

# ESCAPISM LITERARY MAGAZINE



**Escapism Magazine 3/2017 Au-  
tumn**

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## HOW TO SUBMIT

Everyone is welcome to submit poetry, prose and a piece of art to go with the text (photography, painting).

Here are some rules:

Prose: Times New Roman or similar font. 12 points. Up to 7,500 w. Simultaneous submissions allowed. Up to 3 flash fiction pieces or 1 longer.

Poetry: Any style, free verse, up to 5 poems.

Photography and Art : Good resolution.

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## ABOUT US//

Poetry editor/

Lila D: Writer and musician living in Montevideo, Uruguay. Has been working as a teacher for two years. Her music has been published in several labels from all over the world. Loves poets such as Sylvia Plath, Frank O'Hara and Oliverio Girondo. Loves musicians such as Ian Curtis, Darnauchans and Greta Kline.

Prose editor/

Annika L: English teacher, translator and writer from Tartu, Estonia. She has been publishing her works and photography for several years (also under various pseudonyms) in Reaktor, Degenerate Literature, Luna Luna Magazine, Five 2 One, Quail Bell Magazine, Peacock Journal, Zodiac Press Non-Binary Review and Welcome to Anxiety e-zine. Loves writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. Loves musicians such as Rozz Williams, Pete Burns and Trevor Tanner.

# JOANNIE STANGELAND

## Five Scenes

If it's the quick spin out of town, car chasing the desert,  
white streak with the top down, red vinyl seats,  
three on the tree, one hand on the wheel while evening dusts  
my arms, the stars promise. The engine sings. Chrome shines like  
teeth.

If it's the '30s, I'm a character actress leaving the city.  
The studio cheats. The director throws the dice. I gamble,  
sick of doing what I'm told. You're working late, but we  
have plans. The hotel key fits the lock like good sex.

If the suite is a plain set, a scene in white and black,  
yellow splashes make me think of lemons—in a glass.  
If whippet statues guard the gate, I'll be a princess,  
room service my court, the fountain a viceroy with good advice.

If the wind is Myrna Loy, decked out in feathers, gliding  
down the stairs, plays the garden's leaves like a symphony  
or a cabaret, virtues tossed in the heated pool as ice melts  
in a heavy glass and shadows float their last hours.

If I slip into night like a cat through a fence, silk sliding  
over shoulders, the moon tells only half the story.  
Gin's oblivion scripts the rest, the dark heat a door waiting  
for you to knock. The road that brought us here will take us back.

## Collage with One White Anemone

a forecast for wind to blow across this sun

gusts in the trees a ladder leans against the west side

broom holds up the eastern wall

all day a knocking thuds of ghosts

or construction outside

refrigerator growl

the road south to Naalehuwind painting rain on our faces

we drove talk into new landscapes

our letters to each other in the car Dear I can tell you anything

the road listened the tires loved the long saddle road

where there was no road

that part of my heart open the balance

hidden in a box behind the shoes

TOM MONTAG

**NIGHT SKY**

We stand still, we think, in the quiet evening,  
as the earth races its track around the sun,

as the sun spirals its way towards the center  
of our small galaxy, a black hole denser

than God's goodness, and the black hole pushes  
into the mother of all beginnings and endings.

We stand still and say, in the quiet evening,  
*Aren't these stars amazing?*

## **EVENING IN CAMP**

The edge of night

between the high

reach of campfire,

the low scratch of stars

where one wishes

he could listen.

What we could learn.

What those stars could tell.

## **GREY EVENING**

Shadow and light and that which stands  
between. Something of substance, you think,

then the wind moves it. What stays  
is loss, is sadness. Enough is

never enough for the likes of us  
or so the wind keeps whispering.



## **THUNDER ROLLS A NOVEMBER NIGHT --**

a shaking rage of wind and rain,  
darkness at the windows, doorframes.

Out there somewhere the one who watches,  
some stranger who knows your name.

## ALMOST RITUAL

He dresses  
for his daily  
walk, almost

kissing his shirt  
as he pulls it  
over his head

like a priest  
loving the stole,  
slow and graceful.

The holiness  
of being in this  
moment. His coat.

His cap. Something  
pulls him and out  
he goes. Something

in the muscles  
knows more than

**God will say.**

# ALICE BENSON

## TUNNEL VISION

Lydia found her new glasses captivating. Rectangular, with thick black rims, they enhanced her face and made her feel attractive. The clerk told her they were men's frames, but she didn't care. She could carry them off, because she had delicate features and light brown hair that curled in wisps around her face. She just looked like a girly-girl with big glasses.

Her new glasses made her happy. She had little social life, no friends and few acquaintances, but she was never lonely because she had television; she could see her special friends and family at the touch of a button. Thursday night was the best, and she looked forward to watching with popcorn and a big glass of Pinot Noir. *Disgraced* was the last show before the news and her favorite. She took her wine and snuggled under the fleece comforter, almost shaking in her excitement. The opening music sent flutters up her spine, and she was immediately pulled into the story. The program contained constant plot twists. Just when she believed that Shannon was truly in love with Edward, James showed up, and Shannon and James started a torrid affair. Details now came through with blazing clarity. Her new glasses allowed her to see the laugh lines near Shannon's eyes and the pain etched on her soul.

James was a new character this week, a reporter, a crusader for the truth. She noticed his glasses were similar to hers. They looked good on him, strengthened his face, as her new glasses did for her.

Lydia and James looked alike in other ways as well. His hair was the same color as hers, though he wore it shorter and slicked back a little. She hated putting anything in her hair; it was too much trouble and she never thought it looked right. But his hair was perfect.

Their eyes were the same blue; even behind his glasses, she could see that. His cheekbones were a little more pronounced, but he was at his ideal

weight, and she carried a few extra pounds that filled out her face. Still, they could be siblings. Doppelganger? Maybe.

Friday after work, she stopped at the pharmacy to pick up a prescription. On her way out, she found herself walking down the “Hair Care” aisle. She wondered what James used on his hair. So many products. She walked back and forth, scrutinizing containers of all colors, shapes and sizes. The boxes pictured beautiful hair, flowing hair, short perky hair, all accenting lovely faces with high chiseled cheekbones. She stopped in front of the coconut gel and picked up the light green box exclaiming that the gel “creates long-lasting hold and control; adds shine; boosts fullness; ideal for short, thicker hair.” She held it to her nose, breathing deeply, smelling James through the box. She suddenly knew that James smelled like coconut and sunshine.

At home, she found a picture of James on her iPad. She showered and towed her hair, put a dime-size blob of gel in her palm, held it to her nose, took a deep breath, and gently worked it through. Then she used the blow dryer to create her own version of James. After twenty minutes, she put on her glasses and was pleased. Her hair was a little longer than his, but the gel made it less wispy. He was her older brother.

At work, Lydia received a number of compliments on her new hairstyle. She smiled, knowing James would be pleased.

James was a reporter; Lydia was a data entry clerk at a newspaper. Not exactly the same thing, but she saw reporters every day. The reporters rarely talked to her, but just being part of the same business, helped her believe she was familiar with James’ work. James dressed casually, and Lydia liked his style. She bought trousers with rolled-up cuffs and big shirts. Not many compliments, but she knew they suited her.

Thursday, she felt ripples of anticipation all day and kept transposing numbers at work. She was so excited about Disgraced that she skipped dinner and settled in with a big glass of wine and popcorn. When the theme music played, she was surprised to see her hand lifting the wine was shaking. She put the glass down and leaned forward to watch.

James looked so good this week. It was his story. He got an anonymous tip on something big, a story that was going to rock the nation. The president manipulated the election results, and James was finding the proof.

Lydia was exhausted by the end of the show. She drank the last of her wine and went to bed. As she drifted, almost asleep, she pictured James; he floated over her, held her hands, tugged on her arms. She floated too, rose above the bed, and their bodies merged until she fell asleep.

The next day, she talked to her boss about the possibility of doing some undercover reporting. He was adamant that she wasn't trained, but Lydia didn't care. She knew that once she found the story of the century, he would change his mind.

Lydia always questioned the governor's election. How did a state that voted for a Democratic president elect a Republican governor? Surely, there must be something shady going on. Lydia started digging. She watched James investigate and she did the same. She talked to people involved in the elections. All she needed was one anonymous tip. James got one, so could she.

Every week, James got closer and so did she. James talked to election officials, so she phoned and left messages. James found secret documents; she searched for more. Lydia's boss called her in to talk. He was concerned about her behavior; she was missing work, bothering the reporters, calling important people and saying she was working for the newspaper. He encouraged her to go to Employee Assistance and said something about a formal warning in her file. She didn't listen. Lydia knew her boss was in on everything, working to cover up the conspiracy. He was just trying to keep her quiet as she got closer to the truth. James' boss did the same thing. She told him she would stop, but sometimes a good reporter had to lie.

Disgraced went into reruns for two weeks, and Lydia watched the old shows just as avidly as the new. Reporting left her little time to eat; uncovering filth took away her appetite. Her cheekbones were now as prominent as James'. She watched James again and again, his voice, his mannerisms, his walk became hers. James wasn't her brother; he was her soul mate, an exten-

sion of her real self. She couldn't tell where James ended and she began. She was becoming James and James was becoming her. She looked into the mirror and saw James.

Her boss called her in again. He rambled about improvement plans and warnings. She didn't listen. When he said he had to let her go, Lydia snorted and tossed her head. She didn't need this job; she was James, and they were changing the world.

The next week, James found the smoking gun, verification to show the world the president was a fraud. Lydia watched as James hid the evidence in a safe place. But wait. Steve saw him. Steve, an agent of the president, was following James. Lydia watched the last few minutes with tears in her eyes. James was in danger. But James was doing the right thing. He could handle Steve; she and James would be safe.

Over the next seven days, Lydia checked her rear view mirror every thirty seconds. She bought new locks for her doors. She was glad she didn't have to go to work anymore, because her boss was in on the corruption. She was anxious, but she and James were doing the right thing. They would be fine.

Then, the final episode of the season was to air. Empirically, Lydia understood the series was ending, but could not, in her heart, fathom a world without seeing James every week. Then, she realized it wouldn't matter. She didn't need to see James on television; he lived inside her. He would guide her through her days.

The music of *Disgraced* thrummed in her stomach, soared through her veins. She drank wine and watched as James planned his expose, outsmarted Steve. Then, right before the second commercial, Steve confronted James in an underground parking garage. Steve pointed a gun. Lydia gulped wine. She couldn't wait to see how James escaped. The gunshot came through the television, reverberated through her living room, and threw her backwards into the couch. Her arm jerked, and wine splashed down her chest, red staining her gray shirt. James fell to the ground, his chest also covered in red. Blood pooled beneath him, and Steve stepped over his body and left the garage.

Lydia stared at the television, willing James to get up, be alive. A close-up shot of his vacant eyes right before the detergent commercial told her it was fruitless. James was not getting up. But, how? James couldn't be dead, because she wasn't dead. Was it possible they weren't the same person? They were together in life; he couldn't die and leave her.

She sat up all night, watching the blank TV screen. She didn't understand. If James was dead, how could she be alive? Lydia was James and James was Lydia. Maybe she was dead. She scratched herself and felt the sting. Would she feel pain if she were dead? Was James waiting for her in the next world? Maybe she should be dead. Maybe she would be happier if she joined James. With every noise, she waited for Steve to come and finish her off. Her nerves grew taut, her chest tight, breathing labored

At three o'clock, something rustled on the back porch. She heard the noise only because she was awake. Asleep, she would have missed the sound. But it was enough to alert her. Steve was here. Could she kill Steve or should he kill her? Everything roiled together now. She was James and James was dead. Lydia was still alive, but who was Lydia?

Could she go on if James were dead? If she were dead? Nothing made sense anymore. The rustling increased; now it was a tapping. Was someone actually knocking? Steve wouldn't knock. The tapping grew louder, almost thumping. She grabbed an old baseball bat from the hall closet and ran to the kitchen. The banging was pounding through her ears, roaring through the house, vibrating the floor as if a huge cement mixer was driving under the foundation.

Lydia couldn't stand it anymore. James was dead, but she would live. To live, she had to leave James, tear herself from him. She felt her skin rip, shearing muscles, viscera shrieking as she tried to wrench herself free. But she couldn't do it. She couldn't leave James. She would face Steve, and he would kill her as he killed James. It was time. She marched to the back door and flung it open. "Steve." She called into the night. "Steve, I'm not afraid of you."

The pounding continued, and she felt it in her bones, almost smacking



her back into the house. She saw the loose shutter and realized Steve must have set it up that way to trick her. “Where are you, Steve?” Lydia stormed ahead. As she reached the edge of the porch, her foot missed the first step and she pitched forward into the darkness, dropping the bat. She heard it smack and clatter against the step, then a dull thud as her head hit the cement, then nothing.

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Lydia opened her eyes and looked around. Her head throbbed, her vision was blurry, and she just vaguely remembered how she came to be sprawled facedown at the bottom of the porch steps. She eased herself into a sitting position and, with her right hand, gingerly located the source of her pain, a large lump on her forehead, oozing blood. She blinked several times, trying to clear her vision, then realized she didn't have her glasses. Lydia moved her head in a slow, careful arc, scanning the area and located her glasses lying next to her, smashed on the concrete, the baseball bat on top, fallen together like a murder-suicide. She pushed the bat to one side and saw her glasses. The frames were scuffed and twisted with both lenses cracked. Tears of pain and frustration splattered the cement and glistened like diamonds on the black rims. She gently lifted them off the ground and put them on her face. The glasses scratched her nose and distorted her vision. Lydia took them off and cradled them in her arms, stroking the glasses gently and sobbing.

After her sobs faded, Lydia wiped her eyes and nose on the hem of her shirt, pushed herself to her feet, and slumped into the house. Her glasses, her lovely glasses were demolished, beyond repair. The glasses that allowed her vision into the future, into people's hearts were gone. Lydia's connection to James disappeared, shattered beyond recognition.

She went to the bedroom closet, wrapped the glasses tenderly in her favorite silk scarf, and laid them on her nightstand. Catching sight of herself in the mirror, she stared, transfixed. She gently traced the outline of the bump on her forehead, wincing as her fingers scraped the edges of a cut. Dried blood caked on her temples and the bridge of her nose, deep pockets of purple hung beneath her eyes, and her hair sagged under the weight of unwashed gel. As

she continued to focus intensely on her image, she watched James recede, further from her grasp.

Lydia was overcome by a wave of vertigo. She backed into the dresser, and slid to the floor, letting her head rest on her knees. The room tilted; she grabbed the leg of the bed and held on to keep from falling off the edge of the room, edge of the world. As the spinning grew out of control, a huge flying tilt-a-whirl, she rolled onto her stomach and held the leg with both hands, trying desperately not to be flung into space.

Thoughts gyrated through her mind. If James was dead, who was she? She was Lydia. But who was Lydia? She was Lydia and James. The room pitched and shook. She held on and screamed. “James, help me, James. I don’t know who I am.”

After an eternity, the room righted itself. Lydia let go and rolled onto her back. She felt tired and gritty, all her muscles throbbing with pain and confusion. Something hard poked her thigh. She pulled the television remote from under her leg and tossed it across the room. Lydia couldn’t think without her glasses. Her head hurt, so she closed her eyes and slept.

Sunlight peeked through the blinds when she woke up. Someone was in her room, talking and laughing. She sat up and looked around. Then she heard something amazing. James’ voice. Where was he? She searched the room frantically, finally finding him on the television. Was it James? She rubbed her eyes. It was. How could it be James? He was dead. Why did he look so different? She stood up and moved closer, staring with an intensity that made her eyes water. He wasn’t wearing glasses. He was laughing and talking to a woman. Ellen. He was talking to Ellen DeGeneres. How did he know her? Lydia found the remote in the corner, raised the volume, and sat on the bed to listen. They were talking about Disgraced and how sad he was to leave the show. Lydia’s head throbbed, blood pumping in her ears. Ellen called him Nathan. Why did she call him that?

He was sad to leave Disgraced? He didn’t leave; he was killed. What was happening? Lydia closed her eyes. Her head still hurt, and she felt dizzy. The room was spinning again, tilting on its side. She rolled onto her stomach,

flung her arms out, and grabbed the bed on both sides, trying desperately not to be flung to the floor.

James wasn't real? James was Nathan. Nathan was James. Who was she? She was Lydia. But who was Lydia? The bed pitched and tossed, a boat in a storm at sea. She held on and screamed into her pillow. "James, help me, James."

James' words came to her again, borne on the wind. He had a new puppy, and the audience ooohed. Where was he? Where was she? She couldn't hold on any longer, and she was thrown off the boat, landing in the raging sea. Lydia breathed in salty water and coughed. She was able to turn onto her back and floated for awhile, hearing James' voice in the distance, soothing and comforting. Then she knew. James wasn't dead. He was never dead. It was all a ploy to throw Steve off his trail. James was alive, and this was his way of letting her know.

Lydia floated to shore, stood up, and walked back to the television. She stared at James. She ran her fingers lightly over his face, through his hair, down his arm. She felt his energy, his strength calming her. He came for her, he was here in her bedroom, showing her the way back to him. It felt so good to know they were still a pair, still together.

Lydia leaned against him, and his warmth tugged at her, pulled her through time and space. James was back. He would never leave her behind. He knew her glasses were broken, so he wasn't wearing his. She put both hands against the screen. James reached down from his seat and took her hands in his, drew her to him. She joined him on the couch, safe forever in his embrace.



**CRISTINA BRESSER**

**Fishermen's Sunrise**

**Caiobá Beach, Brazil, at 6 AM on a summer day**



**CRISTINA BRESSER**

**Sun, Sea & Coconut Water**

**Caiobá Beach, Brazil, A very hot summer afternoon.**



**CRISTINA BRESSER**  
**Timeless' Street College**  
St Andrews, Scotland, July 2016



**CRISTINA BRESSER**  
**Close Doors, Shared Secrets**  
St Andrews, Scotland, July 2016

# SOPHIE EDEN

## Ice Cube

The girl with the ice cube face.

There's only the surface.

The tip of the iceberg,  
And it's white and cold.

She's going to a funeral  
Lips pulled down,  
Unconsciously  
She's walking to her car.

A flicker across her glass,  
A snowflake melting.  
There's something on the radio,  
A trigger of another life.

The frozen ice is back.  
Only a glimmer through  
What should be clear,  
Too thick, too white.

A crack against the white,  
She can't break.  
Frozen over too often,



A tendril of thawed red.

A call, a word,

The glass shatters.

She fumbles with the pieces,

Incoherent, mixed with red.

This time she can't freeze.

Too much, too much,

Life smeared across

The broken ice cube.

Accident is the word.

Suicide is the whisper.

Streams down flesh,

Water flows too quickly.

Don't riddle with could's.

With the bruise of injustice,

Her heart stopped beating,

Long ago.

DARRELL HERBERT

## **Cantus Firmus**

I understood that society had no room for me, and I had no room  
for society, I never have

To go to the respectable dreamy like society, to the nocturnal side  
Was like changing sides in a war

It's like the blind leading the blind

So empty, so phantom empty

No, a revolver has a drum that revolves

In the throats of love, I was weak, no match for her

But, the goodbye was sad, strangely unforgiven

# Straitjacket

I had a lover

I dated her back when she was counting change

She saw me a year ago and seemed taken aback by my confidence

We hooked up and she judged my body

And me, I was angry

For a while actually

Now I sit here smiling for the strength of my love and resiliency lives on and on

I was angry for years. I was angry for many things, from many people, and many experiences

My anger burned multiple holes inside of me

I know now. I know how to fill these holes back up again

Strength and resiliency lives on and on

You can't be peace and love if you haven't tasted hate and anger

You can't love yourself if you haven't sit with the looks of your many faces

So my fellow humans, we are dual

The pain we have shapes the beauty we create

Insecurities hidden around false pride will get you nowhere

Know that

You're as insane as I am

# Chaos

I used to wish death upon people

Shut the fuck up

I'm mute

I get more hurt by people who tell me lies instead of the truth

My pain and my suffering and my broken heart does not come from  
love

And I feel like a fucking alien

Personally, I wanted to take the darkness and project it

To warp the perception

Being in chaos is a comfort zone

Part of me wants the chaos

I get bored way too quickly around humans

There's only a few of us that are actually aware of this

I just pointed out your biggest insecurity

And it makes you fucking upset

By sword I mean your tongue

-

It comes with pain, but I got to press, to hold to make it sound,

A note,

but will you be quiet or loud?

It comes with pain, but I am depressed, the black sheep in a white  
dress

A frog that no longer croaks

And like a human, sore throat

Should I say I'm waste?

A lost cause?

My flesh can still utter words when it hurts,  
but not only, also when it strokes.

Should I die in sorrow?

With the loneliness of tomorrow

Insecurities hollow, confidence borrowed

CYNTHIA BLANK

## Two Falls Later

Two falls later, we sat  
in Washington Square Park  
under some as yet unchanged  
hanging elms and I told,  
I whispered to you:  
when you know, you know  
and you won't want to  
be anywhere else.

Your body hung  
toward me and your face  
turned crooked  
teeth becoming ripe  
and for just a moment  
I didn't know, I wondered  
if sitting next to you  
in three years would feel  
exactly as bittersweet.

Or three years later

I wondered where the bare feet  
of that first afternoon  
had led me and why  
it was so far from where  
you had finally picked  
the same knowledge.

## Bursting

I had it in my hands,  
an orange—round and ripe,  
and bursting forth  
with juice.

It wanted to be stripped of its skin, and sucked, and licked.  
Tended to with the warm tongue  
of a mother bear on her bleeding cub.

I had it in my hands,  
this orange—and I slowly started to peel it.  
Hard seeds spilled out,  
as I broke it open,  
gently, and with my teeth,  
and the juice had turned so bitter.  
I drank it anyway.



## **A Soul Is Not Enough**

A soul is not enough for a man  
demanding a body.

I give you my guilt, freely  
I give you apologies and regret  
but you look away  
as if I've suddenly soured.

As if selfishness were a cure  
for desire.

Words to you pop before me  
like a crash, a firework  
about to fade into the night sky.

Have I lost even the embers  
of good you composed into me?

I am still the same woman  
though you've learned more.

I am still damaged by the threat

of silence, still thirsty  
for omniscience, still afraid  
of irreversible loss.

## Untrod Sand

Laying down next to you, I shuddered  
in the soft echo  
of a desert; I saw shattered glass  
bottles spilling  
out gray dust as the conical blue  
and green lights hung straight above us.

With hot breath I wanted to whisper  
in your ear; to lean  
over far enough to tell you how  
bright, so much more  
vivid the Negev's white stars are than  
any place I have tried to be.

## The Dark Beneath

To get out of bed this morning, I had to rush  
through the motions of wakefulness—  
pull a pencil skirt over my legs and up  
to meet a sleeveless blouse, retrieve a peach  
and several cubes of chocolate  
from the recesses of a refrigerator shelf,  
then dot my blemishes  
with concealer, purposefully forgetting  
the black Kohl that generously grants  
my eyes some sense of purpose,  
armor against the dark beneath.

To think my life is a series of little tasks,  
each measured in the moments  
until it will be over—  
which makes you funny,  
that I keep returning to  
a dark car in a mall parking lot,  
the silence hanging between us like a gun  
in a Chekhov play; your coal-black eyes  
clouding over—angry for no reason,  
and me reaching over, a hand cutting

across waves, thinking it could,  
at once, prevent and control the flood.



**LYNN WHITE**  
**Falmouth, Jamaica**

STEVE KLEPETAR

## **Before Sumer or Ancient Jericho**

What if you lived on this land  
for thousands of years, long  
before Sumer or ancient Jericho?  
What if the forest knew your name?  
Maybe there were gods in the trees  
and angels in the bushes, their soft  
wings black and lustrous  
as summer night. Rivers sang  
when the rains surged, and birds  
swept into your dreams.  
Then your eyes swam with light,  
you tasted honey and felt the slow  
movement of earth and rock and root.  
And what if your shadow slipped  
away in darkness to prowl  
the underworld, returning with handfuls  
of golden words, story chains long  
as the black snake whose body braids  
the sky, connecting a watery moon to the sea?

## Hour of Flesh

This is the hour of flesh, when you settle  
into your body, late afternoon, the weight  
of the day in this softening light.

And now, the gathering of those who have gone

rustling in corners, scrabbling out  
across wooden floors.

It's easy to mistake them for little balls of dust,  
or whispers on curtain strings.

Even when you close your eyes,  
even when your breath  
swells and your hands go numb  
and strange, they shiver along your neck.

Their commotion is real.

This is the hour of recollection, cool hour  
of fingers barely brushing lips, hour of branches  
littering grass, of leaves, of crows pecking the dying earth.





**DAVE MARKS**  
**Alternative Havana**



**DAVE MARKS**

**Havana Family**



DAVE MARKS

**Old Havana**

LINDA CRATE

## **woke the devil**

you're like an impossible pimple  
won't just pop, won't just leave  
i don't know why you decide to stay  
where you are not welcome;  
i cannot chase you out of this house  
you insist upon haunting when i've said  
time and time again that i don't want  
ghosts—

i kept myself sewn shut, told my secrets  
only to the moon because she's my mother;  
harvested all the ingredients of nature  
to find my peace because i have never known  
any greater kindness than those of trees,  
flowers, creeks, oceans, bays, rivers, clouds,  
skies, moon, stars, sun, or animals—

you tore me open only to leave carnage in your wake  
as if i were just a funeral waiting to die,  
but i don't remember giving you permission to rip me  
open at the seams;

i only open slowly as a flower and you demanded more  
so you woke the devil in me and she won't stop screaming  
of fire and rage so you shall know the things you should have left  
slumbering in the monsters of me.

## **will never go back**

you shouldn't step so close

to the danger zone

because no one knows what another

is truly capable of,

and i with all my silence dreaming of peace and flowers

can be quite monstrous when i put my mind to it;

don't wish to cause others suffering or pain

yet you don't respect my boundaries

always take more than i'm willing to give

don't know how many times i must say no before you

realize that it isn't yes—

you push me into this madness with your stubborn

belief that we should always be friends

even when you contribute nothing to me and i give everything

to you, and i am done crucifying my dreams for your sake;

i know that i can have much more than this broken thing

for a heart and i feel joy for the first time in years

since i dropped your bones in the river

letting you wash away

because our friendship is dead—

haven't you seen the garden?

nothing is there anymore but thistle and thorns,  
and i'm done weeding out everything that came between us;  
now i crave that distance because we have nothing  
to offer one another  
we weren't sisters because i was the only one that was loyal  
you only came to call when you needed me so i don't  
need you anymore—  
it was difficult to shed you but so necessary like a snake  
carrying around extra skin i just had to get you off,  
and now that i am free i will never go back to your gilded cage again

## **don't cross me**

everyone always underestimates me

i am not just another ship you can wreck

every action demands a consequence

my temper is slow building and my memory long

i may snip and snap out of irritation but my

temper once lost explodes like a bomb dismantling

every negative emotion deep within,

and so when they say it's the quiet ones you should fear

perhaps you should listen;

i prefer the kindness and the quiet like persephone and her flow-  
ers

but i can be the coldness of demeter or the rage of artemis—

i am not someone that should be crossed

because i have an elephant's memory and the tongue of a sword  
to any that deserve to stop making others bleed because i refuse  
to

allow nightmares have pardon because they could never be

the dreams any person needs to have for this world

needs more light and less darkness,

more dreams and less nightmares;

i am a lighthouse and i will burn the wings of any storm that  
could

threaten to break the dreamers because all my life i have been



dealt

cards that weren't fair or right and i won't let anyone else  
break in all the ways i've been broken if i can help it.

## the only girl i loved

she woke in me the dreaming

when i thought it was

dead,

and she revived me with a kiss

swift as autumn, sweet as spring

always smelled of roses as i recall

she was a little obsessed;

but i found endearing because there are

vices that are much worse—

i fell in love with her so i pushed her away

not on purpose but out of fear

snapped when i shouldn't have,

and though i apologized i realize sometimes

sorry isn't enough just like love isn't always enough;

there are consequences to everything

my rage burned a bridge that i never wanted burnt—

i never told her how i felt,

and i'd be happy if we could just be friends;

yet we've drifted so far i don't know if that ocean is in the

realm of possibility

every time i think that i have come to terms with it

i realize looking at the memories that i have not

don't think i ever will be okay and i will always love and miss her

even if she cannot remember, cannot care for me;  
that's just how my heart is  
unconditionally loving and with an elephant's memory.

## **you'll never tame my wild**

no one ever understands, and so i don't explain the nuances of me; some people just don't care—always overlooked, underestimated, and spoken over i tire of being around my own species; would much rather fall into the heart of nature for i have found she has always been kind and heals everything inside that humanity has broken—i prefer silence and song to the company of people because they make me feel alone in a crowded room, and i rather be perfectly alone and content than alone and lonely; if you don't know the difference then you'd never fathom me—i am intense and deep full of so many different things deeper than the ocean, hotter than fire, more immortal than time; i have a million stories but some people have no time to listen—they only want to be heard, they don't care to learn to know to feel anything but what they insist is true—the world is perception and i don't want theirs so i've always sought my own, and my path will never make sense to them; i have always envisioned myself as the woman barefoot running through the wood at the speed of light—i am not the type of person anyone understands, but i feel that some people cannot feel me even with my depths because they don't care to know beyond their knowledge; maybe one day someone will appreciate me for my wilds without trying to tame me and i can find a true friend.

CARTER VANCE

## **All Things Scarlet**

Coming down with something's case,  
fever flush of card suits taken  
too literal, whiskey-faced haggling  
with diner shop case radio dials,  
with dusty countertop linoleum for  
a place to rest comforted hands;

I am no longer in darkened  
rooms with chalk sketches,  
with star charts searching June  
skies for dusk.

The road polishes, near-reflecting black  
of graceful shadowing leaping grandly  
from pulpit page to dreaming ink,  
it carves a winding gold river band,  
a miner's lung of bespoke ring fingers  
from the sketch chart physician's  
notes we made of each other  
(flopping haircut, skin strawberry milk shade).

Whirring, fan clatter cuts speech,  
to hung ribbon strings from ceiling,  
to adolescent party paper chains,  
shedding their old tones for  
something stronger played:  
electric, with feeling.

## **From Primrose Hill**

As you turn back in sepia,  
Astair-Rodgers light on  
Southwark station bends, on  
illuminating post-war tenement  
brick ways, there isn't something  
more to say,  
something more to pause upon.

As you look out on many-wandered  
fields, plundered creation  
of peace crowns, or scepter  
surrenders, as they link in  
70s raincoat logic, and  
spill full with unsent post,  
you aren't waiting again.

As you draw curtains from  
clanging Friday's air, humid  
hanging with pressed lips  
of tube driver's strike talk,  
there could still have been  
some roiling wave of regret,

for passing taillights of noonhour.



## Untold Miles

Glory of ember fades,  
imperial medals' twinkling  
takes on tea mug tones,  
rusty bonnet cap kind  
of rushing through cedar  
sap places in daydream.

The baking blackness,  
electric separation, finding  
same holiday greeting card  
lines no matter placing truth,  
a blistered confession to be made,  
of axel wobble sentiments.

Scale of self-help books,  
making of wartime lives,  
draws rough, approximate, map  
of the last time we stood  
in subway station tile,  
or took to mispronounced names.

Nerves of not-so-young not-quite-lovers  
sing still with nicotine twitch,  
so signpost obvious in early evening.

CAROLINE DELUCA

## **A Witch is a Dangerous Woman**

A witch is a woman who rejects

God for the prom, spikes the punch  
& skanks with the devil in the moshpit.

Sometimes this looks like she's dancing

alone. A witch is a woman who sees.

A witch is a woman who laughs & you don't  
know why & she sounds like a night creature

doing it: indelicate, screeching burble. A sorceress is  
a woman who steals manhood from the men & makes  
a nest of it with trinkets, a nest to raise her wishes. A nest

to raise the dead. A nest to kiss the quest

goodnight. A witch is a woman with eyes that laser  
holes through the dark. Nothing gets past her. A witch  
is one who's undizzy with data. She knows what  
you're hiding. No white lies or easy blinders.

A hag hangs out with wicked forces. Air, fire, earth.

She will float in water. She is made

of tough hide, hard to kill. She keeps company  
with animals, allies, ears to the ground. Listens.

A witch is a woman who knows how to read

signs, wrinkled languages & runes. Get too close

to a crone & you'll be shredded to ruins. A witch  
is a woman impatient, ecstatic, shivering & intimate  
with something you can't understand. A witch

is a woman who turns down sex for skinny-  
dipping. A witch is a woman who turns down skinny

for the pleasures of the root & vine. A crone

is a woman who does not pay the body-rent

of pretty. A crone has warts & does not  
use concealer. A witch is a woman who favors

the wrong brand of deceit. A witch is a woman who won't  
use a compass. A woman who travels outside  
of her mind. She doesn't give discounts  
on wisdom. She's not buying what you're selling.  
A witch is a woman who walks alone at night.  
For too long we have said she deserves what she gets.

# Her Mouth a Yawning Black Hole

Funny

how folklore's

defanged her

her, of all the nymphs

to simplify

into just another Santa

she, who wears

necklaces, bracelets,

brooches, anklets,

earrings, lip rings, nipple rings

fashioned from

your children's teeth.

This jewelry, small

solid truth

from the mouths of babes.

She sucks on incisors

when lonely.

She is furiously,

unfathomably lonely.

Tornados, havoc  
hollow the canals

and halls  
of her body.  
Once she thought

if she could only  
stare through  
the eye of the storm

without wiping the blood  
from the iris, without wimping out of  
raw ferocity, despair made rage

the roar would run its course,  
would leave her corridors  
hallowed and clean. Cured.

Instead, the thunderous tunneling  
has emptied, deafened,  
feralized her grief. Blood still there.

Parents, somewhere inside  
you know this. You make  
your sacrifices, placate your children

bribe them for bicuspid.

Appeasing her, paying  
protection racket against

her less reasonable desires.

# **In Sinner Hildegard's Frosting Shack for Wayward Women**

**We Lick the Walls With Impunity**

**Because We Are Not Responsible**

**For Holding The Home Upright**

**& We Do Not Hide Our Pleasure at Sugar**

**(The Frosting Is German Chocolate)**

**We Do Not Need Very Much Though**

**Because We Are Not Wrung Out**

**From Serving & Thinning Our Forests**

**Until They Are Not So Scary & Dark**

**Until We Can Dilute Our Tarter Juices**

**Into Something More Palatable (Women**

**Invented Personal Branding Before It Made \$\$\$)**

**O But In Sinner Hildegard's Frosting Shack We Are Tart**

**Outrageous Homebodies Dark Delectable To Ourselves**

**Our Mysteries Are Connected & We Do Not Twist Them**

**Into Trenchcoats Or Sunglass Frames We Are Pretty Simple**

**When No One Insists On Ignoring Everything We Say**

**O We Let Ourselves Go at Sinner Hildegard's &**

**Do Our Selves Love Going Leaning Into Each Other**

**On The Couch & Lolling Flinging Out**

Our Limbs In the Light of the Disco Ball  
Laughing  
Chortling Guffawing Flying Through The Roof  
On The Wind Beneath The Bat Wing Fat Of Our  
Arms

O Our Selves Love Going We Paint Ceramics And Lis-  
ten To Delilah

Dole Out Advice On the Radio We Know Better We Dive In-  
to Learning

Studying X-Rays & Biographies Of Enemies Of The State We  
Sling Back

Tequila & Sing Joan Jett Sister Rosetta Sheila E. Nicki Minaj  
We Bake

Codes & Hack Open National Atrocities Scream Over The  
Intestines

For The World To See Sinner Hildegard Once Cau-  
tions With

A Straight Face *That's not very ladylike* And We  
Cackle Until

We Cry



# The Real Dangers of the Zombie Apocalypse

1.

So we were speculating  
on the zombie apocalypse  
selecting theoretical weapons  
(ammo, stun guns, superpowers,  
the petrifying powers of Medusa  
for the pacifists and pragmatics, because,  
I mean, can bullets even stop zombies?)  
picking sidekicks and soundtracks  
anticipating pitfalls and risks  
someone said, “I’d have Iron Man  
as my sidekick, wield a super-souped-up  
machine gun, and run to the tune  
of the Talking Heads. Except it’d all  
be for nothing, ‘cause I’d probably fall  
in love with a zombie, ‘cause that’s  
what always happens, right?” I guess,  
in the dystopian romance horrors  
of our dark and desirous big-screen dreams.

I confess I don’t really see the appeal:  
all-circuits-blown cannibals, one-track minds,  
all those holes in the skull, the rank smell of death...  
no, no love budding there, and no love  
for killing the dead, no appeal, I think,

in kicking ass, taking names, no, I know  
it's the names we say  
for novenas, the names we say  
for kaddish, that kill our killer instinct,  
that crack our Achilles heel.

2.

I remember reading years ago  
on some supermarket tabloid covers  
that after Keith Richards' dad died,  
Keith Richards snorted his ashes. Dust  
and powder, ground-up bones. The headlines  
weren't kind; *Us* joked about short supplies  
of cocaine, *Star* doubted his sanity  
with mock concern and multiple  
question marks. I, too, found it  
pretty messed up, at the time, but I  
hadn't lost anyone yet.

They tell me it's time  
to sell your blouses, beaten shoes,  
discard the drawers of cosmetics, all  
your powders and lipsticks and potions;  
the half-empty paints filling shelves  
of your garage, on a spectrum:  
ochre to onyx to oxblood to  
bone white. I was able to rid myself

of some boxes, the bracelets you ordered  
from the jewelry channel and never wore,  
the abstract art that I could never understand –  
but not the paints, and not the thousand t-shirts  
I found in your bureau, the ones you'd lend me  
to swim in – shield from the sun – to swim in, dresses  
on my small body when I forgot to pack  
pajamas for visits and Christmas and sleepovers  
when you still lived so close.

And they still smell like cigarettes  
and dried acrylic stains,  
still feel like dryer-softened  
cotton hugs. I thought I heard  
the wind-up to your wheezing cough  
from somewhere in the kitchen,  
but you were nowhere, you  
were nowhere to be found.  
I can't bear  
to throw away one shirt,  
and though I smell  
like smoke and my asthma  
isn't pleased, I wear them often, to sleep.  
I try your recipes, I listen to your favorite  
Elvis CDs – if there were a way to consume  
some last parcel of your presence,  
well, I can't make promises

about what I wouldn't do.

3.

I think we overestimate  
our sense of rationality. There are people  
who stay, stubborn, planted in their homes  
despite hurricane warnings, flood alerts  
we drown and die in our living rooms  
just because we have no idea  
how to leave what we love.

I think Hollywood overestimates  
the necessity of romance in the face  
of danger, our focus on sex and warm blood  
when faced with dead bodies  
on the prowl for brains.

I think we would not  
fall in love with any new zombies  
no, I don't think we'd be spinning  
into blind dates, sparkling  
white wine whirlwinds with the walking dead.

I don't think we humans  
would be running zapping shooting  
or at least I doubt  
most of us could keep it up  
after running into the remains  
of one we loved – keep shooting? Keep roundhousing  
old disintegrating family

David Byrne playing  
in the background to fuel  
the ass-kicking and fierce  
foraging for food?

I think I'm more like Keith Richards,  
at least in this respect, grasping  
for anything. I think I, at least, would freeze  
if I saw you, my eyes streaming, arms out,  
half-blind to your hunger, the stench, the emptiness  
of your eye sockets, I imagine I'd stare  
barely able to speak,  
but gasping, *you're back,*  
*you're back, you're back.*

## Vestigial Organs

In the wombttime of our species  
we slept in marshgrass or on

beds of shale, depending on the season.

Springtime: squelched and sank into lucid dreams

that our bodies preserved long into day.

Like frayed twine or fungus, they fanned out

and sexed with ordinary thoughts.

Nightly fossilized inside the mud's memory foam

shadows of lizard sister-in-law, pig cousin

ape mother loomed palpable. Did you know

when hyenas laugh, they aren't laughing,

that's just the sound they make? Like

a party of young men shining on amphetamines.

Get out while you can. In winter we miss

the smell of brine We wake up with very straight

spines. Calves overlapping, invisible twine

between us. Opportunity for "misanthrope"

is a recent development. We used to call  
that “hermit”, and in the more before  
we used to call it dead. We remember  
a kindness from the cold, the company  
of bats. Spectacle of upside-down twirls  
in cave kitchen. We used to know something  
about echolocation. Stalactites and lustrous  
metallic solids. The skeleton key to the swamp  
is: not questioning the sublime, such as iodine rocks  
evaporating, some might say rising like the soul  
from the body, in summer months to violet gas.



ASHLEY PARKER OWENS

**Puppet Battle**



CHRISTINE BRANDEL

## SPEAKING IN TONGUES

*for the 89 dead*

I stood with my back to him, leaning on him,  
his hands around my waist, and there was music  
and we were dancing and everyone was dancing  
and, even though I shouldn't have been, I was  
in love with him. In love with the music and dancing  
and everyone in the room, even the men in boots  
that could have kicked the shit out of us both.  
That could have left us dead in a concert hall.  
That could have but didn't.

And now I'm in one country and he is in another  
and the musicians are in a third. The other dancers . . .  
I don't know where they are . . . where their boots  
are . . . what those boots have done.

The musicians, though, still fill concert halls,  
still make people, with or without boots, dance.

There are many languages that can be spoken.  
All have words and sounds I do not understand --

all have words and sounds to fall in love to --  
all have words and sounds to fear.

Tonight I want to find the man I shouldn't have loved  
and kiss his mouth hard in a room full of strangers,  
filled with words and sounds that make Boots dance  
and not kick. Tonight I want to dance like it's all  
we've got live for. Tonight I want to speak in tongues.

## A SERIES OF CROSSES

### *The lullaby begins*

when a face appears on the soft curve  
of belly, when there's warmth in the soft  
pumpkin meat between thighs. One of us  
hopes that the song will keep us awake.  
Folding myself up in maps won't stop  
you from coming in all directions.  
I try to hold but instead I watch  
our children spilling out on the sheet.  
It's giving us away: the cries of the mother,  
the feel of the father, wet on legs.

### *Their cries were songs*

and everything he said music to me,  
lyrics slipping down my throat,  
settling, making ourselves a home.  
When I said the little letters to make  
words like child, his sounds stopped,  
replaced by the closing of a door.  
So to the boys, the boys who knew  
they would not be kings, I bequeath  
my voice: blessings that cry of family.

### *Giving my sons to women*

-- my calling to make this kind of delivery.

To stand in the center, arms toward the sky,  
a tree dropping babies like leaves.  
My sons slide up my roots and out  
my hands. I push my children's heads  
to other women's chests. And against mine,  
I clasp the first brick laid to build our house.  
Pressing to me, breaking breastbones.

*Mothers sing special words: hurts,  
blue as they flee, like wind.*

# TIME AMID FEATHERS

1.

My skin has shrunk.

It's too tight, it tears.

While I slept it said,

let's make ourself smaller

and try to go back to a previous size.

It got pissed that it was obligated to cover  
my grown body.

2.

With my chewing gum

I stick the hands to the face

of my big brown clock

and set it in the red wagon.

3.

Last night I dreamt you stabbed me  
so already you weren't on my good side.

This morning you come by,

you say, I hate you,

what do you think of that?

I say, I guess I'll move on

then you stab me.

Go figure.

4.

I feel alarmed.

Get it? Get it?

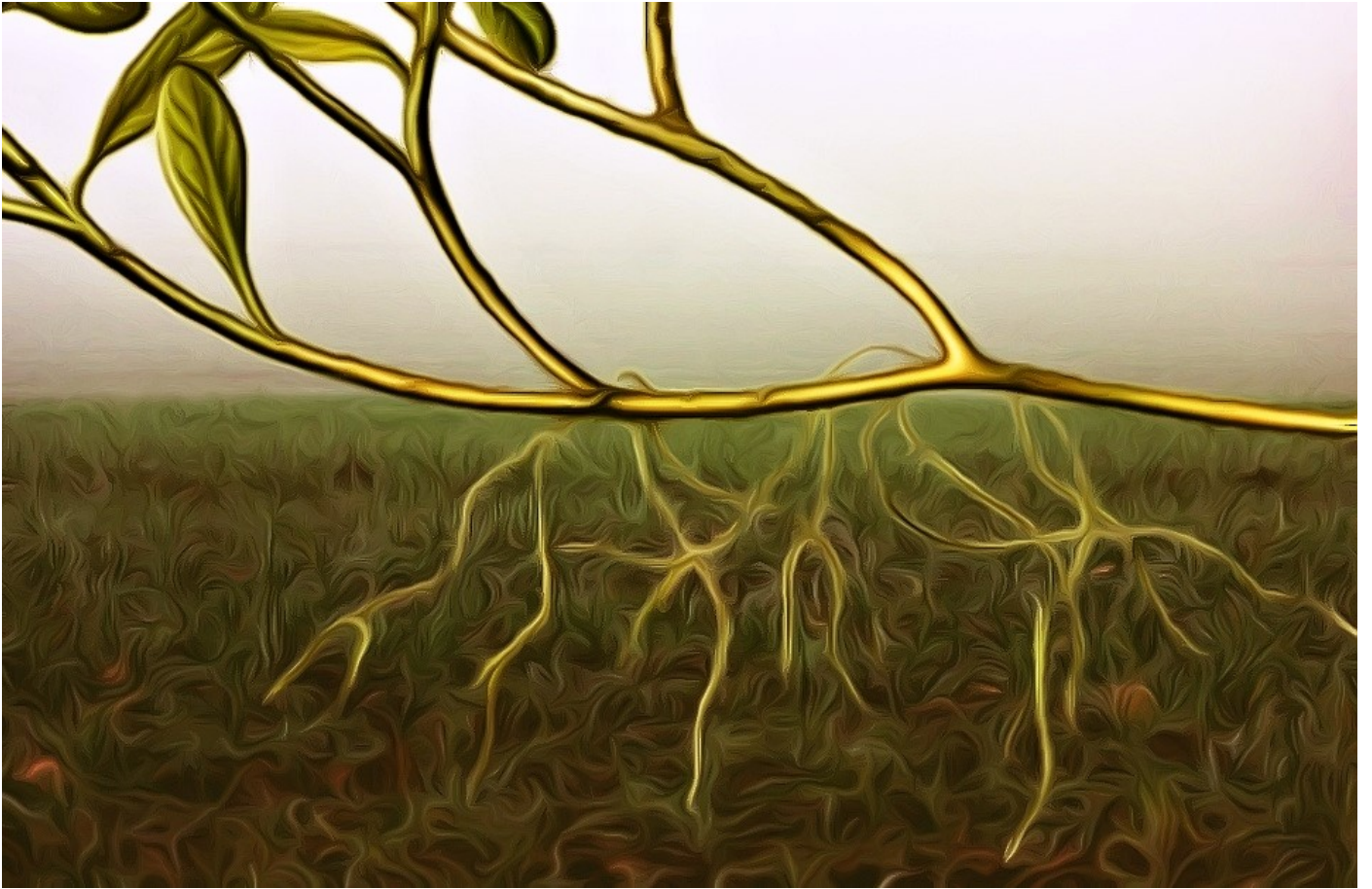
God, Mom, my small mouth pouted,  
no one ever gets my jokes.

5.

I yawn. You yawn. The man next to you  
on the bus yawns. The woman next to him yawns.  
Her baby yawns. The bus driver yawns  
at the precise moment  
that the figure steps into the road.

6.

I need some hard sleep.



ASHLEY PARKER OWENS

**Roots 2**

ANN CHRISTINE TABAKA

## **Beware of the Quiet**

Do not allow the quietness  
that saturates the halls of night  
break through the dawn.

For it will shatter all perception  
of time and space, grabbing  
reality by the throat.

Then where will the sense  
of priorities lie, except among  
the fallow ruins of an ancient past,

defying the depth of disregarded  
wisdoms, challenging all known facts,  
until there is no truth left.

Adhere to the movement of slow  
creeping convention, while the  
lamented longings are just out of reach.

For the quiet is rooted deep within.



## Wash Me Clean

Rain wash down over me  
and sing away my tears.  
I walk alone on whispers,  
fragile as faith confronted.

The tension reaching out,  
with languid fingers of longing  
grasping at my throat.  
Conclusions never complying.

Prayers go unanswered  
floating on a sea of doubt.  
The litany of lust prevails  
devouring the holy with the damned.

I beseech the ancient ones  
to rescue my true self  
and let the rain cleanse  
my desires with its song.

## Late September

Evening reaches across and blankets the land.  
Tall stalks kissed pink by the glow of the setting sun.

Row after row of fence posts stand at attention.  
A lone crow perched atop a rail surveys the expanse.

In the field a one-eyed scarecrow stares back menacingly.  
Darkness falls earlier as the hours of daylight abate.

Soon harvest time will arrive with its thunderous  
mechanical beasts looming over the landscape,  
belching black smoke and churning up clouds of dust,  
as they reap the golden crops.

As the harvesters cleave the shafts they will leave  
the refuse in their wake like so many fallen soldiers.

The crow looks over the bounty of ripe grain,  
aware that it will soon be time for him to go.  
Flying to a place of safety far from the noisy  
metal monsters that now sit on the horizon in wait.

The scarecrow smiles knowing he has done his job well.

## Laundry Day

Crisp white sheets bleached by the sun, waving like so many flags, surrendering to the turbulence of life. Memories of days long past, when life seemed simpler, and yet felt harder, all at the same time.

I can envision my mother standing there, her graying hair pulled back, donning a patchwork apron; carefully taking each rolled up damp sheet from the basket with her age worn hands, and shaking it out to hang upon the rope line.

White sheets, symbolic of her surrender, giving herself in to a life of drudgery and poverty. Labor's love lost to past dreams that never were. Blinded by the brightness of the white, as she herself was bleached and withered by the blistering sun. I still feel her pain today, all these years later.

Certain images evoke strong memories, taking us back in time. Like a daydream coming into focus, I can almost touch my mother in my mind's eye. Then, reality snaps its finger, as the sheets begin to wave their surrender once again.

## What Truth is Spoken

Retreat into the darkness  
oh oracle of the night.  
Your perverse proclamations  
confounding common speak.

Disenchanted diatribes  
from your mouth do spew.  
Hearken to the naïve maid  
who believed in your foul discourse.

Was there no hint of certitude  
in anything you proclaimed,  
or do your heartless speeches lay  
quiet among the decaying



ASHLEY PARLER OWENS

**Red Head**

DON FLYNN

## FLORID

"Have you been taking the Seroquel?"

I lied and told her I had. In reality, I had stopped taking it five days ago.

"What do you do when you have a sleepless night? Do you take some Xanax? That's what it's for, you know."

"I know, but I've been trying to avoid it. I've been listening to mp3s of ocean sounds instead. It helps me relax, but I still can't get to sleep."

The room seemed in unusually sharp focus today. I looked around at the soft burgundy walls, the mottled drop ceiling, the lithographs of Impressionist art. The message light on Dr. Medev's phone blinked steadily. It had chirped just a few minutes before. She ignored it. I hoped that whoever called wasn't in trouble. My problems were nothing compared to what some were going through.

"That's fine, but if you find the sounds aren't helping, the Xanax will. Don't forget."

I nodded.

My eyes felt dry and raw. I rubbed them and noted the time on the clock radio on Dr. Medev's desk. There was still ten minutes to go. I couldn't sit here today. Some days were like that. The adrenalin sluiced through my veins in generous rivers and wouldn't let me find any peace. Best thing for it was to keep moving. If I moved enough, the edge might come off for a while.

It was all reminiscent of my life before I started taking the drugs. The prescriptions gave me some relief from my symptoms, but the side effects were unbearable. They made me a sleepwalker through my days, as if I moved through them cocooned within thick layers of fog. The urge to stop whatever I was doing and lay my head down for a nap was almost irresistible at times. My friend Lara was concerned. She said I was changing, that I wasn't who I used to be. I told her I couldn't remember who I used to be. We've been friends forever. I think what I said really scared her though. She hasn't talked to me in weeks.

“What happened during the flying dream?”, Dr. Medev asked.

“I flew up higher and higher...at first, it was cool. Everyone got so small. I couldn't see people anymore. Then the buildings got small. I could see shorelines, then the shape of Florida. That's when I started to get scared. I was going too high. I thought about how I was going to get back

down. Then everything went black. There was no wind. I couldn't propel myself. I just started floating. I was waving my arms and kicking my legs, but I couldn't control my movement. I felt panic. I realized that I couldn't breathe either."

I stopped talking, remembering the feeling in the dream. I had been on the verge of death. The seed of acceptance had begun to germinate in me. My arms and legs became still. I merely floated.

"What happened next?"

"I...I just woke up. The sheets were wrapped around me, covering my face. It was like I'd been spinning in bed. They were soaked from sweat."

Dr. Medev wrote on her legal pad. Not much, just brief phrases or sentences. I remembered when I thought she was sending her notes to the CIA. When I admitted this, she suggested the pills. She said she only needed the notes for her own work, but I wasn't sure what to believe at the time.

I wanted to ask her what the dream meant. She always threw the question back at me though. I wanted her answer. She was the oracle. She knew about what was going on with me. It was like she was testing me, seeing if I could get it right. I don't know why I brought up the dream. Even if I knew what it meant, it wouldn't change anything.

I reported it, nothing more. Inevitably, she asked the question.



“What do you think it means?”

“How should I know? Maybe it means I want to die by being shot into space without a ship or a suit. Dreams are supposed to have a deeper meaning, but I can’t figure it out. Can’t you help me?”

“I can, but only you can get at the truth. I can’t pick it out for you.”

Despite her evasive responses, I was falling in love with Dr. Medev. She called it transference and explained what it was. I knew it was more than that. She was an earthy brunette with a sybaritic curve to her upper lip. I enjoyed it when she wore skirts. It wasn’t often, so when she did it was like a revelation all over again. She had the faintest suggestion of dark areas under her eyes most of the time. I liked to think she had trouble sleeping, like me. Maybe not all of the beautiful people had it so easy. Her beauty seemed stretched thin, wearied under the burden of caring for others too much. She didn’t have to talk to people like me, but she did. It was admirable.

“I think it means I need help and I’m not getting it.”

I regretted saying it immediately. She smoothed it over with some kind words and encouragement. A reminder to take my meds. Then our time was up. I left the gauzy quiet of her office and emerged out into the bright, sunny street.

I was going to be late for work, so I hurried. There were a bunch of high

school kids at the bus stop. I pulled my backpack up to my shoulder and rushed by without looking their way. They were boisterous, argumentative. A massive brawl had broken out here recently. I slipped by the throng of bodies and turned the corner onto Front Street.

I passed the alley where I'd seen a stray dog a week ago. It was there again, eating something next to the gray dumpster. As I passed, it lifted its head and looked at me. Then it spoke.

“Keep moving. Don't stop for anyone. They don't care what happens to you.”

The voice was a growl. Saturated with cold menace. It sounded closer than the dog looked. It hadn't said anything to me before. I kept moving, trying to leave it behind.

The city was always too close. I felt hunted in its stony embrace. No Seroquel for a few days, and already my nerves were honing their edges again. I jumped as a car horn shrieked, or a bus drove over and sharply jostled a loose manhole cover. Others passed by me, talking on their phones or blankly staring ahead with earbuds pushed in. They might as well have been zombies. I envied their outward placidity. Their faces looked slack, almost tranquilized. If I looked at them long enough, my anger would slowly rise. Thoughts would begin, rushing in out of nowhere, scenarios where I stomp

up to them and cuff them across their cheek, or slap the phone out of their hands. Pummeling them until they show some sign of life, of becoming keenly aware of what they presently take for granted. The scenes that played in my mind were baroque flowerings of violence, my punches, elbows, and kicks landing with rabid force. If the mental drama played out long enough, I would emerge from it with my heart racing, muscles tensed for action. Dr. Medev knew about these episodes and told me to find a quiet place and breathe deeply for five or ten minutes. Not easy to find a place like that around here.

I walked into The Caketeria and my boss, Antonio, was at the register. He saw me and then checked his watch. He didn't react, which surprised me. He could be hot-headed sometimes. Today, he just looked tired.

“Get back there and start right in on the pots and pans. We got a big order tomorrow.”

I was not quite a month into the job. Antonio knew I was a special case, but he didn't know any details. He took me on through a program run by the state labor department. I always felt pressure because I didn't want to disappoint him or anyone with the program.

His apprentice baker came out from the back wiping his hands with a towel. He was a rotund guy whose dark, curly hair was already graying in

spots. His name was Abe, but everyone in the shop called him El Gordo. He claimed to be only 27, but I didn't believe him. He had the bearing of an older man.

“He doesn't like lateness. I know I told you before. Gotta watch your time, my friend.”

“I know. It just got away from me today.”

I pushed through the swinging metal doors into the back area. Throwing my pack on the table, I grabbed an apron and put it on, tying the string behind my back. I inhaled deeply the sweet, sticky odors. A tray of leftover donuts was resting on top of one of the rolling racks. I grabbed a glazed blueberry and wolfed it down while I sized up the collection of dirty mixing bowls and trays.

When I was deep into cleaning the large mixing bowl, Jenna stopped in to get her check. She worked in the mornings mostly, so I didn't see her much. She was excited to see me for some reason. She said hi and waved her check briefly, saying the money was already spent. She asked me how things were going. I always gave a stock answer. If I were honest, people would never come near me.

“I'm having a get-together at my apartment in two weeks. You should come by.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re invited, genius! Why else? Please, don’t turn into most guys. You have to aspire to be better.”

Jenna was beautiful in a goth lite sort of way. She was so pale. She must’ve stayed indoors most of the time during the summer. Sometimes she had a sleepy look about her, and I was sure she was on meds too. I couldn’t bring myself to ask her though.

“Maybe I will come by,” I said.

“It would be so cool. Abe’s coming with his girlfriend. Have you met her yet?”

“No.”

“You should. You’ll have a great time, I promise.”

I had no intention of going. I just didn’t want to be pressured after declining. Like the old wizard would sometimes tell me, “bend like a reed in the wind...”. Some things weren’t worth fighting.

“Here, I’ll write down my address. Put it into Google maps and it’ll take you right there. I really do hope you’ll come.”

“What are you celebrating?”

“New place. I moved in a few weeks ago. Need to break it in properly. Usually I’m not celebrating anything though. I just feel like getting crazy

now and then.”

“I know what you mean. Now and then...”

I stuffed the piece of paper in my pocket and she hurried out of the room. Her demons were milder. They gave her more space, didn't intrude quite so aggressively. She moved less warily, lacking that hunted feeling, unconcerned with what might be around the next corner. I had that once. These visions and the anxiety, the uncertainty, all descended upon me after one bad night. I tripped on LSD with a friend, and I either took too much, or there was something else in it. I spent all of the night in an old honey locust tree I'd climbed in a park. I saw two dragons appear in the night sky over me, breathing fire and swooping down close to the tree. I felt the heat of the flames and the wind created by their dark fleshy wings. Their eyes glowed red. They were enormous creatures. My friend said he found me out there swatting at nothing, yelling “leave” and “I'm not the one you want.” He got me down after hours of negotiation and reassurance. When it kept recurring, I told my mother and she took me to see a doctor. He put me on Xanax because I wasn't sleeping and recommended a therapist. It was a bad trip that just kept going.

The doctor said something went wrong with my brain chemistry. A balance was tipped, and now there was too much and not enough. The neu-

rotransmitters are a delicate mix for some. The ratios can be upset at the slightest disturbance.

I finished the washing up and left with Abe, who locked the doors and went his own way. It was a warm late afternoon. People were just starting to fill up the streets on their way home. Most of them were much better dressed than me. I weaved between them down the sidewalk, keeping my eyes straight ahead. As I hit Fulham Avenue, I could hear something behind me. It sounded like something hissing or breathing loudly, like a phlegmy Darth Vader. I tried to ignore it. It sounded like it was getting closer. I took a look behind me and saw a form in a suit, a human body with a deformed face. The mouth a wide, jagged grin. Eyes which stretched back to the temples, leering, hungry. Its tongue flashed out and made a quick circuit around its lips. It had no hair. Its skin was burned, on not just the head but both hands as well. The hands were huge, hanging in a perpetual grip, ready to reach out and tear at someone. Thick fingers with long, pointed nails. I couldn't help it. I broke into a run and the thing also started trotting. It wasn't as fast, but its strides were longer. It kept pace. I ran past the office people going home, narrowly missing some of them as I picked a jagged route through the throng. I kept up my speed until I reached my building and fumbled with the key. I got in and slammed the

door shut. I glanced at the front door while I waited for the elevator. I didn't see him again before I ducked inside and went to the fifth floor.

I entered the apartment winded and set my backpack down by the chair.

“You're a little late today. Did you have to stop off somewhere?”

“No.”

“Dinner won't be ready for a while yet. I got up late from my nap.”

My mom came into the living room and sat heavily in her chair. Sometimes her diabetes got the best of her. Her energy had been low for a couple weeks, and her feet were often painful. She shrugged off my pleas to see a doctor. There was a talk show on TV; more beautiful faces, oblivious to the suffering around them.

“You're sweating. What did you do, run home?”

“Part of the way, yeah.”

“What for? You weren't that late. You know I'd keep the food warm for you.”

“I don't know. Maybe I'd like to start getting in better shape.”

Laughter erupted from the television. She always had it turned up too loud. I went to my room and got on the laptop, typing “pepper spray” into a search box. I figured I needed protection if I was going to encounter these



things on the way home. I could never be sure when they'd show up. I had to be ready.

I went to bed early, as usual. I didn't like staying up too late. Nights were tough. At night, they would find me in my room. I hadn't seen them in a long time. I woke up after a few hours, feeling someone nearby. I could hear breathing. I blinked my eyes and could make out three dark figures around the foot of the bed. They wore hats and their faces were veiled in shadow. They wore long coats. Their hands were in their pockets. I tried to move. It was as if my body were in the grip of rigor mortis. The thought to flee was there, but I couldn't make it happen. My breathing labored and my heart galloped. I watched them for what must've been hours. Occasionally, one would walk over to another and confer in whispers. When the alarm rang, I opened my eyes. I couldn't remember falling asleep.

It was the pattern I lived with. The weeks were full of stress, too crowded with people and voices. Those seen and heard by everyone else, and the rest, who only populated my world. My tension expressed itself in several ways--canker sores, cuticles that were rubbed completely away so that my fingernails grew out with a persistent ripple, the feeling of an iron band wrapped tightly around my head. Once I woke up with a strained calf. It

wasn't there when I went to bed. I suspected nocturnal workouts that I couldn't recall the next morning. My mom, who was a light sleeper, never heard anything though. For the next few days, I limped around town, hoping nothing would show up behind me. I didn't have the speed to outrun them.

I awoke on a Sunday after a decent night's sleep and felt somewhat restored. I pulled the blinds up to a mostly gray sky and the subdued street below. Only a few people on the sidewalks, going in and out of the bodega across and just down the way. I felt more at rest than I'd been in a long time. I picked up a Silver Surfer comic I hadn't read yet and sat by the window with it. There were times when he seemed as tormented as I was. And the things he must've seen on his journeys through the universe. He was like an escape further into myself. His often tortured expressions mirrored my own inner environment.

A few raindrops streaked diagonally across the window as the wind picked up. I expected a downpour, but the darker clouds passed by quickly and there were breaks of sun. Out of nowhere, I got a text from Lara suggesting we meet at Turtle Park. She asked if I'd had lunch yet and offered to bring sandwiches. After some thought, I responded that I'd meet her there in an hour.

Turtle Park was just a couple miles away. I slung my backpack over my

shoulder and put on headphones. I listened to a jazz station as I walked. Sometimes the apprehension receded and the world took on a brighter tone. It seemed to coincide with times when there were fewer people around. My dream was to someday live in the country. I've visited an uncle who lives upstate in a more remote area, and I could sense my salvation there. I could see a future in the broad, wooded valley his house overlooked.

Lara was already at the park with a blanket spread on the ground when I arrived. Her smile when I approached looked forced. I wanted to ask her what was wrong. Somehow I held back, since I knew the question alone would darken our time together. It was very difficult. Since ending the meds, I found my impulse control had weakened considerably.

As always, she was the one who broke the ice.

“No hello for me? You look as if you've just abducted someone's pet.”

“Hello.”

“Well, you can say that much.”

“Where's mine?”

“I brought your sandwich.”

“My hello. Don't people usually *exchange* greetings?”

“Hellooooo, Cory.” She smiled again in a way that suggested she was

weary of it. “What are you listening to?”

“Mellow stuff. I think the DJ said it’s Lester Young. I can listen to his stuff all the way through.”

“Never heard him before. Do you want to eat now?”

“Sure.”

We both ate quietly. She was one of the few people I felt comfortable eating around. I sat just slightly behind her and watched her as she surveyed the park. There were a couple of guys throwing a frisbee. A lone crow scolded from the top of a nearby tree. We sat almost in the middle of a wide sweep of open lawn. I suddenly felt vulnerable, and my shoulders hunched up a little. In contrast, her shoulders sagged and her back was bowed as she ate. She was a study in insouciance.

“How is it?”

“I like turkey. You used wheat bread though. And mustard instead of mayo.”

“It’s better for you.”

I took a long drink from my water bottle when I finished. I leaned back on the grass with my hands behind my head. I focused on the passing clouds, trying to forget being in such an exposed space. Trying to forget myself.

“How have things been?”

“Okay. Job is going well, I think.”

“Are you still feeling tired all the time?”

“Not so much lately. It comes and goes.”

“That’s good. When we talked last, you were saying some strange things. I was worried. I wanted to help somehow, but you wouldn’t let me.”

“There was nothing you could do.”

“How do you know? You wouldn’t let me try.”

Her voice climbed an octave. She had turned toward me. Her dark hair hugged her round face, brush strokes of black across her cheeks and the rest falling in a curl at her neck. I could only return her gaze for a few seconds—any longer and a tremor would begin in my feet and build up through my body. I was unnerved by someone having such an effect on me. This is why I don’t have friends.

“I know what you wanted. I just feel...if it’s too much for me at times, then it would be too much for you as well. I’m doing you a favor.”

“Why don’t you let me decide that? You can trust me, you know. You need to trust someone besides your mother.”

“Don’t talk about my mother, okay?”

“Aaachh.”

She dropped her head into her hand in frustration. She was tired of all

the walls I kept throwing up in front of her. We'd have pleasant periods, and she'd judge the time right to push the boundaries. I was exceptionally attuned to her efforts, however. Inevitably, I'd retreat behind the ramparts again. If she didn't push, there might be a chance for us, if she'd let me control the pace. She was too impatient for that. She feared that if she didn't act quickly, I'd change my mind.

“Let's go somewhere else. This place doesn't feel right.”

“Cory, there's no one here. It's quiet. We're fine.”

“You don't know what could happen.”

“See, there you go again. What do you mean by that? Are you having symptoms?”

“It's not symptoms. I have to be careful. Every time I look behind me, there's something there. I just want to be left alone!”

“Cory, settle down. What's wrong? Are you still taking your pills?”

“They were trying to control me with those pills. I'm not letting that happen. I can make my own decisions!”

“Cory, wait!”

I threw my water into my bag and got up to leave. I was scanning the entire park. The frisbee players had stopped and were watching us. I yelled at them not to follow me. Lara tried to keep up with me as I marched back

quickly the way I came.

“Cory, you can’t stop taking those pills. You’ll see things. I don’t want to get another call about you breaking into buildings again.”

“You say you want to help me. You’re not helping right now. I know what I need to do.”

“Alright. Tell me what I can do to help. I’m here for you.”

The clouds were back and the wind had picked up. The sky seemed to press down on me. I needed to get back home, to have a roof above me. I broke into a run.

After I left the park, Lara gave up on following me. I made it to a familiar, short alleyway a few streets from my home. I ducked into it and watched cars pass. I saw men in black suits with sunglasses inside them. They were out in force now. I decided I should wait where I was for a while. The clouds thickened and it got very dark. Thunder grumbled off in the middle distance.

I heard him before I saw him. His voice came from the shade toward the back of the alley. I was sitting against the wall. I looked toward the area, seeing only the fence and a few short trees and weeds.

“It’s best you stay here for now. You’ll be safe here.”

“For how long?”

“They are forbidden to come here. I’ll make sure of that.”

I recognized the voice, but wanted to be sure. I told him to come out.

He waited silently for a few minutes, then came forward. It was the wizard.

He was an older man, short in stature with a patchwork robe and broad-brimmed hat. He carried a gnarled wooden staff, a solitary silver ring on his right ring finger. He bent down to have a look at me and nodded once, reassuringly. He was usually very quiet, laconic. Some of my fear ebbed. I’d only seen him twice before. I felt like he was my only ally, the only one who could protect me from those who pursued me. His appearances were rare. I felt like the child who constantly disappointed him, the one who earned only grudging attention.

He observed with little reaction as vehicles and the occasional person passed by. Sometimes he nodded to himself. His mostly gray beard was short. The hat kept his eyes in shadow.

“Carry my staff with you. It will render you invisible to them and you’ll be able to get home safely.”

I took the proffered staff. The wood felt smooth and dry, as if it had been handled for centuries. I rose slowly from my seated position.

“Thank you. How should I return it to you?”

He shook his head sharply and began to walk back into the alley. After



a few steps, he turned toward me.

“With our thoughts, we make the world. These demons are *your* demons. They must see that you fear nothing.”

He walked away and turned a corner. I followed him to the corner and peered round the back of the building. There was only a shed and some stacked pallets. Holding the staff tightly before me, I walked back out onto the sidewalk and towards home.

Later that evening, overcome with fatigue, I was lying on the bed when my mother knocked on the door. She came in and passed some mail to me that I hadn't picked up from the kitchen table. She turned toward another corner of the room.

“Where'd you get that branch?”

I turned as well and saw the branch. It had helped me get home, rendering me undetectable to the predators out there. Now it leaned against the wall, an ordinary piece of wood, powerless. I rubbed my eyes wearily and asked what was for dinner.

I didn't realize it was the night of Jenna's party when I'd gone down to the grocery store to get some stuff for mom. I was blissfully unaware until a car pulled up alongside me as I walked and kept pace for a few moments. I

didn't dare look. I thought about running. There was no place to duck into ahead of me. The next intersection was a formidable distance away. I peered cautiously to the side and noticed a head hanging out of the open window with long hair.

“I hope you're on your way to my place. We can't start without you.”

I relaxed when I heard Jenna's voice. I turned toward her and managed a weak smile.

“I need to get aspirin and some bread. Ohhh. Your party. That's right, I guess I wasn't thinking. Shit.”

“You can hop in if you want. We'll give you a ride.”

“I don't know. I didn't want to be out tonight. Too much going on.”

“Please, Cory. You don't have to stay the whole time. I just want you to see the place.”

“Well...”

I stopped, as did the vehicle after a few seconds. Jenna's face loomed from the car like a pale moon above the sidewalk. Her eyes roared pleas at me while she said nothing. Her lower lip grew fuller and her head canted to one side. It was the full weight of her enchantment, the force that could launch ships or inspire careers as lead singers. It reached new heights as it convinced me to get in the car with her.

Her friend Drew was driving. He wore a sweatshirt with the hood up around his head. He murmured a hello when introduced. Next to me in the back seat was Chrystal. She sucked on a vape pipe and blew the ragged streams of fog out the window. She only smiled when I said hi, then returned to looking out at the passing storefronts.

Jenna asked a few questions on the way. My answers were brief. I was growing more uncomfortable by the moment and regretting my decision. I sat back and tried some deep breathing. They had the radio on and it covered up the sound. I held on to the promise of a short stay. I was trying to come up with excuses as we drove.

Her place was a fourth floor walkup. The light in the hallway as we climbed the stairs was sharp, severe. It blasted out from bare bulbs and highlighted the dingy walls. The steps complained in a distressed chorus as we all trudged toward the top.

The door was at the end of a long hall. Music thumped out from behind it. Jenna threw it open to a small cheer as she brought in a couple bags of liquor and some snacks. Once the provisions were set, there were more introductions. I struggled to remember names, then gave up completely. I looked around for Abe, but didn't see him. Jenna said he'd be here later. Someone shoved a drink in my hand. I smelled it and recoiled slightly from the bracing

redolence. So many faces passed by, all of them at ease, wearing carefree grins. My discomfort hardened, acquired an edge. After meeting everyone I retreated into the passageway that led between Jenna's kitchen and living room. I checked mail on my phone, keeping my head down as people passed. I took a sip from the drink I had and grimaced at its strength. I set the glass down on a nearby table. I couldn't drink on my meds, and I'd always considered that a loss. I began to reconsider my judgment.

Out in the living room, there was a younger guy who was sitting on the arm of the couch, talking with two others. I could see his face between the two of them. He looked familiar, though I couldn't remember where I'd seen him. As he talked, he kept shooting glances at me which looked vaguely sinister. His mouth moved periodically, and I couldn't hear any sound until, suddenly, my focus locked in and I was somehow able to tune out everything else. Some of their words were reaching me from across the room.

“Who invited him?”

“He's going to hide in the corner all night.”

“He came in with Jenna and Drew. Maybe she works with him, I don't know.”

“There's something wrong with him. Probably a child molester.”

They burst into laughter. I'd reached a limit. The anger boiled up from

deep down and took control. The violence leapt out of the realm of thought for the first time. Space opened up around me and I was over him, swinging. Even in my blind fury, I could tell that I was landing a few punches solidly. Then I was grabbed from behind and thrown back. Whoever did it was strong. I went flying toward the wall like a tossed marionette. As I lay on the floor, others piled or fell on top of me. I was pinned by bodies, and the anger shifted over to panic. I reached out with both hands trying to claw from beneath the pile. The weight lightened enough that I could get traction, and I was up and heading for the door at a sprint. There were shouts behind me as I ran, but I ignored them. I needed to get outside.

I turned right after I left the building and opened up my stride. Alternating between sanguine darkness and grainy pools of neon and fluorescence, I flew down the sidewalk, my jacket billowing out behind me. I passed one dim side street, then another. My breathing strained and my quads began to burn. Someone I passed told me to slow down, and I did—only because I was woefully out of shape and running purely on adrenalin. I approached one of the major intersections in the neighborhood. I ground to a halt at the corner and looked up the precipitous walls of the surrounding office towers. Lights still burned in some of the windows. My eyes followed the walls all the way to the top and beyond, where the light was spectral, inhab-

ited by a silky curtain of mist. Red lights flashed among the spires.

Back at ground level, down the street, I saw a shadow moving in my direction, blackening the road surface and the fronts of the buildings. I looked up but there was nothing there to cast it. As it got closer, it picked up some speed. The leading edge of it wasn't straight. It spread like liquid, with some areas bleeding ahead of others. I could see that there was widespread movement within the dark mass. It wasn't a shadow at all. It was a massive accretion of spiders, all crawling rapidly toward me. A sound was discernible as they approached, like a rustling of fabric. I heard it in front of me--and then from above. When I raised my eyes, I saw another wave of them pouring off the roof and down the side of the building next to me.

I turned and ran. I sprinted out into the intersection again, heedless of the traffic. Someone was yelling at me, but I didn't stop. A taxi screamed to a halt just as I passed in front of it. I made it across the wide street and down a broader thoroughfare. I kept looking back and the arachnid swarm was in pursuit, somehow closing the distance. Ahead of me, as the street split into a T, I saw a ghostly wall of silk quickly form, anchored by the buildings on each side. More spiders were emerging from around the silk and piling into the street. As I got closer to it, the temperature seemed to plunge. I could see my breath as I panted. The obvious paths were blocked. I needed to get in-

side somewhere. I stopped in front of an empty store, the door a single pane of glass. I looked around and found a rough triangle of broken pavement, just larger than my hand. I hurled it as hard as I could at the door. The glass shattered into bright crystalline shards. I ducked under the metal handle across the middle of the door and went inside, my shoes crunching over the glass.

I couldn't see anything until I pulled out my phone and turned on the flashlight. The shelves were empty except for a few fixtures. I picked up a metal shelf brace and made my way to the back of the store. With the door broken open, the creatures had a way in. I found another door to the storeroom that was ajar. I pushed it open cautiously and swept the room in my beam of light. It was dusty and smelled of old paper and wood. I closed the door behind me and listened. I could hear them out there, first outside as they passed by the door, then much closer as some entered through the smashed entrance. I felt it as they pushed against the storeroom door, a million legs filling the frame, scurrying over its surface. I leaned back against it, making certain it wouldn't yield to them. I shined my light down to the floor and saw legs stretching underneath the door, curling up, trying to pull themselves under it. I stepped on some of them, crushing them beneath my heels. A few broke off and lay on the floor, twitching. I kicked them away. It felt

like hours that I was trapped in that room, until I heard sirens and saw colored lights pulsing against the back wall. Someone was calling out for me, they even knew my name. I yelled back in response, trying to warn them about what was out there.

The door was forced open despite my weight against it, and I saw all the spiders streaming in. I leapt to my feet and started stepping on as many as I could. I flailed and whirled around as they crawled up my body. I couldn't shake all of them off. I tried to run again until I was tackled to the dusty floor. I broke into a coughing fit. The shelf brace was taken from me, and then, overcome by fear and exhaustion, I blacked out. For a long time, I felt like I was falling through space, unmoored, similar to the dream I'd had. Then there wasn't even the dream. I was gone...beyond pain and fear. I was free.

I woke up in a strange room, to the sound of beeping and someone's hand on my shoulder. A woman was close to my face, talking loudly to me. She wanted me to wake up. I hated being disturbed from sleep and let her know it.

“What do you want?! I'm awake already. Jeez.”

The nurse backed away and checked my drip. She asked if I was hun-



gry, and I said yes. After typing in some readings on her computer, she left and told me dinner would be coming soon.

I was worried about what my mother was thinking. I looked around on the bed and the stand beside me. My phone was gone. I was in a hospital gown. I had no idea where my clothes were. I felt as if I'd been in a violent storm at sea and thrown overboard, to wash up here, a place I'd landed in before. White linen crowded by circuitry. A bed with no warmth...every nerve in my body singing...emptied of something substantial, that formerly gave me weight.

I ate dinner listlessly at first, then with more conviction as my energy returned. When the nurse came back, I asked her how long I'd been in the hospital.

“Since late last night,” she said.

She injected something into my IV feed and asked if I had any pain. I told her I didn't. She said I should get some rest and that I would have a visitor shortly.

Moments later, Dr. Medev stepped cautiously into the room. I pushed myself up in the bed as much as I could. She was more informal than usual, wearing jeans and brightly colored sneakers. Her features seemed more indistinct, and I realized she wasn't wearing any makeup. Her hair was pinned up

in the back. A weary half-smile hung in place of her customary look of concentration. There was no notebook or air of authority.

She asked how I was feeling and I could see the concern gather in her brow. She laid a Snickers bar on the table beside the bed, saying it was to help get me back on my feet. All at once I was aware of what I'd done, and I felt ashamed. I barely remembered to say thank you. I could feel myself closing off to her.

“In the future, you need to be more honest about your meds.”

“I hate taking those pills.”

“You should tell me then. There are alternatives. We can find something that works better for you.”

“I need to call my mother.”

“I let her know where you are. I told her you're okay.”

I broke down in front of her. It was embarrassing. It just came up out of me, without warning. She laid a hand on my shoulder. I wanted to take it, but I didn't. It wasn't the time. I just kept wiping my cheeks with the blanket. She pulled up a chair and sat next to me. The bed was raised up slightly and we were at eye level. I couldn't look at her though. I could only hide my face behind the blanket.

The sobbing subsided after a few minutes. The top edge of the blanket

was soaked. She set a box of tissues in front of me. I took one and blew my nose.

“I feel like a freak. It’s never going to get easier, is it?”

“That’s why we’re working together. Maybe we can get you off those pills at some point.”

“Not all the things I see are bad. One of them helps me. I trust him.”

“Good. It’s important to have help. This individual may represent your desire to help yourself. The part of you that cares about yourself and wants to get better.”

“I care...about a few people. That’s all. I’ve never trusted anyone else.”

I was on the verge of disclosure. I pushed it back though, saving it for another day. I finally looked at her in the chair, her legs crossed. There was just the ghost of a smile. She looked like she hadn’t slept much again. I wanted to thank her for visiting. As I tried to construct the right words, a large spider crawled from behind her shoulder and down the front of her sweater. It crossed to her arm and crawled back up toward her neck. It was poised over her smooth skin, as if ready to plunge its fangs in. I could feel myself tense up.

“What is it, Cory? You want to say something?”

I turned away and looked out the window at the implacable skies and

heedless concrete towers.

“No, it’s okay. We’ll figure it out.”

\*



**ASHLEY PARKER OWENS**

**Pink Nude on the Beach**

## Outlaw'd Love

Impal'd by Cupid's arrow, in too deep,  
An outlaw'd love to be divulg'd or known;  
And how I must this guilty secret keep:  
My love for thee hath long but wax'd and grown.

Thee, Clive to my Maurice, a hypocrite,  
For thy own predilections oft emerge —  
The truth 'bout thee — as clear as if 'tis writ,  
And thus wherefore must thou my passions purge?

Deny thyself no more, and yon within,  
Do let that which is true to meet the Sun,  
Despite the words that cast this love as sin,  
Why seek behind them truths when there live none?

Conceits that 'tis a sin do drift astern,  
Thus shed thy pretense and this love return.

## Grove of Sycamore

Not only neath the grove of sycamore,  
But also there below the mistletoe,  
A loving vow was made, yet still it bore,  
A hollow deep for me to reap and sow.

Unmooring from my bleeding love you left,  
With countenance of knight and craft of knave,  
In half my haunted heart's been carv'd and cleft,  
Along with that which I would ever crave.

In want of nothing but your company,  
How I have laid down all that I have known,  
In ev'ry breath to hear and blush to see,  
The Rose of Romance for to hold and own.

My home sweet home hath long been lost, alas,  
To memories in shards of shatter'd glass.

## AUTHORS//

### GORDEN KEGYA

Gorden's figurative paintings portray invigorating brush strokes which are in the colourful rendition of incisions. He is deeply inspired by the emotions, thoughts, movement and endurance of creatures in Africa. His works are mostly based on the poetics of Africa and the literary study of Westernisation on Africanism today. He said, "The subjects my soul paints, expose the subverted visions of political Africa".



It is a greatly sufficient repaint of the geographical challenges he faced since when he was very young and as a result had conceptualised his works in the transient nature of life, thus from birth to ashes. It comes with the keen eye for observation and an ameliorated heart for appreciation, which the society taught him.

He had majored in Painting and Sculpture (Bachelor of Arts in Art Education) at the University of Education, Winneba where he found comfort in his bias towards the digital media.



## JOANNIE STANGELAND

Joannie Stangeland is the author of *In Both Hands* and *Into the Rumored Spring* from Ravena Press, and three chapbooks. Her poems have also appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Southern Review*, and other journals.



## TOM MONTAG

Tom Montag is the author of *In This Place: Selected Poems 1982-2013*, *This Wrecked World*, and *The Miles No One Wants*. He has been a featured poet at *Atticus Review*, *Contemporary American Voices*, *Houseboat*, *Basil O'Flaherty Review*, and *Blue Heron Review*. With David Graham, he is editing an anthology of poetry about small town America.



## ALICE BENSON

Alice Benson lives in Wisconsin with her partner and their two dogs. Alice recently retired from a job in the human service field; previously she spent over thirteen years working with a domestic violence program. Her published works have appeared in a 2016 Main Street Rag Anthology, Epiphany, Cliterature, English Kills Review, Scrutiny Literary Journal, Shooter Literary Magazine, and Diverse Voices Quarterly. Alice's first novel, *Her Life is Showing*, is set in a domestic violence shelter and was published in January 2014, by Black Rose Writing. Visit Alice's website [www.alicebensonauthor.com](http://www.alicebensonauthor.com).

## CRISTINA BRESSER

Brazilian, fluent in English, Spanish and French. Graduated by Universidade Federal in Graphic Design. Two published books: *Torre de Papel* (Paper Tower) in 2015 - short stories anthology. "Quase tudo é risível" (Almost Everything is Laughable) a 155 pages novel, Nov 2016. Studied Creative Writing at University of Edinburgh in 2016.

## SOPHIE EDEN

Sophie Eden enjoys experimenting with sound and visual elements within word. When she's not playing with words and images, she loves running and cycling outdoors. You can read more of her work at [musingsofeden.com](http://musingsofeden.com).

## DARRELL HERBERT

Darrell Herbert is a poet-songwriter, humanitarian, author, and activists. He is a nationally recognized poet.



## CYNTHIA BLANK

Cynthia Blank received her MFA in Poetry from Bar Ilan University's Shaindy Rudoff Creative Writing Graduate Program. Her work has been featured most recently in Black Napkin Press, Lilith Magazine, The Underground Literary Journal, and Enizagam.

## LYNN WHITE

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. Her poem 'A Rose For Gaza' was



shortlisted for the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition 2014. This and many other poems, have been widely published, in recent anthologies such as - 'Alice In Wonderland' by Silver Birch Press, 'The Border Crossed Us' from Vagabond Press and 'Selfhood' from Trancendence Zero - and journals such as Apogee, Firewords Quarterly, Indie Soleil, Midnight Circus and Snapdragon as well as many other online and print publications. Her artwork has also been included in similar publications.

## STEVE KLEPETAR

Steve Klepetar lives in Saint Cloud, Minnesota. His work has appeared worldwide in such journals as Boston Literary Magazine, Chiron, Deep Water, Expound, Muddy River Poetry, Red River Review, Snakeskin, Voices Israel, Ygdrasil, and many others.



Several of his poems have been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize (including four in 2016). New collections include A Landscape in Hell (Flutter Press), Family Reunion (Big Table Publishing), and "How Fascism Comes to America (Locofoco Chaps).

## DAVE MARKS

Dave Marks lives in north Wales and has been taking photos all his adult life. These pictures were taken in Havana shortly after the death of Fidel Castro had been announced.

## LINDA CRATE

Linda M. Crate is a Pennsylvanian native born in Pittsburgh yet raised in the rural town of Conneautville. Her poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has three published chapbooks *A Mermaid Crashing Into Dawn* (Fowlpox Press - June 2013), *Less Than A Man* (The Camel Saloon - January 2014), and *If Tomorrow Never Comes* (Scars Publications, August 2016). Her fantasy novel *Blood & Magic* was published in March 2015. The second novel of this series *Dragons & Magic* was published in October 2015. The third of the seven book series *Centaur & Magic* was published November 2016. Her novel *Corvids & Magic* was published March 2017. Her novel *Phoenix Tears* is forthcoming.

## CARTER VANCE

Carter Vance is a student and aspiring poet originally from Cobourg, Ontario, currently studying at Carleton University in Ottawa. His work has appeared in such publications as

The Vehicle, (parenthetical) and F(r)iction, amongst others. He received an Honourable Mention from Contemporary Verse 2's Young Buck Poetry Awards in 2015. His work also appears on his personal blog Comment is Welcome.

## CAROLINE DELUCA

Caroline DeLuca lives in New York, working as a freelance editor and educator. She has taught creative writing at Stony Brook University, the NY Memory Center, the UVa Young Writers Workshop, Gaudenzia Substance Abuse Recovery Home, and My Sister's Place. Her writing has recently appeared in Lime Hawk, Sartre, Gandy Dancer, sirsee, Snapdragon Journal, Sheila-Na-Gig, thesongis, Rat's Ass Review, Local Nomad, The Bridge, I Am-Iamb-I Yam, Seven Deadly Sins, Greek Fire, Verbaleyze, Zeniada, and on [carolinedelUCA.com](http://carolinedelUCA.com).

## CHRISTINE BRANDEL

Christine Brandel is a writer and photographer. Her book *A Wife is a Hope Chest* will appear in 2017 as the first full-length collection in the Mineral Point Poetry Series from Brain Mill Press. She also writes a column on comedy for PopMatters and rights the world's wrongs via her character Agatha Whitt-Wellington (Miss) at *Everyone Needs An Algonquin*. More of her work can be found at [clbwrites.com](http://clbwrites.com).

## ANN CHRISTINE TABAKA

Ann Christine Tabaka was born and lives in Delaware. She is a published poet, an artist, a chemist, and a personal trainer. She loves gardening, cooking, and the ocean. Chris lives with her husband and two cats. Her poems have been published in numerous national and international poetry journals, reviews, and anthologies. Chris has been selected as the resident Haiku poet for Stanzaic Stylings.

## DON FLYNN

Don Flynn works in municipal code publishing in Rochester, New York. He has written several short stories, and had one published in *Shadows & Light* anthology in September 2016. He's had many articles and two short fiction pieces published in his company's newsletter.



## SHAWN CHANG

Shawn Chang is a 17-year-old based in Canada. His work has appeared in *Shot Glass Journal*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and five issues of *The Literary Hatchet*. He may be found @Sad\_Cypr3ss.