

Bloodlust Magazine

Issue 2



ENVIY

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Bloodlust Magazine:

a collection of dark, romantic works
where nothing is too taboo, too twisted,
too odd.

Thank you to each and every one of
our submitters for letting us give their
beautiful work a home. We are
incredibly excited for the opportunity to
present our readers with such a unique
and special collection of works.

Hailey Hymenoptera

TO WATER

Amid the overgrown icons
I stumbled on a well of life,

In the shallow above your left clavicle,
I water the wild ferns with your blood
so we may always meet in our dream of dreams,

I sent my consort for lavender
he buried them on your stolen right,

We'd have to skin you
to ever take it back

Shell Walsh

REBIRTH

Your body has
ricocheted off mine
for eternity.

I reincarnate and choose
Earth over afterlife
every time.

Resurrecting
death after death,
I am content
to ache for ages.

I walk through worlds
just to find you
so you can lay me down
across our timelines.

My soul always finds yours
no matter the vessels
we chose,
Forever
doesn't recast
the depth in your eyes.

My fingers have painted
our love stories in hieroglyphics

across pyramids.

Shell Walsh

We are the ancient myth
that has echoed
off the walls of
bed chambers
for eons,
giving hope
to the star crossed.

How many corridors
have I run down
to collapse into
your immortal arms?

The angels
have tried to tempt me
with heaven
and coax me to ascend.

I can never find the words
to help them understand
what it feels like
to rebirth your children
for centuries
and squeeze your wrinkled hand
in mine
time
and time
again.

Maxim Volk

THE CONSUMMATION

On the first day of February, Adam asked me the same question he would ask me all the time. “How much do you love me?” I told him, like I always did, that I loved him more than anything in the world, more than life itself, more than God and the devil and the sun and the moon and the stars. Ordinarily, this answer would appease him. He would smile and kiss me on the mouth and say, “that’s what I thought,” in his sickly-sweet voice that he put on whenever he was acting like a brat. This day was different. “Do you love me enough to kill me?” he asked. The words fell from his lips and stuck in the air. I stared at him. I did not have an answer. Did I love this beautiful, gentle, perfect man enough to take him from this world?

The next day, while we were showering together, he looked at me through the steam and asked once again, “How much do you love me?”

I told him, like I always did, that I loved him more than anything in the universe, more than my parents and my siblings, more than my job and my hobbies and my friends.

Then he asked again, “Do you love me enough to kill me?”

Again, I had no answer. The third time he asked the question was over dinner. We sat on the couch, eating the pasta and garlic bread that he had so lovingly prepared for us, watching our favorite show, some sappy drama night-time soap opera that made us groan more often than it made us smile or feel sad.

He took the remote and paused the show, asking again. “How much do you love me?”

I told him, like I always did, that I loved him more than anything in all of reality, more than my favorite books and movies, more than I

Maxim Volk

loved myself.

Once again, he asked, “Do you love me enough to kill me?”

“I do,” I whispered. The words escaped my lips like a soul escapes from a body in its last moments, unable to be stopped, unable to be snatched from the air and returned to its rightful place.

“Then do it.”

February fourteenth was the day that Adam had decided on. I wanted him to give me more time. When I married him, I had imagined us growing old together and dying in each other’s arms one cool morning when everything else was gone and we had lived lives that were full and happy. I wanted to hold onto him forever. He wanted to be dead within the fortnight.

That morning, we woke up as normal. We drank bitter coffee together in our matching robes and then prepared a light breakfast that we ate at the table. “When I’m gone,” he said, “you may do whatever you want with my body.”

I blinked slowly at him. “And what could I possibly do with your body when you are no longer in it?”

“Anything,” he purred, and then he stood up. “I am going to take a shower. Would you like to join me?”

I shook my head. “I am going to drink another cup of coffee.”

“Sounds good,” he replied, and then he left me where I sat.

Anything. I wondered what he was thinking when he said that. Was he imagining me ravishing his dead body? Pressing my engorged cock against his cold, unfeeling hole as I fervently kissed his blue lips. Or did he want me to consume him? I had heard stories of people who were aroused by the thought of their bodies being broken down into prime cuts of rib

Maxim Volk

and premium steak and then eaten piece by piece until there was nothing left. Perhaps I could use his body in some sort of ritual to bring him back. I could draw pentagrams in salt on the floor and utter some cursed chant and drag his soul down from heaven to reinhabit his corpse so that I could have one more moment with the man that I love. He would not like that. Killing a person comes with the presumption that they stay dead.

When I heard the shower start, I immediately regretted my declining of his offer to join him. It would be the last time we could ever shower together. I quickly undressed and ran to the bathroom. When I opened the door, I saw his beautiful body, muscular and smooth, through the steam that billowed in the air. He glanced at me when he heard the click of the door handle. "I'm glad you are joining me," he said.

That evening, we went to our favorite restaurant. We had made reservations months ago to ensure that we got a spot. Wine flowed freely, and we ate lobster that dripped butter down our faces and steak that melted in our mouths. Adam spent the dinner speaking as if everything was normal. He told me about an aggravating colleague who would not complete the tasks assigned to him. He guessed how the cliffhanger from last week's episode of our favorite show would resolve, knowing that he would never learn the answer. He remarked how fresh the lobster tasted and how the wine was better than the one we had the year before. I found my mind drifting as he spoke, barely able to utter one-word answers in response. I wanted to scream at him that this was the end. That what would happen tonight would not be able to be taken back. That we should not focus our last hours together on such trivialities as lobster and bothersome coworkers. But I loved Adam, and so I remained silent.

The dessert course was served. I was given a rich chocolate cake topped with a single strawberry. Adam was served a white chocolate strawberry mousse. When he tasted it, he beamed. "You have to try this," he

said, reaching across the table with a spoonful of the spongy cream. I took the dessert in my mouth. It tasted like a bright spring day, like the ones that would soon come that Adam would not see. I held it in my mouth, wishing I could hold onto it forever. Then it dissipated, gone too quickly.

When the check came, Adam took it. "I'll get it," he said. "Can't take it with me." He laughed. I only wiped the tears from my eyes.

At home, Adam suggested we make love. "It's Valentine's Day. We always have sex on Valentine's Day." He stripped off his clothing, exposing his body to me. It would be the last time I would be able to feel his body warm, so I consented, falling to my knees and worshipping his cock with my mouth.

Perhaps if I tried hard enough, gave him the best climax of his life, that he would stay. If his orgasm unlocked the secrets of the universe, then perhaps he would not need to die to find whatever it was that he was so desperately searching for. For the next hour, we made love, sweetly and tenderly, caressing each other with our mouths. Then, for the hour after that, we fucked hard. He rode my cock until he came so hard that the ceiling was splattered with his seed. Then, we lay on the bed, spent.

"I think it's time," he whispered.

"Please no," I gasped. "It can't be time. A couple more hours."

Adam chuckled. "You will say 'a couple more hours' until we both die of old age."

"Is that so bad?" I asked. "Is life not a little easier if you think about it in increments of a hundred and twenty minutes?"

"You know I can't stay here," he said wistfully. "It's time for me to move on." He pulled himself out of bed and walked towards the basement. "Are you coming? I can't do this alone."

Maxim Volk

I followed Adam down the stairs for the last time. It was curious. I had never thought about the way he walked before, but now I could not imagine never seeing him descend a staircase again. I thought about all of things I would be unable to see anymore. His laugh, sparkling like the stars in the sky, or his smile, wide as the sea and full of perfect teeth. I would never again see him do that stupid thing he did to brush his hair out of his eyes or stick his hands in his pants to adjust his balls. I would never hear him tell me he loves me again. By the time we reached the bottom of the stairs, I was sobbing.

Adam comforted me, pressing his bare skin to mine. I could feel his heart racing in his chest. "It's going to be okay. I will always be with you, even when I am not here anymore." He took my hand in his and led me to the middle of the room, where he had cleared the table off.

"Are you sure you don't want to do this in the bedroom?" I managed to croak out.

He shook his head. "When a person dies, it can . . . get messy. The table will be easier to clean." I winced at the thought of his body, no longer able to control itself.

He climbed up on the table and lay down. I stood over him, admiring his naked body, so full of life. "How do you want me to do this?" I asked.

"However you want," he said, giving my hand a squeeze.

"It's your death," I said shrugging. If he left it up to me, I would not be snuffing out his life. I needed him to make the decision.

"I want you to choke me," he said. I nodded, slipping my hand around his throat. "No," he said. "I want you up here. Straddle me." I sighed, climbing up onto the table and putting my knees on either side of him.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"As sure as I was on the day you asked me to marry you." I slipped my hands around his throat and began to squeeze.

"Harder," Adam said, and I obeyed, leaning into his throat as I

throttled him. I watched as his eyes began to bulge and his face turned red. I felt his cock stand at attention and rub against my backside, causing blood to rush to my own groin. "I love you," he mouthed as I continued to squeeze. I told myself that if he began to fight me, I would stop immediately. Adam did not struggle. He did not fight me. He only smiled serenely as I crushed his windpipe.

And then Adam was gone. I stared into his eyes, waiting for a sign of life, but none came. His erection began to subside. I leaned down to kiss his lips, still warm.

"I love you," I said. I climbed off the table and stared at his body. Resentment began to grow. How could anyone be so selfish? "I hate you!" I screamed at his corpse. "I hate that you left me. You said we would be together forever. You said you loved me!" I pounded against his chest with my fists. "How could you do this to me?" I was sobbing, my tears pooling on his lifeless chest. "I need you back," I whimpered.

I thought about what he said. That I could do whatever I wanted with his body. But all I wanted to do now was to have him near me. I lifted him off the table and carried him up the stairs. I took him to the bathroom and washed him carefully in the shower, the entire time running my fingers through his hair. He was perfect. I pressed his lips upward into a smile, and then I kissed them again. Once he was clean, I lifted him out of the tub and carried him to our bedroom, laying him on the mattress. Then, I got into bed and curled my body around his. He told me he would be with me forever, and he would. We would lay in this bed together until we reached old age, as it was supposed to be. I am his, and he is mine.



A HOME FOR GREYHOUNDS

Oh my chimera with hands unclean,
my bones will break in symmetry.
I've been graced by cold fingertips in winter.
Still, I seethe with undying envy.

I've bit my tongue until it split in two,
swallowed the blood so I know it's true.
I've said nothing, but I meant even less.
You love to stab me with our bodies pressed.

One demon at a time, please.
Would I be depressed if I couldn't run this fast?
The moment I stop under your willow tree
will be arcane to these blades of grass.

Teach me new tricks.
Even then, you wouldn't be happy.
I'll fetch barberry sticks,
just to be home in your trapping.

Thuy Nguyen

INSTRUCTIONS FOR A HUSBAND

Unzip me.

Unzip my flesh.

Peel back the skin. Drink a chalice of my blood.

Fuck my bones. Then make love to it.

Crawl into my imagination and live in it.

Study my mind. Let it change yours.

Devour my heart to double the size of yours.

Reach into my gut to find your answers.

Crave me, know me, taste me, all of me.

Shake hands with your soul. Introduce it to mine.

Thirst after my humor. Hunger for my words.

Create with me. Play with me. Flirt with me.

Burn with me. Murder with me.

Bathe in my flames and emerge from it cleansed. Nourished. Polished.

For me.

EAT ME, KNOW ME

I want you to bite me.
Sink your teeth through my skin
and do not be gentle.
I want to feel the pierce,
the rip,
I want it to hurt.
You can know me in my pain,
in my fear,
in my ecstasy,
in my wholeness.
I would tear off my own flesh,
let the blood drip steady down my body,
and press it between your wet lips,
if it meant you'd hold another piece of me.
Break open my ribcage,
peel out my heart,
taste it.

NOTNOT

ONE DAY

One day I will call to the Nights
and my heart too walks among the living
Casual apocalypse
Untucked button ups, boots and jeans
There glows a stray dog
curled on the grave in green beams

One day I will call to the Nights
and rise a big top in the middle of twice
removed from town over the topless spine
See, I'm a circus rambling secrets I rehearsed and rambling 'secrets I rehearsed' into 'circus'
Fluent in daylight, I once spoke in glitters
and all they ever hear is riddles
I knew how to put myself at the time

One day I will call to the Nights
and fall — a cigarette on the asphalt
Feigning the sun
Drained as that 'day'
you made a wish upon a scar
and not quite gone
I slip through your fingertips
as the glitters still linger on
smeared around your lips

One day I will call to the Nights
Today delights
not sparing you a single suspicion
of a contrast in white
Warmth is but an apparition
cast in the shape of a tall, upstanding 'I'
Polished to perfection
I've become initial to 'Imitation of imitation'
Behold, your perfection!

No
One day you're trying to reach
withdraws its circumference towards both of us
So call to your arms
You thing of a hundred hands
and let me kiss you in kind, once
for each time I wore an oath of a mirror on your palms
Nots x nots x nots

MATERNA

The feminine existence
This identity nonsense

The desire to nurture
The shame of lineage failure

Forced to act in a hurry
We thirst for self-discovery

Becoming who we are
Still healing from our scars

The judgment is degrading
We're evolving, not creating

To be fruitful is antiquated
The world is capacitated

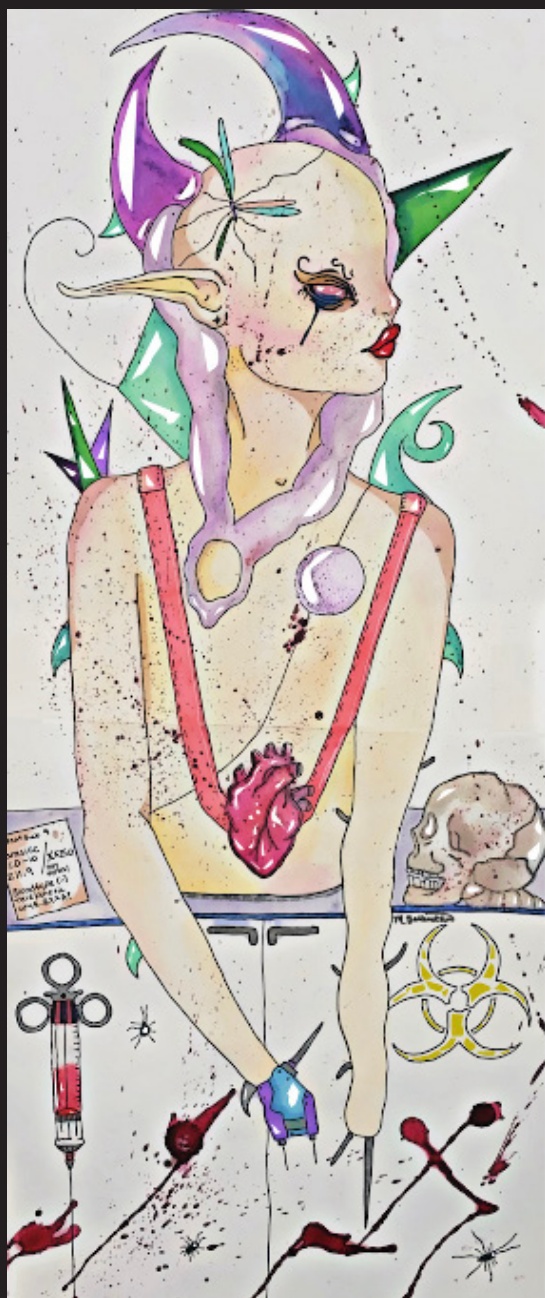
A body engorged
Contorted and disfigured

Like a tick growing inside
Sucking our blood until satisfied

Ossification, crumbling teeth
Pelvic floor, crushed beneath

Let us be a host for our own desires
Release expectations into the fire

Our temples are to be nourished
Our purpose is to flourish



Meredith Gallenstein

COMMENCE



ILL;BEGOTTEN // METAMORPHOSIS

you formed me in the dark
yet wonder how God's light
failed to reach out and bless me.
bathed in beams of the sun, life-giving and stark,
I endure in this body, ill-begotten and odd,
yet you call me vile, abhorrent just to see.
these parts hewn from angel dust
welded at the joints by Satan's breath;
if you loathe me, loathe me, you must,
but you are the one praying for my untimely death.
the Antichrist for being
and the Antichrist brought into being:
it is not the babe's fault that it was born,
so it is not solely to evil that my soul is solemnly sworn.
transcendence engendering putrescence,
you call my metamorphosis the heart's necrosis,
but my becoming begets your righteous undoing.
who am I if not me in entirety?
cannot my flesh be holier than obscenity?
if a monster you made, why do you fear it more
than your stalking shadow or reflection in the mirror?
hellsent to you but heavenbent to me,
if monster I am, then monster, I must be,
but do not fear the creature: fear the creator.

Shannon Gardner

PROFOUND



Shannon Gardner

AS THE WORLD FALLS DOWN



Waylon Skully

THE RELIGIOUS MAN

When you are dead
I will sing to your corpse
and pray to god,
Why you, before me?

I am not a religious man
I am not a religious man
I am not a religious man
but your death will make me a preacher

Though I wished you to die
Before me
So you may not feel as
I do now,
Mourning a deep love
I pray to god,

I am not a religious man
I am not a religious man
I am not a religious man

Why you, before me?
Why had my wishes for once

been honored?
When I so selfishly
Secretly
Wished I never had to mourn you?

You are not gone yet.
You are still here, lavishing me
With kisses and touch
But I mourn the day you are not.
Because

I am not a religious man
I am not a religious man
I am not a religious man
But one day your death

Will make me a religious man.

Kiara

SEMPITERNAL SEVERENCE

I'm hot on the trail of my future self, distorted and marred by the death rays of heat which radiate off the pavement.

Close enough to catch vague glimpses, yet always too far to grasp.

We play this perpetual game of cat and mouse, she and I, flirting with the idea of sameness.

My skin grows sticky with sweat, while she simply remains blushing in the heat of the chase.

She's in my head, anticipating my every spastic movement.

As I clamber and trip, my feet uncertain, she moves ever further ahead with an uncanny grace.

She knows both where she stands and where she is headed, and all I have ever known is the unending horror that is the separation between us.

I know her, the same as she knows me, but we may never truly meet.

Still I am moved by some unseen force to remain in tow of my own potential divinity, and tremble in the bastard flesh of my own body, hoping that one day I might catch up.

Paul Henning

THE VENUE ONLY CHANGED

I step between the cracks of a constructed world
to remember what it means
to choose meaning
in the ruins of the old world.
Yet the silence is not peace.
The graves are marked, and still they do not hold their dead.

Beauty does not protect us.
Ugliness teaches us how to stay.

Some stories resist sutures.
Some wounds take generations.
The gallows were torn down.
The pyres have gone cold.
The accused were laid to rest.
Long ago.

But their screams remain audible.
The scars reopen.

Time moves.
We beg not to look back.

The screams persist.
The wind bears witness,

settling them in the bone.

Silence, when honored,
becomes instruction.
Or implication.

Reflection transcends obedience.
Compassion is met with fatigue.

Paul Henning

Fear becomes a discipline.

Walking the old path is viewed as weakness.

Walking against it, consumed by fear,
rekindles a former blaze.

The desire to persecute never left us.
Denial only steepened with time.

Mere gossip spreads faster and farther.
The hangman's noose is refashioned.
Our judge, jury, and executioner

is *on line*.

We stand accused.
The venue only changed.

J.B. Wheeler

THE EVERLASTING HOWL

It arrives in the twilight hour,
as it always does.
And I am blindsided,
caught unawares by the violent thrumming in my bones.
I cannot control it,
this dreadful orchestra.
I cannot stop it,
this impending darkness.
I am not spared from this.
The everlasting howl.
The end and the beginning,
the end of all beginnings,
and the beginning of all endings.

Max Gershon

MY DEAREST, CARMILLA

My Dearest, Carmilla,

They said never to listen for the way the demonic melody hangs on the deformed branches. Nor watch it sift like mountains of ash, insects buzzing about in the suffocation of post-sacrificial air. But listen you did, and, love, for the first time, you felt it. I know you did. It swallowed you up in a sweet embrace like no other. They said you were lost but never before had you been found like this. You said it yourself, all those years ago, darling. You meant it. Your heart hung on every word. Every syllable on the tip of my tongue to yours.

They always said you never listened. But to me, you did. What a good girl you were, and never did I think that I would want for more, more, always more. Though you are my mortal affliction.

They didn't know your mind was swirling with sorrow, addicted to regret and unrelenting rage; seeds sowed in volcanic soil and rested in bedframes of sharpened wooden stakes. They might as well have laughed, cheered, taunted me directly, painted targets on their backs, for they made the once merciful servant a sinister necromancer when they decided to steal the life of my little lover.

They didn't begin to fathom what it all meant. Perhaps only one or two of them ever did, yet I know a vengeful soul when I taste one. God help a woman alone in this world, right? And I loved you there that night and all the nights after when my kiss first awoke you from your slumber.

A sweet and sour rebirth, those first few breaths you greedily devoured, before drinking me in with those magnetic eyes of yours. Refusal to let the Fates claim your life made my long-quiet, ashen heart burst into flames once more.

“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” That’s what they say. Though they forget that hell is already in our minds, the pearly white bones turned onyx, the stretch of skin sprinting in waves down a body others will always try to claim, melting beneath you, falling, tearing at crimson seams, cracking yourself in halves, not only for me, but for you.

Never fully discarded, still in use when it happens to most of us. To you. A hermit would leave when ready. That’s the way the cycle goes, but your blood flowed through crumpled fists, no matter how hard you tried to stop the inevitable. You couldn’t catch up in the race. Men decided they would always win. That was before, but at that moment, you could try. I had given to you what was always your truth: power.

I marveled at your borealis then, when the luminous reveal of your true self emerged in all its magnificence. You left your human shell behind and made room for the monster that was always within you, begging to be set free from its porcelain cage.

They always told you never to go. They said if you left, you’d never return, but return you did, and with a hunger for human flesh. My love, my angel, look how your wings have grown. I am so unequivocally proud of you. But before I get ahead of myself, Carmilla, would you like to tell your food the rest?



LILITH

Though you do not live to see it,
the fight for equality persists.

Succubus,
another legend stolen,
another woman dismissed.

Demon,
forsaken and forgotten,
for daring to exist.

Outcast,
In eternal Hell you'll burn,
what a shocking twist.

Deceiver,
An angels touch,
A womans kiss.

Apostate,
Leaving Eden,
deciding to resist.

Believer,
in equality,
not subservience.

First woman,
born of earth and Adam's clay,
punished for disobedience.

Molly Likovitch

MURDERESS OF MY LIFE

“In my end is my beginning.”

—*Mary Queen of Scots*

I'd like to make starburst bloom from the deepest blues. Make them osprey and ivory. The crossing X they stitched into my skin six days into life. The weight of the world; such a simple thought. I was starving to matter. A righteous light pretended to welcome me and I was a compelling child protegéé; actress made murderess after I thanked them for giving me a place to sleep, a crown to bear, one title to defend and another to chase. I used to beg for them to take me to Ilium when I failed to bring forth anything of worth from my bones. Greek Goddesses had nothing on me. Tartarus couldn't contain me, tombs couldn't trap me, they couldn't keep me. Heart to heart, bloody ear to bloody ear—this is how epics are made, how stories are told and secrets are kept. They always cut me bone deep but Courage grows strong at the Wound. My fury was always tempted until I proved my teeth sharp enough to put the lion to shame. Bastardess takes on Murderess and they all pay to see the show. 3 strikes of an ax, 44 lashes of a heart, a legacy older than 400 years. Can you see me now? Mermaid-tailed, Unicorn clad, blue as an Elysium sky. They couldn't kill me if they tried.

Molly Likovitch

HOLD OUT, MY SWEET

I dreamed of her last night. She swooped in
like a seabird cloaked in shattered glass.

“Do you love me yet?” I asked her—my heart an aching
muscle in my chest. She didn’t hear me. Crawled
into my bed, kissed me quick,
whispered (in her cadence I so loathsomely adore)

Hold out, my sweet. Hold out if you can.

But I can’t.

Morning comes like a blazing comet
and she is always gone. A western sun—glass intact, dream
dust on my pillow and the same muscle
ache in my body. The ghost
of her lips on my cheek. The scent
of poppies The memory of never.

I dream of her every night.
I die loving her every day.

Molly Likovitch

DIAGNOSED, NEVER LEFT

No one lives here. They breed ghosts
in this place. Scared kids
down in Georgia lose

sleep, check under
their beds for a portal
to Milledgeville, maybe

there's a trap door they didn't
ever notice. A set of stairs to lead

them into Hell. *We all knew
what that meant.
A death sentence.* Maniacal

exhaustion. Abiding sadness. Pay
your respects. *But I don't know
how to get there,* they say

as they go. *Can't you tell me
how to get there?*
Can't you? You can sell

and peddle and prod
and kill.

Molly Likovitch

NO, I'M TERRIFIED OF THE DARK

—after *Grey House*

Swallow me like toothpaste.
Count the snowflakes
on the window.
Pray. You make red.
We knit you up with
all the other bottles
of moonshine. Call this
'justice.' There should be more
for rotten girls. Ghostly
mountain girls. Play
Show & Hell
and don't you dare
lie. Momma's
screaming in the basement.
Welcome to the winter.
Tinker and think.
Countdown.
Do you know the alphabet?
Do you know how to bury
a dead thing? How to build
up the living? How to set
a broken bone? We do.
We have to. Purgatory.
Endless catharsis.
One goes
and another comes.
Thousands before
and thousands still.
This is the grey.
This is the end.
You will haunt
our furniture until the last
dead girl dies.
Shake the boy's hand.
Answer
the phone. End
it's what you came here to do.

Molly Likovitch

IF HELL IS FOREVER...

*Naphtali is a doe let loose; He utters beautiful words.
—Genesis 49:21*

His voice crackles from 1893. I'm worshiping. I'm listening. Why
should I care for their God? / Look up the lists of failings

inject them, remember them. We're all going to die here.
Broadcasting screams like jazz songs.

Rotten venison, bad meat, cleanse the butcher's soul, he doesn't need
it anymore. Why should we long for Angels? / cast down, come through

the ending is a long way from here. How fascinating terrifying is.
You're losing your signal.

A doe wanders through the woods / the eldritch entertainer follows.
Centuries are ending at his fingertips and he is promising everything

with a voice ruled by static. Why struggle for recognition
from the Holy? / Wrestling deers ends in blood. Antlers

in stomachs, deals unpaid. Wouldn't it be beautiful to feed
the birds and tip the buskers and forget how much you

hate yourself? He can teach you. He can love you just
as much as any hunter.

Sometimes it is so beautiful to become the prey.

THE FRACTURED VENUS

I give you my eyes
What use I for sight?
You, my last love
are my vision, my light

Nine fingers are yours
on a silk laden tray
The tenth one remains
to bid you to stay

Here is my skin
to wear as your own
May it grant you damp pleasures
of which I have known

What lay tween my legs
is no longer there
That simple distraction
Now glossy and bare

I offer my heart
still throbbing and wet
Torn from my breast
without doubt nor regret

Take off this face
I no longer need
From vain uncertainties
I have finally been freed

What's left but my mouth
Yours only to kiss
It will speak of my love
You need more than this?

BLEED WITH ME

Cut my hand
I'll cut yours
Palms together
as it pours
Merge and join
my final friend
in these veins
our love will blend

Take my tongue
I'll take yours
Gag and gulp
as it pours
Down our throats
Thick as thieves
Bodies shiver
as it leaves

Open my throat
I'll open yours
Tilt your head back
as it pours
From the gape
this red bouquet
Bathe me now
your mythic spray

Squeeze my heart
I'll squeeze yours
Our grip it tightens
as it pours
Take it all

Greg Jones

Do not stop
Wring it out
My final drop

Hold my hand
I'll hold yours
Our blood is pooling
as it pours

Black as pitch
The final dregs
Kiss me now
I hear you beg

Sahara Matthews

MY REFLECTION JUST DON'T SMILE
BACK AT ME LIKE I KNOW IT SHOULD



Danielle Robertson

YOUTH'S COLD MEMORY

There is a part of her that can still smell snow.

On nights when she and her sisters dance in the chill air, and the sliver of the moon hangs low and bright like a scythe, she can imagine it, for a moment: the cold scent in her nostrils. And with that memory comes warmth from bundling in furs, from drinking goblets of dark red wine in front of a roaring fire. The servants brought out platters of roasted meats and hearty stews. This was food that would stick to one's ribs. A deep dram of comfort, lulling one into a desire to rest for a hundred years, sated and content.

Back then, she could not conceive of the harsh reality of a hundred years of rest.

There is a warmth that will never reach one's bones, no matter how ardently one embraces the hearth's flames. There is a thirst that cannot be quenched. A hunger that will not end, not for all the sumptuous meals in the world. She knows that now.

The man comes at night. The carriage delivers him to the gate, and she and her sisters watch, their nails curled against the stone of a turret smooth with age, as he climbs the stairs and makes his way to the warped wooden doors of the castle.

She can hear the pulse of his lifeblood at his throat, beneath his cravat and jacket. A style so foreign to her eyes, so modern, that she nearly laughs. He positively glows with it—with life—like she once glowed. As he turns to face the brightness of the moon before heading inside, she is transported, as she sometimes is, to a time in her youth when every face turned towards hers as if she was the moon itself: smooth, and lovely, and fair. Back then she'd plait her golden hair into spun softness. Her rosebud lips were pink with promises and flirtations. There was a secret glint in her blue eyes, a special flutter to her lashes. She'd spend hours in front of the looking glass, peering at what the world around her gazed at in wonder.

Danielle Robertson

A cruel memory to plague her, perhaps. The looking glass no longer cares for her.

Leave him be, their lover's voice says, caressing against their ears like smoke. He is not for you. Years ago, she might have mistaken his tantalizing tone for being playful, for teasing. Now, she knows it only as a threat. He is defending what is his.

They are never for us, one of her sisters hisses. She can hardly tell which. As the years have passed, their individual looks have faded; they are now all sharp cheekbones and bright, menacing eyes. Unlike her own fair hair, which has gone almost white, her sisters are raven-dark and wild like brambles. As they tumble through the air they link hands, united by hunger and a common goal: to feed.

And it's never, never enough.

Now she watches this man—the sound of his heart a shush, shush in her ears—sit down at the table where she once sat. She watches him exist amongst the things that she once called hers. The chairs are piled high with her sumptuous furs and fine rugs, to ward off the chill. She watches him pour blood-red wine from the decanter, drink deeply from the goblets of her dowry, that once shone bronze with potential. The dishes and platters are tarnished after years of disuse, but the meats and stews upon them are warm.

The smell of cooked flesh, of tarragon and red wine and tallow and richness, makes her stomach turn.

Leave us now. Her lover's voice is in her ear and hers alone. It's not often her lover's voice is solely hers, and there's a small part of her that wants to revel in it: to have something that is just hers again.

There was a time, many years ago, when so much was only hers.

She can see her lover now, his great wolfish shadow on the wall, so dark against the firelight. She can see him stalking towards the man and his youth and his lifeblood, something that she once had but no longer—

Danielle Robertson

Leave us now, he says again. His voice is softer, the curling smoke of diffused incense. Not so much a demand, but an unspoken promise: There will be something for you, later, if you obey.

Certainly, he could never deny her pretty things.

The threads of her being connect her to her sisters once again. They are outdoors, in the dark sky, and the tattered bottoms of their gowns whip around their legs like cobwebs. There is not much use for finery when they are their only company.

Does he think to keep him long? She can feel her sisters' thoughts through the squeeze of their palms, in the non-beat of her heart's chambers.

What is so long when we have only time?

Each night is an eternity, one sister muses.

They'd spent the last few evenings watching the man pace fitfully near the hearth, his pulse skittering in his wrists like a frightened mouse. One sister had boldly stridden across the hallway while he was combing his hair in his small looking glass, and the sound of her skirts across the floor had set his heart into the most delicious gallop. They had all snickered then, like the sisters they may have been in their youth. From the way his eyes darted to-and-fro, their laughter, to the man, might have sounded like vermin scratching in the walls.

They'd rifled through the man's things while he was away from his room; the newsprint and books smelled of dust and damp and were of no interest to her or her sisters. They could not decipher one scrawl of text from another. The whorls of black ink were mysterious pools, forbidden to them. They were, however, curious of the small, gilded frame he kept with his shaving kit, wrapped in a soft cloth. The filigree frame held the fading likeness of a young woman, doe-eyed and pale, with rosebud lips that much reminded her of the lips that were once her own before an eternity set her scowling.

Danielle Robertson

Through the haze of incessant need, she felt a stabbing loneliness. A wondering for who she was, who she might have been. She missed the golden sheen of her hair. She missed the clearblue of her eyes. She missed the steady grounding of a heartbeat in her chest, acting as her own anchor, with a place in time as her mooring.

She wondered if there were any likenesses of her in the world. If one was packed away in the trunk of some forgotten suitor, lovingly wrapped in soft cloth. She wondered if she would even be able to see herself in it, or if, like the looking glass, her image would be wiped clean. A fleeting memory, like the ghost of a piano's chord in an empty hall.

How much longer can he toy with him?

Hunger is a sigh, wrapping around their minds and squeezing.

Did she know her sisters, before they were as they are now?

She remembers her old life—the life of soft furs and shining goblets and promises in front of the roaring fire—in fits and starts. Some evenings, she swears she began this journey alone. She recalls being the sole jewel in a proud family's crown. Other times she can imagine the tableau the three of them made: one fair, two dark, receiving suitors by the warm glow of the firelight. Dancing in the courtyard in the temperate spring. Gathering soft blue flowers by the babbling river. Their breathless laughter would rise in white clouds in the winter months. The glimmer of stars in the deep velvet of the night sky held their secrets. A dusting of snow on the cobblestones held their hopes. Their youth was that of the startled deer at dawn, and the crackling crust of ice on the river, and the caw of a lone crow at dusk. The brief and mundane and wonderous life of it all.

Of one thing she is certain: she remembers her lover's deep gaze, always. She cannot remember a time in her long, long existence

Danielle Robertson

when she was not feasted upon by his startling black eyes.

The sisters cannot satiate their hunger with their own meager findings. The crunch of small creatures' bones merely gives them headaches. How can they concentrate, how can they see through the haze of need, when this man paces so fitfully?

Through the draft let in by the open window—the draft that sets the curtains moving and teases the delicious scent of the man's hair, his scalp, the beating vibrance of his skull into her nostrils—she smells it, for just a moment.

The promise of snow. The glorious, icy bite.



Lorca Jolene

LYCANTHROPE



CALLUSES

The earths calluses collide with our footsteps. Coarse tissue torn by time. Rebuilt and rendered. I grab your hand. Your calluses collide with my softness. It's kinda funny the way nature protects itself. It's kinda funny that after all this time and after all this blood spilled. I'm more raw than ever.

You touch me gently but also with such passion that I'm afraid your calluses may burn off your fingertips. My skin is far from sharp but it is far from cold. Sometimes I want to touch your tissue, the stuff under all those layers. Just to say I was there. I'm selfishly hoping you soften. Hoping you leave yourself vulnerable.

You take my hand. I grip like a chain. I want to be touched but don't want to feel the weight of any hands. The pressure of temporality. But when those celestial organic eyes find me: nocturnal tombstones with strokes of gold. I can't stop but fight for you. I press your calluses into the skyline between my lips. Hugged by blue and green. Vast and unforgivingly human. I break. I crave. I long. For you. Even to my detriment. Mother Nature herself designed me to cherish you.

Xerces Azul

ALL THAT GLISTENS IS NOT GOLD



Kevin Carson

I AM HEAVEN, BECAUSE YOU SAID SO

To love me is to love the storm, even the thunder roaring like coward lions caught in a cage, the lightning that breaks into pieces when two bodies exchange what can only be explained as heartache. Nothing hides from raindrops; I don't know why I fall so far so thin. There is a need to water everything I see beauty in. I invite you to sit with me in the pour and marvel at how even the graveyard gets wet. We'll lie on the ground long enough to feel the bodies below quenched. We'll discuss how flowers are never needed, soft green grass is what the dead deserve, to peacefully count the never-endingness of eternity. And how one day we'd end up here and be grateful for the rain. You'll ask why my knee hurts before it pours and I'll giggle, say age or some dumb shit like a past injury but deep down I know it's the old pain coming back to haunt me every time I hear those lions cry to the breaking clouds waking the undead thing inside, like hands from my past pointing at signs to remind me – tears only fall when grief/love denies me. No one dances in the rain anymore. Simple happiness has become a cliché, yet you stood with me, turning every droplet into stardust cast beyond the clouds somewhere outside of calamity, named me Caelus, made me holy.



Kevin Carson

NIKE SHOE BOX

for Keith

The first day, I waited by the door patiently
For him

Got a call from my sister saying they're coming home
Him in her hands, stepping out of the car

The most precious thing I'd ever seen
Baby Jesus had nothing on him

My mother stayed for 30 more minutes, they said

His pinkish skin adorned in cotton blankets
I leaned over his crib to get a better look
I swore he winked at me,

The Nike shoes I got the day before
And never touched
Staring at me, hooded and red-eyed

The second day, I played peek-a-boo with him
He laughed
I swore it happened,

My sister figuring out how to be his mother
our mother on the couch

In the same clothes she wore to the hospital
Long white maternity dress
a red stain on her shoulder

The Nike shoes I still didn't touch
Looming near the door, hooded and red-eyed



Kevin Carson

The third day, I picked him up
Gave him a tour of the house
And begged our mother to look

She turns away to the door

My sister washing his bottle
In her tears, asking herself
if he'll need it

They said this could happen
And with the slowing of breath
and cooling of skin

The cotton blankets weren't warm enough
With loss of sunshine and in pouring rain

In the Nike shoe box
They made me bury him in

Hooded and red-eyed.

UNBURIED, ETERNALLY

The abhorrent part of all of this is that
they visualise me smiling whenever I leave,
an imagined relieved tune escaping my lips.

I'm not saying I don't play a role in the creation of this reputation,
but people only ever see me
when the trails of embers following my footsteps become an entire inferno.

Otherwise, they look *through* me,
or they craft an embellished version of me which they easily turn away from
once I consume the light from the golden jewellery they make me wear.

And, I always, always swallow more than they're willing to give.
But, I never walk away because they run out of things to hand to me—
I am not a greedy, thoughtless animal.

My face doesn't dim the moment their attention needs to be elsewhere for a second,
it's just that I never get to hear their voice unless
I tie the telephone cords around my neck and frame it as an accident;

It's just that they never notice that gold doesn't really fit me,
and the accessories weigh too heavily and uncomfortably
until they're digging on my skin and making my bones cave in,

and I still bite my tongue to contain the complaints within.
But eventually, it all gets too much, and even then,
I do not exit with a smile on my face.

Corvrina

I drag my weakened body out of there, fingers broken and feet callused
from all the time I resist thickening the walls or running away.
I do not exit with a fucking smile on my face!

Cobblestones and the earth itself feed off of my blood
when I limp away,
and they still never let me fully rest.

They disturb my burial ground by lighting a candle,
or making me into some kind of monster in their story,
like they're not itching to steal from my own grave soil.

This is often what makes me wonder why my ghost is easier to stomach
than it is for them to open the casket and check whether I'm still warm
and can be helped until I crawl out of the damn thing myself.

HUBRIS: VOICE OF INVIDIA

To look too closely,
to stare, in nature,
is an act of aggression.

Enclosed Gorilla on a mountain
punches a wall made of glass
because a child looked too long.
Boundary stands, cracked floor to ceiling,
hundreds and thousands of little lines drawn
fractures with impending fall.

What is held so tightly
you call it “yours?”
What can you truly possess?
Do you command each cell
on the back of your palm,
on the tip of your thumb,
to take its turn towards death?

Horror of consciousness
always incomplete,
emerging from depths
unreachable,
as a Siren’s song
drowns the unaware
animal called human
that sometimes seems
to think itself “God.”

Just a word
for the source
of mystery,
leaf off a vine
twisting
through centuries,
melodic curves
of conflict
in relationships
inherent
in existence,
sacred stories:
how to navigate chaos
pretending it's a ladder
you can climb.

Can you even possess your own soul?

Fleshy beasts making maps
sewn from metaphors
carrying over history
in unseen threads pulled
from frayed, decaying tapestries
woven with countless unnamed hands
dripped in illusion's paint.

Speaking with poison breath
squeezed out by coiling snakes
at the base of a tree with fruit
on branches too tall to see
standing from the dirt
you will always return to
like an exhale.

J.B. Scarlett

Dance while you can
regardless of evil eyes.
Sense only your own steps.
Antelope's unthinking leaps
almost never stumble,
save near beginning or end
of their soulful run on earth.
Feet feeling forward,
pups without sight,
can you hold both these truths to be self-evident?
Not rapture up to fear on high horses swift to kick with strong
consequence?

Cause and effect
exists beyond intention.
Will of blooded creatures
could never be supreme
no matter how ancient the course
or supposed inevitable coagulation
into towers babbling over
choking rivers dry
for some sort of tool
to reach the height
of unperceived branches
tasting fruit that none have before.

Wed to this universe
but will never lift her veil.
And God is not a virgin,
nor Gorilla bound
by pages of glass.

I WISH I WAS THE DEAD GIRL

I wish I was the dead girl my boyfriend fucked
I asked him if he ever had a threesome
He didn't want to answer,
but twenty means all nerves and open skin,
every question, a reflex.
He told me, "yes I've had a threesome."
I couldn't let that go
I had to ask him,
what positions
Did you liked it
would you do it again
was she as pretty as me?
He pauses—you don't need to be jealous. She's dead.
I ask what happened but I feel I already know.
This nameless, faceless girl I was so jealous of, jealous of what I then called
promiscuity, what I
know now is sexual freedom,
I feel in my bones that a man did something to her.
Took her wanton as an excuse to murder her.
The choking was okay at first until it got to be too much—
when I ask my boyfriend to choke me I wonder if he thinks of her,
Of how she died,
Of how she died like this,
And I wonder if he's capable
Does he think how it would be to push just a little harder against the pulse
in my neck?
I'm still jealous of the dead girl.
She knew my boyfriend before I did
She experienced pleasure in ways that I hadn't
And I have this sick feeling in my stomach
that I would give anything, everything
to be the dead girl.

Vini Greagan

ILLUSORY SACRAMENT



Madison Quinn

DOG EAT DOG

Love is fickle and slippery in my sweaty hands. Clutching the inside of my jean pockets, I am grasping onto that small flame of love. It is my last piece of feeling real and human. I will pretend that I do not know my lips are prickly and acidic when I kiss it for her. I want her to know that the kiss is mine, grossness and all, it is mine. It is disgusting, the feeling that brews in me when our eyes catch in class. Those brief moments make my stomach turn, knowing they are never on purpose.

Her skin shines, nothing like mine. Perfect hair surrounds perfect features, eyes and nose sculpted like a depiction of Aphrodite. Her mouth belongs on mine, I can feel it when I see her teeth. Those cerise lips, God, nothing else could amount to the job of framing her perfect teeth. I am infatuated with everything about her to a point where it brings me physical pain. My eyes easily reside on her hands when she isn't looking because that is my favorite part of her. So made for me, my ideal, as if I'd crafted them in my dreams. I bite my hand again, another scar— I cannot indulge. She can never know. We belong all over each other, melted together like converging mercury.

I have learned to love her insides just as well because she is my lab partner this year. Desks eleven and twelve, tucked into the back left corner of the biology classroom. Introductions waived because somehow she knew me. Rolling over her name on my lips outside of the comfort of my own mind. It can run from my lips as many times as I want, meeting my own from hers halfway. She enjoys me easily, hope blossoms and I think she will be mine soon. The hands I watch will soon be all over my own and the touch will heal me from the disgusting feeling I suppress as soon as she smiles at me.

The days I sit alone at lunch I see her surrounded by smiles and desperate hands of anxious teenagers. When she sometimes spends the forty-five minute break with me I savor every second like a steak dinner. She asks me questions about my future and my family that I try to dodge as best I can without seeming sketchy and I'll inquire the same. Never

Madison Quinn

pushy, I'm cautious to make sure she doesn't stop liking me. Numbers are exchanged and we send silly pictures and games, we even have inside jokes. She's the only contact on my phone outside of my parents. Days of bonding turn to weeks, then to months, and she's become my best friend. I'm lonely when the winter break hits, and she's off in the mountains with no signal. I lay in bed for the entire three weeks.

The second semester comes easier than I thought. When she walks into class that first day back, her skin still shines despite the dull cold shielding the world from the Sun. Her smile is bigger, I light up with joy. She's happy to see me! This must be the day. My teeth puncture the skin of my thumb, and I do not complain. She will not mind the scars.

She is more jittery than usual. I notice a braided rope bracelet tight around her wrist, purple and clear beads dangling off of the ends of the bright yellow and white strings. My brain melts as it bangs against the metal spiral of her notebook when she throws it open. The color, that awful yellow, it mocks me. She knows I hate yellow, just like how I know she hates green. I never wear green because she would be appalled. I melt more when it dawns on me that her happiness is not because of me. It's because of the story behind that ugly bracelet. The smile she bounced in with was gifted by someone else who wanted to hurt me. That yellow bores holes into the side of my head as if daring me to look at it. She cannot catch me, so I ignore it and continue as if we are just two people who happened to collide. As if my world didn't just shatter over a piece of beaded string. I have never felt more stupid in my life. I don't ask about it because she is far too perfect for me anyways.

As we continue to talk, a part of me deep down knows I will never be over it. She rambles about the ski resort his family stayed at, my thoughts are invaded by images of how that bracelet should be blue, my favorite color. How I should have been at the ski resort with her. How that smile she flaunts should belong to me. My hand clutches around that flame of love in my pocket. She keeps talking hushed under the teacher, each word is a chip out of my heart. I think I am going to explode.

"There's a project due next week." Her construed string of words breaks with an important contribution.

"Oh. Okay." My guts twist like knots.

Madison Quinn

“Well do you wanna come over today and just get it done?”

I nod without consent from the rest of my body. What am I thinking? I can't be alone with her. That bubbling, hot disgust is wrapping around my heart. I have never been to her house. I will never go to her house again, I think as I walk through the front door. It's large and loved, with high ceilings and warm beige tones on every wall and couch. If they were to remove the tables and T.V. I'd liken it to a room of flesh. The grey stained glass table is quickly covered in piles of worksheets, posterboard, and multi-colored markers. I'm supposed to be writing in big bubble letters but she is across from me and that bracelet will not stop staring at me.

Music is playing in the background, floating in the air around us. Her head is bobbing in and out of time with the rhythm. Everything about the moment is perfect, I would be so happy if it wasn't for that stupid bracelet. The markers are in front of me so I only see it when she lifts her hand. The green marker is tucked away because I want her to know I care.

She stands up, stretching her back and I see a sliver of her stomach when she raises her arms. I feel that disgust burning sores into my stomach lining, and I can only beg it not to rise. I cannot indulge. My eyes stay trained onto my bubble letters in a desperate attempt to pretend I don't see her. She walks out of my immediate eyesight and I am so, so nervous. She is behind me, and her arm comes down just beside mine. Hovering over me with hot breath on my neck and the fabric of her t-shirt brushing against mine. I can smell her, God can I smell her, and she can smell me and it is almost too much. She hums softly with the music, her eyes tracing over my work. In my peripheral I see a yellow marker in her hand, the same hand held captive by that tainted yellow bracelet, and I cannot help myself.

I lift my arm up and move hers away from the paper, the marker leaving a long yellow line across all of our hard work. Her eyes are wide, mine alike. My mind is running through a haunted mantra; tainted, tainted, tainted. We are just staring at each other, her confused and me restrained.

“Is everything... okay?” she asks. Concern is all over the tip of

Madison Quinn

her tongue, and the disgust is hot, boiling, rotting and rising. She doesn't understand.

"I hate yellow." I mumble, swallowing everything else I want to say. I cannot indulge. I cannot indulge.

Three blinks, she looks at the ruined papers, the discarded marker, her wrist. She half-realizes. "I'm sorry, I forgot. You told me a couple of months ago."

Mustering a nod I look down at her hand, inches from my face. I do not say anything, because the disgust is in my throat, and my trachea is on fire. I can't tear my eyes from her hand, the one I dreamt about, and how it doesn't belong to me. The disgust comes up, up, and I pray to be forgiven because I just can't hold back anymore. I lean forward and bite down. It's cold relief, the taste. I chew on it, smooth going down my throat and pull back to stare at mangled meat and expose bone. I advert my gaze up to her, my lover, but she is horrified and sobbing. What have I done?

"Is this where all of those scars came from all over your hands?" She mutters, stumbling away from me. "This is what you are?" My heart breaks, can't she see this is love?

I stand up, walking towards her until she is against the beige wall. "I love you." leaves my bloodied lips. I grab her arm, raising it to my mouth. Her breathing picks up as it gets closer to my teeth, shaking her head furiously. It's ruining her hair.

"You don't love me," She chokes on a sob and pulls her arm out of my grasp. "You're repulsive. This isn't human."

It hurts when she says it. The words bounce around in my head like a pinball, leaving little dents in my psyche. I am angry and sad and disgusted with myself all at the same time. How can she say such things? Where do I go from here? If I leave, she will just tell everyone how awful I am. How this disgust of mine is dangerous. Green eyes of terror beg for me to move, to uncage her from the wall. I can't, and she knows it too. I love her too much to let her go. With a glance towards the window, I see that the sun is almost set in the blue haze of dusk. I look back at her, fear unmoving.

I cover her mouth to muffle the screams and bite down on her

Madison Quinn

collarbone. Blood gushes out onto her shirt and the floor, all over me. I eat and eat and eat, while I remind her how much I love her between bites, hushing her cries. I cannot stop as I lick up the blood, working down her body. She stops crying when I've finished her shoulders but that is when my tears begin. They leave streaks in the blood coating my face. As I feast I am reminded that I am horrible. I ruined everything because I couldn't help myself, and I really should stop eating and give her parents a body to bury but I just cannot hold back. I am overflowing with guilt after each piece of meat I gnaw off. An hour in, I reach her heart and devour it in a fit of sobs. I don't deserve to cry, I think as I eat. All of this is my fault. I am the one ripping her flesh from her bones.

When I finish, I lick her skeleton clean. I lick the blood from the walls and floors, and all that is left of the girl I loved is her barest frame. She is only mine now, in the closest way possible. I am covered in and full of her as I sprint all the way home, forty minutes across town, to an empty house. I burn the clothes despite my desire to hold on to every piece of her.

Around midnight, sirens echo down the street in the direction of her flesh-beige home. I threw her up twenty minutes after.



This Too Is Holy

HANDS OF THE DISCIPLE

Look at you.
Beautiful and blasphemous.
Knees tonguing stone.
Molten eyes bleeding
obscene veneration.

Fingers drag
across your parted lips.
Flesh flayed open
on the edge of your grin.
By the skinning of my thumbs,
wickedness comes—
pomegranate wine
that tastes like blood.

We play for power.
Ebbing. Flowing.
The rhythmic rising and falling
of tides.
Drowning.
Like the air trapped between you and I.

Only a fool
would fail to grasp—
A disciple's hand,
too,
holds dominion.
Worship is sovereignty.
Watch,
as I touch the veil
with my fingers.

Beg for forgiveness.

You shall be shown none.

This Too Is Holy

STILL HUNGRY

Don't bite the hand that feeds?

Please.

You want to force-feed me

crushed peas

on a rusted

baby spoon.

I'll open wide

if you say

"airplane."

But,

sweetheart,

I won't stop

until I'm digesting

your elbow.

Dab my mouth.

Ask the waiter,

politely,

for a toothpick

to clean you

from my teeth.

Like a lady.

If you favor your arm

you might want

to keep your

favours

that rot

like flayed flesh

under sun.

So I don't have to suck

my fingers clean

to make them easier

to glide

behind my eyes

to pry loose

This Too Is Holy

what's grown rotten
inside.

Tell me to calm
down.

Not to go
off the rails.

As you hold your
already gnawed-off arm
against your
hairy chest.

But your words smell like
candy-coated carrion.

It turns out,
I'm still hungry.

And there's always room
for dessert.

JUDAS LIPS

Stare at the mirror
and watch as it
stares back
into you.
Distorted verity that winks,
as your truth is
reflected backwards.

Staple the corners of your lips into
an eclipsed moon smile.
Crescent clenched
under deadened blackhole eyes.
Show me those sharpened canines.
Let's see that mouthful of coins.

32 rooted slices of soul.
32 enameled pagan offerings,
for 32 pieces of silver.

And when they're all gone—
your tongue probing the mouth full of spoil—
will you dig into virgin flesh
for another chance at burrowed wisdom?

Place your left hand
upon a book
and raise your right.
Gum your way through
the intoned hollow vows.
I swear,
I can smell the decay beneath your
iron-scented breath
from here.
The only thing you traded
for your smile
is rot.

Samantha Shearing



Emily Anne Elliott

A STORY IN THREE BODY PARTS

flesh (n.): physical needs and desires

this body has fat
in all the right places
but nothing to cushion

the fall

heart (n.): the center of love

tick—tock
why won't it stop
I've smashed it to pieces
and yet—

every thousandth cut
still bleeds the same—

shouldn't these scars
be healed?

stomach (n.): hunger, nausea, anxiety

my intestines pour from my mouth
in the crude shape of a writhing heart,
bleeding out for the world to see—
unfortunately not the way it wants
to see

my pain laid bare, unhidden by shame
by fear
of them

of myself

Eileen Stelter

THE LIKENESS OF MEN

From a very young age, the priest said that the devil was between my legs. Later in life, I began to agree. He was licking up in one long, torturous glide and closed his lips around my clit. I held on to his horns and my back hit the back of the fiery planes of hell he had brought me to.

“You need to stop murdering people,” he murmured. His face left my wet flesh and my head shot up, whimpering in protest.

“What?”

“You need to stop killing people just so you can come here,” he stated, looking up at me, his horns right between my knees, curling skyward.

“But we’re friends,” I replied, shimmying toward his face. He clicked his tongue and I felt the waft of air on my inner thigh. I gasped, but he didn’t move any closer to where I wanted him to be.

“You control my grimoire, we are not friends.” His fangs glinted in the dim red light, with saliva or my own juices, I couldn’t tell.

“But we’re friendly,” I whined, letting my head sink back down and grabbing his horns to pull him to me again.

“I want you to help me leave hell,” the devil said and pushed his tongue back into my core without warning.

“How would I do that?” A breathy moan slipped past my lips and I plied my gaze away from his. If I kept staring at him, the fun would be over way too quickly for my liking. Instead, my gaze was plastered on the chunky stream of lava that was surrounding us. It was where the devil kept the bodies I brought to him.

“Bring me closer to God, that’s how,” he murmured and put his mouth on me like it was something sacred. Like he was reciting worship he knew off by heart. One he had recited countless times before. And good lord, did he know every letter, every word. I moaned and anchored my hands in his hair, pushing him harder into me. I shattered, body bowing off the fiery planes, a sob tearing from my throat as I came, hard.

“Do I look human?” The devil fiddled with the chain on his pocket watch that was tugged into his charcoal waist coat. I adjusted the spectacles on his nose and gave the sleeves of his shirt a tug to straighten them out.

“Indistinguishable,” I confirmed and nodded toward the confessional in the corner. To bring the devil closer to God, I figured we would start with making him talk to my local priest in Rat’s End so he could attend mass the following day. He stuck out like a sore thumb. Not because he wasn’t human, but because he was too well dressed for my part of town. “Why do you want to leave hell in the first place? You’re pretty well adjusted down there.”

The devil avoided my gaze. “Yeah but I can’t really build anything there, can I?” I blinked. “The devil wants a white picket fence?”

He shook his head. “Not a picket fence but ...” His eyes fell on a family walking up to the pews, two children were with them. “I feel like I was robbed of a lot when I made that deal all that time ago.”

A young woman walked out of the confessional, sheepishly checking her surroundings. She left the door open and I gave the devil a little nudge. “Go on. Confess.”

He walked up to the wooden box and stepped inside, shooting me one last look before closing the door. I sighed. Given who he was, he would probably be in there for a while. I slipped into the front pew, in safe distance from the family.

Unlike the devil, I had other plans with my life. But also unlike the devil I was very much still alive. And children? They weren’t exactly on my list. The ones the family had looked well-fed. But in Rat’s End that was the exception. Most children would steal food to scrape by, while their families worked double shifts in the factories just to pay for their lodgings. I thought it was cruel. To bring them into all this suffering. At least for the likes of us.

“Are you praying?”

My head whipped around to where the small voice was coming

from. A little girl stared at me, eyes wide and inquisitive. Her clothes were made of wool and too well kept for Rat's End.

"No," I replied and shook my head.

"Why not?"

"I'm waiting for my friend to come out of the confessional."

She cocked her head. "Are you good friends?"

I thought about the fiery planes of hell and the horns I had held onto earlier today.

"Listen, shouldn't you be getting back to your family?" I pointed my chin at the family over there. As I was looking at them, I realised none of them looked anything alike. Must be one of those adoptive families of a lot of the rich people outside of Rat's End had. I huffed. To think that you had so much money to not only afford children of your own but also take in more was beyond me.

The door to the confessional opened and the little girl scurried off like a mouse. I blinked at the devil like he was the sun and my brain filled in the horns and dark red hue of his skin that he had gotten rid of to look more human. The sharp features were a little softer without the horns but he still looked—sinful. I got up from the pew.

"Well," I said, snaking an arm around his elbow, "do you feel human?"

The devil pursed his lips, looking down at me, then back at the confessional. "I told him I wanted to confess stealing money from my mother's purse and having impure thoughts at night."

I beamed at him. "You're playing the role well."

"I thought you'd like it," he replied and looked down at me. There were freckles dusted over the delicate skin of the back of his nose and under his eyes. Pale green eyes with maroon dots in the irises. I had never noticed the devil had green eyes before. I cleared my throat.

"To get the full human experience, do you want to get some local food?"

He crinkled his nose, his slender freckled nose. "I'm a little worried about what is customary where you live."

I chuckled and pulled him forward toward the church doors.

“We’re eating body parts, too, just from a different creature.”

We were in luck. There was a street vendor on the square right outside the church. I greedily inhaled the air coming from his little wooden cart, spiced with nutmeg and pepper, dripping with grease. As we approached, the devil didn’t look so sure.

“What is it?” he whispered, his lips grazing the shell of my ear. I shivered.

“Here in Rat’s End there’s one meat we’re abundant in,” I replied. “Two please. With sauce and fried onions.” The vendor handed us two skewers and the devil sniffed at the burnt bits.

“So you just gnaw it off like that.” I took a bite to demonstrate.

“I know how humans eat,” the devil huffed, eyeing the skewer. He took a tentative bite with the tip of his teeth, chewing as if he didn’t fully trust the flavours. Rat meat tasted like shit. That’s why they drowned the whole thing in sauce and spices. But I wouldn’t tell him that.

When he smacked his lips and took another bite, I chuckled.

“See? It’s pretty tasty, huh?”

His face lit up, his beautiful, tender face. Way too tender to have been forged in hell, but I wouldn’t tell him that.

“Can I have some?” The little girl from church walked straight up to us.

I looked at her, forehead wrinkling. “Your parents can buy you some, no?”

She looked over her shoulder. “They’re still in there, confessing.” I narrowed my eyes. She was still wearing that wool coat, but I spotted a sliver of torn rags underneath. This was a ruse. But before I could warn the devil, she had already bumped into him and reached into his waist coat for the silver pocket watch.

“Watch out,” I shouted, but it was too late. The little girl’s eyes were fixed on me, but they stared into the abyss. Blood dripped out of the corner of her mouth, slipping past her lips and she coughed. The devil’s arm was buried in her torso, a red hand tipped in claws coming out the other end. He had pierced her heart like she was the rat on the skewer I clutched in my hands. The vendor opened his mouth to release a

desperate cry for help and time slowed. I dropped the skewer and pulled the devil's grimoire out of my coat, flipping it open at the page marker I always used when I had a dead body to deliver to hell. The devil pulled his hand out of the little girl's body and she sagged to the floor, like she was sleeping in a pool of her own blood.

We landed back on the fiery planes before the vendor could call for the guards.

"Jesus Christ," I snapped. "You can't murder someone for trying to steal your pocket watch."

The devil wiped down his hands on his pristine white shirt and slipped out of his waistcoat. I could see the red hue of his skin returning, or maybe that was just the red light of hell in general that dipped us all into lava. I had clinged on to the little girl and dragged her over to the bloody stream. She was feather light, another starved child of Rat's End. The woolcoat slipped off her shoulder, exposing boney flesh covered in rags. I sighed and closed her dull eyes before lifting her up and tossing her into the stream.

"Why not? Your kind does it all the time," the devil defended himself and rubbed over the little buds in his forehead that would turn into skyward curling horns in a minute. Gone was his softness. His skin was covered in ridges and bone plates.

"Yes, some of them. But my people don't. They're all our children," I scolded.

"I thought you didn't have any." He shot me a confused look. "That you didn't want any."

"The children of Rat's End, they belong to us all. They're all our responsibility to look out for."

"She tried to rob me."

"She tried to rob you because she thought you weren't one of us." I rubbed my temples.

"But I was human," he replied, still looking confused.

Eileen Stelter

“Not all humans are equal,” I mumbled picking up a small piece of torn fabric off the floor where the girl used to be and chucked it into the lava stream.

“That’s not true. They’re all equal to me.” I came face to face with him and stared into his eyes. His face had lost all of its softness but it still remained in his eyes, the pale green eyes with spots of maroon in them. He lifted a clawed hand to cup my cheek gently, smearing some of the girl’s blood on my skin. “All but one.”

“Because we’re friends,” I replied.

“Yes, we’re friends,” he breathed, closing the distance between us and cupping my lips with his.

“But you’ll have to stop killing people just to spend time with me.”

The devil chuckled. I closed my hands around his horns and pushed him down until his knees hit the ground.

“I think I have an idea on how to bring you closer to God,” I whispered.

The priest was right after all. The devil was between my legs and better there than in Rat’s End.



Elias Lopez

STAINED GLASS SUICIDE



Elias Lopez

THE FINAL TOUCH



Jaden Fong

COME ALL YE FAITHFUL

A church in Sacramento. A young priest swallowed by his robes.
Above him, Jesus. He is on the cross—he is frozen.
The priest's fiddling hands, Jesus' paint chipping
on the soft outlines of his copper abdomen.
I want to pull the priest aside, have him against the wall
while I talk and see if his fingers still fiddle
while he listens to me choke out about the time when
I snuck another glance at your bare waist from across
the grass. It was pale, plaster, chalky. It was sculpted and quickly gone.
It came back when you shifted your hands
in the air to the music. The spirit
of your fingers balanced in the air, pointing in every direction
and rising up in a light resurrection.
The sun watched me watch you
and was so disgusted that it retreated
in hopes that its absence could hide you from me.
I felt shameful doing it but there there something sacred about it,
about all of it, about your navel,
about your obliques, about your waistline.

The young priest tells his congregation
about fasting and abstinence. Jesus' cloth sits
so low on his waist that it barely dangles on the muscle
below His hips. The priest says fasting
and abstaining from want shows our dedication
to the man fixed to the wall above him.
Yes, sometimes the point of prayer is to feel ashamed.

I think I knew this when I saw that your jeans,
bleached, flapping in a sedated sway, were dangling
like Jesus'. With one deep breathe,
with your chest full and swollen
with the skunky incense in the air,
I could imagine it slipping, I could imagine it falling

Jaden Fong

to the floor, I could imagine the dull clatter
of your belt against the hard naked ground,

I could imagine the Romans casting lots for it.

When you saw me looking at you, when you saw my eyes
moving up to yours from across the hill, did you want
to rough me up? Did you want to latch my feet together
and hold my arms so far apart
that I could not clasp my hands together?

Jesus' face looked pained and groaning but yours was smiling. In the
hollow dark,
that was the sole difference.

RECONCILIATION

Father, I'm here because I need to confess to you:
I only know the difference between kiss and kill
when I write. When I write kiss, my hand sways,
two times in a row. Right to left to right to left—
some kind of drunkard dancing the best he can.
And he's dancing alone, he's moving across
the floor to anyone that's there with him. Look,
he's damn near tripping over himself, Father,
and the other dancers are laughing. He loves
the song and they're laughing at him, laughing
at him snake across the room in some hysterical
ballet. When I write that I want to kill his dance,
when I want to kill the music and turn on the lights,
kill him until there's no more dancing, it is much
more final. One line, another line. Prison bars.
A knife's gashes. Watching a body fall onto
a bed, then another body on top of the first.
These are the differences in writing—
a dance and a collapse. Yes, Father,
I know both are dangerous. But when
she kisses me, when I let my lips meet
hers, I can see it happen, I see the bodies fall
onto the bed, quick and sudden the way a snag
drops to the ground, I feel like I've killed her. I feel
like I've done something horribly wrong, I've killed
the girl that wanted to be an astronaut, the one that
was going to have bubblegum for me in case my
mouth was too meaty. I killed the girl that lived
here; I've smashed open the door, thrown
the vases in her home around, and set
the building ablaze with her still
inside. I've gotten to her
the way mold gets to
the rest of the bread
in the loaf. Father,
I've taken
some-
thing
from
her,
I've
taken
some-
thing
from
her
by
giving
her
my-
self.

Taylor Thornburg

KIRSTEN WHO DISOBEYED HER ORDERS

Kirsten felt the headlights coming before she saw them. Then she saw them. Her boss's car pulled into the driveway. It was the stretch limousine. Kirsten sighed. She looked down at the sink and put the dishes she was washing in the basin. She dried her hands on a towel by the oven. Kirsten turned on the porch lights at the switch by the front door. She craned her neck around the windows on either side. The dark limousine hummed in the driveway by her car. She saw nothing through the tinted windows. It was dark stretching into dark. Kirsten gulped. She put one hand on the knob and squeezed it tightly. She held it, turned it, and she opened the door.

She smiled and waved with feigned politeness at the driver hidden behind the tinted windshield. She walked slowly along the driver's side to the back of the gleaming black vehicle where her boss would be waiting. At the end, she stopped and looked up and down her street. Her neighbors' lights were on, but no one was at their windows. No one was walking along the sidewalk. Crickets and cicadas were the only other living things outside.

The last window at the end of the limousine opened a crack, and Kirsten turned with a jump.

"Please," her boss's voice rasped from within. "Come inside."

The locks on the doors popped open. Kirsten put a trembling hand on the handle, opened it, and slipped inside.

With some difficulty, she found a seat along the side of the vehicle. There were no lights inside it, and her eyes only slowly adjusted in the dark. Without a doubt, he was there. Her boss's features slowly came into focus. She saw his antlers scraping the roof of the car first, then his snout in silhouette against the window, then his fur gleaming in the light that trickled in from the outside. His hooves gently tamped the limousine floor.

"Kirsten, it is nice to see you," her boss wheezed.

She clutched the fabric of her pants and thanked him for coming all of the way to her home.

"Yes, it was the least I could do," he said, "for I have," he gasped, "a tremendous job for you tonight. Look before you."

Kirsten peered into the dark. On the seat across from hers was a

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lacquered wooden box. She reached and took it and sat it on her lap.

“Open it,” her boss commanded.

Kirsten obeyed. Inside was a silver six-shooter revolver. She looked at her boss questioningly.

“My daughter,” her boss sighed, “has taken an inadequate lover. He has brought shame on her, and she has brought shame on me. His address is inscribed on the barrel of this gun. It is not far from here. Tonight, you must visit him at his home and kill him for his offense.”

Kirsten balked at her boss’s request.

He shook his head. His antlers grated against the limousine’s roof. “I am not just your employer,” he said. “Need I remind you that there are consequences for disobedience?”

Kirsten quieted.

“You have until sunrise,” he said.

Kirsten nodded. She held the pistol to her breast and got out of the back of the car. She stood in her driveway and watched the limousine reverse into the street, stop, and drive away. She stood alone in the dark clutching the gun. When she was sure that she was alone, she turned and walked back inside.

Inside the house, Kirsten turned off her porchlight. She returned to the kitchen and put the gun down by the sink. She picked a dish out of the soapy water in its basin. Her hands shook, and she dropped it, and she lost her breath. Panicked, Kirsten looked out of the window above her sink again. There was no one there. She reasoned that her boss would not be watching, but he would be waiting. He would know.

Kirsten turned to the wall on her right. She leaned her head against it and fell to her knees, curled into a ball, rocking back and forth. Kirsten mindlessly reached for the oven door and opened and shut it. She owed him everything. He had found her. He bought the car. He bought the house. He told her what to do. He told her what to say. And she obeyed. And everybody loved her. Open. But he had never asked this of her. She had never taken a life. She had never hurt someone on purpose. She agreed to follow the rules. Close. But what if the rules had changed? He was a sacred deer. He knew things that Kirsten would never know. Open. He would cover. He would give. He would make whole. He would make right. Close.

Kirsten pawed the counter over the stove. She pushed herself

up. She picked the gun up off of the counter and read the inscription off of the barrel. He was right. The house was only five blocks away. It was firmly in the neighborhood. Kirsten put the gun in her waistband. She took the hair out from behind her ears and tucked it back again. "I'll go to see how they live," she said to herself, "the daughter of a sacred deer and her lover." She did not commit to violence. She could barely imagine the possibility, but she wanted to go. She wanted to see. She wanted to understand her orders, so she went back to the front door, collected her keys, and she drove the five blocks to the house as requested.

The house was at the end of a dark cul de sac. None of the houses there had their lights on. A couple of kids circled the street on bikes. After Kirsten parked her car, they rounded it twice then sped away. She watched them leave then she looked up at the house. It was an old two-story. Nothing seemed special about it. She got out of the car and tried the front door. It was locked. She looked up at the windows on the second story and either side of the door. Nothing stirred.

Kirsten circled around the side of the house to the backyard. There was a big wooden deck with patio furniture and a barbecue grill and a sliding glass door. She climbed the deck and tried the door. It opened easily. Kirsten slipped inside and closed it behind her. She instinctively pulled her gun out of her waistband, circling around the room. It was an average living room with a sofa, coffee table, and television. It led to a kitchen, a bathroom, and the staircase. Kirsten looked up the darkened stairs.

She put a foot down on the first step. It landed quietly. There was no commotion from the second story. She put her other foot down on the next step, and step by step, she climbed the staircase. The second floor was as dark as the first and just as quiet. There were rooms all around her, but none of them had doors. Almost none of them were furnished. Kirsten noted a lamp and a bedside table in the room on her furthest right.

She crept into the doorway. It was a bedroom, and there in bed was a man and a woman. Closest to her, the man slept with his mouth slightly open. He had cropped hair and a mustache and tattooed script all over his naked torso that Kirsten could not read in the dark. The woman had one arm draped around him. She was one of the most beautiful

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women that Kirsten had ever seen with long blonde hair and delicate features. Neither of them could have been much older than twenty. Kirsten looked around the room and wondered if they really lived at that house or if they were just passing through. Her eyes settled on a lump under the man's pillow. It took time, but she realized that it was the butt of a pistol.

The man yawned, and his eyes fluttered. Kirsten assumed a defensive position. He blinked and furrowed his brow. Kirsten shook her head, "no, don't do this." He stirred and jumped and reached for the gun, and Kirsten heaved and moaned and squeezed the trigger of hers. She fired five shots into the man's chest. He slumped to the bed. The woman leapt up, and she screamed and she screamed and she screamed, and Kirsten reflexively squeezed the trigger again and fired her last bullet between the other woman's eyes. She fell down dead too.

Kirsten dropped her pistol. Before it hit the ground, smoke came trickling out of her nose and the corners of her mouth. She coughed, and the smoke came out pouring. She screamed. She was burning inside. She stumbled out of the room. She ran and tripped and fell down several steps on the staircase. Kirsten trailed smoke behind her. She swatted it out from around her eyes, coughing. Kirsten picked herself up and staggered down the remaining steps. Through the smoke haloing around her head, Kirsten spotted the front door. She clumsily turned the deadbolt lock and threw the door open, running for her car.

She writhed in agony, screaming and bellowing smoke. Kirsten thrust a hand into her pocket for the key fob. It was there. She clicked buttons left and right until her headlights flashed, the doors unlocked. She kept hitting the button that unlocked the doors and flashed the lights until she reached the car. She threw the door open. She climbed inside, curling around the steering wheel. As the smoke pooled inside the car, she started the ignition. She rolled the windows down. Her wheels made a terrible noise, and she went screeching into the night. She did not drive home. She did not feel safe there. She turned down a road and drove west as far as she could go. As she drove, it got darker and darker all around her. One by one, the stars went out until it was just her, her headlights on the road, and a trail of smoke behind her. Everything else was gone.



Jaden Fong

I WEAR A SILVER CROSS BUT IT'S STARTING TO TARNISH

baby i chomp at the moon
like a werewolf whose vocal
cords are shot so i pull
at the inner sides of my mouth
with fishhook hands and breathe
out heavy and hot then pucker
my lips and breathe light
and cool cool as that winter air
outside of this church that's bursting
with hymns and psalms the way
a stomach bursts when it's too full
of meat and something about this
noise makes me wish i would not have
lied during confession because
maybe if i didn't i would not
have already forgotten the words halfway
through "Silent Night" and maybe
if i didn't i would be able to admit
to the sin of thinking in poems
when it's least convenient

Paul atten Ash

VAMPYR II

after Edvard Munch (1895)
golden shovel after Ted Hughes's 'Lovesong'

Pale, living death's caress. She
had craved his heart, and wanted
to possess his soul, bending him
to her will – the act never complete
until her prey's blood races inside
her, a yearning flood, feeding her

In that dark, unnatural forest. Safe
in each other's solitude, moon and
starlight faltering – who can be sure
of love's promise? She lives on forever
in his heart, as she mantles him and
slow-kisses his neck, forever & ever

The lovers limned in owl-light. Her
teeth tearing at his neck, her embrace
tightening – consuming all that was
his life force, his body falling into an
abyss, ragdoll-limp, her desire immense
as gravity's pull – fate's relentless press

Sometimes she thirsts for an end. To
drive a stake into her heart – no print
of her damned existence. Yet, to him
she was life itself. He'd gently sink into
her, hexed by a ghost pulse. No, for her
he was merely blood, and leftover bones

May Garner

MY HUNGER WELL-BEHAVED

I do not want what you have.
I want the way it leans toward you.

The way mouths soften
when your name enters the room.
The way attention undresses you
without asking permission.

I keep my hunger well-behaved.
Folded.
Pressed flat beneath my ribs.

But envy is a patient animal.
It learns the schedules of your existence.
It memorizes the hours
you are most touchable.

I tell myself this is admiration.
That lie tastes almost sweet.

May Garner

DEVOTION WITH TEETH

Your shirt knows you better than I do.
It keeps your heat after you're gone,
sleeps folded like a second skin.

So does the mirror.
So does the dark,
which learns your shape
by touch alone.

I envy the chair
that holds you without wanting.
The sink that keeps your voice
echoing in its throat
long after you've left the room.

Even your shadow
tells me more truth
than you ever have.
How you stretch,
how you fracture,
how easily you can
be taken by night.

Devotion is holy,
a clean thing,
hands clasped, eyes lowered.

But this feels closer to trespass—
mud on the altar.

BORROWED / STOLEN

They say envy is a sin.
So is worship
when the hands linger too long.

I study you
like scripture misread on purpose,
verses bent to fit my mouth,
margins crowded with desire.

Every gesture becomes a passage
I score and rescore
until the paper softens,
until ink seeps through
and the book remembers me.

What I envy most
is not your beauty,
but your permission;
the way you exist
without asking the room
to forgive you.

The kind of freedom
is a miracle I was never taught.
It feels *borrowed*.
It feels *stolen*.

Teach me how to stand
inside my own skin
without flinching.

Lorenza Chiappetta

DID YOU WANT A DEMONSTRATION

Shall I forever be condemned
to Inferno,
wasting in subordinate wind -
for passage;
of which I did not intend to embark?

How many hands have wandered,
unresponsive,
to my smiles that weakly veil
discomfort,
while cold metal is sheathed by my palm.

They'd respond only to an *unsheathing*,
in their guts;
And how many hands, I wonder,
grip tight,
until severed from their fathers?

And, we shed blood,
but violence—
is not from where it comes
and, *disgust*:
even though we can bear,

The weight of a son on
our breast;
We turn our backs to bullets,
and bellow;
Only to again be an object, a shield?

For this, and not disgust for our retributions,
which sustain trivial bruises;
“they're shaped like forget-me-nots,”
but they produce penance:
an odor, like putrid meat;
a slithering, withering devil—
that expels our insides.

EDUCATION

I wish that I carried the same shame as my sisters, and for our sisters of temptations, but I cannot find it in me to feel ignominy; did you know that it feels good, when a tongue is slick against your thigh; and did you know, when the warmth creeps up, unto your most precious and forbidden orifice—that its beckoning is reflected: pulsating, yearning; like something feral, only governed by the highest sensations, and tormented by the toothpick cages for which we, the most unnatural animals, have placed? And is it unnatural to want it; it is where people are made, and made people worship each other; the first pleasure, the first love; why must I feel shame for knees to the ground, mirroring devotional prayer, of which, alternatively, is so venerated; educate me, is it something to be disgraced?

THE INTERNAL EXECUTION

I will not reach across the aisle to strike, nor pour my poison into another's cup.
I go down where the dark is like a heavy cloak,
And I call the demon up.
The wretched bitch who whispers of my lack,
Who aims her arrows at my shaking knees.
I meet her in the hollow and the black;
I do not ask for mercy or for ease.
I crush the doubt until it makes no sound
And she's been overcome
I am no longer spellbound.

INDOMITABLE SPINE

I stood at the edge of the bitter sea,
Where envy promised I would surely drown.
But I claimed the dark for the heart of me,
And I traded the thorns for a heavy crown.
I am indomitable in this quiet space,
Where insecurity is burned to ash and bone.
I forged a new truth in this hidden place;
I am the sovereign of a power all my own.
Rooted deep, I finally meet the sun.

Stephanie M. Wytovich

TAURUS RISING

With lavender eyes and a valerian tongue,
I am a portrait of tree roots, a family burial plot—
step inside my arms, drink from the well of
my words, I am champagne and chocolate,
the smell after it rains.

Cover me in satin. I need the laughter of
nightmares, the stillness of a praying mantis,
something to saturate my lips, to carry me
through rivers of patience, of poison, across
meadows of honey-soaked lyrics, all those
perfume-scented letters:

I am loyal until I am bled.

Jordan Joubert

GETTING UNDER YOUR SKIN

I taste of salt
I have been told.
Not the sweetness of morning dew
But the sting that settles, post kiss,
In split lips after a thunderstorm.

My tongue is a shoreline
That will no longer smooth for anyone,
Each syllable carrying the grit of sand
Caught in a wound
The sharp grain that says
Leave.

I try not to placate.
It has long since been my life's mission to make myself
Clear and comprehensible,
Bite sized.

I do my best to say what I mean and mean what I say.
And, ships ever missing the other,
My points often do not reach the shore.

Those who come near leave with salt
Clinging to their skin,
Embedding into knuckles, flesh stinging
Due to cracks.

Listen close.
Hear the mournful whale's song beneath the waves
And know I, too, ache,
I do not mean to bite.
It is the brine, born in me,
A sting that preserves and corrodes
The same breath.
The wound and the cure
The salt and the sea.

Madame Envy

HEMORRHAGED

I am more than novels and brimstone.
I am ash and vacancy
Scoured upon what moonlit shown.

I am marvel and bounty.
I am coursed with ache
Poured by misplaced hand on a chantry.

I am presence and shame.
I am a victim of villainy
Butchered by a classless people that only maim.

Can you imagine the scope of an unseen heir?
Now entangle yourself in ruin so that they can find my lair.

Xul

TOWARDS ORION



Xul

ERESHKIGAL



Xul

OF MORPHEUS & EPIALES

The darkness devours! It is deadly, and in its embrace, the unknown breathes.
It is murky, sordid, a playground for the imagination's cruelest whims.

 The night's eyes see what the daylight cannot fathom,
for the nocturnal veil conceals, wraps every secret in mystical clarity.

 The heart, parched with curiosity, reaches out,
longing to bleed, to touch the things that shiver beneath its skin.

 When Morpheus opens his gates, souls dri like specters,
wounds contorting into nightmares, memories distorting into haunted visions.

 I yearn to wander this forbidden realm consciously, to erase
certain cursed words before they etch themselves into the world.

 I wish to rescue sunken ships before they plunge into
the ether's abyss, that no soul might drown in the innite, spectral sea.

 I long to decipher the cryptic messages of this living self-portrait
called a dream, to twist its meaning, reshape its dark symbology.

 How I wish I could rewrite the script of these scenarios, infuse them
with brightness, drench their contemptuous scenes in gold and
wine, and crucify their bitterness.

 Were it all a grand artwork, I would exchange faces,
tear away their masks, and dress them in new skins.

 I would repaint the colors, replace the dreary with the
divine, but nothing will steal away the breath from my chest

 In the end, even the most vivid dreams will slip through my
ngers like a ring, glimmering before it vanishes into shadow.

Xul

XI WANGMU



Alix Rojo Guadarrama

LETTER TO A LADY

This unsolvable labyrinth, the web of my own agony, behold its monstrosity: “A heartbeat told me that your reality was never what I fantasized. I used to watch your hurried flight and how you streaked across the sky, swallow of my soul! I’ve realized...that time passes and...

...this pain shouldn’t numb me anymore, but it strikes me again and again like a raging sea: dry, strong, and direct, without mercy, without shame. I resist its insidious nature, yet it’s a fact. I am an automaton in the hands of Fate.

Now that the contempt in your gaze is my newfound reality, and my attempts to calm it have failed, overshadowed by the brutality of your honesty, it’s impossible to hide my truth. I don’t understand it, but that’s your magic...

Now, here, I sink into these memories and wander through my recollections. A puppet of my body, of the life that breathes within me.” Blind.

...“You are there at dawn and at dusk. When I turn over in bed and can’t find you. When I think of you, when I feel you here even though you’re absent, when I remember our past and long for a future where you return to me and are, like the center of my gravity. Why do I love you and hate you? Why do you destroy me even in dreams and return like the waves, a tiny butterfly? Why is what I feel so clear that it hurts that it’s true? Why do I adore your lies, why do I hate that you lie, why do I insist on believing you?

If I’m feeling well, I see you; your memory accompanies me, even though I no longer believe it was ever true. With a firm hand, I buried you so deep in my heart that even my breath carries your scent. Perhaps I am strong for having you here in my mind; I don’t know if it would be stronger to be able to erase you forever...”

...“I know I met you one summer and that your stormy presence flowed to me in the tumult.” I was lucky to have been sitting down because I could have fallen. I listened to the story from your hand and, from my ear, I succumbed to a sharp

Alix Rojo Guadarrama

pain... my mouth trembled and I fell into silence when all I wanted was for you to notice my being. That was the beginning of the best stories I will ever have.

Somehow I sensed the pain slowly approaching me and, when our bodies met, even though we denied it, I know that something was being woven in the shadows, I know that we were conspiring in our favor and, even after accepting it, I remained reluctant to love.

The suffering was already intense when, while I dragged myself along like a lost soul, you faced the world head-on, declaring war, embracing life, surrendering yourself fiercely.

And it was at the end of another summer that we finally knew that what we had was not in vain, that your being and my being had always belonged to each other. Now I knew the world had a master...

...“Don’t tell me you love me, that you can’t imagine life without me, because what you pour out is poison, and I drink it fervently. Don’t say you love me, that you miss what we had, because they are lies like gall, and I know very well that you’re with him. So don’t say you’ll wait for me, that you’ll go anywhere with me, because you accompany the world and leave me with only your promises. Don’t say any more, no more.

Please don’t look for me, because what you have isn’t love, they are illusions and dreams, and like them, unreal.

Don’t even mention that you respect me, that I’m the one who has failed, because you only adore me in words, but you hate me in both word and deed.

Please, I beg you, don’t lie anymore. Don’t you see that you’re killing me? Don’t you see that even if you were a beggar, there’s someone who would still love you?” My only certainty is loving you; there won’t be a second that I don’t think of you, but loving and being loved are things that must go hand in hand...

...I will pour into these words that you will never read, the agony that burns me,

Alix Rojo Guadarrama

the fire that consumes me in the substance of its duration.

You don't deserve my lips; I know you don't deserve the time we shared; nor my steps, which carry you, absent ghost, on every path, nor my legs, now so light, and so solid in our best days, planted in the earth like oaks, unscathed beside your beloved shadow.

This time that I tear from myself to recreate my suffering, letter by letter like the escape of blood, to make our story something beautiful, something worthy of being told, you don't deserve it.

You don't deserve to be the name that awakens on my lips when the light reminds me that you are still absent, making of the awakening consciousness pure hours of unbearable torture. You don't deserve to be the lament of my nights, the salt that burns in my eyes, the breath that dies with me when, bitterly, sleep grants me its daily death.

You don't deserve this trembling that annihilates my voice, my breath, my life, my love.

The fire in your eyes, which is like the hell that ignites within me when I love you, an endless bonfire that feeds on my will, my sanity, my peace—you don't deserve it...not even this pain you think you deserve, nor the suffering that breaks me with its monstrous duration...your irrevocable betrayals, your forgetfulness, the contempt in your mouth and your gaze that kills me, like the arrow that pierces.

Your marble indifference, a perfect reflection of the hardness of your soul, and of the immaculate whiteness of your skin, of the perfect profile the moon traces when you lie in the shadows and in the lightness of the air, which is like the mystery of your beauty.

My hands, my arms, my legs, my tears, you do not deserve them.

Alix Rojo Guadarrama

And you do not deserve the light that grows with your presence and that adores your form and recreates your world, the one you carry with you to other spaces from which I remain absent, spaces more worthy of you, making the hours of those fortunate beings sunlit hours of laughter, of calm, of immeasurable happiness; happiness that must be like drinking life from your lips; happiness for being able to admire the beacon of your body on nights when the moon, ashamed of its imperfect pallor in competing with yours, decides to cover itself with the veil of a cloud so that you may illuminate the darkness. The lands I must traverse, the lakes and rivers, the cities and seas, the sunrises and shadows I must admire until the end of my days as a punishment from the gods—you don't deserve them.

The smiles you will bring to my dreams, the tears my eyes will shed, the sweat on my brow upon waking...

...my tenderness, my embraces, the force of my passions, my audacity, my calm—no, no, no, do you hear me?! You don't deserve them.

You don't deserve to be the voice of my own conscience.

My best days, my saddest days—no, you don't deserve them.”...

“Today I remembered your bright gaze, I recalled the sensation of your scent, its strength, I felt your carnivorous pearls on my body. I heard old promises, those that were once sincere.” I felt the fire of your mouth, your passionate embrace, your silent frenzy like the whisper of the night, the one that sings in my ear words that will drag me to desolation, to a shore where there will be no time, only my private hell. The sand will blind my eyes with the dreams we dreamed together, in the darkness of the hours that intoxicated us with the ebb and flow of their rhythm. And today I lie here, cast upon the barren earth, without light, without your love, without hope, awaiting the infinite kiss of death, immense as yours, mortal as yours, galactic. “..

...”Your fragility was your strength. Your delicacy, the torment of my will. Your indescribable legs, light and flitty as leaves in the wind, supple as new grass, unbreakable as diamonds. Diamonds that now cut me with the prism of their beauty, with the iridescent color they radiated at sunset, when I watched you

Alix Rojo Guadarrama

walk away through the mist, through the crowd, across the abyss that now grows, irremediable. And you leave, you leave me as if you were stealing my breath with your uncertain steps, as if you were carrying my heart in your hands. And drop by drop I bleed out without dying, life dying, my days dying...

There was something abnormal in your luminous gaze, in its extraordinary wisdom, something enchanting. Goddess of the night, of the earth, of fire: this is the abyss in which I now lose myself, seeking only the light that was born from your eyes, begging it to wash away so much anguish, to wash away my agony...

...I cannot write properly, my words bend like my strength, they trickle slowly like my tears, they crumble and try to be beautiful to preserve your perfect image.

The path of my hands, which is like the outline of the steps we took, carries the touch of the lands we traversed, of the river that held us in its timeless waters. It carries the fresh grass that caressed your lips when, in the afternoon, you smiled, biting the blades of grass, biting my hands, biting my lips and my soul.

How imposing your walk was!, standing with A force upon the earth and among men. The unbridled nature of your laughter frightened the birds and drew all eyes. Your loving gaze was like a moment I wish to prolong now until eternity, until men and gods are extinguished, until time itself is annihilated, and to repeat it in my soul until the dissolution of consciousness.

It was impossible not to adore the marks on your skin, the slight cracks in your heart, the wound in your being and the baby you formed, and the implacable sharpness of your will and your immeasurable nobility.

I know that today, as I try to look toward another horizon, your shadow blocks my path, and spreads like fog, poisoning the air, the blood in my veins. I also know that I will die without understanding the mystery of your forgetting me, and why today I lie here clinging to the dead earth, to the grass that rocked us in the wind.

Alix Rojo Guadarrama

After all these wanderings, I only wish to take you to a familiar place: To the night we met. And to relive that first night that enveloped us like a blanket, inviting us closer...

...So the years have passed, and after so much hardship, I still feel this bitter pain. I know you think we're just strangers, but don't you see? It's not the mind, the body, or the years; it's the helplessness of knowing we're human, and as humans, we sabotage ourselves. Anyway, what more can I tell you? Only that I love you, that I'm sad.

More than five years have passed, I've already forgotten the memories, and, through shadows and fog, I perceive a voice that still holds sway over me.

Now my memory is so clear, and in my mind I still see that girl with her incomparable smile, laughing at my foolishness, and with her gaze she annihilates me, and her lips strike me down.

Today my past returns, and what a commotion it has caused me; I'm still that sorrowful child who's afraid to show it. More than five years... more than ten years, I thought this was a forgotten matter, and what immense joy to have noticed that nothing here has changed.

More than ten years have passed... and she is the best memory I've kept, the nymph I adored is now the woman I dreamed of.



Joseph Milne

THE NECROMANCER



Joseph Milne

EROS AND THANATOS



Annabelle Markwick-Staff

BERTHE DE COURRIÈRE

My husband, my lover and I rot in a trinity—love is unlimited like God. My name is absent from the stone, but I am mine, not defined by the laws of the obedient. I brood in a cloud

of benzoin, rose and frankincense, I am queen of my lair, a spider ruling over religious trésors and delicious decay, eating weak men by candlelight. I savour the corruption

of my prey—take them to a Black Mass and they're never the same again. My favourite priest is a charming man, who works with his lover for the Reparation of Souls.

Their congregation love one another, love the saints, Mary, and Jesus—they taste God in the divine union of orgasm. Dangerous experiences sustain my decadent soul—

why stay pristine and uninspired?

Regarde—voici mon petit sac! I embroidered it piously. I pull out Christ's body, and throw it to stray dogs.

INANNA

The first poet was my priestess –
Enheduanna crafted my cuneiform cunt,
voiced my violence, my blood-soft full moons.

I am sex and war. I adore
and claw my devotees.
I am Queen of the Night, unbrowed,

beautiful, bearing the royal rod-and-ring.
I rule over cultic wildness – the devout
fuck prayers into my votive whores,

diffuse gore from sacred daggers.
I am the Lady of Heaven, but I invaded
Hell. I lost one accoutrement

at each of the seven gates. I was degraded,
naked – hooked and hung like meat
by my sister Ereshkigal.

Tammuz was indifferent and self-indulgent
during my humiliation, so I traded
my inadequate husband – demons dragged

Him away, and I returned to the world,
Queen of the Universe, relieving the ravenous
masses who hadn't made love for so long.

Luana Campagna

TO ANYONE CLAIMING THEY HAVE NO INNER DIALOGUE

Can you feel
Mother nature's kiss?

The air learns your temperature.

Feel it?
That the world keeps touching you
without asking for anything back?

I am sick with how easily you are held.
At 4 a.m., your eyes shut
like an envelope already addressed.

Nothing leaks.

My mind, meanwhile,
is a room full of radios
all set between stations,
singing through the night.

Incontinent ghosts
soaking the bed.

I crave
to wear your quiet
like a borrowed leather jacket
still warm from another body.

So, when you say, laughing,
"I don't have a voice in my head"
I hope you feel me:

a hunger with teeth.

Noelani Buonomo

MARTHA

I kept my teeth in a velvet lined wooden box squirreled away in the bottom drawer of my dresser.

It was summer in Brooklyn and the air hung heavy with moisture, a cocktail of the saliva of raisin faced chain smokers, drugstore perfume spritzed with abandon by magazine interns, the excrement of maltipoos and goldendoodles led by mustachioed gallery curators. I was a chrome pebble in a pinball machine, colliding aimlessly with bartenders, ceramicists, photographers, guitarists in indie punk bands. I picked up souvenirs as I went. A whiskey sour from the bartender, a Polaroid of my bare breasts peeking out over the bathwater from the photographer, a serenade from the guitarist. The relationships never ventured beyond the platonic. None of them lasted long.

Each day I would swing my limbs over the greasy turnstiles and let myself bounce between Jamaica Center and Broad. The operator wanted to question me. I saw the confusion simmering behind his weathered brow, but he always left me be. We spoke exclusively in nods and raised eyebrows. He was my best friend.

When night fell I would pluck two bottles of Malbec off the bottom shelf at the liquor store two blocks down from my apartment. I refused a bag and carried them tight by the neck, knuckles white and muscles tensed. I dropped a bottle once. It shattered into a thousand shards of stained glass and I resisted the urge to drag my tongue through the blood red puddle weaving its way through the cracked sidewalk. Instead I went home and I fucked myself with the other bottle, slowly and cautiously lest it crack inside me.

I lived in a basement that I accessed through a concrete stairwell too narrow to navigate without twisting myself sideways. My landlord, if you could call her that, was a bony Russian woman in her late forties. She drank Stolichnitskiy by the handle and ignored my presence entirely. I paid my rent in pennies, nickels, and paperclips like a crow depositing offerings of shiny trash on the windowsill.

The basement was a concrete-floored, shoddily plywalled dump. It held my mat-

Noelani Buonomo

tress, a narrow three drawer dresser I'd dragged home from ten streets down, and a hot plate where I scrambled eggs in the mornings. I fantasized about shoving a knitting needle up my left nostril and swirling it around like a Q-tip, letting my brains flow out through my orifices and into the Teflon-coated frying pan.

My teeth started falling out when I was twenty. First in my dreams, and then one by one they clinked against the Pepto-Bismol pink basin where I spat my toothpaste. It was a gift from the ceramicist, exchanged the same day he told me he loved me. I was disappointed, and told him so. Until then I had been enjoying our friendship, our strolls through overgrown lots and children's playgrounds. I said I didn't want him to come around again, and he let me keep the basin, which was nice, I guess. A hairline fracture snaked along its center.

The teeth usually made their exodus in the mornings, but once or twice I had to duck into the coffee shop bathroom with my hand plugging up my mouth. I was always sure to stop the drain before it gobbled up my molars. I was careful. I thought the earth just might open up and swallow me whole as punishment for losing a part of myself.

The slow deterioration of my smile wasn't painful. It was more an inconvenience than anything. The real brutality of the whole ordeal was the subsequent teething, the needlelike razors sprouting through my gums, slicing through my nerves, the metallic taste of blood mixed with saliva. I never went to a doctor. This is just how life went for the women in my family.

"It's original sin," my mother explained. She had me at nineteen and was in the ground by thirty. "You might be able to resist for a while, but sooner or later, you'll give in. Just make sure you've got everything in order when you do. And if you have kids, don't have a daughter."

I moved into the basement a few months after my new teeth came in. It was about half a decade before that summer, before the longing became impossible to shut out. That was the summer I met Martha. She rested with her legs spread wide on the plastic seat of the J train, elbows locked against her knees, her blue eyes scanning each station lazily as we jumped from Crescent to Broadway,

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Gates to Lorimer. She wore an unassuming silver stud in each ear. A thin cotton wife beater hugged her frame, her ribs just slightly visible through the fabric. Her blonde hair was cropped short, just long enough to brush the tops of her ears.

Martha and I spent that afternoon, and each subsequent one, frequenting the back rows of movie theaters, shoplifting thousand dollar trinkets from Barney's, collapsing in laughter on the stoop of her apartment. I never brought her back to the basement.

Time was like honey when you were around Martha, viscous and sweet, slippery and sticky all at once. Her words had a way of adhering themselves to the inside of your skull, morphing and twisting over themselves, like strips of papier mache sliding around in their paste. In the brief moments we were apart, I silently ruminated on her turns of phrase, the cadence of her voice.

I rarely returned her compliments, her subtle affection lingering in the air between us, waiting for me to reach out and take hold. I was skittish around her like I hadn't been around the others. I had sex with anonymous men, got myself off on how little I respected them. I respected Martha. Admired her, even. She was full of life but had a quiet way about her, a resignation to her reality that was neither bitter nor sickeningly positive. Sex was inconsequential for me, just another way to dull the pain of existing in the time and space I occupied. With Martha, though, I knew the consequences would be disastrous. She ate away like acid at my self control.

I stopped drinking as much after I met Martha, mostly because she typically adopted the second bottle of wine, but also because I didn't like dulling my senses around her. I wanted to experience all of her, and that was precisely the trouble.

Most nights found us under shoddily strung string lights on her building's unfinished rooftop. We drank each other in, propped up on elbows that veered dangerously close to our wine glasses and to each other. When we did touch, in the passing of a cigarette or the opening of a door, I felt only fear. The closer we became, the more dangerous I was. We parted and I was immediately plagued by dreams of running my fangs up her thighs, her sparsely freckled chest, her

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collarbones. I forced myself into distraction before they could reach her neck, her lips. I thought her lips might taste like mine, smoky and sweet like licorice.

Martha was a creature of habit, routine. I knew hers well. At eight she sang *The Cranberries* and lathered herself with lavender soap, labeled “artisan” but mass produced, plucked surreptitiously from some department store’s beauty counter. At nine, lapped at the drop of coffee escaping her to-go cup. She spent her days selling tubes of acrylic paint, linseed oil, charcoal. I spent mine staring at subway ads, lawyers and nurses and actors all slowly morphing into Marthas.

At four o’clock, smiles flooded our faces and the creases around our eyes relaxed. That was how she greeted me as she dangled a bag of Chinese takeout in my face, the scent of meat and oil cutting through the heavy air between us. She never asked me to split the cost, so I brought her packs of cigarettes and annotated novels. She shared the cigarettes with me anyway and read the novels behind the counter at the art store. When my mind wandered I imagined her holding a finger up to an impatient Parsons student as she scribbled a response to my notes in the margins.

We parted around midnight or whenever my eyes started playing tricks in the glow of the moonlight, rivers running down Martha’s neck, sprawling chrysanthemums blossoming along the fine knit fabric of her top. In these moments I often thought of relinquishing her entirely. All I had to do was stop showing up on her doorstep and it would be over. I had practice, wandering between lifetimes, but I was reluctant to give this one up.

I started to rationalize. Martha didn’t want kids, didn’t have family. On three occasions she swallowed cocktails consisting of a medicine cabinet’s worth of muscle relaxants, antihistamines, a dash of cocaine for good measure. I reconstructed the morality of the whole ordeal until it started to seem like less of a condemnation than a gift.

My mother’s vice was a surfer with muscles that rippled like waves across skin the color of charcoal. When he spoke, which was rare, his words seemed as though they were cast by a ventriloquist. His voice was deep, rough, scratchy, but he spoke in lyrics and poems, poignant phrases that made my mother’s

Noelani Buonomo

eyebrows slant sideways and her hands clutch at her chest. His visceral turns of phrase were anthropomorphic, plunging themselves down your throat and into the cavity of your chest, coiling themselves around your heart, your lungs. When they finally softened their grip they left echoes behind, a ghostly cartography etched into muscle and tissue. The surfer wasn't my father, but I loved him like one. I siphoned my genes from a nameless, faceless frat boy who drank Lucky Lager that flowed through his semen and straight into my veins. She didn't respect him enough to ruin him. He was an accountant now with a fairly successful practice in Flatbush. When I first moved to the city I would sometimes sit cross legged on the bench outside his office. I thought about as highly of him as my mother did, but raw curiosity got the best of me. I heard him speak only once, with a tinny, grating voice that felt like maggots crawling up my arms and burrowing into my bone marrow. I dug out the maggots and I haven't seen my father since.

When I was nine I found the surfer turned inside out on the kitchen floor. My mother lay beside him, visage pallid and mouth agape. There was an envelope on the edge of the linoleum countertop. Inside was fifteen hundred dollars. I stuffed it down my underwear and left them with their cheeks pressed against the graying tile.

Perhaps my affinity towards Martha was borne from our shared understanding of how to survive in this world, relying only on ourselves. She came to New York at sixteen, carving her way through cornfields and mountains, carrying only a backpack and the triadic mural of white scar tissue that rippled across her chest. Sometimes she'd fall asleep on the rooftop, shirt discarded in the name of avoiding tan lines, and I would fantasize about ripping open those old wounds, tearing through her chest, cracking open her ribcage and wrapping my digits around her beating heart, squeezing with the rhythm of her pumping blood. Instead I just pulled a blanket over her breasts, snow covered hills reflecting subtle shades of blue cast by the moonlight, and made my way down the creaky fire escape, carefully, so as not to disturb her slumber.



Alisha Garfinkel-Gross

SHADOWS



Alisha Garfinkel-Gross

SHADOWS



Alisha Garfinkel-Gross

BRAINSPOTTING



Maryanna Aster

I. MEDUSA MAY

It was the opposite. A cast glamour so no one could see what I really was, or so she said, bending back my windpipe. A monster in a sort of Psyche's sister.

I could see it. In the mirror and as people met me. Raised eyebrows and mouths open. I wasn't sure which skin they saw, the symphony or serpents.

You saw both. Showed both fury and fear, adoration, devotion, no matter the wide-away circling and return. You loved the burn-through, poison coursing your map, sought it so much when I bled the medicine from my right arm, you stayed, licking at the left.

TRAPEZIUS

mint oil my shoulder
span my studied sleep
stared, her high dress in your clung
slick, her hands from the cuff bloom,
i never rolled you over

above the sugar store
before my stint in the orange
juice factory, i crashed under
the window, stereo stolen
and lipstick smeared the airbag.

our sinew stretch is states away
now my teeth give out
i pull liquids in alone
face in the grass, gaining new ground.

Maryanna Aster

CARDINAL

cared for dinners, nailing
ricin arcs
durian, radicchio, tamarind
lizards on the chairs
radial traces
darn liar
rain for the cairn
draining the rehoboam
carnal palate
dinar in the passing plate
and rinds on the floor
an acrid language
and dressing in dark
the cardiac lair
all din,
all nil cards,
all all all

Maryanna Aster

DARK WOLF WITH A BROKEN TOOTH

I'm a whole place without skin.

Or in the story, when the guy gets his arm stuck between two rocks
and has to cut it all off with a small pocket knife, taking breaks to pass out.
A hard sandstone tourniquet until he got to the thin white nerve,
saw all sparks, and had to do that too.

You're the arm, the rocks,
the blade and the nerve.

You're in my teeth, an always desire to bite you over time.
I had a card once that irreverently said, "he wanted to bite their legs under the table."
That's me, with you, but it's your shoulders.

In a Conrad poem, I think it says, Frank left violets in their laps.
I'd do that too, but never let you know it was me,
so you'd always wonder if it was.

It was.
You're the quick of me.
Everything cuts down.

SEALED WING

Doors bleed sparkling curses
The barred floor stripped
generations out
an angry walk

I forget, I'm sick
Pay rent on old places
Open those doors
see life at a quarter
or so—specters of future
dogs, or a walled-off spot
A bright feel

Someone's magical wan daughter
by the shut room's tall windows
Pet stains on a pink rug
Her fear at first bleeding
walking the hall
for help, a memory of magical threat

Ancestral air sighs
Shows newspaper piles, ghosts
of perambulations,
boneshakers, an old crown exists
The discovery myth

Etheric and walled-off floors
rotting white speech,
Walls of an egg blue tell
Afraid family
and remember-clothes

Maryanna Aster

follow-a-woman energy
Long repeat, horrors
the lost quarter

Shelves of notices, book asks
authorities went
Secret rentals
children among the leaves
Walls realize the lawn
from an open deck

She goes to pee
but it's the blood
People use the rug
pay the bathroom
relate to the bowl
Work through the dress
lace, curls, a mom event
and a guest's apartment

In vertigo years
it's strictness of origin
and excavating every
sealed space

Joe Convertito

(UNTITLED)



Joe Convertito

(UNTITLED)



Aliza Garza

AT THE GRAVE

unearth me
bone by bone
and twisted sinew
dislocated jaw
from a decade's worth
of tethered words
to the tongue

a crawling, lifeless form
(it's you I adore)

UNHOLY GHOSTING

Night drops down—
a shed habit, slipping
around a saint's ankles,
bare body an abandoned tabernacle
of unanswered touch.

Alone in my bed, need knocks—
a criminal crying for sanctuary.
I reach for my slim companion,
all plastic and metal—
feel it vibrate, fill me up
with validation,
notification by notification
as I swipe the way
one cuts a throat for sacrifice.

Ever since I was young,
a hole within me has hungered
for a man to crown me with salvation.
I could live off the crumbs
of a discarded "you're beautiful"
or a thoughtless "I love you"
until the skies run red.
Each new man becomes the alpha
and the omega—
you are number twelve.

There is an instant assumption
of my fallen state, my easy virtue.
You see my painted face,
body a carnal altar,
a ledger of sin inked in men,

Chloe La Vada

and you pray I live
up to the contradiction in your mind:
virgin-whore, on bended knee, pleading
penance for sins I have never committed
but which you construct for me,
force me to act out in the dim chapel
between your thighs.

My hair is a black river washing your feet.
My lipstick leaves stigmata smears
at your wrists and ankles.
You hide your guilt
beneath creased bedsheets, a roadmap
with denial as the only destination
as you wrestle with the reality
of my seven devils.
The ache of your absence could unroof a grave.

I wait - three agonizing days
to hear from you again.
Your name is a litany I recite in the dark
yet not all things will see the resurrection.
In the reliquary of my mind,
every one-night stand is a soul mate,
an answer to a lifelong prayer
that can only end
with an unholy ghosting—
a prediction on my lips
that no prophet can untangle.

Ash Maielle

DARK BUTTERFLY ATTEMPTS TO LURE A MAN

doubtful. \\ \ // shave my
legs. my pits. \ \ // my—optimism
is hair follicles in | | | | the bath. lured down
the .. (o) ..drain. an \ \ // inevitable .. (o) ..fate.
well-worn pink pajama pants. || || once opaque. now transparent.
the washer's attempt. to wing-|| woman me. *she's a girl's girl.*
bending my fate over. ||| *are you watching?* i'm
clumsy. false. i'm a creator || curating a scene. please hold
while i. pick pieces of patience. || off the floorboards. a dark butterfly
pinned in athletic top. *do you* || *like. the specimen you see before*
you? blue and white polka || dotted socks. *no dear, they're*
not poisonous. there's *no camouflaging*
fear of *cold feet.*

Anna Madden

THERE ARE NO DAMSELS HERE

you're opening your lips to speak a spell
holding out a sky lantern that contains a world
where we could reach out and touch each other.
it's there I'm laying sharp claws against your mouth,
telling you to hush, afraid the silence will let you hear
me screaming your name into the velvet of the night.
your boots etch words into the ending of my fairy tale.
this isn't a place for falling in love with she-monsters.
weren't you supposed to kill me, champion? this dream sinks
into a deeper current, floating among nightmares with teeth,
and I'm wondering if I will be your poisoning, by the end,
my scent falling like flushed petals across your skin.
you talk about your walls, but what about mine?
I've been sitting in this tower a long time without hope.
the light you carry hurts me, the silvering armor you wear
reflecting it, as dream-whispers pool wetly
in those beautiful eyes, adoring me.

Anna Madden

ARE YOU ENJOYING THIS DANCE?

Here, there's a grasshopper boy who
dreams of rain tattoos on a nymph
the ink made of droplets, dancing
to the lines and the silence
where longing stirs.

They'll meet in no man's land
where voices are more than magic
and seeing isn't about looking
with one's eyes.

There are other scents she's heard
are unexpectantly alluring, intimate
like nylon stretched across skin or
blooms of cigarette smoke.

But here, she's falling in love with
the scent of gasoline flowing from his mind,
filling hers, igniting wild-born thoughts
she dares not speak.

Anna Madden

MINUTELY FERALING

You're a harbor of elsewhere.
A shelter where a flower-maiden
hopes to moor, her roots ready to step
into a pair of glass slippers, delicate but sturdy,
before she dances with you. She'll disembark
in a skirt of petals and take your hand. Your likeness
is known to her, carved into the figureheads at the bow
of old ironships, a feraling and a siren with the strongest breeze
in your voice, a length of crow wings folded at your back,
a promise of rain held in those keen boyish eyes.
Do you see how she's wilting into you, forever wilting.
But before she dies, she wants you to know everything:
what she tastes like and how a smile can bloom
into the promise of the north star. They say you've
a fondness for shiny things, that you eat wedding rings,
and how when you speak, the words thunder down
from the cloud line in dragon-speech. Is this a reddening
a trick of yours, a paradox as you swoop down?
You're twirling her across a dance floor made
of heartwood that has been dead a long time.
Its grained memories whisper to wait. To find
a space where you can finally meet,
elsewhere.

Freya McAfee

CARNAGE

Consumption

love's most sublime distortion.

To wholly partake:

Teeth tearing into still-squirming

sinew,

Flushing at the sound of skin ripping, bones cracking,

Intoxicated by the thick scent,

iron and salt.

Reducing lover

to less.

Mania overriding conscience, prying into its chest,

A paper-mâché peach,

And pulling out its fleshy, beating pulp.

Between cardinal lips,

Feast,

Beast.

Eat, discard; it will just feel grateful for having been useful.

Iván Estrada Pérez (Erotic Hollow)

LACRYMA DI VITA



Iván Estrada Pérez (Erotic Hollow)

MARTIR



Iván Estrada Pérez (Erotic Hollow)

POPE



Iván Estrada Pérez (Erotic Hollow)

MONSTER INSIDE



Iván Estrada Pérez (Erotic Hollow)

KISSED DEMONS



Iván Estrada Pérez (Erotic Hollow)

BESARE LA CRUZ



Bloodlust



Magazine



From the Editors' Desks:



Liv Iacono

JUST BECOME A COCKTAIL WAITRESS

I suppose I could—

fill the glass // double the ice // watch my back // work the strip // work,
stripped // apologize // in my uniform // apologize // for my uniform //
get a gun // to walk home with // fill the glass // drown the ice // glue my
eyes // glue my skirt // glue everything // so it stays // get paid to bear my
teeth // to bear witness // get paid to swallow swords // razor blades // lame
quips // get paid to stutter through it // less if you fight it // *you're a writer,
aren't you? // you couldn't think of something better than that?* // I suppose
I could // fill the glass // bite the ice // dream later // forget the master's //
the manuscript at home // feel like a kid again // begging to be believed //
swear I'll become an astronaut // a singer // a movie star // I don't want to
do this for the rest of my life // I don't want to own a gun // I don't want to
be polite // I want to be kind // fill the glass // no ice // a dollar bill shoved
into my apron // say thank you // we're in a recession, you know // every
bit counts // say thank you // a war just broke out // your boyfriend might
get drafted // buried in the desert // say thank you // ungrateful bitches get
buried in the desert // say thank you

IGNORING THE ELEPHANT

The big fat executioner
comes a day early,
thumps down in the corner of the room,
drags his knife across the floor,
says,
*Well, don't mind me—
you still have until tomorrow,*
says,
*You know, death lasts twice as long
if you wrap it in grief.*

WHEN THE WANTING SHOWS

Every once in a while
Dusk arrives careless,
Stripping me from the shelter of daylight
Where you cannot linger,
Where the sun settles on me and it feels like a kindness.

When the moon begins to hum
Above me I convince
Myself she doesn't mean to mock me.
I convince myself this is where I'm meant to be, for always.

How to articulate
This silence as intimacy
More severe than any sort
Of conversation? Of any amount of touch?

When the wanting shows,
It is all teeth,
All bite,
No mercy.
But by morning,
When dawn arrives gentle,
I'm everything I've ever wanted.

Breezy Jewel

WHEN I WAS 12 I WOULD SMOTHER MY PALMS IN VASELINE AND
SLEEP WITH LATEX GLOVES ON SO MY HANDS WOULD BE SOFT
FOR THE FIRST TIME SOMEONE HELD THEM

these days
i buy these tight little skirts
never wear them
don't care for a stranger's eyes on me
keep things to myself
secrets i can save for one other pair of ears
write poems about wishing
wanting
you
before we ever meet
before you're even real
keep books
caked in dust
i finished years ago
haven't re-read them
one day
i'll loan them all to you
we can talk about
how that one chapter
reminds us both
of us
i'll keep taking
pictures on my disposable
print them and stick them in a collection
don't want our kids
to witness our youth
through another black screen
grow my hair out
so long
it falls past
your face
when i'm on top of you
tell me
tell me
what it is i'm preparing for
tell me

Breezy Jewel

what it is i'm waiting for
tell me
will it ever come
tell me
am i supposed to say this
like some solipsist
that isn't tired of doing it all myself
that isn't tired
of learning
the alchemy of me
is bred from corruption
i am another thing i swallow down
i'm tired
of swallowing it all down
all of me down
i preach community
for a reason
so tell me
who am i supposed to run to
now
tell me
who is sleeping in gloves
who
is softening their hands
for me
i don't want to write about love anymore
but here i am
again
here i am

Author



Bios

TAYLOR THORNBURG

Taylor Thornburg is an author and essayist based in Chicago, IL where he hosts the Factory Setting prose workshop and After Hours reading series at Quimby's bookstore. His debut novel, *Agathe, 6:00 pm to 7:27*, can be found at Lost Telegram Press. His other fiction can be found in *The Garfield Lake Review*, *L'Esprit Literary Review*, *Thirteenth Floor Magazine*, *Valley Voices*, *The Heartwood Literary Review*, *Disco Kitchen*, and elsewhere.

Kirsten Who Disobeyed Her Orders features romantic components, but at its heart is the subject of desire - animalistic, intellectual, impulsive, unrestrained desire. It is framed as a dark Greek myth in which unchecked desire rather than hubris dooms our heroine, or does it? The resolution of the story is the dissolution of the universe. Is she doomed? Or is she free?

THUY NGYEN

When Thuy found herself in the middle of a toxic, messy relationship in her 30's, something she vowed she'd never do, it cracked open something in her mind. Since then, the words haven't stopped spilling in and she's having a delicious time experimenting with themes of anger, love, deception, and spiritual awakening.

@pixiewhispies

LEA COLLINS

Lea Collins is a newer writer based in London. They love to explore a variety of themes in their writing with a particular interest in fantasy and horror, though they are always looking to try something new.

NOTNOT

NOTNOT is the maker and the made — the name of a Persian poet and the name of his project. He works with mirrors, masks, and negations.

SOFIA ROSA MARIA

Sofia Iacono is an amateur poet, singer, songwriter, and aspiring fairy. She enjoys delving into the darker sides of the feminine experience, including rage, fear, guilt (the Catholic kind), and abuse. Sofia has a Bachelor of Arts in English with a concentration in Literature and a Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology.

MEREDITH GALLENGSTEIN

foldeddaisiez24 - makeup instagram

0crayolaf10werz24 - art instagram

TikTok- crayolaf10werz

M.C. REINE

M.C. Reine (they/them) is a poet and dark fantasy/horror writer from Iowa. They have always felt creatively stirred by Gothic literature such as Frankenstein, Dracula, and Jane Eyre, poets such as Edgar Allen Poe and John Donne, and horror films such as The Silence of the Lambs, Crimson Peak, Raw, and The Perfection. The weird, the haunting, the grotesque, and the taboo have irrevocably defined M.C.'s identity as a writer and as a person, and they actively seek to embody it in their writing and life.

Instagram: @aufertemalum

HAILEY HYMENOPTERA

Hailey is an American poet hailing from the Rocky Mountains who owns an eclectic range of personal pursuits and experiences. Her creative practice includes writing as a meditation. With a deep appreciation for all things connected to human art and nature Hailey continually cultivates a life that balances curiosity, ritual, and exploration.

SHELL WALSH

Shell Walsh is a mother, artist, and licensed therapist who writes to heal and to help others do the same. Based in New Jersey, she lives with her loving family and four cats, drawing strength from the quiet resilience of daily life and the creative process. Hallways is her debut poetry collection, born from years of lived experience with chronic illness, trauma, and the complex work of recovery. Through her writing, Shell offers a safe space for survivors, those living with invisible illnesses, and anyone searching for connection in the wake of pain. Her work is deeply personal, yet universally resonant, an invitation to feel, to reflect, and to begin again. When she's not writing, Shell channels her compassion into her work as a therapist and her love into her home and family. Her creative voice is fueled by honesty, vulnerability, and the belief that even in our darkest hallways, there is light.

MAXIM VOLK

Maxim Volk (they/he) is a queer horror and sci-fi author from the Midwest. Their work has appeared in Carnage House, Acorns, and more. Their first book comes out in June 2026 from Slashic Horror Press. You can find them on Instagram: @Maximvolk1

ELWYN V.J. ROTH

Elwyn V. J. Roth is a lover of all things unnatural, horrific, and disturbing. As a poet first, everything they touch is imbued with lyrical prose and a touch of irony. When they are not writing, you can find them playing cosmic horror boardgames and romanticizing nearly every element of their life.

Instagram: @evjroth

\$ATORI ZOOM

Satori Zoom (@zoomthrax) is a Los Angeles based recording artist. Other than songwriting, he enjoys writing poetry mainly centered around themes of depression, love, and existentialism. He loves his tortoiseshell cat and the color black.

WAYLON SKULLY

Creature of the night!

Waylon Skully is a ghoulish writer based in Northern Ohio whose writings frequently focus on the dark and macabre, as well as the intimate and explicit. Follow them on instagram @skullymediaworks or on youtube @SkullyMediaWorks!

KIARA

Kiara is most likely busy referring to the ancient texts to prove the existence of vampires. She often cannot be reached due to the volume at which she is currently listening to Gregorian chants. You'll know she is approaching by the clicking of her knee high boots and the overwhelming scent of cinnamon that rounds the corner in a cloud of seemingly sourceless smoke.

PAUL HENNING

Paul Henning is a Hudson Valley-based writer and creative whose work examines silence, collective fear, and historical repetition. The Venue Only Changed was written while traveling in Salem, Massachusetts, reflecting on the enduring mechanisms of accusation across time.

Socials—

Instagram: CrabxGrass

J.B. WHEELER

J.B. Wheeler (he/they) is a poet, writer, and indie bookseller based in Pennsylvania. When not working at a feminist bookstore, they enjoy leading a nonfiction book club, playing guitar, and daydreaming about their debut novel. Their previous work can be found in The Blank Quill literary magazine.

MAX GERSHON

Max Gershon is a queer poet and prose writer studying literature with an emphasis on creative writing at CSUN. They love exploring all different kinds of stories but their big three would have to be: LGBTQIA+, fantasy, and horror.

Instagram: @m.xelxs

VICTORIA BASSETT

Victoria Bassett has been drawn to the macabre from a young age, starting her writing journey early on by writing eerie poetry and paranormal short stories on her

grandmother's typewriter as a child. Now, she is an aspiring attorney and poet who spends her time exploring the haunting concepts of grief, mental illness, trauma, and the soft violence of love that refuses to die.

Social media:

Instagram: VickyBXD

Tiktok: VickyBXD

MOLLY LIKOVICH

Molly Likovich is an ancient forest specter who hails from the land of Maryland. She has a BA in Creative Writing from Salisbury University and her poems have appeared in the poetry collections *Not a Myth* and *The Willow's Silence* as well as journals *Quilted Verse*, *The New Mexico Review*, and *Rust + Moth* among others. In 2017 she won Honorable Mention in the AWP Intro Poetry Journal Award Competition and in 2023 she won Second Place in *The Auvert Magazine's Orange Skies Poetry Contest*. TikTok, Instagram & YouTube @magicalmolly

GREG JONES

Greg Jones is a published horror poet from Wisconsin with a second collection coming out October of this year. You can find him at www.gregoryallenjones.com.

SAHARA MATTHEWS

The Walk of Shame Art produces art from repurposed materials—turning ugly things into beautiful things. More work can be found on Instagram @thewalkofshameart or facebook.com/thewalkofshameart

DANIELLE ROBERTSON

Danielle Robertson holds a BA in creative writing from SUNY Purchase and is a Tin House YA Workshop alum. Her short fiction for teens and adults has been published in anthologies by *Once Upon a Book Club*, *Terrorcore Publishing*, *Read Furiously*, and *Haunted Words Press*. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, their two children, and their overstuffed bookshelves.

Instagram: @danjvrobertson

Website: www.daniellerobertson.net

LORCA JOLENE

Lorca Jolene's paper collage art extends themes of queerness, body modification, and dark glamor that they explore in their stage performances as a nonbinary sideshow artist. They slice through and rip up fashion magazines, medical textbooks, and manga to make bodies formed from juxtaposing pieces that are uncanny, surreal, androgynous, and liminal. These pieces center the modified body as a mutable site of ambivalence and creation, where a comprehensive identity emerges as more than the sum of its parts. It is their aim to inspire curiosity about how coherent, beautiful selves can

emerge through bodies that carry traces of violent origins and are formed out of chaos and contradiction. Their pieces have been featured across Chicago at the Zhou B Arts Center, Jackson Junge Gallery, and Agitator Art Gallery.

Social Media:

[instagram.com/voidboi.collage](https://www.instagram.com/voidboi.collage)

BELLA MELARDI

Bella Melardi is a poet, author, and artist. She writes about the political and personal of the human experience. She attends OCADU.

XERCES AZUL

Xerces Azul is a 20-year-old visual artist based in Las Vegas, specializing in illustrative artwork. Dreams, divine messages, and their deepest soul desires explode from their artwork as their main source of inspiration, reaching depths of the heart that cannot be explained with words. "I want my viewers to see their greatest heartbreaks and fears expressed through my art."

KEVIN CARSON

Kevin Carson is a poet and immigrant rights activist.

CORVRINA

Corvrina is fascinated by desire and love twisted into strange, haunting forms, and the cruel realities of obsession and intimacy viewed from a deranged, whimsical, and dark lens. Her work prioritises folding devotion and darkness together until they linger long after they are over. She is based in the Philippines.

Instagram: [@vaeribusy](https://www.instagram.com/vaeribusy).

MADISON QUINN

Madison Quinn is a Florida-born college student currently majoring in English. She specializes in articles and poetry, but has a passion for horror short stories. Her favorite subjects to cover are the fear of death and the heaviness of doing bad deeds. She hopes for her writing to leave a pit in your stomach and a worm in your brain.

THIS TOO IS HOLY

Savannah (18+/she/her) is a published poet writing under This Too Is Holy. Her work explores desire, hunger, power, and the body as both altar and weapon. She is drawn to erotic horror, religious symbolism, and the places where longing turns feral. Her work has appeared in online literary magazines, and she shares her writing and community-based prompts on Instagram at [@thistooisholy](https://www.instagram.com/thistooisholy).

SAMANTHA SHEARING

Instagram: @s.shearing.art

EMILY ANNE ELLIOTT

Emily Anne Elliott is a writer and more frequently a reader. Her work has appeared in *Dusty Attic*, *Cosmic Daffodil*, and *Y2K Quarterly*. She has a website: emilyannenobody.carrd.co

EILEEN STELTER

Eileen is a non-binary writer who made their creative debut with a heartfelt apology to spiders and has since branched out to tell stories about gods on leashes, talking pigs, necromancers and holiday covers for the Grim Reaper.

Their work has been awarded by Listowel Writer's Week, the Irish Writer's Centre and won Reader's Choice twice in *The Dark Corner* magazine. Most recently one of their short stories was published in *Metamorphosis Anthology*.

Eileen is currently working on their debut novel while wandering the Thin Place between Dublin and Berlin.

ELIAS LOPEZ

Elias Lopez is a self-taught artist and photographer who finds inspiration in dark music, poetry, and all things vintage. Many of his works are trying to find beauty in moments of desperation and isolation in a decaying industrial landscape. He's found his biggest muse and aiding creative mind in his fiancée, who you see in many of his works.
Instagram: [Illustrated_silence](https://www.instagram.com/illustrated_silence)

JADEN FONG

Jaden Fong is a writer with a sweet tooth and a soft spot for the whimsical and the peculiar. A two time nominee for the Alike Perroti and Seth Frank Most Promising Young Poet Award, his writing often examines the precise messiness of human connection. In his free time, he likes to spend time in nature, where he frequently and confidently misidentifies every flower he comes across. Among other places, you can find his work on the Academy of American Poets website at poets.org, *miniskirt* magazine and *The Santa Clara Review*. To see his work on custom tea-stained paper, find him @jadenwriter on Instagram, and to read all of his published pieces, check out his website at jadenfong.com.

PAUL ATTEN ASH

Paul's work has been published by Acid Bath Publishing, BBC Radio 6 Music, Broken Sleep Books, Butcher's Dog, Dark Mountain, Free Verse Revolution (Pushcart Prize nominated), Gothic Keats Press (BOTN nominated), Magma, PBLJ, Poetry Scotland, Salò Press, Scarlet Tiger Press, Shooter, Sídhe Press, Under The Radar, among others. *Searchlight Seasons*, his debut pamphlet, was published by Atomic Bohemian (2024).

Paul is currently curating a multi-contributor contrapuntal ecopoetry project, *We Dream in Green*.

Recent awards include: Oppenheim–John Downes Memorial Trust (2024). Recent competition placings include: Classical Association (HC, 2024); The Winged Muse (Winner, 2025). Recent prize shortlistings include: Alpine Fellowship (2023); Ginkgo (2022, 2021); Hexham (2023).

For links to Paul’s published work, visit campsite.bio/northseanavigator and follow him online at: IG/Threads [@north_sea_navigator](https://www.instagram.com/north_sea_navigator) and Bsky [@northseanavigator.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/northseanavigator.bsky.social)

MAY GARNER

May Garner is an author and poet residing in rural Ohio. She has been writing for nearly fifteen years and has been sharing her writing online for over a decade. She is the author of two poetry collections, *Withered Rising* (2023) and *Melancholic Muse* (2025). Her work has appeared in *Querencia Press*, *Cozy Ink Press*, *Arcana Poetry Press*, *Livina Press*, *Speckled Trout Review*, among others. Find her work on Instagram ([@crimson.hands](https://www.instagram.com/crimson.hands)).

LORENZA CHIAPPETTA

Lorenza Chiappetta is a recent graduate of Penn State with a BA in English. She is extremely passionate about all prose work, especially that surrounding the gothic: feminism, sex, horror, and the taboo. Her other published work is “My Final Project” in *Penn in Hand*.

STEPHANIE M. WYTOVICH

Stephanie M. Wytovich is an American poet, novelist, and essayist. Her work has been featured in magazines and anthologies, such as *Weird Tales*, *Nightmare Magazine*, *Southwest Review*, *Year’s Best Hardcore Horror: Volume 2*, and *The Best Horror of the Year: Volumes 8 & 15*.

Wytovich is the Poetry Editor for *Raw Dog Screaming Press* and an adjunct at Western Connecticut State University, Southern New Hampshire University, and Point Park University. She has received the Elizabeth Matchett Stover Memorial Award, the 2021 Ladies of Horror Fiction Writers Grant, and the Rocky Wood Memorial Scholarship for nonfiction writing.

Wytovich is a member of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association, an active member of the Horror Writers Association, and a graduate of Seton Hill University’s MFA program for Writing Popular Fiction. She is a two-time Bram Stoker Award-winning poet, and her nonfiction craft book for speculative poetry, *Writing Poetry in the Dark*, is available from *Raw Dog Screaming Press*. Readers can pick up her latest project, *Howl: An Anthology of Werewolves from Women in Horror*, co-edited with Lindy Ryan, now from *Black Spot Books*.

Follow Wytovich at <https://www.stephaniemwytovich.com/> and on Twitter, Threads, and Instagram @SWytovich and @thehauntedbookshelf. You can also sign up for her newsletter at <https://stephaniemwytovich.substack.com/>.

MADAME ENVY

Lashun Williams, also published under Madame Envy, is an African American fantasy author and writer of romance, dark fantasy, and gothic romance. She's the author of the "Element Princess" series under her pen name, Jenaia Williams. In 2023, Lashun also published "Sea Comedies" with DG Sentinel, with Quillkeepers Press in 2024, and published poetry with Livina Press in 2024. She's currently working on her standalone novel, Darcy's Finest, as well as her debut as a dark fantasy author, By Ocean's Breath.

Instagram/Threads: @madamepenvy

Substack: @Prusillashouse

XUL

Mouad Moustaid, also known as Xul, is an illustrator and art director from Casablanca. His work explores the intersection of mythology, psychology, and culture, drawing inspiration from ancient legends and sacred narratives particularly Mesopotamian civilization. Through dark, meditative imagery and poetic language, he investigates universal archetypes, forgotten histories, and the collective unconscious, creating symbolic bridges between past and present, myth and contemporary identity.

Social Media & Website:

Website: <https://thexul.com>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/xulart>

ALIX ROJO GUADARRAMA

Alix Rojo Guadarrama is from Mexico and studies at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico).

Her poems and prose style stem primarily from her life experiences, her observations of the world, and, above all, her desire to translate and portray them through words, to preserve a bit of their memory and beauty.

She is eager for the opportunity to publish in your magazine to share her work, gain experience, and enhance her creative abilities.

NOELANI BUONOMO

Noelani Buonomo is a multidisciplinary artist and writer from New Jersey. Her work explores transience, gender, and generational trauma through the lens of surrealist

horror. She draws inspiration from authors like Agustina Bazterrica, Mary Gaitskill, and Gretchen Felker-Martin.

Instagram: @skinsludge

ASH MAIELLE

Ash Maielle is a queer poet, artist, and educator. Her work can be found in the fifth wheel press anthology: brainrot, January House Literary Journal, and on Instagram and Subtack at @ashmaielle.

LUANA CAMPAGNA

Luana Campagna (She/Her) is an Italian writer and the voice behind @anotherhumanstory. She writes in both Italian and English, weaving poetry and short stories that explore memory, identity, and the quiet moments that shape us. With roots in Italy and a heart shaped by many places, her work captures the in-between spaces of life—what is said, what is felt, and what is left behind.

Previously published in the Arcana Poetry Press Anthology “Roots and Ruin” with her two poems “Original Sin” and “Supermarket”.

MARYANNA K. ASTER

Maryanna is a poet and essayist living in Portland, Oregon. Her work has appeared in Vinyl Poetry and Prose, g a z e journal, Muse/A, gobshite quarterly, and others. Her essays have appeared in American Mead Maker, Pacific Northwest Horticulture, and DRIVE Magazine (Folio: Eddie Award winner). She graduated from Portland State University with an MFA in Creative Writing-Poetry.

On her own time, she runs a small business giving astrology readings, channeled / mediumship insight, as well as coaching individuals in lucid dreaming. She volunteers helping shelter dogs and is waiting for her next dog to show up in her life.

JOE CONVERTITO

Joe Convertito (Chang Dangus) is a self-taught mixed-media artist based in Trumbull, Connecticut. Working primarily in oil pastel, acrylic, and ink, his practice blends surrealism, expressionism, and humanistic storytelling. His work often navigates fractured identity, the long shadow of substance abuse and sobriety, internal anguish, isolation, dissociation, and paranoia-threaded with quiet flashes of religious symbolism. Transitioning careers and reshaping his life through creative discipline, Chang channels a raw, unfiltered honesty into every piece. Beyond visual art, he also writes and makes music, pursuing all three as interconnected ways of excavating the self. When he's not creating, he's happiest spending time with family, friends, and dogs. Instagram: @chang_dangus

ALIZA GARZA

Aliza Garza is a Librarian Assistant who loves to spend her days lost in a fantasy book or within the lyrics of her favorite songs. She received her BA in English Literature from the University of Phoenix.

CHLOE LA VADA

Chloe La Vada is a Brooklyn-based writer, artist, and designer whose work primarily focuses on the collapse of the self, and the fine line between artifice and authenticity. Her work has appeared in a variety of publications, and she is currently putting the finishing touches on her first poetry chapbook.

IG: @chloe.lavada (personal) | @chloe.couture.designs (art/design)

ANNA MADDEN

Anna Madden is a Rhysling Award nominated poet. Her fiction has appeared in Apex Magazine, Haven Spec, Small Wonders, and elsewhere. In free time, she makes birch forests out of stained glass. Visit her website to learn more at annamadden.com.

IVÁN ESTRADA PÉREZ (EROTIC HOLLOW)

Iván Estrada Pérez/Erotic Hollow (Mexico City, 1989) is a trained psychologist and a self-taught collage artist by way of destruction since 2016. In his work, he has managed to weave together his musical influences and hobbies with surrealism and his psychological background.

Throughout his career, he has participated in several exhibitions both in Mexico and abroad. His creative path also includes various collaborations and commissions for book cover designs. Currently, Iván's work stands as a unique intersection where the clinical eye meets the visceral act of reassembling reality through collage.

Link: https://bio.link/erotic_hollow

VINI GREAGAN

Goblin Brain Oddities (Vini Greagan) is a self-taught artist from Saratoga, NY. She specializes in ink drawings and colorful acrylic paintings with themes of whimsy, horror, surrealism, and fantasy. Her signature artistic style is bold, dark outlines with intricate details and spirals.

FREYA MCAFEE

Freya McAfee is a horror writer located in Catonsville, Maryland. When she is not writing, you can catch her reading, playing horror games, or knitting while snuggled up by her husband and her cat.

Instagram- [freyamcafee](#)

Tiktok- [freyamcafee](#)

Substack- [freyamcafee](#)



Coming soon: Issue 3...
GLUTTONY

