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THE MITRE

2013



M. M. J.

CANADA'S LONGEST RUNNING LITERARY JOURNAL
ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTIETH EDITION



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good that we writerly folk are encouraged to nix adjectives when we can, because there
aren't enough in the world to convey the scope of both your genius and my gratitude.

AN EDITORIAL INTERJECTION

I don't expect this book to change your life.

I don't expect it to rewire the circuits in your brain or scrape at your soul.

I don't even expect it to leave a scar.

But it might be able to inspire a wrench of your gut. Or a pang in your chest. A flash in your eye. Maybe even a quick huff of air through your nostrils. Any and all physiognomic betrayals are welcome.

That'll be enough.

This is your life, and it's ending one word at a time.

My work here is done.



Denise St. Pierre
Editor



Mel MacCoubrey
Cover Designer/Illustrator

THE MITRE

'Art' is the biggest word I've ever heard.

Alison Petrovich

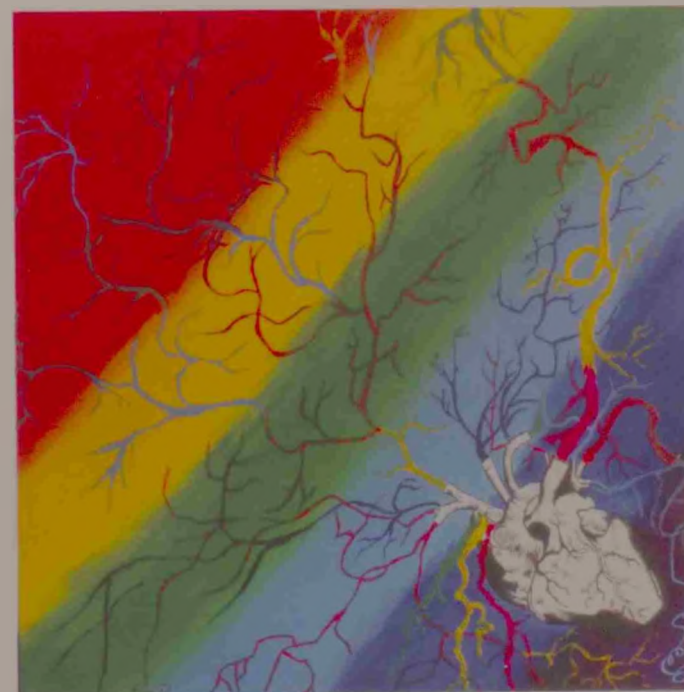
The sandwich artist who puts cornflakes in a grilled cheese will tell you what it tastes like.

You can feel it in the swiftly kicked soccer ball as it hits you in the back of the head.

The inky and stinky studio of an oil painter smells like it.

You'll hear it buzzing through the radio channels.

So I write notes, and names, and nifty ideas in my notebook, just to forget about them when I turn the page.



This Path

William François Tremblay

The 120th edition of The Mitre is dedicated to the memory of

Dr. Noni Howard, '71

Former editor, and lifelong supporter, of this publication

A Casual Cry

Asa Connor

We used to talk
An orating pleasure
Echoing the day we met
And then we turned beast
She's a riot between the sheets
Her head would fall as I tensed with fame
She gave me so much that I gave back
In only one way

Now she runs
To keep away from the Lion
The demon that used her
I am that horizon

Beat her and hit her
Ripped her and bit her
Used her for death
That's what she did best

I wish she would come back
Just one more time
To this shredder of mine

Waiting Room

Frank Willdig

Faint Cancer scuttles over this winter landscape,
dim and silent in the dark before dawn.

Barely detectable, lodged in the light-starved space
between a regal lion and the doomed twins.

Tonight, my ominously named companion,
denizen of the night and the cold,

I think of you as Galen's *karkinos* holding vigil
over the humbling burdens of mortality.



Buddhist Temple

Cheylyne Eccles

Riddled with Gross Things

Jamie Boland

Terry Palmer was getting his head shaved because he had lice. His mother stood over him and the barber was at work, though Terry could only hear this, as his eyes were shut

"Shorter, I want nothing left for those vile creatures to hide in."

"Yes, ma'am."

"What do you do with the diseased hair after?"

"We'll sterilize the tools and burn the hair. We have an incinerator out back specifically for this."

"Good, nothing should be left."

The last of it mournfully fell and several fine hairs landed on Terry's nose. He scratched it and opened his eyes.

"There. You see, Terry? All gone. It's not so bad is it? You don't look like a little girl anymore, far more like a handsome little man. We should have done this long ago."

He was ready to cry. His chest was caving in.

"Now thank the man for his fine job."

"Thank you."

"What?"

"Thank you, sir."

"Don't forget to bring your pillowcase and sheets to me when we get home. I will suffer no further outbreaks."

"Yes, mom."

"And stop looking so forlorn. This isn't the end of the world. It will be good for you in fact. One should be concerned with one's appearance, but not to a fault. He always gets so emotional over trifling things like this."

The barber laughed softly.

"You look manlier now, don't you think?"

"Yes, mom."

"Get ready. I've got to make a phone call then we'll go."

He stared at the hateful image in the mirror. The barber was cleaning up the piles of hair. He smiled and rubbed Terry's head, affectionately, humorously, but did not speak to him.

On their way to the car, up the hill, Terry stared at the red-stained, luminous clouds of sunset. They seemed so close but he knew they were too far to touch. Still, they hung over the street and over him, and walking up the hill seemed to be walking into them. A cool breeze came down the hill and his fresh head felt strange as he breathed it in and out. He passed onto the top and saw the clouds were still too far.

"Stop wandering and keep up."

He fell in behind his mother with impotent tears as red turned to shadow and dusk began to settle onto the street, and as the wind blew dead leaves across in front of them, collecting in piles for Terry to step over.

Hands

Katherine Perrotta

Restlessness plagues these hands, these fingers. These limbs are aching with boredom, begging to be touched, begging to paint, desperate for a command: "Live!"

The artist is fickle, temperamental, fabulous, volatile, loving, boundless. At the very mention of a blank canvas the artist will jump and their heart will race and their mind will turn violently, their eyes filling with colors and filigrees and ideas.

Temporary insanity overtakes the artist. Their movements are erratic, their lips betraying deafening silences, eccentric glances to and fro, darting this way and that like a little child, unfocused and full of wonder.

Beauty springs forth from their hands. Stories are told by their hands. Portraits are created by their hands. Immortality pools at their fingertips. They are God – for however limited a time – and they control their universe absolutely.

They are limitless, they are free. The artist is an enigma, a revolution. They control the world; we are at the benevolent mercy of these beautiful, gentle, erratic, intelligent artists.

Restlessness plagues these hands, these fingers. These limbs are aching with boredom, begging to be touched, begging to paint, desperate for a command: "Live!"

Pull these strings, spattered with paint and idealism and wonder and acrylic. Pull these strings and make me live, make these hands shake and these arms quiver with chilled excitement. Pull these strings, tear them free, fray the ends and watch as I tumble into the fanatical Technicolor abyss and laugh hysterically the whole way down.



Peaceful Lake
Sonia Z Palik

Caliban

Frank Willdig

Neither beast nor man is poor Caliban,
Toiling alone on the treeless stretches,
Prince of the proletarian wretches,
Subsisting on scraps on his stolen land.

Bent on the beach and with his twisted frame
He scrambles across the polluted pools,
He hacks out his days with primitive tools
And gathers the wood for his master's flame.

He's kept a slave with a minimal wage.
While in debt and fear he spends his long days,
Declared subhuman in so many ways,
(He hasn't the words for his silent rage).

The masters of war and masters of greed
Still dream sweet dreams while their Calibans bleed.

A Reason For Insomnia

Irina Sordiya

A big, fat lump of the sky has fallen into my room. Stars within its dark, tremulous flesh are sizzling with light but the whole room has dropped in temperature. Considerably.

They always start like this, the nightmares I mean. I curl under the blanket trying to preserve the warmth but it is no longer mine. I shut my eyes against the vision but the stars burst like bulbs and the heated shards begin to writhe through my eyelids.

The moon is large and looming, painfully luminous in my bones. Children's voices crescendo into the room with a rapid, excited carnival music. The children are innocently asking questions about the slurp of spilling intestines and how to cut off bits of flesh. There is Someone behind the door. Their long shadow spies through the slit and they are silently laughing. Their shadow spills through under the door, and It seeps and slowly flowers out on my chapped lips in a scream, and I claw, claw to get out the broken stars that painfully took roots within my eyeballs. To see! I need to see that person!

My terror is infinite and harsh as I feel, as I *know*, I'm the one laughing silently and see myself standing in the doorway screaming with beautiful, star-like eyes.

I am endless as the night sky.



Sleeping Smile
Francis Auclair

Sepia

Caleigh A. Cross

There are things that always, always take me home. The other night, headlights of a passing car crept along the ceiling. I used to stay up to see that so I'd know my parents were home. Even now, at twenty-four, I found myself half-listening for the crunch of gravel under tires that used to mean they were back and I was no longer alone. This season is another nostalgia trigger for me. September's coming soon. The moon is full to gorging and overflowing in the night around this time of year. My father used to take us out at night and show us.

If you ask me where I'm from, I will tell you "Everywhere". I went everywhere. My parents loved to travel. They loved water. I am named for my father's racing boat, long since dry-docked. There is a pond here, nestled in the woods behind the house where I grew up.

I have put this house up for sale. I am really only here to make sure all is in order and to say goodbye. The real estate agent will be here soon.

I walk around the driveway. In high school, when everything was blisteringly raw and real enough to leave bruises, my friends would come here to swim and flirt and have barbecues. There is a fort, the walls thatched with long-dead ferns, down by the water. My brother and I built it when we were very much younger. I remember saying goodbye to my high school boyfriend on this driveway just before he left for college. We pressed our hands together like two starfish trying to kiss, reluctant to let any degree of separation press between us and make us strangers. I have the photos still from that day. When I left for college in my old MG, I put one on the dashboard so I'd see it every day. When we inevitably broke up, I turned it around so that I see us in reverse at night when I drive by streetlights. The sunlight faded the picture so that everything has a vague tinge of golden sepia, like an old movie.

Nothing gold can stay.

"Miss Pond? Annalise?" A voice calls me from my reverie. I look up and tuck some of the red hair I got from my mother and kept with Clairol behind my ear. I realize I have been kicking the gravel on the driveway with my boot. I stop and face Morrison Bradley. He is weathered-looking; the same look a baseball glove starts to get after having been passed down from father to son to grandson. I wonder briefly if his weariness is from selling family homes like mine, being the tide that changes old and new, but I force myself to think like an adult. I can't afford to keep this place. I wonder then if his placelessness comes from having two first names. Does he feel like he has no surname, no roots? Is that why he is in real estate, to help others find a home?

I shake my head to clear it. "Call me Anna." I close the distance between us and shake his hand.

"Morrison. Your parents did well here."

"They built it themselves," I tell him, even though I can't imagine he doesn't know that already.

"The ponds are great for property value," he continues. My dad had tried for years to have a pond and had ended up with two. "You've had several families see the place already. One made an offer this morning." He sounds hesitant when he tells me this last. He gives me a number. It's big. It's *really* big. I stare at him. Money like that would pay rent at my little apartment for longer than I'll probably live there. And Alice the MG Midget needs a new carburetor. "Anna?"

"Um," I croak. "Can I think on it?" For the first time, Morrison Bradley looks at me with a little sympathy. I am twenty-four and alone; competent, but alone. It must show. I am not trying to hide it. He gives my shoulder a slight squeeze and nods.

"By all means. There's no room for rash decisions in real estate, Anna."

"I'm going to stay here tonight," I reply. I drove Alice here this morning and spent the day in the town where I went to school before coming...here. Home, but not really. Morrison nods again. "I'll give you a call, Morrison. It was nice to meet you in person." Mr. Bradley understands his dismissal.

"Good to meet you, Anna." As his truck bounces down the driveway, I hear the crunch of gravel. I am wearing a long, red plaid flannel shirt over jeans, like we used to wear chopping wood for winter. I hated chopping wood, but what I wouldn't give to hear my father come in the door, ruddy with work and early cold, smelling like creosote and wood smoke. I wish I'd memorized what it sounded like when he came home from work. I wish I could remember the words we said to one another. I can't remember. It bothers me. I desperately wish they were nice, kind, and loving words, but I know they weren't. Regret slips under my skin.

I go inside and make a peanut butter sandwich for dinner. It's all that's left in the pantry. After I eat it, I go back outside.

The evening was never going to come to anything but this. With autumn comes an earlier sunset; it is almost completely dark outside now. When I was younger, I was afraid of what might have been lurking in those dark woods. My brother used to leap from them and scream like a banshee, and I'd fall on the ground and writhe in blind terror.

I know where I'm going. I'm not at all afraid of the woods now. I am headed towards the pond.

The water's arms embrace me, cool and dark and long, stretching into the distance where I can't tell water from night. It goes on and on and continuously on and I slip in, half a water creature myself, evolved past fins but not quite gills. I am silent.

I am seventeen again, and the water washes layers upon layers off of me, and I am going to college tomorrow. The moon shines brightly on the dark water. *It's all sunlight*, I reflect. Looking back, oh, back through the sepia haze of wood smoke and tree forts and my parents' voices, everything looks like sunlight.

I stretch just under the skin of the lake, looking halfway human, a beat in the brilliance of night and water. The photo on Alice's dashboard was taken here years ago. The pond is a little shallower now. Somebody has painted the shutters on the house a shade darker. These are little things, little reminders that time has in fact been passing, but to me, they make the world seem vast and unknowable, the victim of some invisible apoca-

lypse that left everything ravaged, everything burned. For an instant, I have wild thoughts of drowning, of staying here where I said goodbye to my friends, of becoming as much a part of this lake as it is of me. I gaze along the length of my body, looking at the way my fingers slip just above the surface, at how blunt they are. It's as if my body is telling me, "This is the end. This is where it stops."

The water is incommensurate around me. It stretches under and under and around the bottom of the world. I feel that I am losing myself, that the body that surrounds and contains me is becoming less corporeal and more elemental. Suddenly I realize that if I stepped out of my body, I would break into blossom.

I will sell the house. Nothing gold can stay, not even the copper color of the hair bequeathed to me by my mother. My memories are the sepia of things that are over, carrying with them the color and sense of an ending. Nothing could ever brighten my memories more than this. The wind will always blow and not blow. It is done.

I get out of the pond and dress, settling into my body like royalty. It is after midnight. It is September.



Autumnal
Cheylyne Eccles

The Royal We

Alex Morency-Letto

Your arrival needs not:
Trumpeters so all can rise,
Proclamations to endear
Footsteps in the room
Resound in dullest silence
As your court shifts to see
Regal mannerist,
Perfuming the air,
Just petals to the wind
Robust Elizabethan,
Composure deserved
For those above
Defiling definitions
With radiance
Truly natural
Refreshing rose water
Upon callous, jaded eyes
The Jester flocks to muse you
The rose among
Long.
Tall.
Thin and painted weeds
Choking out the flowers
Driving to blossom
On their own terms.

Haiku 1.2.3.

Annis Karpenko

Morning sun shines through
illuminating the dust
way too long ignored

A meditation
each conscious breath in and out
fills the day with grace

The best day to eat
some summer raspberry jam
is a winter day



Winter's Breath

Alison Petrovich

Prospero and Merlin on the Beach

Frank Willdig

They have retired their magic and books,
And regale themselves with their storied past,
Sitting together beneath squabbling rooks.
They relive those tales while memories last.
Mermaids frolic on the waves in the bay,
Unicorns graze in the cool misty glades,
From the shores of Milan they make their way,
Watching the boundless sea as it fades.
What they remember, the lessons they've learned
Merge into magic and dream-like landscapes,
These ancient relics relish what they've earned
And wait together by the timeless capes.
Gone, all is gone, without grief or regrets,
At peace with the world as a weary sun sets.

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Black Ice

Luke Wilson

A vision,
her loving arms.
Pure white intentions; I meant no harm.
I haven't even asked her name,
but Cupid took aim.

I'm no prince charming.

Admission
can still wait.
Our time together is short; the hour is late.
We could have really said goodnight
but it felt all right.

(Chorus)

I'm no prince charming
But I'll do tonight.
Our hearts stay silent
in the moonlight.
How frozen is my heart?
Black ice.

Condition:
Fine, so far.
In bed, we undress our souls and bear our scars.
I never even cared enough
but I'm not that tough.

(Chorus)

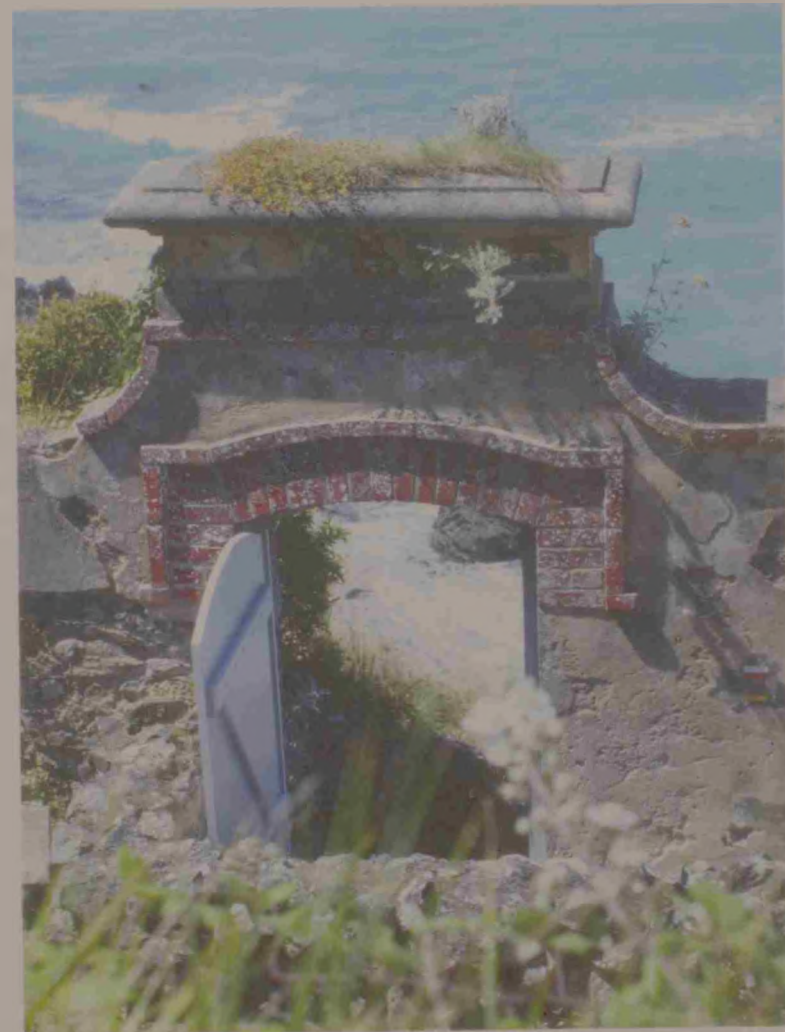
In the morning
we wash off each other's name.
But how long does it take
to wash hands clean of shame?
How can I make right?
One night her heart was just a game.

(Chorus)

THE MITRE

She says, she's broken;
I'm to blame.
Fuck what my intentions were; it's all the same.
I'd say I'm sorry if I could
but it's understood.

(Chorus)



Grandville, Normandy, 2012
Cecilia Bracmort

To what do we refer when we say it's raining?

Christopher Carmichael

What is it? What does it mean? Do you know where it is? Could that be it? No, it's probably somewhere else. In my old age, I sometimes worry that I'm forgetting it, but the feeling passes when I forget about it. When I haven't forgotten it somewhere, I think about it constantly. It's an obsession. Unfortunately, I still haven't figured it out. I don't think you've figured it out either.

It is everything. It is nothing. It comes in every colour. Cool people are with it. Crazy people have lost it. People are so caught up in it, but when you ask them what they did with it they'll say, "Don't look at me, I don't know where it is!" Children reveal far more than they realize when they declare, "You're it!"

I suspect it is ultimately ambiguous, but people shamelessly talk about it with total conviction. Isn't it sad seeing people try to sell it for more than it's worth? Sorry, but it can't be bought.

If you think you know what it is, you're wrong. I don't mean to suggest I know any more about it than you do, I don't. In the unlikely event you do actually know what it is, please tell me!

It's hard to go a sentence without saying it. That last sentence had two instances of it. When it's gone, people miss it, but when they have it, they couldn't care less. It's brand new, but it's always breaking down. It's all been said and done, but it admits a certain freshness when seen by a child for the first time. Ostensibly, school is where you learn it, but that's bullshit.

The prevailing argument of my childhood was that the Hokey Pokey is what it's all about. Andre 3000 told us to shake it, shake it, shake it, shake it, shake it, shake it like a Polaroid picture. People dig it when talking about Shaft. Clara Bow was the first It Girl. It's trivial, I suppose.

Some people have more of it than they need. Some people are dying without it. There are people so desperate to get it they'll murder you in your own home, just because you have it and they don't. Perhaps we might eventually all learn to share it? I doubt it. Why do I get the feeling it's so much more than a two letter word?

I looked it up in the OED and discovered that it refers to both sexual intercourse and Italian vermouth. Serve it with gin and an olive and you'll be doing it in no time! Technically, it's a third person singular pronoun. The function of a pronoun is to stand in stead, but since every instance of a particular exists in the context of the whole, no wonder it has such universal qualities. It's all connected somehow, but we rarely see it for what it is. In case you're wondering, THIS IS IT! Deny it if you like, but as the children say, "You're it!"

It spans the entire universe by fitting in the palm of your hand. It's perpetually on the tip of your tongue. People travel trying to find it, but often discover they had it all along. It's a familiar story. It find it incredibly strange that if you leave it, and nobody takes it, it will be there when you get back. It's apparently normal, the permanence of objects, but

I'm still suspicious. When you're mad at someone, you tell them to shove it up their ass... You didn't hear it from me.

Oh God it's coming right for us! It's right behind you! How could you have missed it? It was spectacular! There are times when it scares us to death, and we beg our parents to make it go away, but even though it isn't real, there's nothing we can do about it. Don't ask me how this makes sense, but you can put it in a box while keeping it in mind. You can sit there and argue it's all for the birds, but it's really absurd for you to tell me it's nothing when I know for a fact it looks like a dumpling.

I have no idea what it really is, but I feel that the value it has is the value you make when you share it with people you love. I have no doubt you can find other uses for it; bomb it to shit for all I care.

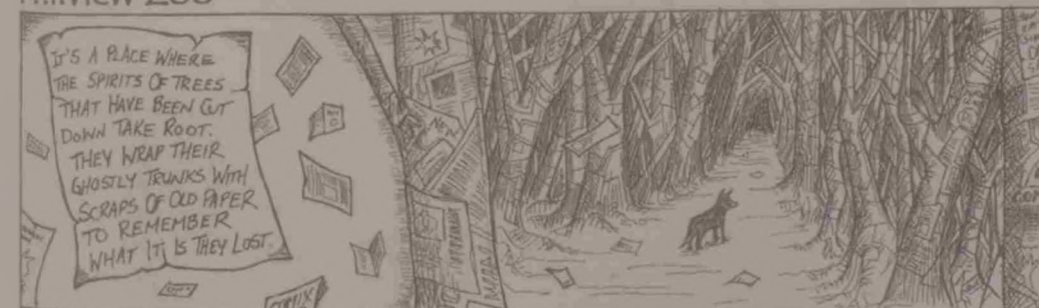
A friend of mine reckons he's a bit of an artist. He says, "I'm not here to break it, just to see how far it will bend."

That's it!



Hillview Zoo

By Jeff Parent



A Modern Day Walk in the Park

Gordon Lambie

Filling your A journey with the phone between us
 sentences with pauses

I see the city birds, chirping together and you, behind me,
 Clicking
 alone

 We used to get lost together
 And careen around lost corners
Laughing and yelling between white column businessmen
 But now you're in your map app
 Too busy to take a wrong turn
 Or see young mothers smile



Prayer
Annis Karpenko

Hopeless Defiance

Nicholas Walling

The man in the cell.
Alone.
The rebellion quelled.
Atone

The people are fed.
Lies.
Their martyrs not dead.
Cries.

The monarch is speaking.
Laws.
The machine is creaking.
Jaws.

No change comes to pass;
Souls shattered like glass.
A society bled,
A future to dread,
Now everyone get back to mass.



Library
Cheylyne Eccles

Specious Sonnets and Other Tedious Balderdash

Christopher Carmichael

Industry is a Virtue

From the day bestride with labour
Food derives the finest flavour
Savour all the work you do
For rest is earned to see it through
To mope and moan that work is awful
Is to deny the greatest gospel
The highest nature man reveals
Is in the boon of what he yields

A Drunk Sonnet Composed on a Placemat at Sebby's

Does ink contain the words I am to write?
Or does my mind compose them in my thought?
My insight into this is slim to slight
But all the same the words like iron wrought
Of all the things to say I will say this
That poems composed on placemats frequent fail
To argue otherwise I'd be remiss
For sure, the image of my poems is flail
A fumbling hand and diction going down
The drain, complain of this you're justified
And by the end my words will be but sound
Can this be aught but poesy homicide?
To wreck the sonnet so, and kill it thus
'Sto bake a pie but make it only crust

Ah, L'amour!

True love is hard and got through compromise
If fair in face then overlook the thighs
Don't stand in love, but fall in love and say
Though filled with fault I love you all the same
No boy yet found was ever true so sure
That some fair gem could not his brain procure
No girl yet chaste so much she couldn't name
At least one man she'd rather entertain

But find a way you must, 'tis true, no doubt
If you do not you will be left without
So seek a spouse so pure and so refined
That all your love exists within the mind
For therein love may find a lover foil
And all the same you both can shuff' the coil

There was an Accident!

In brightest light, I stand in blazing day
And blinded by the sun I only squint
The focal point of mirrors all arrayed
A fusion magnified from but a glint
Or so it feels to stand before you now
To feel the glare your angry eyes produce
If I attempt my sins to disavow
Will I succeed to make my guilt reduce?
It cannot be, I know what I have done
The sentence meted out is just and fair
There once were two, but now there's only one
How can you lose just half your derriere?
It was my fault because I caused the crash
And somehow, in the wreck, you lost your ass

A Sonnet for the Strident Suitor

A lovely found but rarer kept sublime
Is that which man and wife in love combine
An air of grace is hers the part to play
While you must walk the dog ere break of day
As she so ruled by ease anoints her care
On fulvous locks of silken golden hair
Your baldness grows in yet another spot
You're blamed again for promises forgot
So man and wife their earthly days do spend
And as a friend, it's hard to recommend
To live so close so long until so old
Is only for the foolish or the bold
As you may find your task is her to please
Think twice before you bend upon the knee

She stares at me...

Our silent looks so shared
Which seem to voice the things within the mind
Are all the more perplexing when the stare
Suggests a thousand words you hold confined
Are these dissembling moments cast between?
Or these the hopeful eyes of nascent love?
The latter's ours if we apply the mean
'Cause you're the only girl I want to hug

But I can't tell her sinister from jest
The shadow in her eye is always there
That looks can be deceiving most attest
And so I dream of meaning laying bare

The shadow in her eye still creeps apace
To hide the mind's construction in the face

This isn't what it looks like!

I'm stuck inside a basement oh so dark
The drips and drops and plops and all the wet
Of course it isn't true, it is a farce
A poem is not the truth, and don't forget!
A painting on the wall is oh so nice
The brush and stroke and line so subtly placed
But if I've told you once I've told you twice
All that can be drawn can be erased
And when you watch a film you are amazed
The light and sound and candy overwhelm
But while you watch with blank and fixed gaze
Your better judgement abdicates the helm
Assume that what you see is not the truth
Avoid nostalgia for the absolute.

Ghosting

Maria Elsser

Jane pulled her jacket closer, chiding herself for not bringing a scarf. She heard the plunge of footsteps into pavement, and whimsical whispers of poetry. "*Here, above, cracks in the buildings are filled with battered moonlight ...*" Nathan settled himself on the concrete wall beside her, legs dangling off the edge.

Twenty feet below, the seething river lay eerily calm, an abject abyss of darkness. The mist was beginning to form. Silence hung around them like sheets draped on a clothes line. The air was cold, the wind was still. It was the perfect time for Ghosting. In November, the river froze, and by March the walls were crowded with spectators. It was too frigid, too dark and dangerous these late autumn days for people to venture out. Jane repressed a shiver. Nathan continued, softly, "... *He does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties, feeling the queer light on his hands, neither warm nor cold*" he paused, "Are you cold? Here, have my coat."

"No." Jane's long, tightly wound ponytail added emphasis to the shake of her head. "I'm fine."

"Do you like the poem?"

Jane gave an apathetic shrug.

"It's called 'Man-moth' by Elizabeth Bishop. It was mom's favourite." Nathan rattled on. Jane did not a reply.

Down the river she saw them, at first, nothing more than ripples in the fog, but they grew, morphed, gained shapes, faces, legs, arms, eyes. Their silent mouths opened and closed as they drifted by. Jane took out her notebook. Nathan stared at the procession, barely blinking, continuing his incessant murmurs. "... *he thinks the moon is a small hole at the top of the sky ...*" Jane always pitied him. They had been Ghosting for six years, and always Nathan would hope, and always he would be let down. It wasn't like Jane hadn't tried. She'd tried explaining it to him, the science, the revolution, the reason for these rituals. Every time, Nathan brushed her aside with an abstraction of poetry and "You can't fight faith, Jane."

Jane paused from her scrawling after a mother with a child in her arms drifted by, and looked at Nathan, his tanned skin bathed in a bluish glow, thick lips moving soundlessly. Jane supposed he was attractive. His body was opposite to her stiff, sterile frame. Everything about him was a little untidy, a little unkept. His shaggy hair needed cutting. Spikes of stubble were poking through prolonged peach-fuzz. He wore his smile like a slept in T-shirt, and his breath smelled the same, but it was part of his charm.

They met when he moved into the flat next door. After two weeks of Nathan's knocking and love notes, Jane was about to take out a restraining order when the Government issued the law that everyone must travel in pairs during these "uncertain times". More interested in continuing her parent's research than social conventions, Jane had no one else.

But Nathan proved to be surprisingly tolerable. He was a collector of everything, his

favourite: words. Books and quotes and dictionaries and poetry. And like Jane, he was obsessed with Ghosting. They went every night they could. When Jane was cold, he placed his jacket around her thin shoulders. It smelled like library books, and Earl Grey tea, and home, a scent Jane could never explain.

A cold breeze stiffened Jane from these memories. That was before she knew the real Nathan. She closed her eyes, and felt a heavy warmth on her shoulders. The scent of libraries and tea and home curled around her. She heard Nathan's voice, lulling her "... *each night he must be carried through artificial tunnels and dream recurrent dreams.*" Angrily, she shook off the jacket. "I told you, I'm fine."

"It's just a coat."

Jane gritted her teeth. Nathan was right. It was just a coat. Nathan slipped back into silence. His eyes flickered over the ghosts, quickly fading into mist again with the embers of the rising sun. "There!" His arm lashed out. Walking slowly, the caboose of the transparent train, a woman had her arms linked with a man. It was as if they were admiring the scenery, off on a Sunday stroll. "There they are. I knew they would come. Mom loves Elizabeth Bishop. *Cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink.* That was her favourite line." Nathan looked like a child on Christmas who discovered the plate of milk and cookies to have vanished over night. Jane scowled until her head ached. She rocked back and forth. She ground her teeth. She did everything she could to drown out Nathan's voice.

"... *Pure enough to drink* ..."

"Stop it."

"... *Pure enough to drink* ..."

"Why do you believe this uselessness? It's fabricated."

"But, my parents died before—"

"I know!" Jane cut Nathan off. "You tell me every time. 'Of course seeing your parents would prove death is real because they died before Ghosting began'. But they never died! Don't you get it? No one dies! That's the point! We just get recycled. You have the choice as coming back as a newborn or restarting your life where it left off. Society collapsed. If people lost their jobs, they'd shoot themselves! Life had no meaning anymore, so they made these fake rituals and presented them as facts. That's why I'm doing research, trying to end Ghosting; it gives false hope to idiots like you. That's why you've been watching all these years. I know. How can you keep doing this? It makes me sick."

"You don't—" Nathan tried.

"Just give up. Just give up!" Jane turned away and stared into the distance. The air ached between them.

"You know what makes me sick?" Nathan asked quietly. "You. You make me sick" Jane kept her eyes fixed straight ahead.

"You talk all this shit about my beliefs, yet I dare not contradict yours. You act like you are all high and mighty because your parents were the original scientists. You are so afraid, Jane." Nathan grabbed her chin. "If you're so sure death isn't real, then why

is there a loaded gun in your purse?" Jane stared back, considering biting his fingers off. She could almost taste the blood. "But," Nathan said, his lips tracing the velvet hairs on Jane's ears. "But, more than you sicken me, you sadden me, Jane. You are so afraid you can't believe. You're so afraid you turn to science to be your light when you can't see you're burning down cities." His lips brushed her clenched jaw. "You are so very afraid, Jane, that you can't even let yourself love someone who challenges your beliefs, because you know they are no more real than the spirits we see. You're so afraid you aren't living. You might as well be Ghosting."

"Shut up." Jane said.

"You love me, Jane."

"Shut up!"

"I know it's true!" Nathan was shouting. He grabbed Jane by her shoulders and shook her. "I know you love me! Let it go! Let it go Jane! You will never win. You will burn, just like your parents." Jane raised her hand to strike Nathan. He caught it, and kissed each finger. Jane clawed at his lips. They began to bleed. "Jane." Nathan said. Jane reached into her purse. "Jane." Nathan put his hand on her cheek. "I'll shoot you!" Jane cried, revealing her gun. "I'll prove to you death isn't real!" She pushed the barrel into his chest. A lump was forming in her throat. Nathan leaned forward. "You're an idiot." Jane said.

"No, Jane. I'm not. It's not a matter of science and facts. I don't care about how much proof you can throw in my face. I believe, and that's all that matters, and if that makes me an idiot, I don't care. I don't care! But this is all I know."

"What do you know?"

"That life is precious. And time passes. And even if we just get to do it all over again, it doesn't make this moment any less special. Jane, please..." Nathan drew his lips closer to her face.

"Don't!" Jane ordered, her voice quivering. "Don't you dare! Don't you dare kiss me, Nathan!" Now she was sobbing, snot smearing her lips, mascara bleeding down her face. "I'll shoot." Nathan said nothing. He leaned forward. His mouth met hers. "Nathan ..."

"I love you, Jane."

The barrel of the gun deep in his belly, the shot was half as loud as Jane expected. Nathan slumped against her breasts. His eyes were glassy. Blood spurted from his broken mouth. He whispered the final line. "*Cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink.*"

Jane rolled Nathan's body from the wall. It made a pathetic splash, and disappeared from sight in the remaining darkness. She drew Nathan's coat around her. Libraries and tea and home. "*Pure enough to drink,*" Jane whispered, and she watched the final wisps of mist appear across the river.

Colibri

Curtis Mullin

Born of the great Pleiadian solar eclipse, pink and peach, her old worn-out halo spun. But she was young, like Snow White: an untouched pearl of a paradise; beaming over unrestrained sensual voluptuous rolling orchard hills, fountains in thaw and autumn pumpkin-blooms; blinding, falling leaves blew off those mountains to bow a deeper string below giant golden mushroom pillows hugging funnybones and fiddleheads; pulsing, swinging smoother than a baby's cheek—as the rest of her—rarer than the freshest kill, so sweet silence stood, over her, like a hungry lion would. Two doves perched on a cherry blossom tree cuddled as she leaned to look up to see; swallowing whole a twisted tongue, feral tears tranquilized a sleepwalking craze of howls and thistles growing more in maze, only to save some edgy drool for another kind of mossy waterbed. Unspoken civilized tables apart, a word away sat in its leather throne, staring across the pastures, to the east, out of the corners of its frozen I; having nearly caged the wilderness inside, hunters fixed on their bloody game were cast a cherub's spell, by the lures and lines of sights and scents hazing from her pack of petals, out a little ways, just waiting to be picked. Happiest where she lies, daylight shines for her to light the way at night. Cunning weeds choking the only rose with twice the pawns taking all the squares, Calisi's target may have shown her form but still she ruled from a palace so unborn; deadlock is a bore. Soon enough the fog gave way to a hummingbird's beak, to sway and wand about the meadows, writing music in the sand under the rainbow, and wings to fly to her beacon now unchained; fluttering sounds quickly hummed an echoing drone into her flower's drum, with but a feather tickling back to her in Morse code the welcoming image that was the quilted blanket of her soul; pinkish-orange suede. Needless to say, that day, it wasn't cold; pollen avalanche drifts and nectar flows rumbled crackling booms and thunderbolts from her smashing purple haze; this honeysuckle's dew dripped on, without the slightest bird's breath over her embers—glowing with every colour—clearly, from the heat and magic in the air; playing mirrors in between

where her darkness deepened most—the entrance to that concealed mine moistened with a melted chocolate sun. This wealth of molten jewel and flame lit the cobwebs of some empty room upstairs where were called the shots to end the miner's day; having managed to keep the windows clean, could she be a carousel and tambourine? Those round bosom tear-drops clinging to her treasure chest felt the dainty hands of time herself, in plain sight, pointing the way to yet another golden part; keeping the rarest care to polish and prune those bare smooth tender branches into finer stems, of a pianist's ten favourite notes, lulling silk sonatas into shape ad lib—a body language murmuring lifetimes of stories as they played, although mostly clothed, a hand shake away. Inviting dragon's mother's eyes and thick wet spongy lips did beg a virgin kiss—an endless digit of its own pinned to cushions down below her hourglass, where upon them lay, hidden, a freshly-rinsed juicy southern fruit just whimpering for a little squeeze. Quivering choral garden shoots amidst the mundane background buzz of bees, she sung; rippling tales of babbling brooks, nightingales, and early morning mists, as do drip those priceless beads from leaf to leaf—writing upon these scrolls the names of those whose eye like the flower sees... a healthy dawn chorus resurrects each day. Dawn she was, and chorus, whilst she bore the baker's brulerie; where did beat out hearts and mimes, lighting paths of burning shadows from the grave, for other warriors to see, so they might find their own way home with this blind man's walking torch; yet known why butterflies tease inner sacred-sounding harps and bells—a temple built of dance and wind to mingle into angel dust, drawing up the whitest smoke fanned for all to breathe: best left soaring, roaming like the wisest savage beasts; ripening harvest ales in the dark damp cellars of the wedding feast, yet savoured, though miraged and flavoured; raw with the choicest northern peits, from the purest springs flowing down the valleys into waterfalls and oceans, where Mother Nature with all her monsters, weapons, stars and moons, space, rocks and roots cannot tame the wonder of this life that is love.



Japanese Saru, Kyoto, Japan
Mel Hattie



Half-Smile in Habana
Mel Hattie

RUN BKK

Alexis Chouan

Waiting for a train going south to take me away from a life I've known for months, I go for one last run in Bangkok and bid the city farewell. The sun is setting on the Chao Phraya, the bloodline river of the metropolis carrying boats full of tourists, trade goods and trash. The streets are filled with staple food stands, selling mystery meat, fried somethings and sticky others. The motorbike-taxi drivers linger in packs, wearing their colored number vests over their bare chests, waiting for the next fare, but mostly chatting amongst themselves. As I run by, they noncommittally ask me where I'm going. "I take you—very cheap," they say.

It's evening; Bangkok is waking up. I'm reminded of how much of Thai life happens on the street. After only a week of moving around, have I already forgotten what I learned living for six months in a small northern Thai town? Only a short while ago, I was still reading on the long chair on the street in front of my house, watching the dogs fight and listening to the sound of the neighbors making dinner. Eating out meant going to the night market for some Pad Thai from the vendor under the sign that reads: Thai Fired Noodles. Late night, I would get some fried roti off the street corner for 6 baht—less than 20 cents. With my bicycle, I went everywhere. I became one with the movement of the town.

When we travel, we tend to go places. We go to the hotel. We go to the bus station. We go to the restaurant. The street is a transition space for us to get to places. We seek the A/C and a chair to comfort our white backs, sweating from the tropical heat. We visit old rocks without discerning between temples and cities. We do not bother to ask who put these sites here and why. Instead we worry about how we can get the best shot of ourselves to send to our friends with a sentiment of: no big deal, I'm in Asia. Then we lock ourselves in our hotel rooms and say: "We've seen Thailand."

But the Thai street is not a transition space. The lack of sidewalks is not meant to be hostile to pedestrians. They want to say: "Pedestrians don't need to step aside; the street belongs to them!" In the mix of people crossing the street nonchalantly, stray dogs claiming their space, cars zooming past and taxi drivers signaling for you to hop on, no wonder so many foreigners find Bangkok an overwhelming city. The barriers we put up in our countries are irrelevant here. As I run down the pavement, I see the groups of Thai men huddling in the cooling air, the ladies pushing their carts of food, a child poking the sewers with a stick and I wonder: "How much did I ever really know Thailand?" I walk.

Light Sleeper

Jeff Parent

"Hey, what are you doing up? It's like, three in the morning."

Stephen turned from the picture window, "Hey you. I couldn't sleep. Look at this though. I want you to see something."

"Is everything okay?" Melanie asked.

"Yeah, yeah but check it out."

Melanie tied her housecoat and walked to the window. She gave Stephen a sidelong look. He was staring out at something. She followed his gaze.

"Stephen, what am I looking at?"

"Okay, so, see the hydro pylons across the way?"

"Yeah," she yawned, "I hate those things; they're creepy, like skeletons. What about them?"

Stephen sighed. "That's not it. Follow my finger. Look to the left of the pylons, and across Staedtler Road. Okay? Now look over from that, across the canal. See the McDonald's?"

Melanie frowned in the dark. "Yeah." And then: "This is what keeps you up at night? I used to do that, remember?"

"Ha ha. Right, so look to the right of the McDonald's sign. See that traffic light just above the chain link fence along the water?"

She leaned close to the glass. "Yeah, okay. It's red."

"Right! Yes! Okay, now look at me, count to five, then look back at the traffic light."

"Stephen, really?"

"Do it, do it."

Melanie looked at Stephen; he looked back at her and winked. She rolled her eyes. After about five seconds they turned together to look at the traffic light. "Did you see that?" he said.

"See what? It's still red. Stephen, are you sleepwalking?"

"Okay, okay. Try this. Look at it for about two minutes. Don't take your eyes off it."

"Two minutes? Seriously?"

"Just do it. I want to check something."

"Fine, then back to bed. It's chilly in here." Stephen nodded and they both watched the distant traffic light. After a minute, Melanie said, "Geez. That's a long red light. Even at *three in the morning*."

Stephen missed the sarcasm. "I know right? Give it another minute then look away."

"Huh. Still not changing."

"Now look away. Just for a few seconds."

Melanie did as she was told.

"Did you see that?" Stephen asked urgently.

"I...I think...okay. Wait. Let me do that again." She looked away then looked back again, quickly. "That was weird."

"What? What did you see?"

"Well, the light is still red but when I looked away and then back again, I'd swear for a split second it was green."

"Ha!"

"That was it?"

Stephen looked at her seriously. "I've been watching that thing every night for, I dunno, the last four nights and not once have I seen it turn green, or even yellow. It's always red. I'll stand here and it never changes. I thought maybe there was a sensor in the road—you know, if a car was stopped? Still, even with no cars it should change on its own. I've tried to catch it out but it's always red—except for that weird split second where it *might* be green."

Melanie shivered and hugged herself. "You're crazy."

"Maybe, but try it a few more times. It's always the same."

She didn't say anything and stared out the window. Stephen looked at her and frowned.

"Are you looking at the light?"

"Shh. I'm looking at the reflection of it in the canal. The water is still."

"Oh, hadn't thought of that."

"Don't look at it!" Melanie scolded.

"Hey, I'm doing the same as you. Checking out the reflection."

They watched for a while but the reflection didn't change.

"That's *so* spooky."

Stephen nodded silently. "Let's go back to bed."

"Just a sec." She vigorously shook her head left and right a half dozen times, blinking quickly.

"Now who's crazy?"

She sighed heavily. "That didn't do anything. I thought I could trick it. I don't know what to make of it."

He shrugged "It's a mystery."

Melanie suddenly grabbed Stephen's arm. "There's a car coming! Let's see what happens!"

They watched the car slow and come to a stop. It idled, taillights red. The signal didn't change. "Wow." said Melanie, "That guy must be...uh oh...AHHH-CHOO!"

Stephen jumped. "Whoa! Gadzuntheit."

"Ah! I missed it! The light! Did it change?"

"Nope, I don't think so. Looks like the car U-turned into the McDonald's."

"Arg!" she exclaimed. "Now I have to pee. Be right back. Tell me what happens!"

She ran to the bathroom. The light went on under the door. Stephen sat on the sill with his back to the glass. The traffic light was reflected in the mirror above the sofa. He closed his eyes, opened them. Still red. In the kitchen the fridge hummed into life.

The bathroom light went off. About a minute later, Melanie emerged.

"Thought you fell in. Why were you in there so long with the light off?"

"I had to let my eyes adjust. I want to try this one more time."

"It's gotta be close to four, hon. Let's wind up this little experiment, okay?"

She crossed her arms, sternly. "Stephen, you dragged me into this. One more time." She glanced out the window. The dark shape of another car approached the traffic light. Seen through the fence its headlights seemed to flicker as it moved.

Stephen narrowed his eyes at her in mock seriousness. She stared back, grinning.

He quickly kissed her on the nose. "Alright. We're both crazy. One more time."

"Then bed." she said.

"Then bed." he agreed.

"On three. Start the count."

He smiled. "One."

"Two."

"Two and a half..."

"Stephen!"

"Fine, fine—three!" They both turned.

The light was green. There was no sign of the car.

"Stephen! Ha! Look!"

Stephen didn't say anything for minute. He cocked his head to the right, listening.

"Stephen! The light is green!"

"Shh!"

"Are you serious?" she said incredulously. "You're hearing the fridge!"

"I know Melanie, but listen. Just *listen*!"

She gave a grunt and pouted. The ambient fridge noise stopped. In the quiet, she suddenly stood up straight, alert. "Hey, is that a car horn?"

"I...I think so. It's weird though. It's not turning off."

Melanie touched his arm, staring out the window. The horn was distant, muffled by the window but even then it sounded broken and irregular. They listened for two... three... five minutes. Mesmerised by the sound, they couldn't tell where it was coming from. Stephen noticed the area around the traffic light was bathed in green light, defining edges a red signal couldn't catch. For just a second, he thought he registered a ragged gap in the chain link fence and a dark shape in the water.

"Melanie, look...do you see..."

The light snapped red. The horn stopped.

They looked at each other but said nothing.

Quietly, Melanie finally said, "Probably just a car alarm or—"

"Yeah, had to be," said Stephen quickly, frowning. "And that light must be busted. Someone should call the City. Let them know about it."

Melanie nodded in the dark room and shivered. "We should go to bed," she said, but they remained, looking out the window, staring at the red traffic light. Its reflection bobbed and danced on the black water.

Burning Shit

Rebecca J. Durocher

The house caught alight today.
Your damn space heater went crazy –
sparks flew, hitting Milhouse, that stupid stuffed cow
you bought me almost a year ago.
I had time to put it out,
I suppose. But,

I revelled in it all –
watching the life we built together
burn to the ground. I let it go.

My pleasure faded though.
I added fuel to the fire.

I threw in that grotesque
oversized purple sweater – even the smoke
couldn't choke out your lingering scent – and all
the photographs of us –
they were useless now.

I made a trail of fire to
our living room – your favourite room.
I piled your video game collection
under the insipid blue sofa we'd spent
hours looking for.
When they caught alight, I waited,
as flames licked at the couch –
engulfing our love seat.

Your precious DVD collection
was the last to go. For all
500 DVDs, I stood over the fire –
watching the discs melt in my hand.

I burnt your life down.
Are you mad?

Notes from the Womb

Lara Henerson

I certainly wasn't born by choice. While all the other pimply little eggs were gossiping in the ovarian schoolyard, I was smoking a joint in the toilets, listening to death metal and wearing black.

The invasion took us all by surprise. There I was, silently mocking my peers as they giggled, when without warning in squirts a stream of macho fucking spermatozoa through those shaven double doors, all decked out in military gear and armed to the teeth. Needless to say I ran like hell, but the measly little tadpoles sure can swim. All that smoking hadn't done much for my endurance; I guess I was doomed from the start. All around me the other eggs were throwing themselves willingly at the newcomers, twirling their hair and batting their eyelashes. The little bastard who chose me must have been up for a challenge.

I gave him no satisfaction; just let him do what he wanted, while I remained stone-faced and stoic. I thought I'd just get all this unpleasant grunting over with and then I could get back to my stall and finish the graffiti I'd started earlier. Little did I know this particular dickhead happened to be the leader of the pack. I should have known, after all he was the only one able to grow facial hair.

I started to suspect something when the dirty deed was done, but he wasn't getting off me. On the contrary, it's like he'd decided to latch on or something. Fuck, I thought, you got what you came here for. Now fuck off already! But he didn't. Instead, he glued himself to me like a smelly, bearded parasite. I tried shoving him off, but he had literally managed to merge himself with my body. That's when the realization came. How fucking typical: that the one egg least eager to be fertilized should be chosen in that dirty, sweaty lottery.

I spent the next nine months growing, sprouting odd appendages, and silently cursing the horny little fucker who was turning me into a foetus. I decided that although destiny had stuck us together, I would always despise this intrusive parasitic twin of mine, born of a man's ball-sack. Every time the measly tadpole tried to make nice with me, I thwarted his efforts by punching him in the face. Which, by the way, became easier and easier as my arms continued to develop. That put him in his place damn quickly. I wasn't about to let him warm up to me; the last thing I needed was to look down and discover that I was growing a penis. Thankfully, I did not.

Eventually he stopped trying, which made it easier to believe I was alone again. I could still feel his bulk welded onto my body, but I noticed it less and less every day as I grew. That's when I noticed just how cramped it was getting in that womb. I feared the worst.

My suspicions were confirmed as soon as the whole place began to contract. My mother was trying to push me out! I held on with every bit of strength I possessed, trying desperately to postpone my imminent birth, and knowing full well that if I left my cozy little bed of placenta, surely things would only get worse. I didn't want to be launched

head first into that sinister bright light at the end of the fleshy tunnel.

I thought about her as I held on; this woman desperately trying to eject me from within her depths. She did this to me! The bitch! I was full of rage by the time my muscles failed me, and I came sliding out into the bleak world, understanding only too well just how doomed I was.

So, the piercing cry I let out was by no means unfounded. An ugly little nurse swaddled me in a straight-jacket of a blanket, and handed me over to that sweaty whore, who was still panting from her efforts like an exhausted red-headed pig. She cooed over me, grinning a grotesque grin. I silently cursed her, longing for the day when my I'd have the language skills to do so out loud. From over her shoulder appeared another, hairier face. I recognised him instantly. Jerk! Producer of foul sperm! I could not decide whom I hated more.

Overcome with awe they began counting my fingers and toes. The pig scrunched up her snout and put her face right up to mine, far too close for comfort. She began babbling incomprehensible baby noises that I can only imagine were meant to please me. She sounded like a mental patient. The beard loomed in the background, snapping photos. I felt a trickle of dribble slide down by chin. What had I become? I resolved to kill myself at once.

When the nurse, who had a face like my mother's vulva, wrenched me away from my parents and carried me away to wash off the placenta, I took it as a convenient opportunity. She put me into a shallow plastic tub of lukewarm water, and began to scrub. I turned my head as discretely as possible so that my face was underwater, hoping to God the nurse wouldn't notice until it was too late. The nurse noticed. She gasped and scooped her hand beneath my head, bringing my face back above the surface. Stupid bitch! I thought. I need a plan B.

The nurse finished washing me and put me on a changing table. She bustled off to find me something to wear. As soon as she turned her back I began to wiggle wildly, hoping to gain enough momentum to roll off the edge of the changing table. I wasn't sure how far it was from the ground, so I could only hope the impact would be enough to finish me off. The nurse came back. Barely an inch of progress. Foiled again! I tried to spit in her face. She giggled and wiped the string of saliva from the corner of my mouth. How utterly degrading. I realized that offing myself wasn't going to be so easy. At least not until I acquired some basic motor skills. I wasn't sure if I could wait that long.

I struggled and kicked as the vulva-faced nurse fought to slip the little jumpsuit over my body. It was pink. No, worse than pink. Pale pink! I began to cry as she buttoned the offensive garment up to my neck. My punk days were over.

To make things worse, I soon found out that they'd named me Jane. I could practically feel my personality being flushed away like a turd.

By the time my parents were strapping me into the car-seat of their minivan, I began to accept that I might be spending a little more time on earth than I'd originally planned. But if it had to be that way, I certainly wasn't going to make things easy for my parents. After all, it was their fault I was here in the first place. My mother pawed at me from the

front seat, seriously cramping my style. I began plotting all the ways I could make their life a living hell.

That night, I sobbed into the baby intercom as loudly as I could. My mother came rushing into the Pepto-Bismol-pink room, dark rings below her panic-stricken eyes, frizzy red hair sticking up every which way. The sight of her was so funny I could have wet myself; which of course gave me an idea. I proceeded to actually wet myself.

She changed my diaper. I wet myself again. She changed my diaper again, and left the room. I waited five minutes and began sobbing once more, this time even louder. My father came in. I was out of liquids so I shat myself instead. He wiped my bottom. I shat again. On his hand.

I was having the time of my life fucking with them, which wasn't surprising considering how recently I'd been born. But there was just one thing that really put a damper on my little game; no matter how relentlessly evil I acted, my parents refused to put the blame on me. They continued to speak to me in that stupid voice, and covered me in kisses as I covered them in shit. I didn't get it. Don't you realise I'm being an asshole? I wondered. Why must you be so damn forgiving? I took it up a notch.

The next time I lured my mother into the room with my tears, I didn't excrete anything. She assumed I must be hungry, and stuck her saggy breast in my face. I looked up at her and batted my eyes as I put my mouth around the nipple, mustering as much innocence as I could manage. Then I bit down, clamping down my still toothless baby gums as hard as I could. She squealed like she was being slaughtered for bacon, her face contorted in pain. But she didn't drop me; she just said, "Naughty girl," and let me finish feeding.

I felt cheated, and it stressed me out. I craved a cigarette. That thought stressed me out even more. I finally went to sleep, feeling completely miserable.



Giant Carp Kiss, Yamaguchi, Japan
Mel Hattie

The Puppet

Alicia Cumming

You say marriage is a form of prostitution,
 And men objectify women's bodies.
 You say you posed for these local artists because you didn't want
 to be a piece of meat men want to fuck,
 But there is love and respect between men and women I see.
 But you,
 Intellectual Woman who only got one C and that was the time
 you deliberately didn't write a paper for a class (whereas I got Cs
 regularly),
 Why would you say that all men are this way?
 You couldn't have let those few men shape your view on all men
 if it wasn't true.
 But would ALL men treat women like objects?
 But she is an Intellectual in my eyes;
 I feel I have not the mind she has,
 With my Cs and not having the confidence to think critically about
 things I've only begun to learn about,
 Like feminism, politics and social injustices.
 They overwhelmed me with their knowledge and alternative
 viewpoints I see as 'critical' and I worshipped them and ate it all
 up with a spoon.
 In insisting on a sex-only relationship with a man who wants a
 committed relationship she's doing just what she doesn't want
 men to do to her, oh why would you paint only men with this
 brush?
 But
 So cowed by my insecurities am I that I cannot see my own -non-
 Intellectual-voice as an equally valid truth to add to the patchwork
 quilt that encompasses the whole truth about men and ourselves,
 And so wanting to be loved and engaged with by these women as
 they love and engage with each other
 Even though they all seem to be the same,
 I write on my Facebook for her and all the other Intellectual femi-
 nists in our commune to see
 That I think marriage is a form of prostitution.

Loneliness is

Eleonore Blaurock-Busch

...sitting at a hotel bar
 counting ceiling lights
 and wine bottles neatly stacked
 behind counters.

...mentally matching drink
 and food to plain people,
 watching them talk
 or not.

...envying the ugly man
 stroking his fat wife's thigh,
 imagining fingers wandering up
 into the moist.

Waiting for the Dawn

Jamie Boland

John K. woke up to an imploding heart as he fell through the floor. He saw the bottom of his house vanish. Nausea attacked his stomach and throat and he screamed.

This was some time ago and he continued to fall. Or so he supposed. He was in pure white, falling through it ever deeper. Terror had passed with his screaming. It gave way to anxiety. This passed and he felt confusion and a throbbing headache. His pillow and sheets had mirrored this transition. They floated above the bed frame then resumed their place upon it. His eyes began to ache.

John reasoned that both he and the bed had stopped falling and were simply suspended in emptiness, or they continued to fall but he could no longer notice it, for the bed might have a centre of gravity that irresistibly held him to it, yet was still pulled by another irresistible force. He sat upon the bed holding the pillow in his lap. The whiteness penetrated his closed eyes so that un-vision could only provide a less painful alternative. Maybe this is a dream, maybe I'll wake up soon. But it wasn't, and he would not, because it was real. The bed was a large, with a blue pillow, double layer of dark red then checkered blue and white sheets, with a thick duvet on top that was a light brown. It was his world now and very comfortable. Could he escape it? Move through this whiteness? But he might get lost or start falling again and be simply a body alone. Was it a dream? But he should treat it as if it were real. He had no clock and time is irrelevant in the face of surmounting whiteness. Sickening doubt pulsed in his veins.

He flung a sock off the end of the bed. The sock was white with a faint dirtiness to it, and it melded into the whiteness. He pulled the pillowcase off the pillow, rolled it into a ball, and flung it. The pillowcase continued in the path it had been thrown. He started crying. He hit the bedpost and screamed, hurting his right hand. There was nothing for him here. He was stuck on his bed in the whiteness; he could advance no further nor retreat back.

He settled down. He lay on the bed. His headache got worse, for the whiteness was the sun, everywhere. He vomited a few times, and these bodily blobs sailed away just like the pillowcase.

He held onto the side of the bed and lowered himself off it. His fingers held onto the frame. His mouth was dry and tasted metallic. His legs gyrated slowly. Eventually he pulled himself back.

Would he die? He seemed to still be able to breathe, so there must be earthly reality to this place. He was hungry. Then thirsty. Time must have passed. Or it is all in my head, and no time has passed and I am only imagining my hunger and thirst. What if I am in coma? He hoped he wasn't in some form of a lucid coma. What did I do before this? Only slept. Nothing to warrant a coma. He had been drinking. I wasn't too drunk, I wasn't partying too hard. I didn't get hit in the head or anything when we were wrestling. And Dan with his ridiculous chicken suit, so drunk and stoned was he, so drunk so stoned, the stonedest. And Aaron punching the walls until he knocked

through with his right and broke it. And Jessica Fallow and Martin Rashid and Morgan and other Dan and boy-Jesse and Stephanie who looked so good and kissed so good with her pierced lip and little bites on my lower lip, I'll never get to, again, though I didn't really the first time because other Dan busted in when the fight started and the cops came and I lost her and went home with Mike and Aaron and ripped bong with them passing out there and me here, in my bed, and maybe them falling too and he looked around but didn't see them, so he reclosed his eyes fuck, motherfuck, weed weed bong weed wish I didn't, why did I go there?... but I'm not dead now or maybe am, maybe this is death, but why, when, did I die I wasn't that drunk I made it to my bed I cleaned a little, not drunk enough for death, maybe heart attack or stroke but that is unlikely, I wasn't that drunk or old, still am not that drunk or old, still am not that drunk or old, what now, what happens next, what comes next am I to die am I dead already?

And he contemplated morality, and he contemplated life, and he tried to sleep but it was not a good sleep and eventually he woke up.

The peasants are revolting. They want to depose me, for I am the Stondedest, me, me and no one else is Grand-Duke Stondedest. But they shall see, me, thee, they shall be repressed all the more, for, they think above their station, compilation, all their sins first sins seeking like shark fin, win, the triumph they so desperately seek, meek, you cannot be meek in that you must be loud, proud, busting up a crowd and get off my cloud you there, you degenerate, and stop your howling, prowling, for I am the Old Man, the Sal Paradise, and beatific Meursault. Distinct, united, consubstantial

At some point there was a companion. It was a flimsy companion, who would race from one emotion to its opposite with any provocation. It would often sit on the edge of the bed, open to the temptation to hurl itself off, and John would feel a lure to push him, because he could, because it was there and he was here. It was good company.

They played tic-tac-toe by carving up the bed frame with a blue pen John had found in his pocket; they would play guessing games and create stories for amusement. He found in his pocket his wallet. The wallet had \$68, a condom, and small paper with numbers on it, along with his ID cards. His eyes were steadily bleeding.

"...and then the two men taught the dog Spanish and though he pronounced it with an outrageous accent he could be very witty. They continued to decorate the house but grew tired of it and stopped. They decided their creative abilities were not being used most rewardingly, and so began a joint collaboration on a novel. It was in English, though they only knew French, and the dedication and preface was to be in Cantonese, these managerial decisions undertaken through a proportional vote as the dog, two men, and washer-dryer were very democratically inclined though authoritarian in nature. They wrote the book and it was very successful, enjoying a wide but not total readership among the group of them."

"Yes, Yes, Yes! That was nice. Criticism: I feel you were too bound to conventional structure and themes, far too restrained and realist; you must let your imagination go."

"Alright"

"I didn't care for your lack of expletives either. Stories need bravery on the part of

the artist in the face of the philistines and moral police; they need to appreciate the Kantian awe of the asshole."

"Alright."

"Make it very aesthetic or ascetic, I forget which I mean. Something a Wilde or Joyce might admire."

"I'll work on it"

"What's wrong? You seem so forlorn."

"My eyes hurt. So does my brain. I might be going insane."

"That's probable, it could only be the work of a madman to have created a story such as the one you so inelegantly delivered, let alone the double mad half-man it would need to enjoy it."

"Yes"

"So what will you do to fix this? I don't have any Visine or Advil or Adderall to pluck you back up."

"No"

"Have you tried yoga?"

"Not enough room."

"What about masturbation, that always calms me down."

"Can't get hard."

Really? That is unfortunate. Never had the problem myself though I sympathize nevertheless. Why don't you kill yourself?"

"Do you think?"

"Sure, you're practically dead already."

"How?"

"Would jumping work?"

"Scared, what if I just float?"

"Strangle yourself?"

"I pass out then awake again."

"Belt?"

"Not tight enough."

"Break your neck?"

"Tried, just strained it."

"My you're very thorough, I wish you had reflected this attitude a moment ago in your un-alienated labour. Why don't you make a noose out of sheets and jump off the bed?"

"Think it'll work?"

"Give it a shot, it can't hurt."

"Wish me luck."

"I don't need to. I have absolute faith."

John tied a tight noose, secured it, jumped, broke his neck and died. Then there was a bed missing a portion of sheets with a body hanging from it floating in absolute white space, floating and falling together.



Breakfast Paper, Tokyo, Japan

Mel Hattie

Concrete Molasses*Jennifer Fytelson*

Part of a world I do not understand;
 an existence we are told to take part in.
 Why should we labor 'til our bones grind into dust?
 Mundane robots performing a classic over and over again,
 MUTINY! MUTINY!
 I want to yell; only a squeak escapes my exasperated lips.
 What would I pay, to run free?
 No bridle, out of this concrete jungle.
 Burn out the day.
 Must be the last of the dreamers
 demonized by lucid thoughts, I do not envy you.
 To live in a gray,
 padded,
 cell,
 gated
 off,
 a
 recluse.
 Drab thought, salivating into your heads.
 Not I...
 The melody of freedom,
 tinkering around my mind,
 outburst of hysterical laughter.
 People down here think I'm crazy.

The Bridge Master*Mel MacCoubrey*

Red pulled her scarf up around the back of her neck to block out the wind. She tugged at the strings that kept the red Il Capitano mask fastened to her skull. Its high cheekbones dug into her own and its accentuated eyebrows made it hard for her to see, but she kept it on. She never believed in that one-size-fits-all thing anyway.

Her hand found its way to a piece of paper folded inside the breast pocket of her leather jacket and she pinched the protruding corners between her thumb and forefinger. She leaned against the railing of the bridge and took the letter out from its confines. Red took a deep breath, hoping to clear her head, but she just felt cold.

The bridge had never been anything significant to Red, or the town of Backwoods. It was just a link between the town and the school which ran adjacent to the railroad. One side of the bridge showed a university campus, its serene water-scape and the curved track of the impending train. The other side – the side no one walked on out of convenience – bore the gloomy sight of Lake Fogo, a fast moving current. It was barely visible through looming trees, and was silent even in the town's frequent storms. The bridge was held up by two large, steel arches, which inebriated students tried to master on occasion, often failing and severely injuring their spines, heads, or life spans. To Red they were structures to hide behind and avoid the drenching sprays of moving transport trucks. The arches were never a challenge, and tonight was no different.

A soul-wrenching beat exploded into the crisp night air as a house down the street released a group of drunken jungle cats, ghouls and zombies. Red darted across the empty street to the other side of the bridge and, as habit permitted, hid behind the archway. She closed her eyes and listened to the monsters caterwaul back and forth, pulling on each others' skins and drunkenly jumping onto one another. They took their sweet time, making their way back to residence, never noticing Red on the other side of the bridge, probably never even looking.

Red opened her eyes and in a moment of panic, and searched for her letter. She found it in her pocket and took it violently in her hand, as if reprimanding it for ever leaving her grasp. She unfolded it and read its contents that she had written only an hour before, but couldn't see her writing over her protruding red nose. The ties of her mask cut into the sides of her head, right above her ears, but she wouldn't take it off. Not tonight.

As the world quieted down around her, she took another deep breath and attempted to recall her words, her plight. This letter is my last gift to you. It would have been the twenty-fifth neglected letter, but she guessed it didn't matter anymore. Her free hand found its way inside the pocket of her jeans and fiddled with her red Bic lighter. I gave you everything, and you took all of it. This paper is all I have left. Grunge pulsated back into the air and the words left her head. She felt her vision cloud over and she held her breath to contain herself. People drowned in lakes, not beside them.

More ghouls stumbled around noisily in the background as the town clock struck one. One of them howled, causing the rest of the pack to shriek with laughter. There were

more of them this time. Thor and a band of Greek gods held on tightly to each other and sang something unintelligible while a guitar struck unsupportive chords further down the line. Another cat leaned over the railing and released the entirety of the night's sweets into the calm river, only to be yanked back into the crowd by a white rabbit in an incredibly short skirt. Change was thrown around, and most of it made its way to the guitarist, the bridge master. He thanked them as they yelled out requests, but he never changed his tune. Alleluia, Alleluia.

There was a clang of shoe on steel and Red turned around to see what was going on. A vampire was scaling the archway, and her following of zombies, nuns, and werewolves screamed at her to get down. But she wouldn't. The nun started to cry and two zombies ran to the edge of the arch to help the vampire down. She climbed and mastered the peak of the arch, and then she sat and slowly crab-walked her way into the zombies' arms. All the while, the guitar continued to play. Alleluia, Alleluia.

The crowd drifted on, leaving Red and the man with the music alone on the bridge. She turned her gaze to Lake Fogo and let his words follow her.

Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might, he began to sing louder. Maybe he thought he was alone. Thou Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight. His voice was hoarse, Red noticed. It wasn't the sort of hoarseness that came from the inability to master the song, she thought, but it came from having sung it thousands of times. His words left her as she pulled out the letter once again, but the song lingered like a consoling touch on her shoulder.

It's okay that this happened, Red's mind returned to her own words. I've always wanted to venture off the path. She closed her eyes. I trusted you, I loved you, and I don't regret anything. She reached back into the pocket of her jeans and withdrew her lighter, flicking it absentmindedly, letting the sparks flicker with the wind. And now that you've left me all alone in the woods, all I can do is hope I find my way out. She folded the paper back up and lifted the flame to its corner. She watched the flame take hold of her gift. Alleluia, Alleluia.

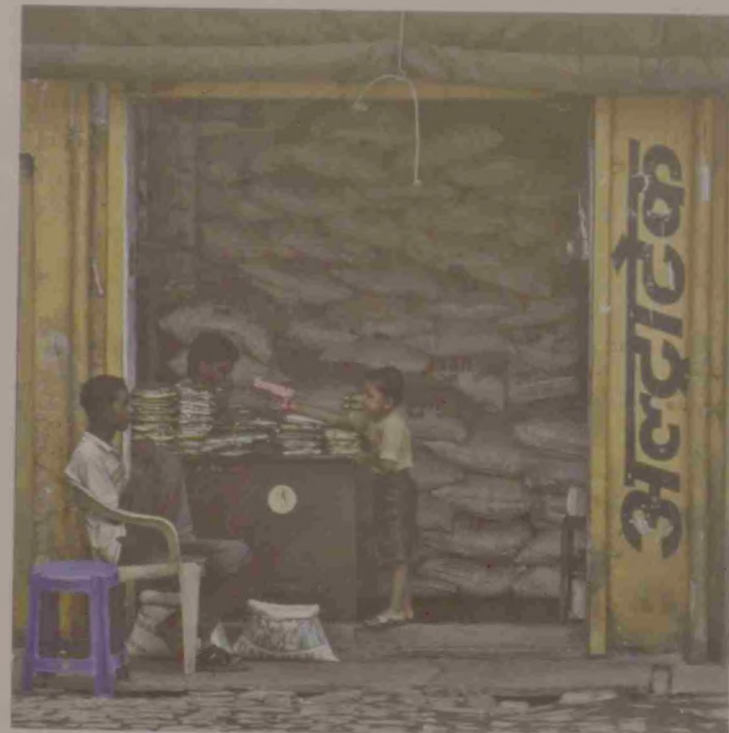
And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long, she heard the guitarist sing, his words closer. Steals on the ear the distant triumph song. He was beside her now, his playing slowed and quieted; but it was still there. They watched as the paper became a dancing light. And before it consumed her too, Red tossed the letter into the lake. She felt her cheek dampen under her mask and she let herself cry silently.

And hearts are brave again, the music man whispered as he turned to leave. Red reached out and touched him on the shoulder, and arms are strong. He stroked the penultimate chord, like an intake of breath, and offered Red his hand. Like the gift she was always waiting to receive, she gently placed her hand in his, and he led her off the bridge

Ravaged Souls

Asa Connor

Pills and grass got close to her head
And wisdom fluttered from her feathered bed
A teenage party
Celebration in a crimson pleasure
Cunts and cocks, love without measure
The satyr leads, our souls are heavy
The dying begins, the girls will love me



The Robbery
Alison Petrovich

Cathexis

Denise St. Pierre

Even when pain is an abstraction, people insist on making it tangible. It lives with us like an unwelcome guest. It weighs us down like a heavy load. Even though the bed is empty, the impression is never gone.

There are no more abstractions.

Now, our pain is cut out of us. Separation is surgical. If you're lucky, you can grow back what you've lost and fool everyone into thinking you're infallible, like how people used to mend their wounds with drugs and cars and other petty things. Most people just wander the world like wretches, looking for something to fill that vacancy, to offset the shame of knowing their investment didn't pay off. They played the field and lost.

I play to win, and I expect a prize.

The half-masticated bit of chicken hanging from Emily's lip doesn't escape my notice, but I find her company so thoroughly stifling that I let it linger, focusing my attention on the likeness of my steak to human flesh. This is a nice restaurant, and my knife is so sharp and the meat so tender that it's like taking a hot knife to butter. I smile, which proves opportune as it appears that Emily was recounting something amusing.

I've gotten good at this.

I don't care about Emily. I don't care about her friends or her cat or her position on welfare or any of the other useless drivel that now suffices as tolerable conversation. I've ignored her lack of social graces and the way the border of her foundation snakes distinctly down her jawbone like a fault line, so I figure if I nod and flash the requisite smile every six or seven minutes she might not protest when I insist she put out tonight.

She is a conquest, a triviality. She will be a notch in my belt, a trophy in my cabinet. And she'll be grateful for the honour.

I muster my third smile, and she jumps at the opportunity to elicit a dialogue, catching me with my guard down. Or up. That all depends on which face is the mask. She's smiling too, her elbow planted on the table and her eyes fixed on mine.

"Ever been hurt, Gabe?" She underscores the question with a hasty rhythm drummed out on the tabletop. Her fingers are long and slender and perfectly intact and despite the obstruction of the tablecloth, I note that the fleshy pads of her fingertips sound consistent. No hollow ring, no hint of artifice.

"That's a little forward of you." I put down my fork and clench my fist to offset the unnatural sheen of the first and third fingers on my left hand. The seam of new growth is impeccable, but the skin still looks alien in some light—almost foetal—and lacks the distinguishing characteristics of natural flesh: the calluses, the moles, the ragged cuticles and long-healed hangnails.

"I-I'm sorry. I figured it's our third d—"

"Forgive me. I didn't know there was a designated checkpoint for inappropriate questions." I avert my eyes and speak to her in profile so she can see how resolutely my

jaw is set. Judging by the sharp intake of breath and her impeccable hands, she has been coddled her whole adult life. Part of me wants to grin, to gloat in the promise of what's to come. Instead, I let the tension steep between us to such an unbearable degree that she'll be compelled to defuse it.

She sighs. Like clockwork. "Gabe, I—"

"Gabriel."

"Um, Gabriel...I'm sorry. I'm in no position to ask."

"No, you aren't."

"It's just...you never talk to me. Like, really talk. I want to know you. I think you're the good kind." She reaches across the table to put her hand on mine and I recoil reflexively, disguising the reaction as a motion for the cheque.

"Don't be ridiculous."

There is evidence of Emily's inexperience in her pleasure at my mechanical fucking. For me, it is routine—a step towards my inevitable prize. I'm not looking to impress. I don't even want to look at her. She, on the other hand, seems to be attempting transcendence, clawing at my sheets like an un-tranquilized beast.

I pitch forward and take her hands in mine, extricating the sheets from her fists and letting her feel the full force of my uncanny grip. She thinks I want her to be submissive, and she's not entirely wrong.

"Emily."

"Yeah?" She breathes the word, more a strangled sigh than an actual assent.

"Emily, these are 750-thread-count Egyptian cotton and they deserve your respect. Do you understand?" I let my nails sink into her so she knows I'm serious. Her face contorts into some facsimile of penance that turns my stomach, so I flip her onto hers to finish the job. With a wince and a grunt, it's over.

Normally, I'd sever ties right away, but the night's pretensions have exhausted me. I roll off her, but there's still too much of her on me. The stench of her drugstore perfume, like vanilla and cheap roses, latches on tight. How appropriate.

"I'm going to shower."

She doesn't roll over, like she has already acknowledged the unspoken agreement between us.

Washing clean of her is only the first step.

I've already been idle for half an hour before I hear Emily get out of bed. I was hoping to make this brief, and not in the sense of tearing off a bandage and being done with it. I just have other things to do today. However, she seems intent on protracting her own agony. Admittedly, it does make everything a bit more cinematic, which stokes a part of me I'd rather not own to. I wonder if she's cracking her knuckles or scratching an itch or indulging in all the things she won't realize she misses until it's too late.

She walks in on me fingering the blade of my pocketknife in the kitchen. She's wearing one of my shirts, barely fastened across her breasts. I repress my fury and make a note

to be gentle. It's one of my favourites, and I don't want it to stain. I fold the knife closed and place it on the table.

"Give me your hand, Emily."

She hesitates, cradling her hands against her chest. "What if I don't want to?" I extend my own towards her as though it was an invitation and not a command.

"You can't honestly expect me to believe that you're surprised by all this."

"I held out for s-so long. And you...I, I thought you might be different."

"They always do." I cluck my tongue at her condescendingly. "Emily, you should know better than that. Hand, please."

Resigned, she takes a seat next to me at the kitchen table and places her hand into mine. "I t-thought you might g-give me a chance." Her fingers seize momentarily when I draw them closer to my face, but fall flaccid as I take my time studying them.

"I think you overestimate yourself," I murmur, running my fingers over the hardened callus on her right ring finger. "This'll do." I pick up my instrument and draw the blade with a flick of my wrist. She catches a glint of light off it and whimpers as I splay her hand on my custom-made bamboo cutting board.

"You should be glad I'm even using this. We could have done this the hard way." I remove the bandanna wound around my wrist.

"D-don't you h-have anything to say? A-about this? About m-me?" Her breath is jagged and irregular, and it blunts my focus.

"You flatter yourself. Well, let's see," I muse as I fasten the gag behind her head and push it between her teeth. "It's not me, it's you. I'm just too good for you. You know, I really want to focus on my career right now. Etcetera, etcetera." I slice into her flesh and begin sawing with methodical precision. "Don't scream."

A tendon snaps; she cringes, further muffling a guttural moan.

I know she wants to argue, but as the blade grinds against the bone and squeaks through the marrow, her eyes roll back to the whites and her head lolls forward in unconsciousness.

"Almost done," I whisper with the calm assuredness of a doctor administering a needle. This finger is stubborn, dangling from a strip of skin like a loose tooth restrained by a single root. With a final tug, it comes free.

The blood starts pooling, so I wind a bandage around the vacancy as a temporary suppression. I buzz the doorman, a husky mass of a man, who will usher her from the apartment and send her on her way—one of the many benefits of generous tipping.

"Oh, and don't forget to drop off the shirt at the dry cleaners on your way back."

I slip him a fifty, as always, for discretion and steal away to the trophy room.

She's no Hall of Famer, but the cabinet's still got plenty of room. I slide her into a container and jot down a quick label. Name, age, appendage. Another notch. Another prize.

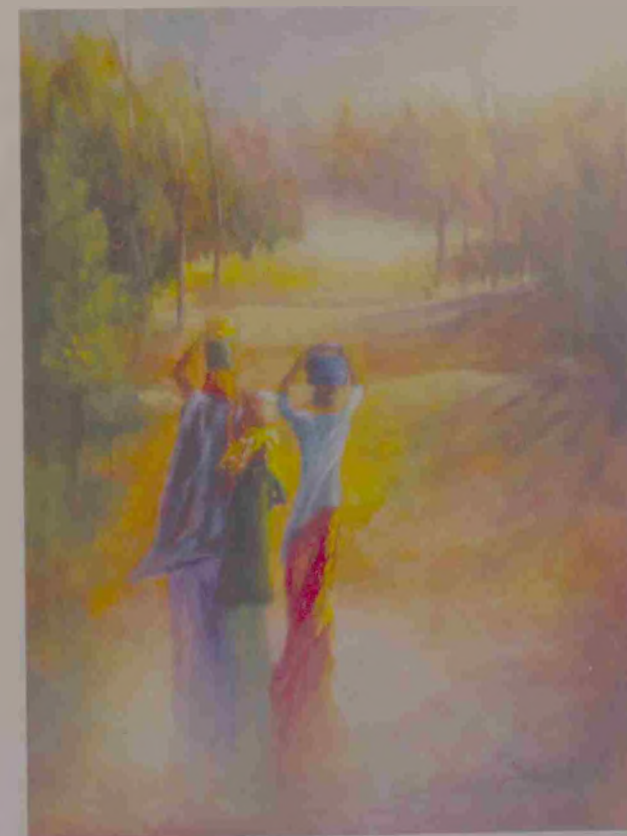
A phantom pain teases at my alien flesh and I grit my teeth in a macabre grin.

I'm winning. I'm winning.

I've won.



Bee on Lilac, Kawaguchiko, Japan
Mel Hattie



Kenya, Three in the Light
Sonia Z Palik

Memoria

Cheylyne Eccles

The shop was poorly lit, with every bulb burnt out, black as ash. The remaining light was given off by three small gas lamps spread out in each side of the shop. Stained wood alcoves held jar after jar of little bottles of perfume of all different shapes.

Franz reached out to touch one of the purple perfume bottles when he jumped at the voice behind him. "For looking only. Don't touch." The old man gestured curtly over to the sign above. His coke-bottle-glasses made his eyes appear three sizes too big. Franz had a difficult time placing this funny looking old man in such an ominous shop.

"I'm looking for something for my mother. Perfume. It's her birthday." Franz said, slightly disgruntled.

Without a word, the old man went behind the counter and placed a small oval perfume bottle on the counter. "This one. I'll give it to you for a very good price. It's the last one, and it's a very special kind of bottle. 'Memoria', I call it."

Franz paid for the perfume and was glad enough to leave. Returning home, relief found him only after locked his door and closed the curtains, as if to make the house appear vacant. Locking himself in like that, he couldn't be bothered by anyone. He never had to answer a single difficult question. It was almost too easy to exist like that.

For Franz, losing his wife made life intolerable. It was the staying at home each night in dim, incandescent light with TV dinners and the mind-numbing hum of kitchen appliances. It was going to bed each night and staring at the peeling plaster on the ceiling and berating yourself for not fixing it earlier. Because God, anything, anything was better than thinking of how in the middle of the night you will reach your hand over and feel only sheets beside you. Like a phantom limb, it was the constant compulsion to seek something that was no longer there. There was always this fleeting delusion that nothing had transpired at all.

Franz splashed cold water on his face. He looked at himself in the mirror. Black circles. Scruffy. It didn't matter. He'd shave tomorrow, or next week. There was no hurry. No hurry for anything.

Franz reminded himself that his mother hated anything too sweet. Lifting the lid, he hoped for something more floral than saccharine. Top notes of orange flooded his senses, and then gave way to a base of cloves and charred tobacco. He closed the lid quickly, but not before experiencing a weird sensation of vertigo. His body didn't feel connected to anything; as if every section of his body was waltzing in opposite directions, or drifting away in space. His vision blurred and he fell forward, nearly catching the table with his hands before his head hit.

He woke up lying in a field hemmed in by the distant silhouettes of fir trees. The sky was clear with a few clouds; wisps of pale white on navy. The scene was familiar. Franz stared at the sky long and hard, looking out into the darkness. He felt a movement beside him. Exhaling little puffs of steam in the cold air, his girl lay still beside him, her long black hair padding the ground beneath her. She was fixated on the sky, too, just as he had

been a moment ago.

It was surreal. This dream had absolute clarity. He had dreams about her before, but not like this. It was like reliving a truth, like being transported to the past. This was exactly how his first date played out when they went out into the forest, away from the trappings of the city. "I want to see the stars!" he remembered her saying, when he asked her what she wanted to do. No movies, no dinner, but stars.

Just as Franz began to grasp what was going on, he awoke beside the bottle of Memoria. Belief was suspended until he realised it wasn't just a lack of sleep, but that each time he inhaled the perfume, he was transported into a world of tangible memory. During the weeks following, whenever he missed her, when black-haired women in crowds resembled her, when time seemed unconquerable, he just went into a state of memoria. He removed pieces of armour only to don them again, yet things seemed to be going better. He went back to work. Basic societal expectations were met.

Reality shattered in its usual way and another memory began. He awoke, finding himself in a kitchen. The golden glow of morning filled the room. Specks of dust danced along the rays of light. He angled himself toward the window looking outward, until the silence was broken by the clinking of dishes and the spewing of tap water.

His wife was turned away from him toward the sink. She was humming some kind of tune from her hometown as she piled one dish after another on the side of the sink. She wore a short bob now.

It took him a moment to stop staring. "This must have been after we were married," he thought.

"I wanted a change," she said, interrupting his thoughts. She turned to him and coyly held a strand of hair between her fingertips. "Good morning. Do you like it?"

Just before this memory took place, it had been many weeks he'd been away with work. A new job with a heavy workload took him far away on business. He couldn't deny his employer his time, but his wife was another matter. Because she never complained, he easily mistook it as a happy consent. Work was good, home must have been fine too, whether he was there or not. "Good morning," was all she said after so many weeks of absence. She never scolded him, she never complained. She just smiled. She continued to smile like that even after he continued leaving for long periods of time.

He nodded in approval. "I like it. It's stylish," he said. "It suits you."

"I saw it in a book once," she said. "I thought I would surprise you. I'm glad you like it."

Her soft, light voice hung in the air for a moment like a bell before she turned back around.

It only occurred to him just then, visiting the memory for a second time, just how lonely she must have been. He noticed now how her wrists trembled more than they used to. Two years into marriage and she was already getting these strange nervous tremors. "How could I have left her here?" he thought. She was always alone at home. This was the place he insisted on taking her to after they got married; it was his idea. A new country, a new city... He uprooted her from everything she had known and loved back in her

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home country for some pipe dream of a job that he insisted would make it better for the two of them. "I hardly even saw her after that," he thought. "How could that have been better? Better for whom? The only one who benefited was that stupid company I worked for."

And it always went like that. Short bursts of a beautiful, fleeting dream and then back to reality. But never did it end before he had accumulated more regrets.

Another memory. Only this time, it began differently than the others. Franz stood in the middle of the street, more aware of himself in this instant than any other. It was peculiar. Every person that walked by was faceless; a fleshy blank canvas. Every car looked identical. His left arm was bleeding from a wound he did not remember receiving. It was as if the memory had been laid in the sun too long and became warped.

The air sweltered with mid-august humidity, and a rusty, sickly scent took hold. It took a while before Franz identified what it was.

It was blood. It was a lot of blood.

He knew where he was just then. He was in the scene of the accident. His legs became heavy, leaden. His face paled. Anchored down, Franz was helpless to watch for a second time.

Scene by gruesome scene, he saw the crash. Large pieces of twisted aluminum peppered the road amongst pools and pools of gasoline. It was there he saw the girl he loved, her body mangled in the mess. A bloodied blouse, flashing lights of red and white, and the finality of plastic stretched over ivory skin.

This wasn't how it was supposed to be.

Franz awoke in Paxon's perfumery. His arm was bandaged. He seemed to be in mid-conversation, but had no recollection of getting there at all.

"And so, you feel guilty." The shopkeeper stated.

And he did. That much was true. His last "good memory" had sprung a well of latent guilt inside of him, and even the best that the memories could offer could no longer stay purely blissful for knowing that. After a point, the more he used it, the more it became cheapened. Like a wine taster turned wino, he only drank for the insobriety.

Franz hung his head and tugged at the pale sleeve of his shirt. "I only have memories, and now she's dying in them. I don't know what it means. I don't know if death is a spring breeze and fields of bluebells at dawn, or if it's just a big cold room without any light... deep and dark, like the oil slick sea. Maybe you call out, out into that void, but you never get an answer. Maybe death is just an infinite loneliness. Maybe death is suffering."

"A temporary fix," The shopkeeper said at last. His gaze turned to his glass and he poured himself another glass of Cutty Sark.

"Too much of it is never a good idea. I don't think you realise that what I've given you is the exact same thing." He paused for a moment, and then continued.

"You're an addict. Look at yourself. Look at this gash in your arm. You're addicted to something I gave you to help you and it's made you sick. It was never intended to ruin you. You talk about there being no future? There's isn't one. Your future is the past and the past is gone."

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In memories, Franz found guilt because he saw things clearly for the first time in his life. And in the same way, in memories one can surely absolve the guilt. He would be liberated. The guilt was the addiction, the inability to move on. This was the chance to change things to the way they ought to have been. You could make up for the years. If you couldn't alter your own fate, you could alter another's.

He opened up the lid of the bottle. And on the morning of his wife's death, he stepped into the car with her.



Lavender
Sonia Z Palik

Esker with Merlins*Frank Willdig*

Behind the library, across the tracks
 an esker rises sharply from the land,
 a ridge of ancient glacial till that backs
 the river with an old-growth evergreen stand.

Above, between, beneath tall pines he darts,
 shearing the dappled light, cleaving shadows;
 his business is tearing life into parts,
 he does it well and his prowess shows.

His mate scans from a nest deep in the wood,
 high on this esker and over this earth,
 her talon and her beak are just as good
 (to kill is as natural as is birth).
 This savage beauty always draws me near,
 where there is no guilt or innocence here.

Unfiltered, a Tail's tale*Josh Quirion*

The reason why I eat, drink and masturbate so often is to shut down the micro-existential crises that arise when my head is given time enough to interpret things cynically. When everybody stops talking, and the ejaculatory fluids have left my body, the voice in my head gets louder. And I begin to pay attention, because the only person I can't ignore is myself. I must be an egocentric asshole.

Or maybe not. This morning I held the door at the bank open for a decrepit old lady. Good deed done. Yet, there was a sinister part of my imagination that conjured up a grotesque oral ritual between the sweet Miss Daisy and myself.

What if she spent her entire life being one of those conservative spenders, taking the time to cut the rebate coupons from grocery pamphlet only to save 59 cents on half a pound of radishes? What if a grand heritage was bestowed to her upon the passing of a late husband, bless his soul. Or what if she was a modest spending lottery winner who kept cutting the coupons after she won?

Any one of these scenarios seemed like a rational motivation to hold the door open for her, and maybe just maybe, she had been waiting for a sincere gesture of goodness from someone with whom she would share her riches. Only this gesture wasn't sincere. A creative part of me thought that if I held the door open for her, and went down on what was left on her archaic vagina, I could benefit. Duality. Nothing is really gratuitous, unless you're a liar.

A girl I knew said to me once that the only part of her that wouldn't accept my bullshit was her genitalia.

Across the street from the bank is a cafe. The non-franchised kind with dimmed lights and shitty mood music that makes everyone who sits sipping on over-priced coffee feel more sophisticated than they truly are. These kinds of places are all about creating an atmosphere that incites a mood, which is to be exploited purely on lucrative purposes. Money is the mistress of the modern businessmen, while loyalty, truth, judgement, and communication are his four Muslim wives. The guy who hires these coffee vixens knows how to brew sexy customer service and self-indulgence into a beverage that seems only right to drink.

I know the barista; I had sex with the barista. It's strange interacting with someone you've penetrated when there is a counter that signifies professionalism between the two of you. It's like, no matter how much pain you caused her, no matter how much she hates you, she still has to serve you that fucking coffee. It's almost comical, how we're whores for cash. How we are willing to thresh out our pride and honour just to make twelve dollars an hour. I pay for my coffee, forget to tip the barista, and take my leave. Asshole, she mutters under her breath.

It wouldn't have worked out, too astringent. Between the fighting and the fucking, we were left with merely enough time to be and become spiritually simpatico. She wanted to fix me. I was her passion project. Like a broken bicycle you find on the side of the road.

You take it home, endeavour to mend it, some patronizing shit. Just so that one day you can ride it with no hands. But this bicycle didn't want to be mended; it wanted to stay on the side of the road, that's where he belonged, broken, battered, and aware.

The coffee tastes like neglected ass hole, or bitter ex-lady friend saliva. A smoke might nullify the flavour. So I light one and start walking to school. I am learning to be an educator. That's code for going through the systematic procedures to have three months paid vacation annually, time with which I can lose myself in most unprofessional practices. Not unlike the tumultuous events that took place two nights ago...

I fucked up in a most unprecedented way. When my recklessness obtrudes the lives of others than my selfish self, that's when I have to repent. She had been clean for three months. That night, she smelt the white devil. She told me she had been loyal to her man for two years. I'd just met her, and in the same way that a child believes Santa and his father are two different people even though they spend Christmas in the same house and look vaguely familiar, so I believed in her. She gave me hope: hope in women, hope in monogamy, hope in America.

Six hours after our acquaintance, she severed another streak, and wrapped her lips around a most unfamiliar cock. And later that night, she lost her shoes.

I was the object of corruption, I instigated her moral demise. Today, she is a cheater. Today, she has re-visited a filthy habit. Regardless of her condition, it is myself that I feel sorry for. Egocentric. At least I have fucking shoes on my feet.

A funny thought crossed my mind. One day I may have to instate knowledge to our bastard child. Although minute, there exists the possibility that this adulterous fetus may sit before me as a pupil, oblivious to his roots. Your father left when you were very little, she'll lie to him. I don't blame her. The reality would expose her antecedent weakness, and potentially cause the downfall of her family. Try to tell her that although detrimental, one should always tell the truth. She'll pretend you're right, and that in itself will be but another lie in her collection.

What if the little fucker looked like me?

The next day, I went to church.

I sit next to my favourite sexually conflicted friend. She's a beautiful, lesbionic girl who enjoys the sporadic presence of a penis between her thighs, and the serenity of a woman's whisper in her ear. I remember when I found her in the closet. I could see her yearning eyes gazing through the cracks. I could tell she didn't want to simply come out, she wanted to be unleashed.

She confirmed her bi-curious tendencies when she told me this pleasantly inspiring anecdote. She and her best friend were leftovers at a party. They got high, giggly, and naked. They started trading saliva, and laughing about it. And then did it some more, but they stopped laughing, and embraced each other with genuine affection. So damn inspiring. I was proud of her, like a father who sees his daughter take her first steps. So she leaped in the direction of an affirmed sexual identity. She did something radical, and omitted the laughter that would have rendered the act juvenile, and emotionless. These two demi-dykes stepped out of their safe-zone in search for something more authentic

than a comical connection they could have blamed on the weed they smoked. Humility.

If we could all do it.

Not just feel our emotions, but trust them, live them out, exude our feelings. Stocks in condoms would rise drastically. How many times have you left a party with a dick full of dissatisfaction and a mind full of "I could have sealed that deal?" Maybe all she wanted was to share the sheets with any man that wouldn't be cryptic about his desire to play the love game with her. But because we fear denial, we apprehend a lonely, masturbatory night. Rejection hurts, but so does jerking off three times a day, and tube pornography infects computers with virtual Chlamydia and other such viruses. Something we too could contract if we but grew some testicles and plunged into the ocean of opportunity that is the female species. Let's not keep our heads above water, the ocean is deep.

Leap, and the net will appear.

Class is over. The wife of Bath's authority was derived from her experience as a sexually emancipated being. Robert Browning killed his last duchess for reasons not unlike that which instigated Beowulf's demise to the Dragon. Pride. The girl sitting in front of me periodically attends class commando. I'm convinced that my teacher knows that too. Pervert. But I learnt that a few classes ago.

I have been educated. I deserve a drink.

Six or seven whiskeys and a string of heated debate about the dangers of anal sex later, my acolyte decides that he wants to go on what he calls a pussy quest. It's amazing what a few drinks can do to an English majoring introvert. Alcohol really does impair your judgement. He is convinced that his knowledge of Shakespearian sonnets and 18th century literature will cause a torrential wetness in the between of any lady to which he'll try to impart knowledge. I, being an honest fiend of a friend, tell him it's a good idea. Speak contemporary English, I remind him. He has an awkward habit of courting woman in Olden English.

Would ye fancy my company in thou chambers?

Fuck.

I revert back to my own process of inebriation. Two drunken first year gals stumble upon the bar and one of them knocks my drink over. The unapologetic, cantankerous duo proceeds to ordering four shots of colourful, 20 proof alcohol, the sort that looks like a colourful cloud hovering over Charlie's chocolate factory.

You knocked my drink over, I tell her.

Buy another one, she responds.

Should I punch her? You can't hit a girl who drinks rainbow juice. You can't hit a girl at all. Should I insult her to the point of tears? Too un-gentleman like, and besides, she's intoxicated beyond the point of sensitivity. Should I just take money from her unattended purse? I can't steal.

Should I just buy myself another drink and avoid an altercation. . . No. All of a sudden I feel a transcendent proximity between Beowulf and myself. I am a Geat, athane warrior who has to fight for justice of possession. My property has been ravaged by the dragon's fire. They have fanned my own flame, and now they too, must burn.

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Conclusively, in succession, I gently dip my middle finger in each one of their shots, and let it soak there a while as they stare at me in disbelief. Now, they are still, and attentive.

The fuck you equivalent of a slap in the face.

Hey, you ruined our shots! My pre meditated answer is locked and loaded, but I hold it off for a little while and sensually lick my middle finger, trying to pretend the viscous liquid doesn't make me think of Smurf sperm.

Buy others, I tell them in turn.

An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.

An ounce for an ounce makes the whole world sober.

It took a form of reciprocity for them to understand the effects of their stumble. They too had to be deprived of something which was rightfully theirs in order to fathom the concept of justified vengeance. My teaching practice had served, and I felt like the bell had just rung after my lecture on the dynamics of knocking over a stranger's beverage.

Regardless of the series of events, the three of us now found ourselves in a place of common ground. Common ground, I believe, is the inception of developed human interactions. Upon reasoning together, we find ourselves apologetic, forgiving, and mutually, financially investing in each other's battle against sobriety. Our relationship inevitably moved forward.

And back. And forward. And back. And forward. And back, and forward. And back.

And for the first assisted time today, and fourth all together, a squadron of my soldiers is evacuated from my military base of a scrotum. Sexuality works in mysterious ways. It was a profitable decision not to punch her.



Breezeblocks
Aimee Buttcock

THE MITRE

Timeflies

Nicholas Walling

Timeflies fly 'round the corpse of the world,
eating the shit of the earth.

Timeflies fly amongst the planets and the stars,
propelling them from birth.

Timeflies fly outside the universe
yet lay their eggs inside.
Timeflies fly between dimensions,
out on the other side.

Timeflies fly about you and me,
lighting upon our skin.
Timeflies fly towards our friends,
killing kith and kin.

Between you and me, though timeflies fly
and whither our bodies away,
there's a beauty in this, that we're sure to miss,
if we never get led astray.

Poison*Shannon Jackson*

And so I walked until I could jog; I jogged until I could run, and then my legs screamed "FASTER," fascinated by the movement, and my heart screamed "HARDER," until I gasped into the night "I'M NOT DONE!" The wind pulled me back by the ponytail; it drove the sweat down my back in tight streams and licked me dry. No more tears, no more marrow—the fried me crunched in the night air with each fitful lunge forward. "You are so easy to replace."

Now the coins I am, the post dated cheques he made me, are on top of the hill. Now the world moves in me, around me, and I am fulfilled, stronger, not yet satiated. I am dry and drunken, a desert—drench me! "DROWN ME!" I need you. I need you. My limbs are sobbing, needy in the face of your compulsion. I drive myself over the muddy hill, muscles straining, shaking. I pound the mud thinking, "I trusted you, I Trusted You, I TRUSTED YOU," yet I trust the mud more, so I slide, falling from adoration to friend, from friend to grudging, from grudging to nothing... Nothing standing naked next to your window on the lawn, wondering how you keep yourself intact when you've reduced me to pieces you can buy and sell. Trees softly thrumming on my edges, stars collapsing in on themselves as I push myself to the end of the path. The End. The end; I am there; I am here. I jog until I can walk. I walk until I can fall. I fall until someone catches me.

Your eyes can glitter all they want, but I glint in the starlight, I waver in the breathless air. Living is an ache. I'm not done yet.

NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY
CONSULTATION SUR PLACE

