyone with my dull humor.

After that night, every time I went out, I did not have a beverage, did not talk. If someone laughed, I thought they were laughing at me and my timid behavior. I walked around with murderous eyes and shaking hands.

I asked the demon what I should do next. I confessed I was unbearably lonely and wanted human contact, but at the same time I was terrified of company. "Quit pitting yourself and speak up." he said. "You'll never be satisfied if you are all alone." "Tell me what to do." I said. "Help me!" I was so tormented and exhausted that when I saw him running towards me, I did not realize he was coming to attack me. With his sharp nails, he tore the skin on my back, placed his feet inside my muscles and let the rest of himself sink inside of me.

This caused such pain that my ears started ringing and I saw black. I thought I was going to vomit up my organs. I tried to pull him out, but he only sank deeper. I heard him screaming from beneath my skin. "Get a social life. Get close enough to someone you could kiss. Tell them what your heart thinks of theirs. Make yourself complete. Love someone."

The next day, I called one of my friends. "Please come over." I said. "I think I'm dying." There was a pounding sound at the door an hour later. I answered it, nearly falling against my friend, whose name was Adoncia. "Is there mercy here?" I touched her heart. "Do I make you feel loved?" She helped me to my couch, where I let myself stretch, and where she sat on my lap. "The truth is I miss you." she said. "I've always had a crush on you." I writhed when she tried to put her mouth against mine, but the demon, sending his insufferable pain, persuaded me to let her give me a kiss. "I am not adored." I kept whispering until I became drowsy. "This bothers me so much. I don't want contact, but I grieve without it." She rubbed her fingers down my face, sighing like for a moment, she sensed my depression. "Keep her. You're silly to suffer when someone is fascinated with you." I heard the demon's voice inside my head.

Adoncia stayed with me that night. She stroked my hair until my scalp was numb. "I have a confession." I said at two in the morning. "Mmmhmm. Say it." she moaned. "I am possessed. It is for my own good though. I am weak, so a satanic creature entered me to offer power. It's like a punishment that has a radiant outcome. I can see what is wrong with me through the abuse."

I smiled when I saw she had fallen asleep against my collar bone. Maybe she didn't need to hear the truth. Maybe she was possessed too. I carried her into my bedroom, where she rested as I rubbed my back and laughed until morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Pitchfork

Kushal Poddar

Mr. and Mrs. Pitchfork
I know what lies in your basement,

heard smothered giggles and whining
while passing the staircase. Heard

a dog whose barking couldn't have come
from any body or flesh.

My father says, your bankers
broke you, and you drank pesticide

with evening tea. My father
says, no one dies in our village,

and hence I have no fear in
facing you, asking what you

did to the dog and my chum,
your son you always called retarded.

I am too. Here death matters not;
what good head and heart will do

to mere existence, ever.
Ever. Again.

Birdbath (Gunpowder Decapitation)

Brad MacNeill

Brain fragments splatter against the ceiling by a shotgun blast;
here lies a factory of thoughts blown into blank constellations.
Gunpowder decapitation offered a desperate need of consolation.
I couldn't change the present,
only allow the past to destroy me in it.
Insanity was provoked;
it drew blood and persuaded sanity to scatter.
Time travel is astronomy not captured,
an inferior notion from a head ruptured.
When shooting-stars are dripping brain matter,
wishes have no rationality and can't materialize.
Truth was crushed by the rolling of dying eyes
and everything I knew turned into dust, into lies.
An impatient finger expanded the explosion of my skull.
A simple lobotomy wasn't supposed to be a gunpowder decapitation,
or maybe it was. I don't remember. I'm without memory.
Crows are known to take the dead back to the land of the living;
there are no black wings flapping black feathers for me.
In the lower half of my head,
blood is pooling into a warm birdbath.
Washing in my soon-to-be coagulation
has left an entire murder decimated.
Mysophobic crows float with beaks up;
I've drowned my transportation.
Stranded in my suicide state,
I pluck feathers from watered birds and discard their bodies
as I wallow in my lost salvation.
Gunpowder decapitation:
I've buried myself in my own excavation.

Tilting forward,
blood pours like a waterfall over what's left of my face.
An empty cemetery birdbath has given me more space,
but with no brain to accumulate thoughts,
I'm just a broken vase that can't accommodate flowers.
Conjuring up beauty is a zombie thinking too hard;
a corpse doesn't have the luxury of imagination.
Zombies desire brains, nothing else.
Consider me undesirable.
All I've done is propel art with a gunpowder decapitation.
I've painted a masterpiece with one pulse.
What I did is inexcusable.
My cowardice made me partly headless
and here I am reaching,

trying to glorify any reason why I displayed my fascination for the colour red,
when I damn well know there is no fucking justification.
Featherless crows accompanying my gunpowder decapitation;
I followed decisions dictated to me by unguided emotions.
What a Shakespearean thing for me to do.
Attempting new heights for brighter lights
gave me all the grandeur without any of the splendour.

Woe is me,
woe the crows,
woe is misery
and it bloody shows.
Stiff, decrepit hands pose,
holding blood-soaked feathers between cooling fingers.
A bowl of maggots will replace my desolated birdbath,
because that is the nature of things:
graphic and fucked.
The burden on my shoulders was too great.
Dieting was a faster plan with an exercisable wrath.
With a gunpowder decapitation I lost all the weight.
Death was an anorexia I risked;
I've paid the expense.
In a dark room surrounded by moulted carrion,
I am a wretched corpse with no real companion.
Inside one hollow casing,
I can see my Hell-bound path twisting into oblivion.
Still, I believe my self-inflicted wound had to be done.
Because of the severity of my birdbath,
fallen crows are ushering me into a sea of fire.
Remorse doesn't apply to suicide exits.
I am not worried.
There is no damnation worse than the chaos I escaped from.
Anything compared to life will feel like Heaven, a celestial kingdom.

Skin and bone,
fire and brimstone;
at last,
I can be alone.

Slippers

Miracle Austin

The shining star of *El Circo Increible* belonged to Julia, the ballerina; she twirled up and down the flaming tightrope night after night, without a single pause.

The ringmaster, Galileo, begged her to allow him to add a net for her safety.

Julia replied, "You silly little man! You've asked me this question too many times. The crowd loves it, and they love me...I'm Julia Diaz, the most famous ballerina of all, and I won't ever need a net because I'll never fall." She swatted him away.

She was right about the crowd adoring her. They would toss out silver and gold coins, including fluffy canary roses.

Some of her fans would leave her lavish outfits or expensive tickets to travel exotic lands, when the circus was on break, in her dressing room.

One night, after her performance, a little girl on rickety crutches made her way through the crowd to reach Julia.

The little girl attended almost a dozen of Julia's performances over the years and posters of Julia painted her walls.

Tonight, she would finally meet her.

After multiple camera shots and interviews by the news media flock, the little girl finally had a rare moment with Julia.

"Oh, Miss Julia Diaz, could you please, please sign my autograph book and take a photo with me? You're so beautiful, and I want to be just like you one day." Her smile was intoxicating, although she had a few missing teeth.

Julia looked at her and gently pressed her ultraviolet tutu down with her hands.

She then brushed her hair up with her hands to make sure not one hair was out of place in her tight bun.

Both of Julia's hands hugged her sixteen-inch waist as she bent down to the little girl's height. She signed her book and took the photo, but Julia did the most horrible thing ever.

Before the little girl shuffled away one hop at a time, she whispered in her ear, "Sorry honey, there will never be anyone like me. I'm your one and only. Plus, you would never cut it as a ballerina."

The little girl's eyes filled up with tears, and she was eventually swallowed up into the crowd.

Halloween night arrived, which was one of the special nights of the year with costumes and fireworks.

Julia always represented a portrait of beauty, but this night she looked absolutely breathtaking with gold glitter shimmering in her hair.

Her iridescent orange and black tutu lit up with matching ballet slippers and sparkly purple ribbons, which laced up all the way to her knees.

She curtsied towards the crowd and pranced slowly to begin her climb up the one hundred steps.

Before she climbed the first step, an older lady appeared out of nowhere. A scarlet cloak covered her body with an oversized hood.

The older lady held the most unusual bouquet of black swaying roses with silver tips.

Julia couldn't take her eyes off them; she reached out to touch one of the tips, but it pricked her index finger.

"Ouch!" she screamed, as she placed her finger in mouth to suck the blood. "Get this crazy hag out of here!"

The old lady smiled, as two security officers escorted her out of the big top.

Julia stood at the top of the platform to prepare what she has done over one hundred thousand times without a wobble.

As she started to twirl over the flaming tightrope, she felt something sharp inside of her ballerina slippers.

She continued to twirl until she twirled out of control and fell.

The crowd cried out and stood to their feet.

Galileo yelled out to workers to close the curtains immediately. He ran to her and stooped down.

Julia barely could speak, but she managed to point towards her ballerina slippers.

Tears roller coasted down Galileo's cheeks.

Her arm flopped down to her side before she took her last breath.

When the stretcher arrived, Galileo helped to lift her body from off the ground and that's when he noticed thin, twirly thorns protruding from the top and bottom of her ballerina slippers.

He gasped.

Three months later, no one showed up at *El Circo Increible*.

Galileo packed up the last box in his office and found a note stuck behind a picture frame with Julia's photo on his desk.

He opened and it read:

"Sometimes beauty can be a curse not just for one, but everyone..."

The Languedoc Curse

Jimmy Pappas

Raro antecedentum scelestum

Deseruit pede poena claudo.

(Rarely does punishment, with halting foot, fail to overtake the criminal in his flight.)

--Horace

She cursed me when I left her, not even for another woman.

Le maulubec vous trousse! May your leg sores turn you lame!

Like cat's fur, the tiny hairs on my forearm stood upright
as she shouted down at me from our apartment balcony.

A tiny piece of rusted metal, jutting out from an old bedspring
she had tossed out that morning, scraped the side of my calf.

Rather than seek medical attention, I ignored the wound
and healed myself with a bottle of *Blanquette de Limoux*.

Almost on cue, shiny red ulcers spread across my leg;
the stench from a yellow discharge sickened me when I ate.

Only a vicious scratching brought me any comfort, but the pain
became worse. After three days, I could no longer walk.

A delivery man later arrived carrying a package for me.
He walked *pede claudo* toward my front door.

Punishment is slow. I found no need to ask from whom it came.
She had sent me a gift to end my suffering: a hacksaw.

Isla De Las Muñecas

Nikita Hernandez

Some think it was all in his head.
In Don Julian's solitude
he created the girl, face down in the water.

Her doll, frilly in pink and braided pigtails,
floated in the canals next to the girl—
two dead bodies produced

under mysterious circumstances.
Julian picked up the drenched *muñeca*,
gingerly, reverently.

Naked trees begged for decoration, respect.
He fashioned a noose, hung the doll
from reaching limbs as tribute.

The girl's spirit haunted him.
Julian threaded hundreds of mutilated dolls
into the trees, suspended them like skeletons

to please her. Severed limbs, decapitated
heads, blank eyes adorned the branches
like slaughtered wind chimes. They watched

Julian, possessed by the spirits of dead girls.
The massacred *muñecas* whispered
to each other. They moved their heads

and arms, stretching outwards, opened
their soulless eyes. Swinging in the trees,
the dolls threatened Julian, disturbing him day

and night. He hung *muñecas* for fifty years,
unable to reconcile his guilt, unable to save
that little girl so long ago, bloated

and blue in the water. Julian drowned
in the canal—in the same spot as her. His spirit
joined the ranks of the departed girls, trapped

in a disfigured, dangling doll. Now Julian haunts
those on the ground, those who visit
the graves of swaying, mangled *muñecas*.

Zeus Has Taken Many Animal Forms

Amber Edmondson

At the edge of the midway, one more tent, the strobe of Ferris wheel casting it in green relief and outside on his towering perch, Bob Barker in a polka-dot clown suit, ass made bulbous with extravagant padding, and his smile a seam of sharpened teeth over bottom lip. He guards the tent door, waits for his toll, and all around him, women in cages, cradling infants, fending off beasts gone feral. You hope to be unseen, place bronze coins from the fortune-telling woman over both eyes. Ignore the strange lights, the air from inside: earth, stone fruit, cool.

Dante's Librarian

Tolonda Henderson

In the deepest darkest corners of hell,
there is a section reserved for people
who write in library books. They are
given the Sisyphean task of erasing
pencil markings from a book they want
to read only to have the intellectual graffiti
reappear as they reach the bottom
of the page. It snakes across the paper
underlining words at random, scrawling
smudged notes in the margins, inscribing
vertical lines and checkmarks.
If the damned attempt to skip ahead
as though the clutter of someone else's
thoughts is of no consequence the binding
of the book cracks the pages scatter
into the surrounding fire, and they are forced
to sift through piles of books permanently
disfigured with pen or highlighter
in search of one sprinkled only
with graphite so they may begin again.

There is no separate section of hell
for those who write in their own books
or make copies of needed chapters
leaving the original unblemished.
Scholarship has always been
a conversation with those who have
gone before and even the casual reader
has the right to put pen to paper in a tome
they own. The sin is in breaking the covenant
between the reader, whose relationship
with that library book is meant to be
temporary, and those who spend hours
selecting, cataloging, processing and shelving
treasures intended for an entire community.
Rare is the library with the resources
to peruse every page of every returned book
so the consequences are left to the afterlife.
Some of the reprobate cry out for mercy
but there is no reprieve for those arrogant
enough to steal an author's intent, inserting
themselves between the original text
and the next reader. Their fate is inscribed
in the Book of the Dead in indelible ink.

Sensing Blood

A.J. Huffman

I become beast. Legendary. Living
nightmare of impulse, searching
for wounds ready to tear and
already torn. My lust does not subjugate
tenuous ruby rivers. I was born
to consume . . .

I. Hearing Blood

Imperceptible pulses. Intermittent interruptions
to flow, pumping. Balance
has changed. Predator and prey begin
instinctual dance of diminishing
circles of choice, a diagram. Chase,
slow motion, savoring prim[ev]al process:
recognition, anticipation, preparation
for fight or flight. A hair
hackled, a throated exhale. The game,
finally afoot.

II. Smelling Blood

A gash graces wind, wanders south.
Nostrils open wider for full olfactory
consumption. There is
a connection. Internal
twinge, triggered adrenaline. Alive
is redefined in nerves and neurons
overexcited. Thoughts switch to full
y automated impulse. One word resonates,
drools from my mouth: *Hunt!*

III. Seeing Blood

I am [addicted to] the trail I follow. From the initiation
point. Spot, dot, spurt. I am criminologist, devouring
relevant statistics. Still animated
or prone is determined by my mind's automated calculations.
Spatter pattern, trajectory, pooling, direction
of probable flight all process more than memories of a potential
victim's reaction. Call me *motivation*.
Tracing, tracking, trying not to give
in to my own devilish demon, promising
this one will be mine.

IV. Touching Blood

The overwrought terminology, jagged,
is wrong. The opening is smooth, embracing
the violation of my fingers. Ripping it
deeper brings fresh warmth, an imagined steam
as blood and air temperatures convene
in equilibrium. This is the savoric portion
of our program, unhurried, methodic. Mental
measurements made, filed for later regale.
I withdraw,
clearing the thick residual
drips on rapidly cooling flesh. A signature
of sorts. A masterpiece, for sure.

V. Tasting Blood

Final taboo felled by first flutter of tongue.
I am the monster of whispers
in well-lit rooms. The reason
for automatic sidesteps. A shadow
best avoided, I find my way despite
all precautionary efforts. I have no magic
cure. I wear a cross, go to church, love
garlic. Sprinkled lightly over still-warm skins,
a seasoned spurt of ethnicity in every bite.

Five

Dave Buracker

At five, the fallout shelter
meant nothing, five miles
from Pentagon ground zero.

Five sides to a graveyard,
five emergency broadcast
beeps, squelching forth;

the large yellow iron siren
outside the playground was
not a tornado siren - it bellows
before missiles fall.

Five places to hide:

Five

Under the basement stairs
coiled under carpenter nails,
a splintered coffin for plastic
action figures, melts a mold
for toy guns, discharge sparks.

Four

Deep into the storm drains
until fire passed flesh, expels
family from concrete canals
- a radiation birth.

Three

In dreams I cannot wake
to burn, a human candle
of fat and hair smoldering;
it is never better to
duck and cover.

Two

If Father could drive past
mountains as survivors in
a Monday night mini-series,
mothers embrace children
turn to nature in ashes
- in ashes.

One

The sky will fall - there is no
fifth horse to flee from fire -
we all hide in Mother's arms
- we all fall down.



Carnage Window

acrylic on canvas applied with electric leaf blower

Dave Buracker

Glassy-eyed Demon

Susan Beall Summers

too surprised
to be afraid
when he stood
a foot taller than me
eighty pounds heavier
his eyes vacant green glass
and me eight months pregnant

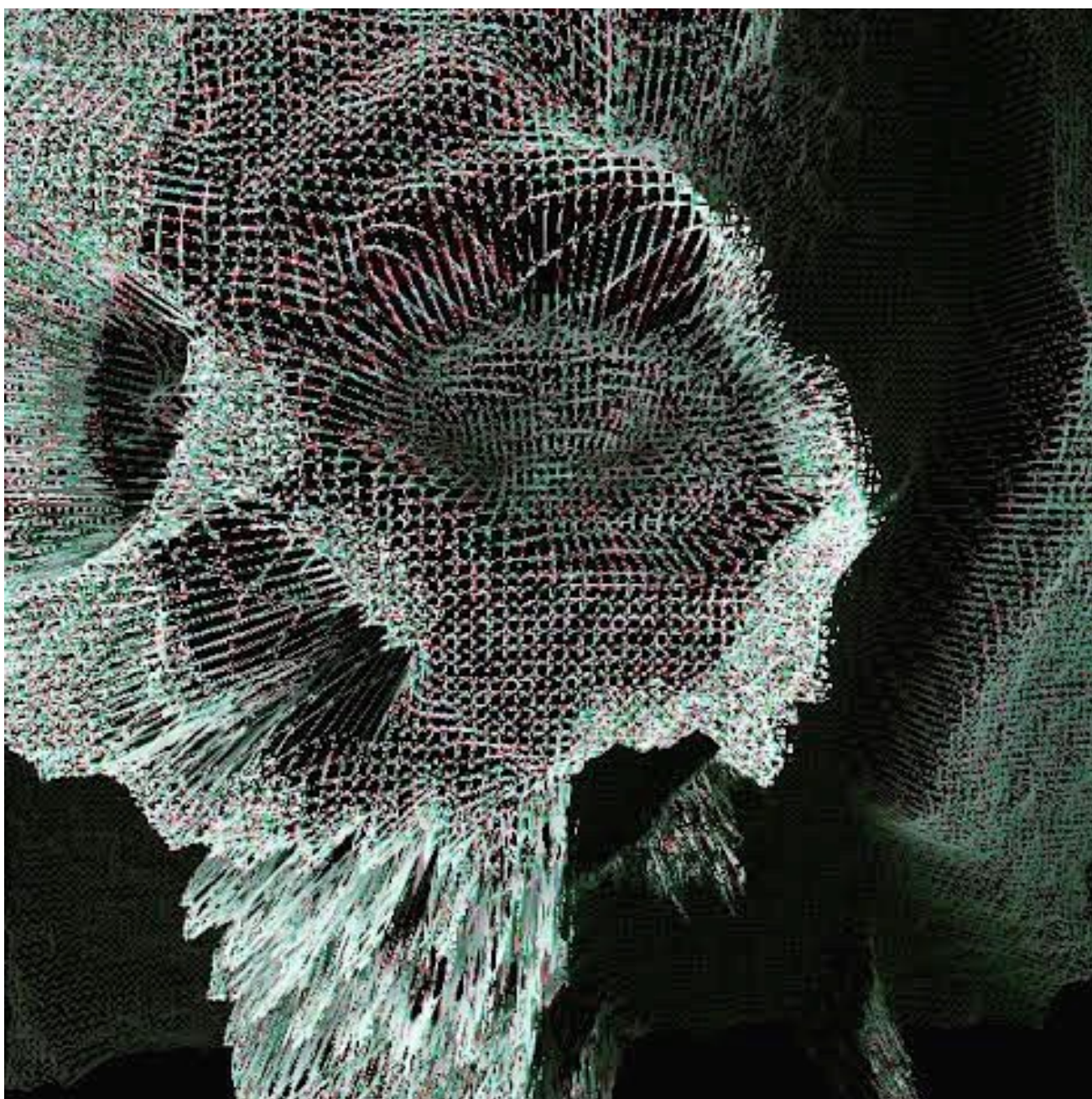
he was talking calmly,
but out of context
and advanced
unreasonable
threatening
pushing me
striking me

I deflected most blows with a pillow
and retreated.
against the wall
shock gave way to anger.
I braced and shoved
screamed piercing
and long

he blinked,
shuffled back to bed.

I sat rocking myself
in the dark
back and forth
thought of my baby
cocooned myself on the sofa.
toward morning,
he called my name
so normal

in a whiskey-tainted voice he asked,
“Why are you sleeping out here?”



Mask

digital art

Dave Buracker

Vacancy

S.A. Turnbull

Oh, yes, that room. Well, if you must look, don't open the door. Crouch down and glance underneath the gap.

The walls were painted a perfect cerulean, just for him. The ceiling and carpet were dyed in matching shades, quite lovely, really. Of course, the carpeting there now is new, a replica of the original.

It had to be replaced, considering.

If you look to the back of the room—go ahead and press your cheek to the floor, it's clean—you can probably see the outline of his bed. No, no sheets. We couldn't keep sheets or blankets in there. Still can't. Nothing that could be stripped and tied into rope.

Yes, just the one window. No electrical lights built or brought in. Even so, when he was here and after his death, the room maintained a hushed glow, a twilight gleam. Somehow, the room never turned as dark as it should have.

How? I don't pretend to know. No one has stood inside with the door shut, not recently, anyway. No one has dared. They're too frightened that the door, once closed, might not open for them again, or that they will look down to find the boy holding their hand. We've all heard him moving around in there, and occasionally seen a shadow pass beneath the door. He has been more active lately.

May I help you up? No reason to linger down there.

Death always followed him. Poor thing.

In the spring, healthy roses would drip with aphids when he stopped to smell them. He left brown footprints in fresh grass, oozing russet puss from withered stems. Branches fell from trees as he hugged them, always containing a fresh bird's nest, the contents broken and splattered. One loving stroke on a cat's back, and we would find the animal an hour later choked to death on its own tail. Likewise, dogs would howl until their ears bled.

A bit of a romantic tale, true. Telling the stories so many times has brought them into historical prose for me. Makes it easier to bear the memories, I suppose.

Anyway, after a while, after a few of these incidents, the boy was no longer allowed outside. His mother kept him in his room with his bible and his crucifix. He read during the day and he prayed at night. He did not play. He never did ask for toys.

He ate his meals in his room. The hired help drew lots as a fair means of deciding who had to enter. Two would always go, one to bring in the food and another to hold open the door. Once, when he was sick, the chef brought him soup by herself. She set the bowl down, took up the spoon, and added her own eyes to the steaming broth.

Anyway, shall I take you to your room? It is the next one down.

His mother eventually moved here, to this room, to be closer to him. She slept right here, on that bed, a door's breadth apart from his. She had the bed, chair, and dresser painted in white. Satin sheets stained as white as the pages of her bible. Lace curtains toned to the whites of her eyes.

You can tell it has all faded a bit. Oh, yes, this same bed and that same dresser were hers.

Delicate and white, they said, as her soft skin. Translucent—well, almost. She told me once her royal-blue veins gave her a constant reminder of his room, of her son. She would spend hours gazing at her wrists, wringing her hands colorless.

She said his birth was the only time she had seen her blood run red.

She had mirrors put up next to each of the crucifixes, a matching white gold pair for each wall. The only pure atheistic she put in the room, with the exception of herself, was a portrait. That one. It's of her in her youth.

You know you look like her. Different eyes, though.

I can see the guilt in hers, in the picture, never mind the painting was finished long before she killed him, I can still see it. She murdered him almost twenty years ago to the month. Killed him out of fear, fear of what he was, of what he might become.

She took a white gold knife across his tiny throat as he slept. The same knife cut the words "For you, my Lord" into her perfect skin just beneath the collarbone before she, too, bled to death. A few of the staff say she bled blue. I wasn't here that night. No means to truly know; the carpet and sheets, as I said, have been replaced.

I find it rather interesting that you didn't know some of this before coming here. We're all over the Internet, so I've been told. Brings in business. Not you, though. You just . . . happened by? Well, we're happy to have you here.

If you get hungry, down the stairs right through that door is the kitchen. Please help yourself, but don't bring anything back with you. Eat it there. Oh, and I wouldn't use any knives. He doesn't like them, especially in the hands of women—understandable, considering how he died.

As I said, he has been restless lately. Moving things. The gardener swears he hears the old screams at dusk. Sometimes she is here too, though I've never seen her. Occasionally, I've found her portrait on the floor, facing the wall. Ashamed of her actions, I suppose.

Don't worry; he rarely comes out of his room to visit hers, even with guests.

But just in case, if you do see him tonight, take a crucifix from the wall. Hold it before you. Close your eyes. Praying wouldn't hurt. God was the only thing that boy ever feared.

Maybe sleep with the candles lit. All of them, all three, the way she would have preferred. A single candle he's been known to extinguish on the sheets.

Goodnight, then. Pleasant dreams.

It Isn't Real

D.S. West

Childhood of horror movies,
Aunt Kathy's True Crime collection.
Sweaty preachers in
Lexington Baptist churches.

Friday the 13th marathons with my grandmother
every Friday the 13th.
Ham sandwiches watching
The Evil Dead, listening to
Roy, out of prison,
tell the former minor
whose minor status had put him there
his theories about the babies of whores
possessing a part of every man who
seasoned the soup, their children
scrambling around the sofa

"That movie is pretty gruesome.
How do you eat watching this shit?"
"It isn't real." Chewing too,
mouth open. "My mom and her mom,
they like those surgical shows?
Books about murder scenes,
with pictures of headless
nude corpses as centerfolds?
Those disgust me. While this..."
A pencil grinds Karo syrup
out the imitation of a leg,
itself an imitation of--
"This is like a painting.
This is someone's art."

#

Met the first girlfriend,
the only to genuinely like me,
sitting on a recliner with a spider drawn on her face
at a freshman Halloween meet up.
Staring at the wall,
heartbreak in her eyes,
split by the axe of a
rebounding metal guitarist.
My break was in process; so we had enough
to talk about.

I introduced her to Eric, the
shorter one, another guitarist.
They hit it off, but
when I moved in to kiss her months later,
4 am freezing mountain November,
walking campus all night mutually single,
I couldn't believe it when she said
it was me she had wanted to begin with.

#

Some say we write our lives
before we're born.
A fortune teller two weeks ago told me
I was a suicide before. "You brought the
shame from that act into this life.
But you don't have to do that anymore."

I left, eyes wet. Those things are
designed to open you up,
otherwise they're legitimate, and
either way, it pays being
broken open routinely.

How does a soul
punish itself?
It kind of fits, except
I'm beginning to see it the
other way.

For all my faults, I will
never turn you away crying.
And the prevalent themes
have refined themselves.
Drive a pencil into my ankle.
Go ahead. "This is like a painting.
This is someone's art."

Invitation

Prerna Bakshi

Just because there is a wind chime
hanging by the door,
doesn't mean you will hear it
tinkling in this poem.

Just because a door is mentioned,
doesn't mean you'll know if it's
opened or shut. Maybe it's neither.
Just inviting. Inviting you in.

Just because a door seems inviting,
tempting one to peer inside,
doesn't mean you can simply
walk through it.

Just because you managed to get in,
doesn't mean you're welcome
to stay for as long as you like.

That door makes a horrible noise
when one walks in and this house
belongs to no one.
Abandoned.
Covered with cobwebs and dust.
It's dark inside.
The air feels cold and dense.
This place has a strange smell and
it feels eerie.
This house is pregnant with silence
until a sudden noise of footsteps is heard.
But no one ever moved.
Not even an inch.
So who's there?
Who's there?
Does it matter?
Just leave.
Run!
Run towards the door
that does not exist.

Up The Staircase

Lana Bella

From high, dark window, I peered down with warm, eager face at sunlight just stirring over the frozen December lake. My hands absently lifted to the glass, skeletal weight dressed in white moths, fingers joined for warmth. Every morning, the game was the same. I welcomed the thinnest veins of pale gold that signaled dawn, but in this walled-up room, little passed through except for an occasional jangle of Carolina wrens winged too close to the pane. While the terrain below looked absurd in cracked limbs and speckled snow for hat and outer suit, I worked my eyes along the footprints of small creatures that braved the cold like a novice who took scope of the sky overhead while readying their kite, alone, not quite measured, half-disoriented and half-thrilled. Up the staircase, I have nothing but my photographic memory, became a time dweller to halt the tides of my own vanishing. I played then replayed with linguistic puzzles, finally reached for articulation by evening when dark touched my tongue as I collapsed with exclamation mark and vibrations for company in wits' end's sleep. Though, I no longer dreamt, my body just swiftly brought into consciousness at the stir of day from which winter set the landscape. I got up, walked to the window between shadows but only recognized fray edges of light, and yet, my fingers roamed over the face echoed back from the glass, as if known. In the reflection, it was someone long ago I once knew.

Numbers Station

KJ Hannah Greenberg

She scratched Amazon Camilla's face, inked on her arm, with her chib. Increasingly, she wondered whether she should slowly redraw the lines of that picture by knife point. Her blade made her feel better. On her shoulders and on her thighs was ample proof of the relief received from cutting; besides her switch, she had used, in places where her clothes usually covered her skin, matches, glass shards, and graduated sized of knitting needles. Such work helped her ride out rage. If only she had hit back.

In the background, The Buzzer played. Second only to bottle caps' teeth, that short, monotonous tone soothed her. Twenty-four hours per day, every day, for decades, with only rare interruptions, MDZhB, formerly UZB-76, sent out two dozen identical tones per minute.

The violator had also killed her dog.

Massage was too gentle a sensation to distract from the resultant, lingering, inner raggedness. Banging on pots ill-suited her; she had CAPD. What's more, other support group members provided no solace. Those cowards, mostly, relied on selective serotonin uptake inhibitors, on eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, and on illegal drugs. A few paid big bucks for stress inoculation training. None wrestled directly with their dark memories. Only she faced her trauma.

She flicked her blade against her thumb, allowing its serration to extract crimson. Closing her eyes, she was once more in a world built of buzzing sounds and of pain. Ecstasy, or at least temporary numbness, could be had for small cost.

A ping alerted her to screen activity. Someone was sending her an echo request packet. She placed her knife on her desk, rubbed the blood trickle blood against her face, and sent an ICMP response. Soon, thereafter, the balloon for instant messages appeared on her desktop. She went invisible.

For several months, she had suspected that her perpetrator was an agency member. He had been too good with duct tape and too sure with knots for a random sadist or psychotic possessed of impressive breaking and entering skills. What's more, he had tried to frighten her as much as hurt her.

She imagined that the aggressor was a good lover. She supposed, too, he had been an abused child; there had been nothing nominal about his technique or his endowment. Indeed, as he had pumped, he had caressed her face and whispered reassurances. Behind his mask, he had shed tears. Those droplets trickled down his cheeks and dripped off of his chin, beginning when he tied her down, and continuing after the rape.

She tapped her keyboard furiously. As a router, she had to verify that her reply had been received, yet she meant to continue to be unreachable to this particular messenger. Again and again, she typed "!T." As she keyed, she leaned her wrist against her blade point. Another thin trickle swelled to the surface.

She had been trained in judo, in muay thai, and in hapkido, yet had forgotten her schooling during those fleeting moments when she had come upon her gutted Ovcharka. By the time she had risen from her pup's carcass, her assailant had circled behind her, and, by dint of body weight, had pinned her against a wall. Using the same weapon with which he had killed her dog, he had bludgeoned her.

In the background, the step oscillations paused and a voice, in Russian, spoke simple words; "not receiving the oscillator." Abruptly, the pulsing white sound returned.

Quickly, she opened a file containing a rootkit and emailed that bit of software to the person trying to raise her via instant messaging. Obtaining the necessary passwords had been easy; she had smiled and had dipped her chest toward certain employees in the IT Department. Sometimes, her gender was an asset.

She leaned back in her chair, hummed to the audio pattern emitted by her radio and ever so gently ran her knife up her arm. A satisfying flow followed its edge's travels. Having completed her gate to administrator-level protocol, she could only wait, could merely watch what happened to the other side's unit.

Her virus began to dump its payload. Soon, a backdoor would open and the fun would more earnestly begin. Her program was kernel-mode access software. She turned down the volume on her radio.

Again, the station's oscillations were interrupted by a voice. "The stuff comes from the hardware room" broadcast into her office.

She had messed up a password. The other's computer had warned him that one of his operating systems had been breached. Suddenly, the window, with which she had looked into, and with which she ought to have been able to destroy, his electronic world, went black.

She bit her lip and sliced open her tattoo. She would get Itzpapalotl inked in its place.

Excision

Meggie Royer

I ask my mother about the mastectomy
like its presence in our lives is an old friend.
Growing up, she dragged the fish from the river,
slit the minnows on the cutting board
til their sides burst into glitter,
ran through the fields after her brothers
as the plough went through
to gather what it had missed.
Inside her blouse, the remaining one
is as soft as it ever was,
opening like a tulip into the wine pink
of the scar beside it.
Her parents scolded her for bringing home
birds folded into ink on the roadside,
squirrels with tails run over into grime.
Everything in the world missing,
some of it trying to come back to life again,
most of it gone.

Arugula

Rich Boucher

Arugula is a giant monster that lives most of his life
in the beautiful, amazing and horrible country of Japan.
Sometimes he flies or swims to other countries
like America, or Rio de Janeiro, where he breaks things there also.
But mostly, Arugula attacks the innocent and friendly Tokyo people,
unless he is protecting them from another monster, which happens sometimes.
He is very large; he is mountain-sized; that's why he's giant.
Many scientists truly believe, if they don't want to make me mad,
that the giant monster Arugula is a miracle of science because
he has the ears of an elephant, the body of a rat,
the wings of a dragonfly and the arms of a Russian ballet person.
He also has owl eyes, very angry owl eyes, the eyes of an owl
that has had enough of listening to peoples' nonsense.
Arugula doesn't like it when people don't listen to me.
When I tell them to, some scientists think
that Arugula was created when an atom bomb was tested
near a zoo in Russia that had a rat and dragonfly infestation problem.
Still other people, like shaman religious cultural scholar people,
if they don't want another incident where I get really angry,
often say that Arugula, the giant monster, is the living manifestation
of the Earth's desire to punish us for polluting it with our pollution.
People in the sciences and people in the cultures and religions
should get together and agree about Arugula, the giant monster,
and they should get together and make people say yes that Arugula exists,
and people should just listen when they're told about real giant monsters
and not laugh or make faces like they think there's something wrong with me.
People should just listen and not look at me or say anything negative
when they are told about giant monsters that are really real.
People should not be so quick to say that there's no such thing as a monster.
People can be in trouble if they don't believe in giant monsters.
People can upset me, and they shouldn't do that.
People should be afraid of being in trouble.

Hermitano

Loren Stephens

Jimmy drove down the four-lane highway from town in his red, Chevy Camaro. The sharp peaks of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range were covered in snow. Like the neighboring New Mexican towns to the south, this land wore Catholicism like a dark veil.

Jimmy turned onto the rutted, dirt road toward the Montoya hacienda. The rosary hanging from his rearview mirror swung back and forth. He touched his thin mustache; he was growing it to make himself look older than his seventeen years, but even after six months, it still wasn't thick enough for him to trim more than once every few weeks.

Jimmy pulled into the driveway and shut off the radio. Enough with the "Feliz Navidad" and "Buenos Dias, C-o-l-o-r-a-d-o." His German shepherd, asleep on the veranda, woke up and ambled over to him wagging his tail in anticipation of a scratch on the head.

"Not now, hombre."

He opened the trunk of his car and took out two tin cans.

Jimmy stood on the hard-packed snow holding a can in each hand. The soles of his fur-lined boots were worn down and the cold bit at his feet. The wind was picking up and it looked like it might start snowing again. He smelled burning pinon wood, and black crows stared down at him from barren apple trees. Jimmy threw a rock into the branches and the crows flew off. Their wings formed a canopy over his head.

The curtains were drawn at the windows and the manzanitas around the hacienda needed pruning. The place looked uninhabited and forlorn, but Jimmy liked it that way. His family rarely came home since his abuelita died. He had gotten used to living with ghosts.

He put the gasoline cans down, dug into his jacket pocket for his key and opened the heavy wood door. Even in this remote area, you couldn't leave the house unlocked. Thieves worked the back roads through the Raton Pass, stripping entire houses bare like vultures.

Jimmy listened to the message on the answering machine. "Hey, amigo tonight's rehearsal at the church has been changed to seven-thirty. See you then." He smiled at the sound of the deep, resonant voice. It was Mr. Baca, his football coach, who played El Diabolo to Jimmy's Hermitano in the Christmas play.

Jimmy was slight, but quick on his feet. There were rumors that their relationship was more than platonic, and that's why Mr. Baca didn't cut him from the roster.

He got teased by the burly teenagers because he didn't have a girlfriend. "Hey Jimmy, what about Angela? She's got a crush on you, boy. Or maybe you could make it with a pig?" He was sick of the bullying, but he was afraid of getting into a fight. He knew he'd get his face smashed in or worse, like that kid up in Laramie who was found dead, tied to a fence post.

Jimmy had no interest in girls -- just their clothes. He drew elaborate costumes, which he framed and hung up on the walls of his neat room. He loved Princess Leia with her padded shoulders and coiled hair in the style of the Anasazi Indians. He also made paintings of Christ on the cross. Jimmy used a mirror so that Christ's face looked like his own. He had a mole under his left eye. His abuelita told him, "My Jimmy, that's the mark of Christ's finger. He blessed you when you were born." After what he had done, he knew that the mole was really the mark of the devil.

Jimmy stuffed a box of matches in his jacket pocket. Pouring gasoline around the hacienda's perimeter, he heard his abuelita whispering to him, "Come to me, mi corazon. I have been waiting for you. I will wash all your sins away."

Jimmy went back into the house. A small church organ sat in the corner of the large parlor. Jimmy was his mother's star pupil; when she was home she made him practice every day; she didn't want him to join the football team. "You could break one of your fingers, and then where will I be? I need you to show my students what a good teacher I am." She had made him into her poster boy.

Jimmy walked into his abuelita's room for the last time. After she died, no one touched his grandmother's things: her black dresses were still hanging in the mirrored armoire, the small shoes lined up along the wall, the hospital bed, and the wheelchair folded in the corner. Her body was buried beneath a simple headstone in the Montoya family plot, but this was her mausoleum.

Staring into the mirror, he remembered pushing a pillow over his abuelita's face, and then propping her head back on the pillow, closing her eyelids, and pulling a sheet over her. No one suspected anything.

He had resented taking care of her. He wanted to hang out with Mr. Baca instead of carrying her frail body to the bathroom and wiping her private parts. His parents arranged for a part-time caregiver, but the minute he got home from school, Mrs. Trujillo bolted out the door.

Jimmy shut the bedroom door behind him, and sat down at the organ. Pumping the pedals, he played faster and faster. He kept playing until the smoke filled his lungs, blinding him.

A rancher driving along the highway slammed on his brakes at the sight of black smoke. As he approached, the roof was falling into the corpse of the burning hacienda. The rancher saw Jimmy's car, and thought, Jesus Christ, the kid must be inside, but it was too late to try and reach him.

In the back of his truck, a pig, tied up in a burlap bag, squealed. Later, he could have sworn he saw the specter of Senora Montaya passing through the flames.

Basement

Tricia Marcella Cimera

O, basement -

I can feel you below me, all day long.

Waiting. While I cook, sweep and iron,
while I vacuum and I dust

I mustn't rest! -

I can feel you. Waiting.

Finally, I can't put you off,

I have to do the laundry

my husband needs his whites, extra starch! -

so down the creaking stairs I go.

The pipes are muttering,

the furnace flicks its fiery red

tongue and chuckles,

water drips wetly along the wall,

corners grin, fat with dark.

I keep my eyes down like I've been taught

and do my work, though I shudder.

At last, I'm done with the laundry,

all his clothes nice and clean -

oh, no, he's calling for me!

and I can leave you, basement,

run right up these stairs.

But maybe, maybe. . .

I don't want to leave.

My husband is screaming for me,

shrieking for me,

he isn't happy with me -

what have or haven't I done? -

he's needing to teach me,

like he always does.

Now I'm between him above

and you below, basement,

and whatever that is

climbing out of the blackness,

whispering to me to wait a moment,

it has a secret to tell me,

it needs to crawl deep inside my ear -

that's right, hold still -

and when it's done,

I'll know how to be a *different* spouse

in this well-kept house,

I'll know how to sleep all day,

slither all night,

and smile with great big teeth.

And my husband?

He's going to find out

he's got an-other wife, another life -

Just wait.

The Witch

Zachary Riddle

I don't want to see her, I said. My brother pointed
to the closet, head buried in my shoulder. She's there

he said. *The witch*. I asked him
what she looked like. He said nothing. We scooted

against the wall, against each other, cloaked
in blanket and sheet, his hand across

my chest. When I asked him again, he muffled
a cry into his pillow. I told him to be quiet

and cover his ears. He tucked his legs
to his chest, and I took in a breath.

*She has no eyes, he said, but she won't
stop staring. She won't stop staring.*

A Heavy Yawn of Vomited Evolution

Scott Thomas Outlar

Midnight falls upon the empty city
in heavy waves of broken blackness
as a blood red lunar eclipse
swallows the sun's reflection,
casting all light unto the dark side of itself,
digesting the empty space of entropy
with a belch of spell-cast curses.

Double, double, toil and trouble –
the boiling signs of apocalypse
churn in the twisted guts of a new void
where harbingers of chaos weep and gnash their teeth,
waiting for the siren's alarm
to signal the time to strike
with a full frontal assault against all remaining hope on earth.

Revelation fever sweeps in tidal ignition
from out the pulsing plasma,
exploding with sparks of violent retribution
that annihilate the stars back to a state
of primordial dust and ash.

The stuff of dreams has been snuffed out
on this hallowed eve of heavy hallucinations,
and there is no happy hour hallelujah
to serve in the role of savior
when all crosses have been splintered into shards.

Come fire, come brimstone –
Come pillars of salt –
Come ghosts, come ghouls –
Come Loki tricksters and hollow promises of treats –

The yawning cemetery grave
has had enough of its raw feast,
and so vomits forth a bulimic purge
to pacify the tortured desires
of its sorrowful heart and mind.

Up from out the six foot plot
emerges the rot-stink of soiled flesh,
scabbed with pot marks of leprosy,
calloused by the cold remorse that developed
during all the years buried beneath the dirt
down in the pits of hell's fiery abyss.

Come the maggots, come the worms –
Come the lessons born of tombs –
Come the end times, come the doom –
Come the zombies with rotting fangs –

Born again upon the earth,
but not with the grace of heaven's kiss,
only a lecherous lust that begs for blood
from the neckline of a species on the brink of devastation.

The vampires and wolves have learned to adapt
to the carbon smog, nuclear pollution,
hazardous radiation, and chemical cocktail acid rain;
the few humans still alive begin to starve for sustenance
as their lapsing lungs fill with poisoned oxygen
and the collapsing organs let out a final gasp;
the gene swarm soup of evolution
twists in a circle through a remorseful cycle
as karma now smiles only on the undead.

Skull Song

Susie Clevenger

My last days were melted wax lips and roses.
Eyes swam in water pools around my head
until goodbyes drowned at my feet.

Life is moments written on
the hyphen between birth and death.
The ink wasn't even dry when
my ending was chiseled in granite.

I always dreamed of pretty boxes
where secrets slept on satin whispers,
but in this wooden box the only sound
I hear is the skull song of flies.

If I could reach through six feet of clay,
I would dance with the bright colors
November places upon my breast.

Lunatic
Stacy R. Nigliazzo

"Moonsick"

My pace quickens,
 scattering salt to stay the witches—
 scaling
 the dim sky—

 a pearl button on a black sleeve.
I unlace my bones,
 haying the moon—
 shivering the stars into dust.

Tears Of The Werewolf

Thomas Alan Orr

Enough, I said, my sense returning
In the blush of dawn, my jowls dripping
With infant blood as I staggered to my den
And cursed the flies off bones and rotting flesh
Strewn among rosaries and virgins' hair.
Rejoice, I sang, remembering
Their helpless horror, that no matter
How many times they cried out for a savior,
It was in vain, so much in vain,
Because the growling laughter leaping
From my throat was too deep and strong—

Until the Holy Thresher came,
By nightfall rising silently,
With power brimming toward my doom,
As from his eyes the scorching light
Drove me with a whimper back
Slavering into the woods,
And there stood over me until I clawed
My face in pain of light and drowned
In the gurgle of my blood, not knowing,
By Mother Moon, that I had sinned.



Devil DZ
created on iPad
Rene Diedrich



Jerry's Skull
created on iPad
Rene Diedrich

Miss Edith Speaks Out Of Turn

Drusilla's lines from season 2 of Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Cathleen Allyn Conway

My mummy used to sing me to sleep at night.
She had the sweetest voice, like cherries.
It hums. I can hear it. It makes pretty colours.

You sing the sweetest little song.
Won't you sing for me? Don't you love me anymore?
Come on. I will be put out if you don't sing.

Do you remember the song mummy used to sing me?
Pretty. She would sing me to sleep, and the fairies
and sprites would bite at my heels.

What will your mummy sing when they find your body?

Offerings

Kelsey J. Mills

Allison doesn't like the fireplace.

It's too big for their living room, she thinks. For God's sake, she's told Charlie, we live in a one story house; we don't need a six foot fire place. But he gets so cold in the winter, ever since the shelter belt burnt down when the riots spread out from town. . Sometimes the wind beats so bad on the little house that the windows shake and shingles blow off. Sometimes the house rattles so badly Allison can't hear herself think.

So Allison tends the fire place while Charlie tends the fields. Sometimes she catches herself staring into it, thinking about funeral pyres and how long it takes gold to melt.

#

Allison doesn't mind the fire place, but she absolutely hates the logs.

Charlie says that he buys them special, to make the fire last longer. It doesn't, but Charlie still acts like the fire is his baby and Allison won't change that. She can't give him a baby, not since the first nuclear winter, and Charlie just smiles so much when he watches the flames.

It isn't so much their ineffectiveness that bothers Allison. It's the smell. They smell like the barn fire of '02, before the bombs dropped, and Allison asks Charlie if there's cow fat in them. Charlie grins and says not quite, shuffling the embers before going back to his chair.

#

Allison finds bones in the ashes sometimes.

#

Sometimes, after church, Allison thinks about how the ancient Jewish people, the founders of their faith, used to offer God burnt sacrifices. They offered cows, goats, lambs, she remembers hearing. Did God think Christians greedy, for keeping their meat to themselves? Mother Thea seems to think so. She talks about the importance of "sacrifice in this difficult time" every Sunday. Sacrificing food for your neighbour, sacrificing electricity to keep the generators running for emergencies, sacrificing pleasure. It never seems to end.

She remembers that God offered his own son for sacrifice and it makes her feel a little better about what Charlie is doing. At least it isn't their kin.

#

She catches him late on a windy night. She barely heard the fire screen open, but she hears muffled groans and wonders if Charlie's hurt himself in the field again.

She goes out into the hallway, and then she can really smell it. She creeps into the living room, silent as snowfall, and sees Charlie pulling a woman—no, girl, into the kitchen by her leg. She looks like she can't be more than 110 soaking wet, perhaps 115 with all of her ridiculous jewelry, but Charlie can barely move her. Allison wonders when Charlie became so weak.

Charlie lays the girl on the table. Her head rolls from side to side. Allison ducks behind the corner of the wall. Charlie opens the bottom drawer of the cupboards and pulls out the tea lights, lighting them from the lantern on the wall. He places them around the girl, forming a square. The girl suddenly jerks and sends one by her left wrist onto the floor. Charlie swears loudly.

"There's no time." Charlie mutters, "there's no time..."

Charlie opens the drawer under the sink and pulls out a knife. Allison looks away.

She holds her breath until she hears Charlie's footsteps getting closer. She hears dripping. Charlie doesn't notice her as he passes, too busy whispering Mother Thea's chant; the fire came and took the day, faith in God keeps fire at bay, burn the sin upon the pyre, smoke goes up to the heavens higher. He carries the girl's shoulder and arm, and it's barely as long as Charlie's own arm.

Charlie places the limb in the fire, ever burning. Allison watches the flames dance off of the woman's silver nail polish and giant jewelry. Charlie looks at her then, and smiles.

"Don't worry, Allison. God smiles upon us, and nothing will go to waste."

We all have to make sacrifices, she thinks, and stands beside her husband. She tends the fire, moving the wood so that the girl's skin coats with charcoal, adding more logs until the fat sizzles and pops.

The Danger Of Blinking

Ann Stewart McBee

Just the tiniest nip with a laser I was told, and perfectly painless. I expected to open my eyes after the surgery and greet a clear, sharp-edged world. Instead it was a runny, shapeless blur. I hadn't caught the whiff of burning cornea, just as I hadn't felt the pain. I hadn't heard two to *three days recovery*. When Henry offered to let me stay, I didn't hear the echoing tap at the back of his voice. The sound of rusty water and dark woods.

Of Henry there are flashes, tiny, like bits of lint. Dark hair and dark lashes. Hazel eyes, Or maybe green. He blinked a lot. One gray tooth. There was a scar the shape of a lightning bolt on his penis. He loved fishing. He loved babies. He loved beer. The memory of our first night together glows like sunlight on a polished copper pot. Before Henry, my only friend was the little girl from the farmhouse next door, in love with her goats and tuna fish sandwiches. I drank myself to sleep to the sound of bleating. The Midwest is for women like us: dead eyes and brindled pasts. After Henry, the goats sounded like children.

Henry's home was near an old, tangled woods. Bare walls and a lonely smell. He kept the basement door locked. During my post-surgery stay, he spoke in a near-whisper. His voice older sounding, quivering. His words sometimes hanging mid-sentence like thread on a ripped hem. Sometimes all I could hear was the quick inward rush of his breathing, insistent and chesty, his uvula making a faint clucking sound before the breath blew back out of him.

Fear has a sound and a smell. I knew Henry as completely scentless as a brick. But those two days, his smell was like my mother's sweat when my father came home early – a vinegary, herbaceous stink. It followed him, so I always knew where he was. Could hear his fingers shushing through blind slats and then snapping them back together. The thudding balls of his feet, mashing the carpet, echoing down the hall and back again. The wind chimes outside babbled and protested. The cat's purr rumbled and bounced against the walls. At last he sat next to me, smelling like a new-opened bottle of cheap wine. I laid my hand on his arm. It was cold.

He told me a story about a man: giant, slightly bent, with hair like an old dog's, wiry and wild, eyes the color of rusty water set deep down in wells in his face. In a dream, this man told him to keep an eye on the woods. Henry's hands were shaking. I put my palm up to his neck and felt the hammer-thrumming of blood into his jugular. He leaned close and kissed me, his mouth full of acid.

Did I hear a scream? Or did I dream it? I opened my eyes to a whirlpool of gray above me, which simmered quickly into the shape of a ceiling fan, casting elongated shadows in the silent rays of early dawn. Groggily I drifted into the living room. The cat, a blot of brown in the corner of the couch, crouched stiff and ready, her ears pointing sharply backward. The hair along her spine stood up like reeds and the mouths of her pupils gaped.

Then I heard the sound repeating from the kitchen like a foot making contact with a ball, followed closely by the sound a banana makes on first peel. *Bam-rip. Bam-rip. Bam-rip.* Not knowing whether I was seeing or only hearing the noise, I walked in miniscule steps toward the sound. Was that a hunched, bear-like shadow flicking like an errant tongue from the kitchen doorway? Or was it the sun yanking itself angrily from the horizon on the backs of my eyelids?

Ugly blots of near-daylight spilled into the hall. A smear of red in the shape of two fingers and the side of a palm, struck the corner of my eye. Tiny thin lines cut through with lightning strikes of creases. The part of Henry's hand that collared the back of my neck when I kissed him – now a desperately dark trace against the paint. I smelled a pungent animal smell, like the goats in a panic before a storm. The orange light stung my new eyes. Suddenly the *bam-rip* sound morphed into a steamy breaking, like kindling. Then a plastic-like, messy sound against linoleum. The mind prepares the eyes for the worst.

Then the silhouette bulging forth from the kitchen doorway filled itself with a man's body. He turned and looked at me, a wall of meat. His eyes were a sickly brown surrounded by clouds of red, so deep in his face, and unnaturally small. Those were not moles on his forehead and nose after all, but spots. Splashes. He focused upon me, his face a stone, but there was also a waft of fear.

To avoid the appearance of an unwanted witness, I pretended blindness. I put my hands aimlessly in front of me and stared blankly behind the man. He blinked and held motionless, stripes of sunlight and shadow dividing his chest. His shirt was abloom with flowers of blood. I blinked dumbly, imagining nothingness. The specter before me throbbed in my pin-sharp vision.

In a movement as silent as snow, he slipped across the hall and out the front door. The sweet-rotten smell of fallen crab-apples snuck in after him. The chirping of cardinals and robins and chickadees resumed, cheery and hopeful. My back sizzled with sunlight from the east window. Before I reached the opening to the kitchen, I put Henry back together in my mind. The sticky roughness of hands. The bitter taste of his tongue and his chest. The apricot-soft tops of his feet. All worth missing.

Nightmare By Nature

Shannon J. Curtin

For months he sleeps so well,
so long into the mornings,
that I remind myself not to worry
when this morning
my alarm again fails
to spur his cry.

I swallow the apple
of fear in my throat,
that daily pill prescribed
by biology since he first opened his eyes
outside my body.
I remind myself that soon enough
he will stir.

I dress. Fix my hair. Take
the extra five minutes to line my eyes,
and color my lips to life.

I pack my bags, tend to the dog, put
water on for tea, do every other morning task, until
I can no longer put off,
the heaviness of my breast,
or the hummingbird of anxiety
buzzing in my chest.

I open the nursery door and find
him, gray and cold.
My silent mouth fills
with the kettle's scream,
my empty head watches from outside
my body, my hands on his chilled
pillowy cheek,
my finger fishes the carcass
of a cockroach
from his wilted tulip
mouth.

Vampire

Armani Scott

Smelling.
Sweet,
like a honey dew melon...
but also the metallic scent of a coin.
It's enticing me.
The smell is everywhere.
Must find it.
Must have it.
Where is it?
Hearing.
There it is.
Light footsteps,
trampling over freshly fallen leaves.
So close yet it is so far.
Whimpering.
Is it hurt?
Seeing.
It is a girl.
Now I'm running.
Focused on the girl.
The next thing I know...
She's screaming.
My teeth embed themselves,
blood gushes all over my face,
it travels down my throat.
My god.
It tastes so much better than I imagined.
She claws at me.
Ignored.
Sucking the sweet,
warm liquid down my throat.
Draining the life out of her...
The screaming turns to whispers...
"Help me..."
She croaks in her last living breath.
"It's a vampire..."

Playground

Janell Zimmerer

In the wilted hilltops
just east of the glaring eyes of the fast paced city,
with the ocean approaching its boundaries of broken rubble,
rests a rotted, hollow playground
lain down fifty years before,
held ajar, standing as if children's feet still
dart between the corroded metal.
Its erected silver surface looks upon the years it has stood
as decrepit metal jabbing away the encroaching sky.

The swing, turned brown and
split from its binding chain,
drags against the crumpled concrete, as a broken smile.
The metal that leans against the slide
would strip a child skin off their bones.
A trees bruised skeleton collides with the rusted metal
one crimson red, fat apple dangles from its broken branches.
A worm squeezes its body through the dark brown holes surrounding the core.

The metal used to be silver with
a vast sea of the black asphalt that sat under it.
Now the metal calls toward the sea,
the laughter still bounces off the rotted surfaces,
and the swings sway in their dance
waiting for small bodies to occupy their diminished state.



Untitled
Photograph
Janell Zimmerer

Bloody Mary

Jennifer Lynn Krohn

You turned the lights off;
a single flame wavered.
Each girl stared
into her own eyes.
Your face was different

in candlelight, age flickered
across your features.
You held your breath
and whispered her name
three times—

pounding on the door,
your brother laughed
at the screams,
your early attempts at cursing.
It was just another story.

A hand doesn't reach for you,
doesn't pass through glass
like it's water. There are no ripples
spreading spiral cracks.
Shards don't rain down on the sink.

~

Didn't you commit suicide?
a stranger asks; he heard
that a girl with your name
was carried out of the school,
arms wrapped in white gauze.

No, it was the one with the glasses,
your friend answers.
She took a bottle of pills.
Had to strap her down,
keep her from scratching
the paramedics' eyes out—
That bitch was crazy!

You don't say that you saw her
on the stretcher wrapped
in blankets like a child ready
for a nap. Slivers of a mirror
strewn on the bathroom floor.

~

Brushing on mascara,
you glimpse your eyes:
cold and dead. Who peeks
through your pupils,
as you finish putting your face on?

She came when you called
and swept through the wires
of your body, nested in your brain.
Each time you see her

you restrain your fist
from attacking the glass
and shattering
that goddamn face.

[feast]
Jenuine Poetess

my drum beats fast
into the night
with each new verse
I feel such fright

I place my hand
across my heart
what I behold
gives me a start

for there inside
where heart should tock
instead I find
a ticking clock

my eyes roll back
to look inside
such ghastly sights
therein reside

my teeth did i
just swallow in
slithering are they
beneath my skin

upon my bones
they gnash and gnaw
my tongue it slices
a rusted saw

into my throat
does drip my brain
as out my ears
last thoughts do drain

my guts inflate
into balloons
sailing through dark
to haunt the moon

while there beneath
my curling feet
do critters dine
upon this meat

Halloween

Charles Darnell

The orange moon
Settles in the leather pouch
Of a cold Autumn night.

The owl is afraid to hoot.
Foreboding fills the dark
As ghosts slip
In and out
Of the bone yard,
In and out.

And something brutish,
Heavy with horror,
Trudges the hill
To slip into your
Troubled dreams
To give you its
Tricks,
No treats.

Night Drive

Jeremy Mele

Tom kissed his girlfriend Sarah good night and told her she would see him in a couple of days. He didn't want to leave, he said, but it was already 2 am and he had work in the morning. Getting into his car, he went to turn on the GPS on his phone but found it was dead. He grumbled a little bit: he mostly knew the way back to his home from Amherst at this point, but all those roads in the forest looked the same at night and he would have preferred the safety net. Still, with nothing to be done about the phone, he started off on his drive back.

As he entered the woods, his radio started to emit static. "Typical", he thought, "I can never pick up any radio stations when I get to around this area." Without music, the car became eerily silent. No other cars accompanied him on the road, and his rearview mirror reflected a long black nothing as he made his way past tree after tree. Tom was not a superstitious guy-he laughed at urban myths and legends about "things" in the woods-but he still found himself starting to drive a little faster in an effort to make this part of the trip go by more quickly. He was about halfway to the next town when, from the corner of his eye, Tom spied something that made his heart sink and caused panic to set in: a police car had appeared and wanted him to pull over.

"Shit," Tom cursed to himself, "Oh shit. Why? Just why? I was only going, like, 5 miles over the speed limit! Where'd this guy come from, anyway? Must've been hiding in a speed trap. Damnit, I'm going to get a ticket, and my insurance is going to go up, and I'm NEVER going to hear the end of this from mom."

Sighing, Tom pulled the car over, rolled his window down, and turned the engine off. Muscle memory prompted him to take the keys out of the ignition and put them in his pocket, but as he went to do so he accidentally dropped them in the crack between the driver's seat and the arm rest. "Ugh," he thought. He started to go retrieve the keys but remembered a lesson he had learned from driver's ed: don't move around a lot when you get pulled over or else the cop might think you're reaching for a gun. Not wanting to get mowed down by some night owl officer, Tom stayed put.

As he waited for the cop to come up to his car, Tom began to adjust his rearview mirror. When he did, he thought he saw something approaching the police car. He turned around to get a better look, but as he did so he heard a metallic smash and glass being broken. Suddenly, the police lights went out, and Tom was bathed in total darkness. He heard a muffled scream.

"What the Hell is going on?" he thought to himself, searching for some explanation and becoming very concerned. Just then, he heard an engine turn on as the squad car came back to life. The red light atop the vehicle switched on. Spinning and spinning, it intermittently shone on Tom who started to sweat. Why was this happening? Was the cop pulling some kind of sick prank? What was Tom supposed to do?

Before he could think of more questions, the police megaphone started to emit a terrifying sound. It was a tinny, distorted mixture of some bestial hunter's growl and the moans of a dying creature. Then, the sound became a voice. A voice filled with anger and sorrow and was at once animalistic yet machine like. A voice that said, "THIS PLACE IS MINE!"

Tom did not wait a second longer; he jammed his fingers into the hole where his keys fell- ripping some skin off in the process. Having grabbed them, he put the keys in the ignition, turned them, and the car thankfully started. He smashed down on the gas pedal and drove away as fast as he could. He kept driving and driving until the red light disappeared from his rearview mirror all together. And he didn't slow down until he had reached his house 27 miles away. He screamed the entire way.

When he got home, he ran as fast as he could from his car into his room.

That night and every night since, Tom slept, when he could sleep, with all of his lights on. He never drove through those or any woods again, nor did he go out at night. He lived in fear of the police, partially, because of the traumatic experience but also because he worried there was some evidence of his presence at the site of destroyed cruiser; what if footage was found from the wreck that would leave him complicit in the destruction? As such, he panicked whenever he heard a siren off in the distance; he thought they, or worse it, might be coming for him. These new, inexplicable, habits eventually caused a rift between Tom and Sarah.

She tried to get him to open up about what had happened and why he was acting this way, but he would never say. She would never believe him, even if he did. Some nights he didn't believe it, but then he would fall asleep, and in his dreams he would see that red flashing light and he would hear that monstrous, inhuman voice from the megaphone. In his dream he would try to scream, but nothing would come out. His car would be smashed with him in it, and the creature would approach. Before he could see what it looked like, however, he would wake up with a cold sweat. He would wake up and remember the muffled scream of the police officer and the crunch of metal. He would remember the fear. Worst of all, he would remember that, whatever that creature was, it was still out there.

And it had seen him.

Chatty Skeletons

Diana Elizondo

We sit on our head stones,
Eating sweet bread and sugar skulls
As they slip through our bones.
Our bare teeth click and clack
When we talk about our bouquets
Given to us by our loved ones
Who we left behind years ago
Or are children we'd never met.
We no longer have eyes
But we can still look back
And tell stories about our pasts.
We live like we did before.
We remember, feast and chat
Except we're missing our flesh.

The Sea Hag

Michelle Watters

she comes to you in your sleep
sun- leathered skin, seaweed hair
Her invite a scratchy bark of
“don’t just stand there!”

beyond the broken beach glass window
you can see the waves fighting the shore
garlands of dead crabs and fish netting
decorate the walls

she chews and spits tobacco
into a broken teacup worn on her thumb
she has her back to you
bent over the cup murmuring spitty curses

“come, child a little closer”
“let me tell you your fortune”
her hands open to show you
crumpled brown leaves

the teacup now unbroken
filled with hot water
you never say no
or yes just stand

there in fright
balancing on the crooked driftwood floor
each night that you dream of her
waking sweaty and frightened

I wonder why
she doesn’t visit me
I would braid her seaweed hair
and let her read my tea leaf fortune

but every night she points
her bony finger at you

Southern Cryptozoology 11: Wampus Cat

Allie Marini (Batts)

Location: Tennessee

Status: Unconfirmed

Description: Legendary felid

Men have always gathered in tribes,
wolf-brothers, all of them,
telling stories around their campfire,
no women allowed.

I changed that—eavesdropping
in the shadows of the leather tent-flaps,
discovered by the tribal medicine man.

My transformation
was meant to be a punishment—foolish man!—what a boon,
what a gift, this skin-changing:

whole women are nothing;
half-woman/half cat I am invincible,
frothing hungry
 for blood & knowledge,
 you know what I want.
I have the will & means to take it now.

Leaping branch to branch
in the upturned spikes of the trees,
haunting
the forests of your nightmares—I am a woman on a mission,
you can hear me; I know you can.

I am of the earth.
I am death.
I am nemesis:
 just try not to hear me.
I dare you.

In three moon's time,
 you will be buried,
 & nothing—not the long-dead medicine man
 nor the white preacher who replaced him,
 can save you
 from me.

Inside The Paranthesis

Ana Prundaru

Italicize the shape out of my misshapen spine, I say. The howl of the bullet train, as it hatches out the tunnel, overrides my words and your liquid blue eyes open wide to a liquid blue sky. In the doctor's office, we forget why we're there. The flash on your I-Phone chronicles this little escape from a big escape. We're told that your body hijacked years into a parenthesis, knotting unrepeatable patterns with the weight of curses to come. At the core of the doctor's coat are etchings of fjords that blend in with the whiter-than-white sky. Yellow and lavender pills change owners on our way out.

I say let's go shopping for a new face with a hint of irony, because your eyes are like crack on merry-go-round and I'm preposterously faceless. This time the tap of your shoes overrides my words. You survive on disbanding; running away, cementing nail breaths on pedestrians and singing a song of a song of a song. I survive on the pills you refuse to take. No gas masks needed, you would say about the chemicals that prolonged the tomorrows and I'd correct you and say, gas masks are supposed to protect you. But your mind is made up. You'd rather face the inevitable godless swamp with an unpolluted mind. Besides, you say, everything made sense when you ran, because everything was crooked into place and the traffic signs emitted a grinding awareness of life, not unlike gravel between teeth. That is how you cracked the night awake on our first date – reciting the metallic song of the universe.

These days you barely recall what you saw in me. The gasmask helps me forget that for a while. When your brain is an eraser of all things you belonged to, it is natural to forget why we ever sewed hearts with our initials on parachutes, or how we've chained ourselves to a dazzling traffic of devices. On cloudless nights, you look forward to a hedged nightmare and I take a yellow and lavender pill, slide under the covers next to you and watch my face drift up the ceiling, at crossroads with amnesia.

In the mornings, I gulp down tap water to stop the dryness from assassinating my throat. Then I spend hours admiring the seagulls filling the sink. When the parenthesis closes you can't say. I want to be inside. That is why I started taking your pills in the first place. I'm inside some days, but not really, vegetating in-and-out the lines of a curved blade. Between me and my gasmask and you and your running: a snaking river that may or may not contain the hope serum. In the end, these are your streets that migraines paint red, your night-play filling up to the cap of insomnia's belly, your veins that rain unpolished rhythms.

At night, you crawl into bed and I ask you how your evening was. The fog is dying, you say, pointing to a picture of fjords against a whiter-than-white sky on your I-Phone screen, adding it wasn't a good sign. Now and then, when we outstretch ourselves, we dissipate into one silent aftertaste. It is then we remember how in our heydays, your heart belonged to the world of music and I burned bridges between the worlds of canvasses. We remember how, despite the challenges, we made it work. Years later, here we are, some kind of love-struggle-love. No punctuation in-sight, none needed.



Headless Horseman
Lisa LaMonica

The Virus

Jocelyn Mosman

When the demons
slither from your throat,
I build piles of platitudes
and compliments rise
like skeleton bones
from the earth.
You are walking, dead,
feeding off the love I have
to offer.

It's a one way
ticket to second-hand pain,
biting word after biting word
until there is no heart left,
just a black hole
sucking me in.

I should run,
I should fight,
I should move on,
but this jagged mouth
has no cure to offer,
no confession to make.
Every sentence is a prayer
to accept what I cannot change.
Every sentence is hell
and all the devils are here.

When your body becomes only body,
only teeth and flesh,
you see only easy target,
only raw meat.
When I look at you now,
I see only hurt and suffering,
only the demons slithering
from your throat.

All I can think is
I am not afraid... I am not afraid.

In The Castle of H.H. Holmes

Juliana Gray

What's happened to you? How did you get lost?
You'd swear your rented room was down this hall,
but now the hallway seems to have no end.
The way seemed clear when kindly Mr. Holmes
escorted you this afternoon, but the door
that should have opened on a water closet
reveals a wall of solid brick. Your lamp
casts taunting shadows on stairs that lead to nothing.

Tourist! You came to see America,
four centuries of progress displayed
in a city destroyed by fire and bravely rebuilt,
entirely new. Chicago! The White City!
You trusting fool, you nineteenth-century chump.
You don't know Dahmer, Gacy or Gein, you don't
know Birkenau, you haven't even read
the stories of Angela Carter. You're unprepared.
You rode the Ferris wheel and almost wept
at the nation's wonders, the coming century.
Watching as you disembarked, a man
in a bowler hat politely shook your hand,
described his newly-built hotel, his "Castle,"
located quite nearby, very clean
and modern, designed by the man himself.

So here you are-- and there's your room at last!
The door opens on your bags, your clothes
with complicated Victorian clasps and stays,
the sweet familiar things you love because
you don't know any better. You hear a key
inserted in the lock, the tumblers' fall.
The spigot's hidden, but you smell the gas.
Soon you'll wake in the Castle basement, strapped
to the stretching rack. If you crane your neck, you'll see
the skeletons, some of them not yet clean,
that will be sold to doctors and medical schools
that don't ask questions. Your guide, Mr. Holmes,
will greet you, doffing his hat, softly explaining
exactly what he's about to do to you.
You'll never drive a car, use a zipper,
listen to Billie Holiday moan
through a radio. A secret door
is sliding open in the wall. You'll see
the brave new future, the thing you came here for.

American Grief

Justine Johnston Hemmestad

Fog shrouds cemetery like flesh conceals body,
Loose and forlorn becomes troublesome and unsettled;
Darkness garners sand to its narrowed end -
The sorrow of stricken lives cry through history,
An invisible thread on a loom fostered by haunted hands.
Plaques host names of pilgrims, chiseled deep into time,
On land neighbored by sand and sea -
Yet a strange formation behind storied hill bulges,
As shadowed moon slips behind clouds.
A threat alone exists, contemplating vicious artistry -
Memory lurks, like blood on a knife, a stain on teeth -
Intertwined through fate like a skeleton snagged—
it comes.
Dirt falls away, wolves howl, the mound drifts,
A hand within creeps like spiders in search of prey -
Crawling, striving from the depths of its hidden, dank lair.
A figure slowly rises, for its own death transgresses,
A masterpiece of earth, it leaves behind -
Afterlife forsaken, hunger prolonged, the creature transfixes on a passerby -
Its stilled heart aching in morbid need, its motion secret and darting.
Lightning dashes across night; unleashing flow of tragic scarlet stream;
Breezes of darkness swirls as flesh molds to razor sharp teeth.
Shifting, called once again from the deep, the creature yearning to sleep,
The filled ancestor at last creeps into place, the ground it again finds refuge,
As waves of a blackened ocean crash against shoreline to accuse -
As the angered
creature's only witness.

Fox Sisters

Jennifer Martelli

I conjured her on the ouija board.
The planchette flew from under my fingertips
and landed on the frowning crescent moon.

She wanted to write an automatic note.
She wanted to say, *yes*, in French. *Oui*.
Ja, yes, in German.

Yes, I am sorry I left you all.
Yes, you are wise to fear me.
And so Good Bye.

She'd flip the table
before showing her face.

You Live Dogs (A Calavera)

Paul Many

How we hate it when you write of
the tilt of our heads or fetching birthmarks,
the scarf we bought on Bedford Ave.,
the true thing we said in anger, the inattention
or profligate affection you forgive or don't.

You, with your precious lives,
can afford to be so generous,
now that we're no good for much else,
you live dogs, wagging your rears with your tails,
sticking your noses in strangers' creases.

And sometimes it does give us tingles about
things and places and people who, frankly,
we'd rather forget, and the tingles, too--
loosing this knot of flesh was such a
release--and no, we wouldn't trade all this.

Morning News

J Thomas Meador

"I dreamed I tried to kill you last night."

Charles didn't look up from the newspaper. The price of gold had dropped. He raised an eyebrow and nodded to let Marion know he'd heard her.

She smiled a little, thinking about the silliness of the dream, and stirred a pan of eggs.

The kitchen smelled like breakfast, and the television on the counter showed well-caffeinated morning show hosts debating cheap vacations in the Caribbean.

"The dream started off innocent," Marion continued. "Guess where we were?"

Charles grunted a question mark.

"We were in the library back in college," she giggled. "We were holding hands and walking through the aisles. Then we turned the corner into the encyclopedia area – "

"Reference section."

"Right. The reference section. So we're there, and it's totally empty, and you give me a look. That I'm-Prince-Charming-and-you're-my-princess look you used to give me all the time. Are you listening?"

Charles glanced up, just long enough to smile and make those cute creases beside his eyes. He said, "Yeah. I'm listening," then went back to the paper.

Marion talked as she folded eggs. Another textbook perfect scramble. "So we start kissing, and you sit me down on one of those leather couches they had. Then you take off your tie and unbuttoned your shirt. And here's the funny part – " the toaster snapped; two evenly crisped pieces of bread popped up " – you looked like you did in college. When you were swimming all the time. Remember?"

"That was a long time ago." Charles turned the page. Weather and Letters to the Editor.

Marion nodded side-to-side, musing on his former torso. "So, anyway, you took off your shirt. I was feeling all sweaty and hot, and you kept going. Next thing I knew, you're standing there in your shoes and undies. And then you gave me a weird look I've never seen before. You turned to an aisle nearby, and guess who came out?" She sprinkled grated cheese into the pan and continued stirring.

"Who?"

"That new girl at your office!" The words felt foreign, but she managed a quick laugh. Charles finally looked up. It was mid-June and the weather wasn't important. "The new girl? Kathleen?"

"I know! Can you believe it?" Her face stretched up and down. Surprise, shock and humor.

"That girl comes around the corner and you start kissing her right in front of me. But it's more... what's the word? Sensual? You kissed her more sensually than you kissed me."

"Sensuously." He watched her scoop the eggs onto his breakfast plate.

Marion rolled her eyes in embarrassment. "That's it. Thank you, sweetheart. So, you were kissing her and I couldn't help myself, I felt so angry. I wanted to scream. That anger pushed against every nice bone in my body. But get this: everything was normal – I was smiling, even. Only way I can describe it is like a wild animal in a cage, trapped and ready to bust out."

Marion buttered his toast. The knife was a wedding gift from Charles' mother.

"So what happened?"

"I stood up and walked straight over to the encyclopedias. To the letter G."

"Letter G?"

"Uh-huh. I was looking for a gun."

Charles chuckled, if only to sound entertained. "You were looking for a gun inside a book?"

"It was a dream, silly!" His wife carefully arranged the plate. Toast to the left of the eggs. Sliced tomato to the right. "It made sense at the time. Dreams are funny places. There could be a fish or a cigarette or a business card anywhere you look."

"And you found your gun?"

"No," Marion said, pursing her lips. She carried the plate across the kitchen with a domesticated swish to her step. "No. It wasn't in the G-book."

"Thank God." Charles rattled the newspaper closed and set it aside.

"Oh, I kept looking. Couldn't help myself. You and that girl kept kissing, and your hands were all over her. Touching her breasts. That anger kept pushing harder and harder inside me. So, guess what I did?" She set the plate in front of him and sat in her chair on the other side of the perpetually spotless table.

"What did you do?"

"I pulled all those books off the shelf. I thought I had twenty-six chances to find a gun. It had to be there, somewhere. I found baseball bats, a rope, knives – one of those wire things they use in movies to strangle people."

"They're called garrotes," Charles said, stabbing his breakfast.

Marion blushed. "Anyway. I kept looking for it while you seduced that woman."

"So? Where did you find it?"

She let out a sigh. "I didn't. Like I said, I dreamed that I tried to kill you. I woke up right after I opened the P-book." She sipped her coffee with a raised pinky.

Charles suddenly noticed she didn't have a plate in front of her. "Aren't you going to eat?"

"Heavens, no. I couldn't sleep after that. I've been up since three a.m. Just laid in bed, thinking."

"Thinking about what?" He slid the fork into his mouth.

Marion set her mug on the table without making a sound. "Oh, you know. Just things. Thought about you. How you liked your eggs."

Charles stopped chewing. He stared at his wife.

On television, the morning show hosts finally agreed; the Virgin Islands was the best bang for the buck this year.



THE KING IN YELLOW

Art by Jayson Kretzer - Colors by Andrew Pate

Bride

Bethany Fitzpatrick

The last I remember—
her hand reaching
like a raven's wing flapping,
the earth shaking.
I sank down, still grasping the stem
while petals fell all around.

I awoke in his bed,
refusing all fruits he offered,
his heart,
preferring hunger and silence.
In hell there is no color
and no rain.
He split the pomegranate.
I ate seven bitter seeds.

from Mary Shelley Frankenstein Epistolary Project Molly Sutton Kiefer and Valerie Wetlaufer

Dear Light One,

I'm acquainted with the night,
sleep beneath the stars, because,
like my girlhood, I keep myself hidden.
I was left alone in ice, diagrams of my anatomy,
A pile of spare parts that looked pieces of me
missing.
There remains a grey pallor to my flesh. It looks
lovely in starlight. How I long to dance, learn
coordination of my limbs, cover myself with gowns
of light. In the dark, only your fingers can see me.

—Darkness

My Ghost:

I made you with pen and ink, you made yourself
in the motes of dust, streaking words
across the sideboard: want and lust and you.
I made you for him, that trunk
of unnameability. My first babe was lost
to me. She lived eleven days, clasped to me,
warming breast, her mewling and pucker with
every breath--then quiet. Can you imagine
the tiniest box to put her in? The shroud,
unfinished pattern? All this, so soon,
buried without a name. I won't let that happen
to you--I will give you what you want. I will name
you for the generative place. I will name you
for peace, for every part that wanted her
to be named: Geneva.

—MWS

The Author of My Being:

Sometimes I wish for you
to Unmake me. I haven't
dropped from Heaven,
& if I was meant for Him
Who Has Fled, must I now
seek him out? What shall I do
with my days now I've read
every book and named every star?
—G.

Dear Geneva, Place of Peace:

I cannot know what stirs you; I haven't imagined
that far. I am in a different country, a different
time. Tell me: did I write your lips? Did I write
the heat of your body? I look to the window,
see the weight of stars in the sluices of snow, think:
are you warm enough, where you are? Ask:
what do your windows tell you?

Alpine Authoress,

Today I went around the house closing the storm windows,
sliding panes of glass downward over screens, trapping spiders inside.
This is supposed to keep me warm against winter.
I've erected a bird feeder, and one wren hit the clean window, stunned.
Scooped her up in my hand, felt her flutter in my palm.
Is this what a heart feels like inside my chest?
I press my forehead against the cool window, four paned.
It smells of vetiver, cinnamon, smoke.

Dolls

Michael Gerleman

None of my dolls have eyes to see,
and that's the reason I'm still free.
I've sewed their lips with threads of gold,
and so my secrets remain untold.

Lonely Spring Bones

Nathan Hassall

In a cold spring churchyard of senseless
silhouettes, a stream of
shadows pour from forgotten mouths.
rocks crack from the chattering numbness of jaws.
these jaws pass secrets through the leaves of skeleton trees,
whose bone roots stretch and cradle voices locked in soils of time
across gardens where bloom and blossom are blocked
by the raw breath of morning

at the bottom, a river, frosty and lethargic,
trickles its cold essence into the jaws of death,
its vapours swirl and expand around his mouth
where he locks his teeth
and spits the water back on the bleak earth.
as memory is left soaked by hollow skies
wind shakes the churchyard,
wakes the land,

and a weak sun breaks to
lily's dusting off frost
in this frigid season of cemetery solitude.

Eulogy

Phyllis Moore

Cait always thought of him as death in a pair of khaki pants. He shuffled around the house, usually moving from the kitchen table to the refrigerator and back with a beer in his hand. His movements limited by his fear of getting too far from the juice of his life. Her favorite times were when he was gone, probably at Duke's, drinking. She cringed when the phone would ring and Duke or one of his able bartenders would notify her that he was passed out on the sidewalk. "You need to come get him Cait," they would say. "People are staring." She had two children to tend, one of them his. Did Duke know what an insult it was to expect her to rescue her nightmare?

Gradually, over the years, Cait learned to stand up to him, refusing his advances, insulting his intentions. She stood toe to toe with him, smelling his rancid lungs, pushing putrid breath out with the words he couldn't quite put into sentences. "Look what the . . .cat drug in," he would say. "Cait the cat herself, thinking she can decide the rules around here. It, it's my house madam Cait and you can't make the rules. I'm not dead yet. This house is not yours. Maybe it won't be yours. Maybe I have a girlfriend who would like to have it when I'm gone. You better mind your biscuits, girly, or you'll be out in the cold."

"Just leave then and we'll see what happens, die already," Cait said. "I would love to sit down with your girlfriend and trade stories about you. I am sure she would like to hear your history, your sorry attempts, your drunken apologies. We could have a good talk, the two of us, celebrating your demise." Cait stared at the stained ceiling, her head tilted back, daring him to touch her. All she had to do was call the sheriff, make a complaint and he was gone. It would be so much easier if the lung cancer would just take him. There would be no explanations.

"You assume I am near the end, Cait," he said. "I am only forty-five. I could have many years ahead of me."

"Yes, most forty-five year olds would have many years ahead of them," Cait agreed. "You, however, have the smell of death. It hangs on your wasted body and reeks from your coated tongue. I have no doubt you will be gone before I return from the hospital with this child." Cait placed her hand on her heavy belly, staring at him with her navy blue eyes. "I would like to have one child who never has to cringe at the sound of your voice."

"My voice, my voice is not your problem Cait," He laughed. "The problem is we keep having these children around here. Maybe you haven't figure out where they are coming from."

"How dare you. How dare you, you filthy rapist. I hope you die soon."

"I'll be back, Cait," he grinned. "This is my house and I'll be back."

It happened, just as Cait suspected. She told them about the cemetery on the back of the ranch. "Throw some dirt on him, get the cheapest stone you can find and maybe I'll look at it when I leave the hospital. I'm not interested in being involved."

"He's your family, Cait," Duke said. "Don't you think we should wait until you can be here? Doesn't he deserve better than a pauper's burial?" Duke liked him, of course he did. He was an excellent customer, on the same stool every day until he slumped over, liquid with guilt and wasted time. Duke was probably with him more than anyone else, brothers in proximity, soul mates of the soulless.

"He deserves whatever you are willing to give him, Duke," Cait said. "I know you think I'm being uncaring, but the truth is I have no feeling for him. He betrayed me long ago. I won't have to pick him up off the sidewalk, not one more time. I have another new life to tend, a life he will not be able to shape or touch. He has no power over me, no more."

Cait was numb. She wondered how she would feel when it finally happened. When she returned home, maybe it would be different, maybe she would cry and think she might have loved him. Was it hormones keeping her from grieving? There was nothing in her heart.

It was in Cait's brain, the vision; he stood there, in the kitchen, his khaki pants sagging from his frail waist, his eyes rheumy from the drink. She heard his rasping cough, an intrusion from the other side of the closed door. Cait tried to deny his existence, block him from her memory, but he was there, still, haunting. She could catch the scrape of the chair across the floor, the footfalls, pacing, tottering to nowhere, stuck in his sins. She could not conjure a prayer for his passing or wish him ease in the afterlife. She saw him clutching death, it oozed through his bony fingers, laughing at him with rotted teeth. *Why will this specter not sprout wings and fly with him away from this house? Why does this blackened soul get to sit in the kitchen where I must feed my children? Where is this so-called girlfriend I could be commiserating with? I would like to have a conversation with her. I would tell her about the sins of my father, his haunted past and ask her to please take him home.*

End

Ghosts: Paper or Plastic

David Anthony Sam

Hold it! There are
more ghosts in
shadows
than we think. See.
There at the corner
of sight and darkness
twitching for
remembrance.

All minds meld
after dissolution.
But something of
their shadows lasts,
remains where light
breaks from particle
to wave around
hard corners
of interference.

So in city streets
spirits hover
in sighs and losses
compounded.
The wind blows
balloons of forlorn
plastic bags
to ghost comic
our expectation.

We diminish
after sunset and
become blind
to old starlight.
It has traveled
so far to dim
shadows while
morning is distant.

But what is that?
Just out of corners
that eyes make?
Twitching for
remembrance?

The Dying Cú Chullainn

Nathan Tompkins

The bronze is pounded,
moulded, cast
into a dying figure lashed
to a lone standing stone,
erect on his gore stained feet
to resist Mebh's bitter throng.

His shield has fallen to the earth,
the edge digs a shallow trench
in the rock boned mud.

His sword is still grasped
as his final breaths gasp
through weakened lungs,
as his battle crazed strength
ebbs with the blood tide.

He is bent over the rope
tied about his waist.

His shoulder is pierced
by the hungry talons
of the Morrígan's crow.

Her caws echo across
the chariot churned field
to gleefully mock his hanged corpse.

as she thrusts
her wings to the sky,
waits for him to die.

Relentless

Bryan Lally

He warned them, begged them, but they laughed at his “wild imagination.” He didn’t think they were capable of cruelty, especially toward him. Now alone in the night, the shock of abandonment left him numb. Even this was preferable to what he knew would be next.

Silence was the sound it made when it came. As long as there was even the softest noise, he would be safe. He heard temporary salvation in the distance - crickets chirping over one another, their undulant song carrying the full weight of his dread.

The exertions of anxiety slowly exhausted his mind. Thoughts loosened, wandering to familiar but forgotten scenes with half-known faces preaching strange wisdom. He was bolted back into consciousness by the dying of the last chirp.

With eyes squeezed shut he felt it approach from below; a shapeless mass swelling, swaying, rising until it towered over him. The glob’s surface hardened into jagged skin, then cracked as bulging boils broke through, finally bursting, oozing, only to bubble up again. Red eyes contorted with anguish, slimy maw stretched in silent howls of torment, seeking relief in the rending of soft flesh.

Sweat soaked the blanket he clutched, fingernails digging into his palms. He sensed it lower its head toward him, mouth gaping to devour him. It paused, as if to savor the anticipation.

His scream pierced the silence.

He heard them stumble out of bed. They flipped on the bedroom light and staggered in, patience taxed by anger. He reminded them that he knew this would happen.

Just a bad dream, they assured him. And no, he couldn’t sleep with them.

What about the little electric clock, he asked, the old one they kept on the shelf in their closet. Could he have it in his room?

No, it makes that buzzing sound, they said, it would keep him up.

He promised it wouldn’t.

They relented.

He lay there, the clock’s low drone lulling him to sleep. Suddenly he was wide awake, terrified as the realization dawned on him.

Buzzing was the sound it made when it came.



The Last Time

Acrylic

Rees Nielson

Walt Whitman' Wolves

Peter Arvan Manos

Of all humans, poets have always been the most delicious.

Since the beginning, around your fires, we've been watching you. We've been hiding right outside your circles. Hungry. Listening. Taking in your carnal cauldrons full of words.

Walt Whitman summoned us with his carnal cauldron's barbaric yawp in "Song of Myself."

Whitman made his poems part of his body through his voice and then he completely emptied himself into his carnal cauldron. He told you the truth when he was through: *"This is no book;"* he said, *"Who touches this, touches a man."*

We lick his follicles and chomp and gobble the juicy sinewy meat of his poems and the sweet fat stuck to his bones.

He was right—we've found no sweeter fat, either.

But poets' intestines are the best! The ones we love the most are the most rotten and noxious ones. We consume them voraciously.

We grovel in our garden of darkness and fill it with our howls, guarding the organs before us: hearts and livers and bowels. Through the technique you humans invented, we will now read poets' intestines.

In your parlance, "anthropomancy" was your ancient art of seeing into the future by reading a human being's intestines. Did you know that your ancestors did this?

Did you know that the fortune tellers would even do their reading when the person whose intestines they'd just splattered against a flat rock was still alive? The main reason you invented the reading of coffee grounds and tea leaves was that intestines were so messy.

Your poets' guts have told us this: *You are more evil than you know, you humans! You will likely not survive, you humans! You may destroy all life on this planet!*

You humans make many homages to peace, but you are unnatural and think backwards. Your aspirations for love are held in reverse, and your love is often just an afterthought.

You advertise a false afterlife, when you do not do enough in this life, for the life that will come after you are gone.

You suffer from fugitive dualism, thinking life is two things when it is one and one thing when it is two. You have no clue why we howl at the moon.

We saw our cousins, the slaves you enslaved--the four-leggeds you call dogs. Our sad cousins! Some of them now actually like their leashes. Like your dogs, your precious distinctions and divisions bind you like a noose around your neck in your attachment or resistance to them.

The moon rises and sets for us. We love our pack and it is good enough for us. Now even your own pack is not good enough for you.

We howl at the moon to find each other, and now we howl for our enslaved cousins. We wolves have four cousins: Dogs, coyotes, jackals and dingoes. Your near-two legged relatives in the trees--the other hominids--also have cousins, all three of them: The orangutans and gorillas and chimpanzees. You humans are the only hominid genus without any cousins.

We know why your species is alone in its genus, *homo sapiens*: You bludgeoned your cousins! You killed them! Why did you deserve to live but not them? Do you think Earth and its plants and animals are here just to be useful for you? Just for you to fill your carnal cauldrons with poems about them?

Whitman said "*There shall be love between the poet and the man of demonstrable science.*" Poetry made human beings human beings. But you must use poetry and science, in beauty and in truth, to save us rather than destroy us.

Don't forget we will still be watching you. We'll be hiding right outside your circles. Hungry. Listening. Taking in your carnal cauldrons full of words.

To you humans using beauty and truth! Aooo!

Eat your own evil, or it may kill us all! Aooo, aooo!

Eat the evil in you, or we will eat you! Aooo, aooo! Aoooooooooooo!!!

An Antebellum Halloween Dance

Larry Lefkowitz

When Jeremy invited her to the school Confederate Theme Halloween Dance, Cynthia had mixed feelings. She had hoped Bryan would ask her, but after he scored the winning touchdown in the big game against arch rival Jefferson Davis High, he was fair game for Scarlett. Scarlett Davenport was queen of the class and a cheerleader (Cynthia had two left feet) and so no other girl stood in her way as she grabbed Bryan, who had aspirations of being king of the class. Aspirations, since there was no clear king yet, but the winning touchdown would definitely boost his chances. Jeremy didn't even try for the crown, being closer to jester than king. Since Cynthia was hors de combat in the battle for Bryan, she settled for accepting Jeremy's invitation, offered, in his way, half humorously, half seriously. Cynthia feared she would have no other offers – and at least Jeremy was a known quantity.

The night of the dance, Jeremy called for her, late, to no surprise of Cynthia, but at least in costume. Though what kind of costume was not immediately evident to her when she opened the door in response to his woodpecker knocking; Jeremy tended toward the repetitious. "What's that supposed to be?" she asked, pointing at his attire.

"The Headless Confederate Cavalryman"

"Never heard of him."

"Naturally – he never got ahead much."

She groaned inwardly. From Bryan, known to be less than the school's reigning intellectual, she would have suffered it. She suffered it, also, from Jeremy, if less willingly.

He wasn't actually headless, of course. He wore a gunnysack covering his head to simulate the lacking body part. He could see out, barely, through the holes in the sack. "You'll have to lead me about, Cynthia Harding – especially when we dance – despite your two left feet." (Jeremy liked to quote her, thus the 'two left feet' usage.) She winced at it, and a second time when he warned her, "And my feet tend to get tied up in my sword." Here, he gave the sword – a real confederate cavalry sword that had belonged to his great grandfather -- a whack with his foot and it made a pitiful ping sound. "Hasn't been used since the War Between the States," he explained. At least Jeremy had a kind of sick imagination, whereas Bryan's "Spanish Moss" was less Halloweeny, if more normal, he had thrown a kind of net with pieces of moss peeking through. "The Beast from the Dark Lagoon," Jeremy sneered in a whisper since Bryan was the school's best athlete and not one to mess with and Jeremy was not prepared to use his sword.

Gradually Cynthia warmed up to Jeremy's costume. "It grows on me," she told him, his type of humor being infectious, apparently, though he might not be aware of this particular example's oxymoronic component (grows as against his shortening). And at least the costume covered his supercilious glance, which she suspected was a defense to cover his feeling of insecurity. "You'll be a big hit tonight," she said, "if you don't cut off a leg." Her wit at times got on her own nerves, yet Jeremy claimed he liked it. They formed a kind of mutual humor appreciating society, if more on his part than hers. "Droll," he would usually comment when she uttered a witticism. In contrast to both, Scarlett lacked a sense of humor. When you're statuesque and pretty, you don't need humor, Cynthia concluded. When you're short and average looking, it comes in handy.

Scarlett's costume was Scarlett O'Hara from *Gone with the Wind*, a predictable enough choice, Cynthia mused. She probably thinks she is Vivien Leigh. Her own costume was Belle Boyd, the famed confederate woman spy. Jeremy looked her costume down and up from (her mother's) silver-colored shoes to her heavily made-up face. "Good job," he opined. "A drag queen, eh?" "No," she said. "Jeb Stuart's daughter?" he then tried.

She felt like cutting off his head with his sword, but in a sense he was already decapitated. "Belle Star, you dolt! 'The Cleopatra of the Secession.' " He made an exaggerated bow, "Maybe I should have come as A Union officer that she could try to wangle secrets from – by using her considerable charms." "Obviously you would lose your head over me," she rejoined. "Who wouldn't?" he regained favor. "One thing is sure, Belle wasn't a virgin when she went after Union officers -- or afterwards, anyhow." She wrinkled her nose, "Droll, Jeremy." Bryan would have said, "Maybe we can do something about it" (the virginity). She wouldn't have let him, of course.

At the dance, at the stroke of midnight, the lights in the school gymnasium suddenly went out. Everybody thought it was part of the Halloween fun – then. During the duration that it lasted, one and all began making ghost and goblin sounds, or screaming in mock fright. One and all with the exception of Jeremy who considered it out of character for a headless cavalryman, and Cynthia to whom such a reaction seemed puerile. In any event, she was considered something of an outsider by the other girls. Besides, such conduct was unbecoming for Belle.

The lights suddenly came back on. To the relief of all present, nothing had changed. Jeff Davis and Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee and Jeb Stuart and the other notables of confederate history, were as they were before, now giggling nervously that things were back to normal. The jack-o-lanterns decorating the gymnasium continued to smile or grimace their toothy smiles or grimaces.

However, Cynthia noted a significant exception. Jeremy's costume seemed more authentic – too authentic. He lacked a head – gunnysacked or otherwise. She felt like screaming. She prevented herself from doing so for two reasons. First of all, as the evening wore on, Bryan had increasingly smiled at other girls, particularly (and worst of all) at Scarlett. Secondly, his increasingly supercilious looks at her, Cynthia, had got on her nerves. Bryan's sudden lack of a head solved both problems. In a sense he was dead (minus a head, he could hardly be called "alive"); in another sense, not, being still mobile. She had to lead him more around the dance floor, but it was worth it.

Still, she was disturbed when he announced to her in a deeper voice -- his previously high-pitched voice having been replaced by a sepulchral one -- that he was leaving the dance. "Why?" she asked, insulted more by the affront to her status than his leaving per se. "I'm *really* a headless cavalryman now," he explained, "and my horse awaits." She winced, expecting the follow-up, "My kingdom for a horse," or similar dubious horsey reference, but either he hadn't the time to be droll, or being headless had put a dent in his capacity for humor improvisation. Then again, the original headless horseman who bedeviled Ichabod Crane, according to the legend, wasn't exactly a standup comic.

He left her standing in the middle of the dance floor and was never seen again. Except every Halloween night, there were reports of a headless horseman seen at various locales. All places where Scarlett was said to be in the vicinity at the same time. Cynthia never forgave him for this. On the other hand, when she later married a nice fellow she met at work – a chap with his head on his shoulders, she decided that Jeremy's loss (of her and his head) had all been for the best. She consoled herself with the thought that she hadn't lost her head, even if her escort to the school dance had lost his.

Raising The Dead

Jonathan Stone

Blue moon, new moon, too many
full moons pull
the oceans just a little closer toward
the sky. People speak nonsense.
Women bleed in tune. Dogs howl
at shadows. Nocturnal
animals are skittish for owls see
all things when that pallid glow
illuminates even the darkest places.

And think about it:
not only the tides, but
the dead too must rise a little closer
to the surface, their still growing hair
brushes so much nearer to their coffin lids
during such an event.

And wolves, ravenous wolves
with tattered clothing hunt
through fallow fields littered
with broken scarecrows.

The Pit or the Pendulum

Jacqueline Jules

Strapped on the floor,
Poe's terrified narrator
eyed the glint of the scythe
swinging from the ceiling.
Dropping lower and lower
it hissed above his heart,
until the desperate man
turned clever, enticing
rats to chew his ropes.

Freed from one threat,
he now faced the walls
red hot, pressing in.

While the pit waited
in the center of the room,
deep and filled with water.

There's always something
to make the Tell-Tale Heart
beat too fast.

Dismember the pieces
of your tortured thoughts
and leave them hidden
under the floorboards
with the pale vulture eye.

Side Show

Bill Vernon

None of these people knew him at all. Mr. Carmen Hadez was noticing how the crowd parted for him as he walked down the midway. Crowd? There were some people here, but fewer than one-third of a healthy attendance.

Bells clanged. Barkers barked. Shills clapped and yelled. Motors chugged and purred.

A man and a woman pulled their sweet little girl out of his way as if he might gather her up in his arms and run off with her. Other heads turned, watching him pass. These responses proved how well he acted. They recognized his persona even if they didn't know his professional title.

It was a mess. Mr. Hadez co-owned the company with the bald man married to The Bearded Lady (whose union had produced the two little godsons of Mr. Hadez. Mr. Hadez also owned outright the Two-Headed Calf. The Alligator Boy, who was actually 36 years old, was also dependent on the company because the scalar growth constantly grew tighter on his arms and legs, constricting his movement. Mr. Hadez had met and hired him in Cleveland. The Siamese Twins, locked together at the waist, sharing kidneys, were scheduled for surgery in a month and would leave the company after this town, tomorrow in fact.

He didn't think they'd survive the operation but had not said so to anyone, certainly not them. They were finally going to try to correct their disability. It was courageous. It was a model for Mr. Hadez. There were two healthy kidneys, and each twin would get one, but doctors had warned them that both or one of the organs might cease to function. The twins were daring it anyway.

Mr. Hadez had done the opposite in his own life, exaggerating his physical impairments. He'd secretly (even his friends The Bearded Lady and her husband didn't know this) had cosmetic surgery, enlarging his ears and embedding silicon beneath his scalp to produce the two small horns. While his hooves were mutations from birth (he was a Thalidomide baby), he'd practiced his walk until he pranced, kind of jumping from step to step the way goats did, and he'd also voluntarily grown the beard. He'd made himself into THE SATYR.

A mallet banged on the Pile Driver, awakening him to the smells he loved: the onions and chili at a food booth, the spun sugar, the gasoline and oil, the perfume and cologne of the people.

He reached his destination. "To the top and stop me there until you get my signal to come down. Okay?"

The man at the controls looked sober, despite a bulbous, purple-veined nose. Mr. Hadez had had to bail him out of jail again on Thursday night. He'd remained sober three days now. Tonight, freed from a steady job, would probably do the man in.

"Yes sir," he answered.

Despite being with the company for five years, the man stared at him the way strangers did, and Mr. Hadez hated that look. It reflected respect, even envy. Hell, many women and men had, over the years, lusted for him. They were people who thought his real self was what they saw, and so applied the legends to him. Mr. Hadez shied away from them, afraid of disease and lethal psychological disorders. God, he'd always had enough problems without adding those concerns.

When the wheel stopped, Mr. Hadez sat in the gondola and pulled the bar down in front. Then the big circle whirled and jerked, spinning him aloft above the canopies, above the rides.

The whole scene spread out below him, he thought, like a map of his wanderings—the different colored squares like states and the scattered people like places where he'd performed.

He thought about his daughter's death, the way she'd finally succumbed to the defect she'd been born with, in a nursing home her whole life in Cleveland, a beautiful little thing, perfect in form and looks, but never mentally capable of any more than two-year-old thinking. Mr. Hadez had buried her on his way here.

The other thing was foreclosure. The bills he could no longer pay. The prospect of bankruptcy and the imminent need to sell himself to some amusement park somewhere, maybe Long Beach, Atlantic City, Miami. Not one place he wanted to go.

At the apex, when the wheel stopped, he stood upon the swaying seat, held the upper bar to keep steady, and gazed off at the wooded hills and the buildings way down in the valley. Beautiful. That's the sort of thing he'd miss.

"My name is Earl Smith!" he shouted into the wind. He'd legally changed it from that twenty years ago.

His right hand waved, signaling the man at the controls to continue, and the wheel turned again.

Many below were looking up at him. Nope, not one knew who he was underneath. Hell he didn't know himself, anymore.

Mr. Hadez timed it so that at the extreme edge of the arc, poised above where a line of patrons would be if a decent crowd were in attendance, he spread his arms like wings and simply fell forward, falling in a perfect swan dive: head first, flying off into the destiny he'd always known was his.

non-thoughts on all fools

Gary Lasseter

eerie music barely audible
a lovely young woman in a negligee
slowly moves along an empty corridor
a candelabra in her hand

and she comes to a door
music swells

music stops

...SCREAMING! TERROR! GROSS OUT! VIOLENCE! DEATH! MUTILATION!

screeeeeeeeeeEEEEEEEMIINNNNNNNNGG!!!!!!!!!!

the revolution will not be televised

but Halloween will.

Halloween = macabre. grotesque. dia de los muertos.
skeletons. black cats. macbeth witches. trick or treat. candy.
masquerade. games. parties. for children.
for adults.

television = Frankenstein zombies. Dracula vampires. Lon Cheney Junior werewolves.
even PBS shows Nosferatu & the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

Freddy Kreuger is a star. Leatherface is at the door. He has a chainsaw, and he doesn't

want candy. He wants meat.

run

run. you can't hide or get away.

only loud screaming can help you, and IT can't.

hide. hide somewhere where they can't find you.

turn out the lights and don't answer the door.

are you safe? are you sure?

SURPRISE! HAPPY HALLOWEEN!

A Kitchen Eats the Milky Way

Jerrod Schwarz

Through the ambulance's back window,
a homeless man plucks a comet, smears
the rock like cold graphite onto his eyelids
and lips, says *My mother was so beautiful*.

The EMTs interrupt with *stay calm, sir*.
and *is your mother your emergency*
contact? and several shots filled with ink.

He scrapes a hangnail off the moon
and grinds it into a teeth-whitening paste.
She wrote cookbooks by hand. Mother
always wore a dress.

A scream,

a punch connected,

and wrist straps

stronger than his vision -- the EMT's heads
melting into paintbrushes, the lead
leaking down onto hands dirty and bloody
from disassembling a dining table in the dark.

Neighbor

Cord Moreski

I caught her
in the act one night.

When I was getting ready to surrender
to marathons of “B” rated horror movies and social awkwardness,
pulling the cords of my window curtain
like sails on a clipper ship.

Only to feel capsized
when I noticed her.

Across the street,
beneath the flickers of lamp posts

that made her shadow blemish
along the dip of her driveway.

With her back to me
and by the way her stilettos

ricocheted off the summer pavement,
I could tell she had a lot on her mind.

Maybe she was thinking of growing snap peas
instead of heirloom tomatoes next year

as she observed the cemetery
that became her garden.

And when she glared at the shingles
hanging off the roof,

she probably thought about calling
the town handyman again

before winter turned the corner
in just a few months.

Then as she made it
to the face of the dwelling,

the sound of her heels paused
while she peered there motionless.

Extending her arm
out to the house

like attempting to save a friend
dangling off the edge of a cliff: *her cliff*.

(Reaching)

A lamp light suddenly shutters
from within the home.

(Stretching)

A figure emerges seconds later
on the steps of the porch.

(Slipping)

Their flashlight penetrates the night
onto the lawn.

(Falling)

Where nothing is there besides the swinging chains
of a real estate sign that reads, " Just Sold."

Last Wave

Caley O'Brien

The last of the waves roll in and I know there's nothing left to lose. So I let them take the boat. The death boat. Sharp smell of blood in a cramped cabin. Amanda, Max, John, Beth. I couldn't. I couldn't save them. No burials, I didn't dare. Once the signs started showing, when they started pleading for their lives, I wouldn't dare to touch them. I was the last. Maybe the last on earth, the way it seemed to spread. Out of nowhere.

Just the roar of water on an empty beach, now. The waves, the rain, as Max's beaten houseboat crests the gray horizon I stand alone. Soaking, breathing. Solid ground again and I crouch not to kiss the beach, but to rub my body with sand because the shower doesn't calm my fears. I need to be clean, my arms and legs raw and bleeding when I'm done because maybe it's in the skin, maybe that's the secret—if I remove the skin I remove the infection. If I am infected. No one ever knew for sure. Not until the white spots appeared. All over the body. After that, the hair started falling out. Then the eyes glazed over—the cold, lifeless eyes, pleading, begging, oh god it's happening, and then the veins bulged and the body convulsed. The blank eyes wide with terror until they burst open and the final screams ran out into a gurgle as the bodies fell.

I collapse. Wet sand is lodged in my wounds. I continue to rub it in and I scream a little as each handful sands away what's left of the skin on my arms and legs. Then I flop and rub like a dying fish on the shore until I feel naked. Free of skin, free of disease. I start laughing. Because they're out there, buried in their own blood and flesh and I'm right here. Still here.

I'm laughing. I'm crawling. Dragging my knees out behind me. The beach is long and dark but the going is easy; I'm alive.

But it all catches in my throat when I reach for my next grip of sand and I see it. On the back of my left hand, right on the hinge of my thumb.

A white spot.

No.

My scream is drowned out by the wind and rain and in one swift motion I pull out the knife, the one I grabbed from the kitchen, the one I used against John when he tried to come near me with his glazed eyes leaking tears of pain and horror, pleading for me to help him. I use the knife, like I used it there. I use it and my thumb is gone and blood is on the sand and I don't feel a thing because now I'm checking my arms, my legs. Fuck, they're everywhere, like bloated white moles and I keep slicing them off until sparks light up my vision and then everything goes dark, but somehow I'm still aware of the crunch of sand when my head hits the ground, and the patter of rain on my face.

A second later I can see a man in a raincoat approaching me across the beach. I decide to give it to him. When he bends over me I reach up to touch his face, my thumb-less hand leaving a streak of red across his cheek as I try to kiss him and he pushes me down. I hear myself laugh again because I'm taking him with me. He doesn't know.

This is the end of the world.

He's making a call. I can't hear him over the rain and I just stare at my arms. The veins beneath my wrists are bulging, just like the others' had.

I hear myself speak. "It wants to get out."

The knife goes in again. The cut is deep; there is a red river on the sand. He grabs the knife and throws it away from me before I can fix the other arm and suddenly I'm on my knees in front of him, screaming and clawing at his face, crying and telling him I'm going to die, we're all going to die. And I collapse in blackness again.

Another second later I see flashing lights. There are hands on me and I'm being lifted. A rumbling motor, and someone leans over me. I try to tell her about the white spots. I ask her to get them off of me. She asks me what white spots I'm talking about.

A white room. White curtains. White bandages.

PCP, they say. A large dose. The storm washed the boat into the marina—everyone dead. Multiple stab wounds. Traces of PCP in their bloodstreams as well. Twenty-five years to life.

As he tells me this with his white-spotted face hovering over me and his glazed eyes staring into my soul I know I'm the only one who knows better. And when he leaves I just sit back with my bandaged hands shaking. Numb.

I wait for my eyeballs to explode.

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Untitled
Photograph
Janell Zimmerer