

Three Drops from a Cauldron

Issue 27



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August 2019

Edited by Kate Garrett

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Issue 27 / August 2019

Elfin Elegance	8
Sleeping beauty	10
Misfit	11
How to Spot a Witch	12
Threads	14
witchy woo	17
Hare & Hounds	18
The Honeycoma	21
I, Kikimora	22
Ananse (of the downstairs water closet)	23
Silver Threads	24
This House is Not for Sale	26
The Cailleachín	27
Children among the Wood	29
Nightmare Bed	30
The Behrs	31
Princess	33
Bunny boiler	34
Bluebeard in Portland	36
Ash	38
To the end	39
Safety	40
Almost Eden	41
The Sunken City	43

Camelot	44
The swans	47
The Wolf Mother Speaks	48
Wolverine	49
The One You Feed	50
The Dragon's Song	53
Predatorial	54
Eagle's Last Flight	55
High and Beyond	58
Sowing Light	61
Waves	65
Miranda at the Stern	66
Mr. Sandman	67
God's Breath	69
Hologram	70
things can change	72
Shroomcat	73
Biographical Notes	75

Elfin Elegance

One amber afternoon I walked
Up the trail on my honeyed hill.
Bending, I parted the dry stalks
Of grass; they rattled in the still,
Warm air. There, beside a wooden
Post, posed a miniature form
Of sweet proportions, with hooded
Eyes peeping, and brown hair adorned
With turquoise, rubies and sapphires.
The figure was of a female
Fae, in a dress coloured like fire.
She stood as tall as a milk pail
And wore shiny, shimmering shoes
On her tiny feet. Up she glanced
At me with a glimmering glow,
Her irises gold-green. Entranced,
I chanced then to stretch out my hand
To her. She laughed; I felt a dream
Like a soft cloud encircle and
Lift and drift me, as though a stream
Floated me on its current-flow.
Then it seemed that I slumbered long
In a fairy sleep, deep-shadowed.
Time lost, waking, I was alone.
I looked in the grass and around
The post, in the patches of light
And shade, but without sight or sound
Of the elfin pixie or sprite.

Since that time, on such rare amber
Afternoons, I walk up my trail
To the grasses by the timber
Post. Amongst the stalks for flash-flame-

Phantom I seek, to no avail;
No one waits there in ray or veil,
Not since that strange gold-yellow day.
She has not returned, bright hill-fae.

Eric Bryan

Sleeping beauty

She dozes during the day, drugged by the dregs of decades, the lees of an active life spilt beneath slippered feet. Sleeps slackmouthing, her face a chalice lifted up to the ceiling, where cracks widen and plaster flakes into wafers. While her eyes are closed, ash seedlings in the garden thicken into thickets and a fox parades round the lawn with impunity. In the evening, moths come out of hiding to threaten the carpets, lacing their flight with wisps of conversation. Memories spiral to the surface, become clogged with words and sink again. The cat nudges the catflap with her nose; outstares the fox and comes back in; curls round the night-time hours on the bed where lungs rise and fall, and the dawn waits for a kiss which will never come again.

Hannah Stone

Misfit

It isn't easy pretending to be warm blooded,
often I have had to seek a recharge
from a sun-baked wall or linger in a hothouse
until I start to feel remotely human. Winter
is the worst, when the battery of my heart
runs down to a sluggish thump and all I crave
is the bedroom of a moss lined crevice. On top
of which these takeaway, boil-in-bag habits
have played havoc with my guts, the metallic
crunch of a green bottle or dragonfly, a hawk
moth's powdery aftertaste, nothing but a distant
dream. How I've come to rage against sugary
sorceresses, pumpkins, glass stilettos, the stroke
of midnight that failed me, refused to return
my diamond pattern of black and gold, quicksilver
scuttle, forked inquiring tongue.

Stephen Bone

How to Spot a Witch

We become godless with good intentions,
halving ourselves into hares
along the linea negra.
My belly splits open
and babies mewl out
robed in fur,
spilling to the floor.
And dampened, my love,
my guts cry loud
making ugly
the female form.

Don't say things
if you don't mean
them – leverets
lift their ears, desperate
to hear your voice.

This is what you've
spoken for – this wound,
this home, these paws.
But a hundred clouded
eyes turn around
with tears to disappoint,
and with heavy sighs
they answer back
wet with salt
and blood:

O mother

dear mother

please

take care

only to wish for good.

Jennifer Wilson

Threads

The witch arrived one afternoon in late March.

I had never seen one before, not a real one, and was surprised to find her clad in a simple t-shirt and crumpled jeans with a cigarette pressed between her lips. She appeared on next door's step with a pile of boxes, took a key from her pocket and turned it in the old lock. The house snapped to attention and flooded with warmth. The weeds shriveled up, cowed into shyness by her arrival.

Just like that, a witch lived next door, as though she had always been there.

She appeared sometimes after that; I would press my face to the rain-slicked glass at my living room window and look out for her. She sat on the low brick wall which separated our gardens, hands curled around mugs of tea and eyes narrowed as though seeking something in the empty street. I knew better than anyone that there was nothing to be found here.

This was the problem of living where all of the students lived: the max exodus during holidays, which left the city hollow. Or perhaps that was why she had chosen that time to arrive. There's something to be said for that quiet, liminal space between one academic term and the next.

I had come to live quietly in it, only staying because I had too many books to read and I didn't know where else to go.

Eventually I gathered my courage and brought her an umbrella. I explained that I went outside so little these days that I didn't need it. She looked at me like she wanted me to stay with her awhile, but I couldn't meet her gaze without blushing and I fled back into the safety of my house. Heart hammering, I curled in my hallway beneath the coat rack and berated myself for my fear of the smallest things.

The witch kept the umbrella. Every time she walked with it, flowers sprung up beneath her feet. The scent of herbs and woodsmoke prickled my nostrils whenever she opened her windows. Even through the walls of my house, I could hear her music.

She knocked on my door one morning and offered me a teapot. It had been making her tea taste bitter, she said, because it was full of old memories that wouldn't wash out. I might be able to love it better than she could, and did I mind giving it a try?

The drink I made for her was the sweetest she had ever tasted.

She told me to call her Tea. A new name for a new place.

--

“What kind of magic do you do?” I asked. I hadn’t been able to put my finger on it.

Tea looked at me in silence for a moment. Maybe it was a stupid question; I was about to pretend I hadn’t said it, but she shook her head and explained to me that magic was found, not created, and she sought hers in the beauty of small things.

I wonder what had happened to her, that the big things no longer seemed so beautiful.

Out loud, I said, “The small things fill me with dread, a lot of the time.”

Tea nodded. “That happens too. The line between fear and beauty is thin, depending on where you look at it.”

We were sitting on the low brick wall, where we had gradually become friends. I watched the smoke from her cigarette spiral upwards into the sky. We swapped ideas, books, snippets of songs, Tea's always coming from places I had never heard of. I explained that I was studying psychology and she quizzed me about theories of the mind, what made us feel hope and what made us have dreams.

She scooped prisms of lights from puddles, plucked clouds from the sky and weaved them into brightly coloured bracelets around our wrists. She looked for these, she explained, and worked them into new and beautiful things. Tea liked fading light and summer birdsong in winter. Spending time amongst forgotten things made her feel like she wasn't alone.

You're not alone, I told her. You have me.

That was true, she admitted. She had finished tying the thread around my wrist but her fingers stilled on my beating pulse. I did not pull away.

I realised that she had, without me realizing it, stopped gazing searchingly into that distance.

Sash Steele

witchy woo

dust to them
dust to him
dust to us
keep me cold
my spider legs
bottle of gin
choose me now
a spell or sin

Melody David

Hare & Hounds

Version 1

A dream turned up last night
& unfolded my latest poem.
By the time I woke, breaking
apart, I'd forgot.

Version 2

There're the lines in dream-land,
then the lines in the finished draft
then the space, silences, between.

Version 3

When I was 8,
for a while (but not long)
I was bona fide Brownie,
a gnome and with pixies,
sprites and fairies,
kept my promise
dancing the weekly ritual
around the spotted toadstool ring.

One evening, after we split,
the hare, the hounds – I,
hare speedily left the hall,
spun right by *The Copper Key* then again
right into Town Square, then ran down
Fore Street's hill right up the track
leading to fields, at Letheren's Lane
and Lune's Hill.

Trail-blazer, hair-raiser,
I tuck in close to the edge of the lane.
Meadowsweet's white sprays entice me, *sit
and bide*,
whilst gorse tries to hook,
but doesn't stop me.
I'm used to being alone

on the breathing land,
thrive being away from the pack,
the chattering crowd,
my footsteps, & beech & ash-tree arrow-sigils,
drawing their solitary elaborate patterns
on the ground.

High above, on the ridge
where I live
just north of the town
the all-seeing, all-knowing rooks *caw caw*,
rally my way.

Version 3b

They will not catch me
I am hare ahead
the first arrow heart beating I run on this place familiar as the back of my
lined hand I will win
in the cup of my hand is the invisible map tracing secret paths only we
know
I am hare leaping leaving an inverted v on our homeland
& I am in ecstasy hare run free.

Version 4

Nancy, I am,
an Amazon,
later I knew
I was Artemis.

I did not know about
I did not know
of Nemetona,
but she was in my bones.

Version 5

I cannot run. I am rooted.
The gorse hurts me.

Version 6

There're the spaces in the years between,
the spaces on the boundaries of what is known
then the determining lines that chart incontrovertible facts.

Version 7

The other me, left behind
watches an/other run,
the hare, springing alive.
Looking back, I wonder
along the edge, the track,
the trace, of memory.
Did I really run along, alone
across the marginal ways
of our fifties hometown?
For though I knew our parish's
northern edgeland's lanes
like a book
& had a propensity for taking off along its paths,
the well-worn tracks behind Fore Street
remained unfamiliar, mysterious territory.
From where, what source
did I misconstrue the flickering flashback?

Version 7

The I, split, doubled
again, the dream
where I ran up Letheren's lane
& across the paths
until the track splits again.

I'm the prey of hounds
filigree on encrypted ground,
I'm *Filipendula*,
future hanging on a thread.

Julie Sampson

**Nemetona, Celtic goddess of sacred spaces, is associated with mid-Devon.*

The Honeycoma



The Carlie Nooka Martece Collective

I, Kikimora

The spider first classified
the year I wed—

spider smaller than a speck
of straw, spider of the bog

of swamp, wetland, marsh, quagmire.
A mere wisp of khaki chaff, of hair,

a sphinx moth, night butterfly, invisible
wraith who slips through the keyhole

after dark—both beautiful and ugly,
whiny, glass half-empty-noisemaker,

dish breaker, home wrecker—
wet footprints across his heart.

Cindy Veach

Ananse (of the downstairs water closet)

My pet. My secret. Your black orb
glistens, braces itself, belly up
on strings of silk.

How patient you are, night after night,
trapping nothing but my darkness
in your haphazard net.

With eight eyes weak as a guess,
you wait for some scuttling thing,
a silverfish perhaps, to snag,

set off a vibration bright
as lighting, bright as all the world's
wisdom hidden in your precious lair.

Claire Cox

Silver Threads

Before you push the door open, you listen. Hearing nothing you enter the dark and silent room. Your shoes make no noise upon the floor, surprising because they are wooden boards. You shake your head and strain to hear a noise, any noise above the sound of the blood in your head.

You hear something very faint, a soft whispering. Like a conversation in a church. This goes on and you strain to hear but the meaning and the clarity eludes you. The second sound is a steady rhythmic clicking. It sounds like the sound an old clock makes in an empty hall. This is the sound of wood on wood... click, soft click, click, soft click, click, soft click, click... A soft comforting sound that invites you warmly into the room.

At first you think you have entered a totally dark room. You realise that it isn't really dark. You can see as if soft moonlight filtered through lace curtains of purest white linen. A gentle, silver light that lands softly on objects slides across their surfaces, skating at the edge of the visible, hinting at the possible.

Beneath the soft wooden ticking, you can hear something else. Lower and deeper in tone, a sort of rhythmic creak. Again regular, like a part of a clock that needs oiling. You try to find the source of the sound. An area of darkness untouched by the silvery light. A dark shadow, moving backward and forward. It isn't threatening; you have no feeling of danger. You approach and as you get closer the light appears to grow stronger.

You see a woman in a rocking chair. She is weaving on a small loom. At first you have a feeling that she is very old. She looks at you. Directly at you, and she knows you. She knows when you were born, she knows where, she knows about your pain and she knows about the worm you cut in half with the garden spade. She knows all that you know about yourself, and everything you don't know.

She smiles at you. As she smiles her face lights up with the most beautiful, heart-stopping smile you have ever seen. In that moment you love her and you know that she loves you. Her face is young and caring, the

most beautiful face you have ever seen. Her eyes are kind, so very kind and yet incredibly wise. You can see deep into her soul and you know that she carries within her such a deep understanding and wisdom as you can only hope to glimpse or understand. Mortal lives were not meant to comprehend the knowledge that she holds within her mind.

Her hair is red, the colour of molten gold, and throughout it run these fine silver threads. Every so often she plucks a silver hair from her head and weaves one end into her ethereal fabric. As she does the silver thread grows, stretches and curls away through the open window. As they whirl away to the outside they whisper with their passing, hints of conversations, growing ideas, and as yet, the unrealised potential in every one. The threads are very fine, so thin that the only way to see them is concentrating on the nimble fingers of the woman and then following the spark of the thread as it catches the diffuse silver light.

Through the open window come more threads that wind themselves around the threads the woman weaves. You know that you will have to find the specific one you seek and break it. You stretch out your fingers to touch one, it curls around your fingers. Gossamer thread, finer than spider silk, sliding across the skin of your hands. The touch of the thread, softer than the draught from a butterfly's wings. Sliding along your arm and over your body. The end of the thread coils away from you for a moment before plunging deep into your chest.

Your heart is filled with an all-encompassing warmth that washes throughout your whole being. You are suffused with a feeling of total love for the weaver and the world. Your fingers are tingling. After it stops you look down and see that they are glowing with a faint silver light.

The woman is still weaving and she smiles at you. You feel drawn toward her, you approach and sit in an identical rocking chair next to her. The woman passes you a thread and suddenly you are both weaving together. A single, silver blanket with billions of threads that stretches out to touch the world. Your plan is forgotten. You know his end will come. It is time to move on.

Peter Roe

This House is Not for Sale

You can't have my view of the oak on the hill, two polo ponies flicking their tails like clouds over the moss-line of the hedge.

You can't have the dying ash trees whose broken hands hang, or the upright, sun-proud, lime-live ones.

You can't have the bed from which I write, or these walls as blue as a Sussex boy's eyes.

You can't have my eyes, which saw the bricks of the walls rise, the factory logos on the plywood floor beneath this posh cream carpet you so admire with its spring-green-you'll-never-clap-your-peepers-on-it-underlay.

You can't have this October air. You won't find out where I've hidden the spring bulbs, how many slugs I've slaughtered or who's buried deep like they'll never come out in the grave-cold clay beneath the staddle-stone.

I'll eat this place before I let you have it: I'll draw it under my belly and spit you screaming for suburbia with my home-grown garlic breath. I'll curse you with my sleepless hag-dug stare, my get-your-grubby-paws-out-of-my-grubby-cupboards sod-and-fuckoffery.

Siân Thomas

The Cailleachín

She was not our blood, my snide-tongued
Grand aunt, an in-law, who lived next door.
From birth, she named me, 'Cailleachín'
I'd no idea what it meant,
'een,' supposed affection. Yet, I felt no love.
Not our mother, childless, she reared my brother.
Our wounded family grew under her
cloak, her spell.

I watched my father daily walk our fields,
babbling fire, too decent, proud, to murder,
neighbours said, 'If it was me, I would!'
Old women gathered, sat around the fire,
snuffed, smoked tobacco. I heard their whispers
tell my mother how to curse. Hurt crushed her
courage, fear suppressed her craft.
I would save the day, twelve years old, a Viking

girl, unconscious yet intent, avenge my parents'
pain. Better to get it done. I marched, stared
into her eyes, strength from the bones of my kin.
It was land, you see, one hundred acres, no small loss.
Our ancestors fought, died to claim it, my brother
evicted, became the sacrifice.
I spat her witch venom back, used salt to dam

her fields, health, joy, soured her peace.
A child embodied their adult war, a quagmire
of hurt, pain, hate. I waited, passion mixed in fear,
it took a year.
Her fate much worse than I'd intended, she knew
hell on earth, ended her days in a workhouse.
'Too good for the bitch!' our neighbours said.
I was also damned, kept my secret twenty years,
but it was her that woke the witch
in me, kept the wicked me alive. Always women,

the 'she' who curse, are cursed, curse each other. We
couldn't see, our granduncle, dead, let us down.

Women blamed, terrified, with such power, I swore
I'd never curse again, unless I needed to.

Attracta Fahy

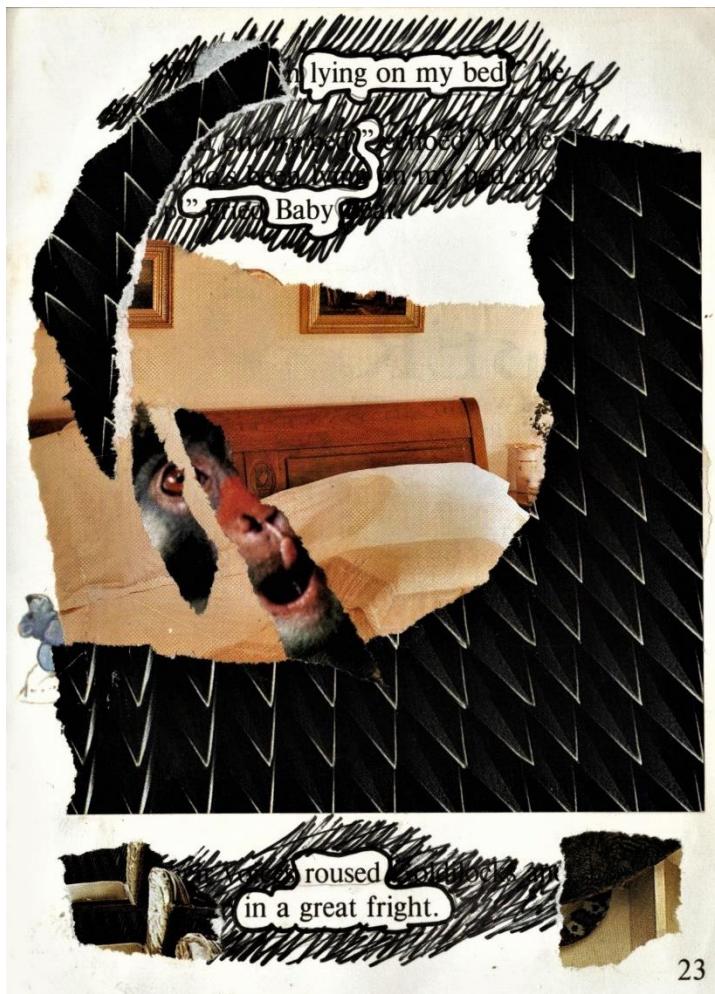
Children among the Wood

The trees have eyes but not the children. They wonder aimless, the world not known fully, crunching on things beneath them that sound as though they used to be living. Only the watching trees see what lies underfoot. As the children stumble further and night approaches like a hawk to carry the small away.

Rickey Rivers Jr

Nightmare Bed

A treated page from the Goldilocks story



Janina Aza Karpinska

The Behrs

We were the Behrs at no: 3: the odd lot. My dad, made of good Bavarian stock; massive, brawny, square head, round belly, huge paws; fingers like raw sausages. Embracing England wholesale: English cars; house in the suburbs, English food. Couldn't get round his accent though – far too guttural to do anything with. And mama – smaller, sweeter, hardly speaking, shyly smiling, wearing her Bavarian trappings with pride and considerable persistence: kerchiefs, bodice-and-blouse, dirndl skirts and her ever-present basket. It was excruciating. When we went out - I'd trail behind or skip ahead as much as I could; would die the instant they hollered my name in shopping centres or supermarkets – *Baybee! Baybee!* - blushing furiously just to make it worse.

I could never stray too far away. I wasn't allowed to have skates, roller blades, a bike, or scooter – not even the really tiddly ones you could use on pavements. No – they were *all* 'too risky'. I was their 'one and only', they kept reminding me. I decided *I'd* have 10 children and they'd *all* have wheels of some kind or other – if anyone wanted me in the first place, which I doubted. Too weird; too different. I didn't have friends like the other girls. It was a miracle I got to be an Imp in the Brownies, but even then papa would drop me off and pick me up right on the dot each week. He didn't like me to mix with others – it was mama who insisted I join.

So that summer when we hit the headlines it was a shock to everyone– our names and faces on the front page of the local daily paper. Mama looking shy, and bewildered all at the same time, standing uselessly beside a broken chair; papa looking suitably affronted, and myself trying to hide a cheeky smile. The camera-man was nice, I remember.

But what had got me the most – which stayed with me all these years - was why anyone would *want* to be in our house, and such a young girl, too! We *never* had visitors – ever, only people to fix the plumbing, or deliver a 'fridge. And she wasn't exactly a 'housebreaker' as such - we often left our

back door open. She wasn't a thief either - hadn't taken anything, as far as we could tell, except the liberty of coming in, that is. No, that morning, as we explained to the press, papa had insisted we all take a turn around the block before breakfast to sharpen our appetites (something we all had to do together - there wasn't much we ever did on our own). I was always boggled to learn of classmates who were the only vegetarians in their family – 'you mean you can be different!' I'd cry, though I soon learned *not* to do that – it just confirmed my 'weirdness'. No – we all ate the same plain food, at the same time every day; all our furnishings, bought from the same simple functional place – no room for personal frills or colour-schemes, you got what was given, and were made to feel grateful.

But there – there in my bed – when we came home - was a sleeping angel – someone who had *chosen* to come in; someone who felt at ease being there; able to sleep without fear of being disturbed. How I envied her sleeping so peacefully. Little smears of food around her lips and cheeks! I wanted to laugh and cry all at once. I had a new friend! Delivered! It seemed like a miracle, until papa puckered up a roaring protest, which he spat into my new friend's face. And then I saw that familiar look; her eyes – the same I'd seen in the bathroom mirror.

Nowhere safe in our house, ever.

Janina Aza Karpinska

Princess

He kissed her while she floated on the pond
and unaware of bow legs, bulbous eyes,
she saw him swimming graceful as a God.
Her hormones told her he's a find; a catch.

She didn't mind his croak or swivel eyes –
they're sexy; liking how he sat cross legged,
was always hopping off; swam every day;
spoke little, empathised; his toothless grin.

But when he caught a cold the kissing stopped.
She found out he had kids he never saw
by other girls. A slimy, lightweight guy
morphs from a handsome prince. He's daydreaming

And always catching flies. And then she spies,
in bed, a webbed foot and a specked leg –

Stephanie Blythe

Bunny boiler

Ten seconds to time out where you will stand back and crack a smile,
Pale to grey brings you down
A grin turns frown
You. Surrounded by doubt
Out in the world with no
Thought as how you can be free
Washed it down with gin.

Nine times remade
Stitch and stone
Tighter and tighter
Before the seams stretch and break
Under the strain of your flesh cage.
Clawing and crawling from bash
To scream inside your head for advice.

Eight mates turn to three
Tree trunks to hold you up
As the timber falls. You count
The annual circles beneath your eyes
Creep no sleep, no deep breath to soothe
Or move you to dream
Of a big reset button.

Seven dwarves in a story of true love
Drilled into you, mined for that gold
Experience of heart flutters
Speech stutters when you feel the one.
That person who should be with you
Forever and never make you feel
Lesser but better than ever!

Six states of dread, walking dead
Down the aisle all fixed and fitted.
Unwelcome, unwanted.

Five gold rings narrowed to two
No calling birds to object
No fallen lover to interject
While silent screams flood the air
Beware of what is to come.

Four tears shed rolling rivers
Cast on chill the foreshadowing shivers
Glass lenses steams and shatters,
This matters we mad hatters can
Not look on any longer.

Three months made
Abandoned bodies
For single salvation

Two pages turned
For this story's creation

One woman

Katja Brown

Bluebeard in Portland

I met Bluebeard at an anarchist bookfair. He was wearing army fatigues and a snarl of talismanic necklaces, his beard dyed Manic Panic electric cerulean. I browsed through the boxes of pamphlets and political screeds at his stall. When he handed me the book I was reaching for, I noticed his tattoos. Not simply a group identifier, he said, grinning, but body spells, talismans.

Look. He showed me the veiny underside of his forearm, where a Matisse woman-girl with a stricken, abstract face had been spider-inked. “It’s you”. And it was.

I showed him my bird, striated with pearly stretch marks. I had it etched on my hip the day my mother died. I remembered the loveliness of the pain as though it were yesterday, in the tattoo parlour where they also cut hair and sold bodega snacks. My face had been swollen with tears as the gun whined and buzzed.

He thought bird tattoos were tacky, and said so.

I became his pretend wife. He held meetings in his penthouse, big and white like a studio hospital nightclub. In the many rooms of his labyrinth he kept treasures, jealously guarded. To his domain I was given access, although there were places I could not enter, places where his privacy must be respected.

At the meetings I served multi-packs of crisps, wine, vodka sodas, beers, biscuits, olives, bags of delicate green moss to be set alight by silver lighters. I listened to the talk of semiotics. I read his books, I watched the screens, and swam in the outdoor pool on the balcony like I was starring in an advertisement for expensive cologne. I disappeared into his realm. I lost my job. I started smoking again. I developed a sore on the left-hand side of my inner labia. I scratched it absentmindedly, blood blooming behind me as I swam lengths in the pool.

He showed me the room at the centre of things eventually, the room where the meetings always seemed to end up. Finally, the wound in the story. Dim lights played on his intricate machines, glinting dormant in the red room.

I'm sex positive, he said.

I stroked the iron maiden, deprived of its medieval malevolence, redesigned for the millennial sadist in stylish chrome. In the corner I saw a rainbow mountain of lace, polyester, cotton.

Of course, he had to show me. He couldn't wait. He was getting bored and I wasn't curious enough. He had to create the momentum himself. I would not ask for the key fob that he secretly longed for me to steal. I was humiliated and afraid, but I spoke. I told him that the time had come. I was leaving. His face screwed up in a sneer of feigned indifference. I walked out. He had to let me walk out, because I had ruined the game.

Oh, he must have tantrum-danced like Rumpelstiltskin, realising what he had done, as I was rubbing my gums, my bird tattoo singing, in the elevator. Yes, down to street level, and breeze, and light.

Louise Murray

Ash

Rooted in high limestone fells,
strong branches, spring-dressed
wave limbs of hard, pale wood.
Ash keys ballet down, fresh
breezes stir pollen showers gifted
by your spiked, purple flowers.
Fertile, until die-back strikes –
instead of sap, disease and age.
After my mountain climb,
I ache with gout and pain.
Your bark, your leaves,
though potent, now fail
to halt or heal my bane.

Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon

**Ash bark and leaves have long been used for their medicinal qualities*

To the end



Fabrice Poussin

Safety



Fabrice Poussin

Almost Eden

'And they call the boy Pan meaning 'All'.

Our wintered love sought out his greening glade
the boughs budding, the birds that had endured the cold season
finally in song, and there in the company of Dionysius –
was Penelope's baseborn son; the hollow-horned god of the pastures,
Lord of the Fields in an almost Eden.

We watched crocus break the crust of the earth,
the grass grow rapidly at his hooves,
heard a strange and fluting call in a slender throat.

What followed was unspeakable,
he was amorphous as Zeus
thunder bolt and bull then goat again.
My wife made shapes I'd never seen in our bed.

Afterward he gnawed bark from a tree
crowed of tearing *Echo* into pieces
and told of how his pipes were fashioned from Syrinx, nymph
turned first into reed then hacked down
pushed to his lips, to become his instrument.

Despite, or perhaps because of this, we wanted him more.
He even told us where to worship
kept us cupping in the dank caves, coupling on the forest floor.

It's not the same without him - we lie together tepid, barely touching,
stifling yawns. I ache for his hoof when I reach for my wife's thigh.

She started dressing in tunics, fashioned a wreath
for her head, I shaped stones to resemble arcadia
but he never came back.

When I hear the wind it reminds me of his piping
and how there was all of Eros in that song –
as if Syrinx herself, half flute, half woman

were singing of the terror and tenderness of love,
the exile and the home coming,
the adoration and damnation.

I seldom sleep.
My wife mutters to herself all night –
a single word refrain that sounds like *All, All*.

Anna Saunders

The Sunken City

Pink sun ripples on green roads as boats float by
shoals spill from skeletal legs and leopard sharks
hunt on church steps full songs rebound above
bubbled to foundations where god is lost in black

Lovers cradled in melon as one spoon penetrate
gondola purses and bags spilling over as coins
into fire-gore sinking gulps like fish food
to under-city with dusk flicker of summer warmth

Venice catches the wishes and the curses so deftly
spun in bubble froth the underworld of water
purgation peered at like an uncovered mirror at a
wake ghosts in gloom lapping in distorted faces

Each day the buildings creak closer to autumn
stains unclean growths sprayed over propped up
by hot air as swell gorges on brickwork burns
through stony roots to finally sink with crash sizzle
to baited oblivion and long dead kissed by darkness

Z.D. Dicks

Camelot

last night i dreamt of you
in a dark room
a book in one hand
and the other open, outstretched
palm turned upwards
as if you were waiting
for a small bird to land
all hollow bones
and lightweight frame
and pleasant songs

i cannot take this shape anymore
no longer can i fly
over Camelot
in a hawk's body
i have been each
of these things
in so many stories:
mistress, lover, daughter, king

i cannot run from the truth
i cannot contain my grief
when the ropes of trauma
slipped from my wrists
it was loneliness
that crept in
to bind me

the night lasts forever
and when the sun comes up
it casts a long shadow
my words are traitorous
too revealing
they damage those
i wish to protect

i have been living in
Pandora's Box
for so long
that i can no longer tell
order from chaos

i have lovers
i have those who are
in love with me
i have you
your friendship
or something like it
with this, i am
satisfied

i shall not covet
i will not mislead
nor break a sacred vow
i am
no one's wife
there may be no cage
strong enough
to hold me

it is not the age of others
that is so tragic
it is my own
this ghastly, endless youth
which has so betrayed me
my body
deceives, misleads
as much as my mind

when you are gone
i will be left with nothing
i swear, only then

will i be able to
wrap my sorrow
around myself
like a funeral shroud
and finally
fly away

Darby DeJarnette

The swans

They slowly approached us,
silently, over the black water
as we lay in each other's arms,
making love in the moonlight
upon the banks of Loch Etive,
in that place where,
to the shoulder of the hill,
there still clings some of that holly
for which it was named long ago
in the language of the Gael:

two swans, their brief curiosity
aroused by our ungainly form.
Then, satisfied, they retreated
back into the recesses of midnight
and, as if in a waking dream,
I heard them say as they departed
“we were once as you are, here,
two thousand years ago.”

Peter Clive

The Wolf Mother Speaks

I went to drink. There I found them –
strange new cubs – naked things
no fur, no tails, no claws – with hands
as if they might be men.
I brought them home and now they suck.

I am accustomed. Come close,
drink deep, take what you need
of milk and warmth of wolf
of will of wolf, so you will grow –
for this is what I give to you –
pink twins with blunted teeth
through soft warm milk –
the taste for blood.

I the wolf mother do not know
how you will live and die
but time will tell, my suckling cubs
how you were saved
by a nameless lupine mother.

Richard Westcott

Wolverine



Karolina Andreasova

The One You Feed

I remember those nights,
In the old home,
that too-small-for-us house that stood by the power stations,
So near the utility lines that mother fretted and feared, shut alone in the
bedroom we shared,
sleeping off the frequent headaches from the static hum

I can picture us and grandmother,
In the corner of the kitchen,
sitted 'round the heat of the cast-iron stove,
You or I, nursing some childhood hurt, some bee-sting injustice, or thorn-
stuck jealousy,
after another one of our pin-to-ground fights, door-slam arguments, or
silent treatments of on another
Grandmother pulling us close, up onto that sturdy lap –
even when we were getting near too big for that,
No nonsense,
she would look at us and begin to tell all those old Gluskabe tales

Her favourites began with how Gluskabe came to be,
her speech came slow, heavy as blackstrap

*Gluskabe was born in the deep mud season,
And Gluskaeb came to be, as most things come to be born into the world,
greedily, bursting through earth
after they can take no more,
beating of the rain, and the longing for breath overpowers the dangerous
weight
of a spring thaw*

*And Gluskabe was not born into the world alone, but tore out of
earth's womb
with a twin sister, Malsumis
Gluskabe took the form of humans - of order and unadorned flesh
While, Malsumis took the form of wolf - of chaos and bared fang*

And from when they first opened their eyes to each other, how they fought

*Each one out to undo the other,
They would agree on nothing, just to disagree with one another*

I remember, how there in the story, grandmother would pause,
close lips into a tight line and look at each of us in the eye,
Before opening with that next phrase we knew to heart,
*Both had equal power to do great good or great evil,
but they could do neither when working against each other*

*As they hunted on the top of a great mountain,
Malsumis shot an arrow into stone and created a deep alpine lake.
Gluskabe shot an arrow into the sky and brought forth the North Star,
But they did not look upon the beauty of the thing,
The duo, that harmony of scene*

*Each thought themselves superior to the other in the things they could
create,
Jealous, they began a tearing earth-shaking fight –
They could not see, that by the light of star, what reflected back from the
lake was Malsumis as a woman,
and Gluskabe as a wolf*

We held our breath, watching the creases on grandmother's face,
Closing our eyes as the story broke –

*Each form existed within each other,
And so as they fought, they fought first as two humans,
and then wildly as two wolves
And this wild reflection of two wolves imprinted,
became trapped in the lake, became a part of the water,
then a part of the sky and, then a part of the rain, and part of the air and
earth*

*So that slow, through the sieve of the years, these wolves came to live and
exist in us all*

I remember, that the stove's fire would crack and hiss,
And ash would float like snow and dust the worn linoleum
And mother would come in and speak

Wikuwossisol, mother, nika, Mom, it's time to put the girls to bed
Without fail each time, right before a story would end

I remember the question, begged, as we were dressed in clean but
threadbare nightgowns,
Laying head to pillow, imagining Gluskabe and Malsumis, in battle, on a
high precipice,
Our small voices peaked, *Which wolf will win?*

The answer came from outside the story, yet from the heart of its
wisdom

These wolves,
They fight within you and they fight within every other person too
It is a terrible fight,
One wolf is anger, self-pity, guilt,
The other is joy, love, hope

Which wolf will win? We would plead
The one you feed

Suzzanna Matthews

The Dragon's Song

Far over the widest forest, in the mountains' deepest cave, sang a dragon in a cage. He had been trapped by men who were now long gone from these lands. His once mighty body, as large as a sailing ship, had shrunk to the size of a horse's.

Dark and damp was his prison. Its metal bars were thicker than tree trunks and the space in between so tight a dog would struggle to pass.

Everyday the dragon would spit fire on his cage in the hopes of melting it, and everyday he would fail. So he lay down on his belly instead and sang. A melodious whistle that pierced the air and flew freely beyond the metal bars, beyond the darkness. The stone walls echoed his music back to him in a choir of a thousand voices, and he was not alone anymore.

His song meant spreading his wings and flying under the glaring sun, warmth soaking his every muscle deep to the bone. It meant fresh air and company, far away from the moist hole he was in.

Sometimes he would hear the ghost of a bird's whistle, barely a whisper slipping through the stones' cracks to reach him in his pit. And he called out to it, replied with the same soft melody, begged it to come to him.

But no matter how long and loud he sang, only the stones replied to him. No one had come by this mountain's buried cave in hundreds of years, and no one ever would.

Laetitia N.M. Beck

Predatorial

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome puts victims at a high risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, obesity, inflammation, obstructive sleep apnea, and mood disorders

Ravenous, I saw
your wolf teeth baring within
you, hungry, ready

to clamp me
shred my organs, cut my veins
grow new through my blood

you rapacious
horde of carnivores prowling
round my naked cells.

Molly Murray

Eagle's Last Flight

A very long time ago...

Long before paper, pens, papyrus, and prose- before the written word splashed onto page from the nib of a feather pen, in a time when stories were passed down by word of mouth, there lived a storyteller. In his tribe, he was the most important of men, as important as the medicine man, or the chief, for his job was to keep history flowing- the good and the bad, the life lessons, and the beautiful moments that should be remembered through generations.

The world was not always as we remember it, for in the time of our story there were only two long seasons. There was summer- when the world was bright and hot and full of all things that stimulate the five senses- beautiful smells, bright colours, birdsongs, bubbling brooks in which one could soak their feet and feel the tickle of currents and the cooling sensations, and of biting into fresh fruit and getting that taste that only the purest of soil can provide. Then, there was winter- darker, gloomier, trees bereft of their leaves, and everything much blander, much less alive.

Now, this aforementioned storyteller had only one child, a daughter. She was as beautiful a maid as ever lived. She was gentle, she was kind, and she was beloved by all. Even the wild animals worshipped her. Birds flew south to see her in the winter. Salmon traversed oceans, yet undiscovered, in an annual pilgrimage. Word of her good nature and beauty travelled the world over, for she was a perfect representation of all that was good with the world. She had human friends, but her closest friends were fox, brown bear, and eagle. They went with her everywhere, as both companions and guardians.

One summer's day, this beautiful maid was bathing in a stream all alone, when a handsome stranger happened upon her and so stunned was he by her beauty, he froze where he stood. He was embarrassed to have found her like this, but his feet refused to go back the way they had come. She looked up and saw him, their eyes met, and at that precise moment, the sun crept out from behind a cloud, bathing the two in her light. They

looked deep into each other's eyes, their souls laid bare by some magic of the sun's rays, and they knew they were destined to be together.

They each headed back to their tribe, bearing the news of their forthcoming nuptials. Our maiden's arrival and announcement were met with great joy and celebration. Unfortunately, this was not the reception her betrothed received. He was one of five boys, all sons of the chief, and all highly competitive. As he was the most loved, the handsomest, and the kindest- the others, to varying degrees, were jealous, and despised him. So it happened, in this time before the written word, but not a time before evil- for there has always been evil lurking in every corner of the world- that he returned to *some* excitement. Alas his brothers met his announcement with open hostility. As the days passed and they heard of the beauty and purity of their brother's betrothed, their hatred grew. They did not want him to have her and the two foulest of his brothers were overtaken with so much bitterness that the seed of hatred was allowed to enter their hearts, where it took hold and grew. This seed opened itself up, and infected every aspect of their lives and so consumed they became determined to show the world what their hearts were now full of.

One dark night, they rode to the tribe of the maiden, pulled her from her bed, stole her purity in every twisted way they could envisage, then left her dead- hanging beaten and bloodied in a tree.

It was fox that found her first. So distressed was fox that she lay at the foot of the tree and did not move. Brown bear was next, and though he had never particularly gotten along with fox, he wrapped himself around her to give her comfort. Eagle came and landed in the tree, wailing in despair as she lighted. The tribe came running at the blood cry of eagle, finding the pure soul destroyed and limp, swinging from the branch as if she was a giant leaf caught in a breeze.

It was the medicine man that cut her down, but not before her soulmate appeared, and fell to his knees before the tree; clenching his fists to his chest, then roaring in agony as he lifted them up to the sky.

She was buried under the tree. Bear and fox and eagle refused to leave. Eventually, her beloved was taken back with the storyteller, where

he would end up staying and making a new home for himself. Later, he even married, had children, and became the tribe's new storyteller.

After the burial- brown bear, fox, and eagle remained. Winter grew closer, yet they still would not leave. Fox was first to die, and eagle took her skin off and hung it from the tree. She did the same with brown bear, when he finally succumbed to his broken heart. Eagle used her own last bit of strength to fly up and capture a bit of sunshine, hanging it from the tree as well- then like the others, died, feathers falling into the tree and catching on the branches.

Then a beautiful thing happened. The tree erupted in colour- the red of fox, the brown of bear, the gold of eagle, and little splashes of yellow sunshine. Over time, the trees whispered the sad story of the beautiful maid and her tragic demise, and all of the trees began to display these colours at the end of summer in honour of all that is good and pure.

K.T. Slattery

High and Beyond

Once, a child came to these high ramparts. Underneath a spring moon she was led by the hand through the maple grove to the precipice. Wrapped in sable furs, her breath steamed silvery tendrils into the night.

It was here that she saw her griffin for the first time.

What she remembered most was his size. His sheer immensity. As her mentor prodded her closer, the child shivered, from the cold, yes, but also from the sight of the beast's great talons and curved beak, gold and black, glinting in the moonlight.

"Inaya," said her mentor reassuringly. "We fly these ancient beasts to protect our city from the northern hordes. We become part of their lives, for the time we have. He will be your brother. Your son. Your everything. He is yours."

Slowly, the child placed her hands upon his feathered side, tiny fingers slipping underneath to the warmth of his skin. He was trembling too, yet within, his heart beat a steady rhythm.

"You are a rider now, Inaya. And a rider you shall always be."

When she was sixteen, Inaya topped her class at graduation. Trained in all aspects of Griffinyr, she mastered offensive and defensive aerial techniques, how to fire a bow mid-flight and how to care for her bonded beast.

Their mentors let them ride free that night.

"Be back by sunrise!" they shouted.

The graduates soared south, riding summer thermals shimmering from the lands below. High and beyond they flew, outdoing each other with tricks and maneuvers, landing to rest and water by babbling creeks, plucking ripe fruits from the woods. They laughed and talked of days to come.

They flew until the sky faded yellow to gold and slipped away unto dusk.

In the still hours before dawn they returned to the precipice. There between the maples, under a strawberry moon, Inaya shared her first kiss, her lover's hands caressing her shorn scalp.

Her griffin watched from a distance. His feathers bristled yet he remained calm, his eyes locked with hers.

The war came as bronze leaves fell from the maples, the hordes sweeping south on icy winds, terrible silhouettes on a cold autumn sky. Atop their wyverns they came, the monsters shrieking their arrival, sharp claws ready to rip and rend, poison barbed tails poised to strike and slay.

Many times before had they come, jealous and hungry for all that Inaya's people had worked to achieve. The horde was larger than ever before, a swarm of hatred and darkness.

Inaya fought bravely, the bond between her beast and her so strong they now thought as one. She guided her students forth, shouting battle songs of their homeland as her silver-streaked braids danced in the wind. Battles were fought, and lives were lost, but the war was won.

Standing on the precipice, Inaya gazed teary eyed over the burned city where her lover had died. With brittle breath she whispered to herself the words of her people.

“There can be no love without sacrifice.”

Her griffin nuzzled close and she scratched his neck lovingly, turning back to see her students dwelling near their own mounts. Eyes downcast despite the victory, their hands were wrapped around their beasts' necks and wings, keeping each other safe and strong.

Inaya hasn't flown in years. She no longer mentors young riders. Her eyes can't see well anymore, and she's unsteady on her feet, but she walks proud as her daughter guides her across the frosty precipice to her griffin. The night sky is clear, pierced here and there by stars. Only a

few lights twinkle in the city below. It's late, and they shouldn't be here, but Inaya wanted to be with her old friend one last time.

"Tomorrow he will bond with his next rider," her daughter says by her ear.

Inaya shivers as the wind picks up, biting cold torn from the snow-capped peaks. With blurry eyes she sees the griffin before her, standing proudly near the edge.

She lets her wrinkled hands slip within his feathers, smiling at the familiar rhythm of his heart. With her daughter's help, she straps into the saddle, leans forward and kisses his neck.

He leaps to his feet, spreads his great feathered wings wide and shrieks in anticipation.

She leans in close, nuzzles her face alongside his, and she whispers.

"Fly."

Paul Alex Gray

Sowing Light

1

“Enough!” she cried out loud, “I’ve had enough of treading clods, breaking ploughs on flint and chalk. And growing nothing more than docks or charlock. Look at my fingers, knuckle and bone, frayed by frost and wind. And I’ve done with fishing! Arms scabbed by salt, worn thin from battling tides; my back bent by the rain’s constant hammer, casting nets for fish who slip away!

“No more!” She slammed the door, fell upon her bed and slept. Three days and nights. Neighbours tapped the windows, rattled the latch and muttered, is she ill? Or dead?

Strange dreams and visions came and went and came again, smoothed her weathered brow, softened the rigid jaw-line, danced behind her eyes. She burst awake. “To work, yes, to work, but eat first, eat.

2

She filled a leather bag, crept from her house as the sun was dipping low, strode towards the sea, unmoored the boat and set its little sail, slid away on the falling tide, unseen, or so she thought. “Stop, stop!” they cried, “you’ll drown! Come back and wait for dawn!” Stern-faced she plied the oars, broached the waters’ fret and dash, out and out, steering by the fickle stars, peering for the white-tipped curls across the shallow ground. She shipped the oars and drifted, held between dark and dark; felt for the leather bag and teased it open. She stood, swaying with the sea’s

chop and pluck, grasped handfuls,
broadcast, once, again, again until
the bag was empty, hearing the softest splash
as the sea received. The stars fell dark, the current
turned, bringing her and dawn-light home.

Men were about already busy, knotting and splicing nets.
“What did you catch last night?” “Chilled bones.”
“You took no nets or lobster pots? Why not?”
“I sowed some seeds upon the sea.”
“Of course you did, it’s spring.”
They scratched their heads and sighed,
“The fish have took her mind.”

3

Small work filled her days; and climbing up the hill
to scan where she had sown. Patience paid
though others went to search. “There’s nothing
there but waves and fish,” “Look harder then!”
she chided, “for I can see them plain from here.”
They turned away, “Best let her be.”

First night of autumn,
a glimmer out at sea, candle flicker,
growing on the wind, a ball of gathered pollen,
two, then more, twenty, found her on the hill,
nestled in her apron, lit her homeward steps.
She placed them in the corner of each room
around the hearth, filling her home
with gentlest balm of harvest-yellow-gold.

4

A child came by, stopped, gawked with widening eyes,
shouted, “Look, quick, come and look, she’s stolen
all our moon!” Shouts, retorts, “get back to bed,
you witless child!” She shouted back, “No, not until
you come and see!” Protests, murmurs, a rope

of chatter hissing through the streets, enticing
the bored, the nosey and the gossip gang
to open creaking doors, follow sceptic neighbours
and throng before the house, tongue-tied
by threads of the floating gleam.

“That witless girl was right! It can’t be lamps
of oil or candle light to give out such a glow!
She must have gone to sea, cast her nets and caught the moon!”
“How could she?” “Just look up and tell me you see moon.
And where.” Skywards they searched, craning their necks round
all the compass points, stopped and pleaded: “Give us
back our moon to light our streets and keep the running
of the tides!”

But no response,
her door stayed closed. Jostling, mutter, a finger
pointed. “You saw it first, you must go and knock
And wake her up. You ,yes, you!”

5

She pushed the door, advanced, tugged
on the sleeper’s sleeve.“Wake up, old lady, wake.”
Folds of clothes stirred, a hand uncovered twitched,
opened an eye.“What? Who? Yes? Yes? Speak!”
“They want their moon returned.”
“Then let them ask who has it.” “I. Am.Asking. You
Who.Has it.” “Me!?” “Who else?”
She stood and took the young girl’s hand
and led her to the door. “Look up yonder, look!”
“We did, it is not there, now give it back!”
“It will return, in two nights time, or three.”
“How? You fished it from the sky and took it home!
We want it there tomorrow!” “Wait, wait,
I’ll take the girl back in and I’ll explain
to her and her alone. And then I’ll see her home.”
Her eyes flashed fierce. No one moved.
“Well, if you won’t I’ll take my broom and sweep
you all away!” They turned and homeward trudged,
wondering, afraid.

“This way, child, over by the hearth. Do sit
and look about before I tell you more.
This spring I scattered seeds across the sea, seeds
which now have grown, invisible to all but not to me.
They’re taller now, higher than the steeple of the church,
thick with tangled branches, like hawthorn is,
or briar, heavy with creamy bloom.
They’ve trapped the light and spun it with the wind,
over and over, globe on globe then dusted them with pollen.
Take hold of one and feel how light.
Yet strong. The wind has cords, tougher than any rope
or hawser; these will never yield to the edge
of the sharpest blade. They grow like apples
and then, like birds, they lift and fly, searching
for darkness, for darkness is their home.”
The young girl worked the little globe, her
fingers teasing it for knots or threads. “Will it
glow forever?” “As long as there is wind and sun.
Here, I’ll take you home and this will light
our way. And two more things to tell them, so
you take careful note. Meet me on the hill at dusk
tomorrow. And tell them I have harvested the sun.”

Next day, as the sea swallowed the sun,
they gathered on the hill.
And gathered.

Frank McMahon

Waves

She waits for him, in crashing waves,
With each passing ship, she calls his name,
Her siren song, so sweet to hear,
Draws curious travellers ever near,
But it is not these men she craves,
She drowns each one beneath her waves,
And gifts their hearts into the sea,
And asks "please give him back to me."
But on the sea he disappeared,
Now salty water hides the tears,
That flow into the ocean's depths,
A promise made, but never kept.

Chloe Gorman

Miranda at the Stern

The buoyant fruit, seeded
with pearlescent faces bearing names
of extinct, pedantic gods,
dives from father's cay
in albatross form, sails puffed
in stasis, catching no current,
slapped by the wide palms of rain;
the mineral sea a mouthless
appetite, devouring islands, spitting them
back like stones.

The waves' tongues pitch and roll
the rootless boat. Fish-eyed
undines swirl, stare
at she who tore and drifted through
the veil, broke the soot-circumference
of Prospero's pentagrams, forsook
what is solid, with no place
to anchor.

L.C. Ricardo

Mr. Sandman

The sandman sits on my bedside table. He is shorter than I expected. Fatter, too. And, he isn't gold and dusty. He is black, and lumpy, like tar. And, he won't shut up.

"Let's talk about your mother," he says. His voice is small but piercing. I glare at him. He doesn't look at me. He hasn't this whole time. He looks at his own hands, turning them over and over, fascinated.

"Oh, would you shut up," I tell him, rolling over.

"What about your girlfriend in high school. The one you had for two weeks. Remember when you met her father. Remember how big his mustache was?"

I do, it was thick like a broomstick and always twitching. I always remember him on an incline for some reason. I close my eyes. There he is, above me, frowning, mustache in motion.

"Yes, that is how I remember it, too." The Sandman says to his own hands. I roll over and shove him off the bedside table. Behind him my clock says 4:03. I groan.

I lay back. The Sandman crawls up the blanket and sits on my chest. He is warm. He looks down at his smallest finger.

"What about when you wet the bed at your friend's house and you just flipped the cushions? Do you think you got away with it? Maybe you just have polite friends."

"You're the devil," I say with my eyes closed.

"No, no, I don't think so, I hope not."

I open one eye and look at The Sandman, he is looking wide eyed into a corner of my room, thinking. He looks about to cry. I sigh.

"You're not the devil, you're just, annoying."

At this, The Sandman does begin to cry. Crumbing bits of black fall off his face onto my chest. It trickles under my blanket.

"Oh, stop."

I grab The Sandman and pull him closer to me. I roll over, hugging him. He stops crying, he turns soft. I look down. My childhood teddy bear looks up at me. It has the Sandman's eyes. It smiles. I smile.

“Remember when your brother vomited on your teddy bear after they tried to drink Mother’s alcohol. And then you cried, even though you were too old to be crying over things like that.”

I pick up the sandman and hold his placid face to mine.

“Shut up,” I growl. I grab him by the neck and tuck him down the bed by my feet. He wiggles my toes, one after another.

“Remember when you thought witches were coming to grab you by your feet in the night? Even in summer you slept under a blanket because you thought it would protect you.” He giggles.

I open my eyes; my alarm is blaring. The sky out the window is gray.

Benjamin Davis

God's Breath

The wise old crone
[For by such name was she known]
Would sit and stitch and warm herself
[Trying not to cackle]
Over her perpetual flame.
How she inherited it
Is not so important – suffice to say
[Though probably by out-surviving
All the others] – she watched the blaze
And cooked on it: meat, stews, dough-balls.

The flame needed no fuel further
Than its issue of gas from the underworld.
Her people called this flare 'God's Breath'.
A conqueror came
And first he blew and then he stomped
And then his cloak extinguished all the fire
And he breathed in his holy victory and died
– Asphyxiated.

Our heroine hurled a brand into the cave
And the massive 'whumph' rattled teeth for leagues around.
The god is angry, they said. She said things would
Settle down but still, she was the only one who
Dared return: cosy, warm, constant hot water...
They brought her cresses, birds and roots,
She sent back holy wisdom.
'Lord, what fools are men', she thought.

Clive Donovan

Hologram

Scott stayed out of my dreams for a while after his death. I think he wanted to get away from me. My ex-husband always had a bad habit of leaving whenever he felt like it. He vanished into a crowd at Folklife Festival when our son was two, and I had to go to the lost child area. Nolan was crying and saying, "My daddy walked away," as I rushed forward to claim him.

I have plenty of reasons to be angry with Scott, but it doesn't make much sense to be mad at a dead person. Anger wasn't much help when he was alive. I didn't expect him to visit my subconscious, since he argued for less than five minutes when I first told him I wanted a divorce.

So, when his ghost appeared at twilight, I wasn't ready. He stood about five feet away from me, smiling, while the outlines of his body pulsated with weird, radiant light. I couldn't believe I was staring at the specter of my ex-husband. Instead of being terrified, I felt pleased. I'd never seen a ghost before, though I'd tried my hardest, especially as a child.

Scott looked delighted. It was the same expression he sometimes had on his face when Nolan was a baby. One evening we came home, opened the mailbox, and found a parcel of cassettes we'd ordered from the Columbia Record Club. The two of us had scored a couple of joints that afternoon, as well. Life was good.

Scott's usually melancholic face had broken into a huge grin. It was the happiest I'd ever seen him. Now, here, in my dream, he looked even more jovial. Why? We'd never gotten along well after the divorce, though my second husband and I worked hard to keep him in the family.

My ex had always been a hermetic, depressive sort, chain-smoking and watching television for hours. When he finally discovered Facebook, he spent much of his time on the internet, trolling right-wing sites until he finally fell asleep.

Scott was a welter of contradictions. He had a talent for gardening and grew peppers, tomatoes and sunflowers on his front porch. Seedlings sprouted from buckets and egg cartons, adding color to Scott's otherwise

drab apartment. My ex-husband's green thumb was a blessing, since it forced him to interact with neighbors whenever he stepped outside to water his garden.

Today, however, Scott seemed more than happy to leave his shell. He grinned wider, but his image shimmered and began to disintegrate. I felt a pang of alarm, then excitement, as his form came back into focus. The blurry outlines looked sharper than before.

I watched while Scott's perimeter broke apart, realigned itself, then dissolved again. Behind him, the rising sun began its work of melting the molecules of his body. Daylight radiated through a nearby, cathedral-like window and fell upon his shoulders. The incandescent panes glowed and vibrated.

I didn't have much time. I needed to speak, before he was gone forever. My words burst from my mouth, uncensored. "I love you."

The force of speech awakened me. Instantly, I sat up in bed. Sunlight pushed through the slats of my bedroom window. Halloween was only a week away, but the weather was unseasonably warm. Perhaps the veil between the living and the dead really did become thinner in late autumn.

Scott wanted my forgiveness, and I gave it to him without reservation. He was free to go to wherever souls reside when they no longer have to deal with their ailing, imperfect bodies. The agony of being human is directly tied to the limitations of physical form. We're never liberated until our cracked and leaky vessel is finally gone.

Meanwhile, I wake up every morning, glad to be trapped in my skeleton for another day. The winter sun shines through the window blinds, pressuring me to rise and be useful. I must lift my feet, unclench my hands, organize the objects in my path until they make sense.

Elsewhere in the cosmos, Scott's molecules are rearranging themselves, opening and closing, like a perpetual hologram. There are worse fates. Perhaps we'll all end up there eventually, twirling in circles on the cosmic dance floor. And nothing will ever hurt again, not even for a moment.

Leah Mueller

things can change

i don't chase the strobe-light anymore.

all i need

is lamplight instead

the soft heave and sigh

of your chest

as you read to me

from dusty books

headlights flashing past the blinds

so infrequently

that somewhere past midnight

when the words have

settled softly on the sheets

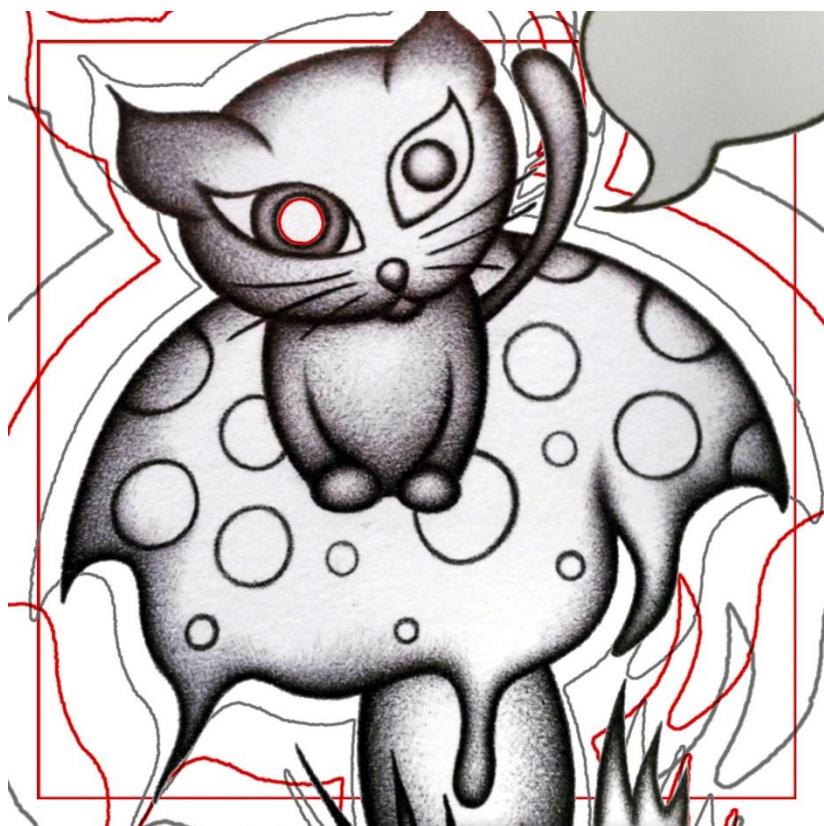
its feels

(lost in half-sleep)

somewhat extra-terrestrial

Paul Robert Mullen

Shroomcat



The Carlie Nooka Martece Collective

Biographical Notes

Writers

Eric Bryan is a freelance writer originally from Burlingame Hills, California. His work has been published in The Saturday Evening Post, The Globe and Mail, The Caterpillar, The London Magazine, and many others in North America, Ireland and the UK, Continental Europe and Australia. One of his short stories received an honourable mention from The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror anthology.

Hannah Stone has published two collections (*Lodestone*, 2016 and *Missing Miles*, 2017) and 2019 will see the publication of *Swn y Morloi* and (with Rosemary Mitchell) *Holding up Half the Sky*. She convenes the Leeds Lieder poets/composers forum and hosts Wordspace open mic. Her recent collaboration with a composer yielded the Penthos Requiem (penthos.uk).

Stephen Bone's first collection *In The Cinema* (Playdead Press) was published in 2014, followed by a pamphlet, *Plainsong* (Indigo Dreams) in 2018.

Jennifer Wilson lives in Somerset, England, with her newborn baby and full-grown husband. Her work has appeared in various online journals including Vamp Cat, Memoir Mixtapes, Molotov Cocktail and Awkward Mermaid. A full list of her published work can be found at jenniferwilsonlit.wordpress.com and she may be found on Twitter @_dead_swans

Sash Steele is a queer writer and illustrator who dabbles in prose and poetry. They also work for the indie RPG label SoulMuppet Publishing, which combines a love of the fantasy genre, roleplaying games and improv. You can keep up to date with all of Sash's projects on Twitter @heyyash and Instagram @sp1ritjam.

Julie Sampson is a widely published poet. Her poems have recently appeared in a range of magazines, including *High Window*, *Amethyst Review*, *Picaroon*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Amaryllis* and *Pulsar*. She edited *Lady Mary Chudleigh's Selected Poems*, 2009 (Shearsman) and has two poetry

collections: *Tessitura*, (Shearsman, 2014); and *It Was When It Was When It Was* (Dempsey and Windle), 2018. She was highly commended in the Geoff Stevens Memorial Poetry Prize, 2019.

Melody David is a queer British-Nigerian writer and poet from London, United Kingdom. Her journalistic contributions have been published in The Guardian. Her poetry and creative writings have appeared nowhere. She currently lives in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Cindy Veach is the author of *Gloved Against Blood* (CavanKerry Press), named a finalist for the 2018 Paterson Poetry Prize. Her poems have appeared in the *Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day*, *AGNI*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Sugar House Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Journal*, *Salamander* and elsewhere. Her long poem, *Witch Kitsch*, was selected by Marilyn Nelson for The New England Poetry Club 2018 Samuel Washington Allen Prize. She is a poetry editor for The Mom Egg Review.

Born in Hong Kong, **Claire Cox** now lives and works in Oxfordshire. She is Associate Editor for *ignitionpress*, and is currently a part-time practice-based PhD student at Royal Holloway, University of London studying poetry and disaster. She has been published in *Magma*, *Envoi*, *The Butcher's Dog* and *Lighthouse*.

Peter Roe is a performance poet, writer, film-maker, nerd and technology junkie who likes to shatter peoples misconceptions about Aspie computer geeks! His debut poetry collection 'Technology Bytes Back' is about technology meeting people and the inevitable mayhem that follows. Peter has been The Deputy Bard of Caer Dur, Runner up in Bridport Short Story Slam 2018, Finalist in the Apples and Snakes South-West Slam 2018, long listed in 'Writing Without Limits' 2017.

Siân Thomas holds a Masters degree in Creative Writing from the University of Sussex and is Poet in Residence for Ashdown Forest. Her work has appeared in various publications, including *Agenda*, *Poetry Wales*, *Swamp*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Rialto* and the anthologies *London Rivers* and *The Needlewriters*. Her first pamphlet *Ovid's Echo* is published by [Paekakariki Press](#) and her second Ashdown is due this year.

Attracta Fahy's background is Nursing/Social Care. She works as a Psychotherapist, lives in Co.Galway, and has three children. She completed her MA in Writing NUIG in 2017, and participates in Over The Edge poetry workshops. Her poems have been published in Banshee, Poetry Ireland Review, The Blue Nib, Poethhead, Coast to Coast to Coast, Orbis, Crossways, The Curlew, Picaroon, Dodging The Rain, Honest Ulsterman, Three Drops From a Cauldron, and several other journals, and magazines. She has been included in The Blue Nib Anthology, shortlisted for 2018 Over The Edge New Writer of The Year, and is a Blue Nib nominee for Pushcart. She was one of the winners in the Pamphlet series competition with Hedgehog Poetry Press, and will have her first collection published in 2019. Having grown up on a farm, Attracta is inspired by the intricate world of nature, and how it reflects in humanity. Her particular interest is in myth, symbolism and ritual.

Rickey Rivers Jr was born and raised in Alabama. He is a writer and cancer survivor. His poetry has appeared in the Ginger Collect, Vamp Cat Magazine, Royal Rose Magazine, Mojave Heart Review (among other publications) and is forthcoming in a Twist in Time Magazine, Dodging the Rain, Elephants Never (among other publications). Twitter.com/storiesyoumight [/https://storiesyoumightlike.wordpress.com/](https://storiesyoumightlike.wordpress.com/)

Janina Aza Karpinska is an Artist-Poet with an M.A. in Creative Writing & Personal Development from Sussex University, not long after which she won 1st Prize in the Cannon Poets Open Poetry Competition. Her work has appeared in several anthologies including: **Poems in the Waiting Room; Write From the Heart: Home**; and, **Pandora's Books**; and various magazines, including: *Psychopoetica*; *The Fertile Source*; *Dwell Time*, and, *The Third Way*, amongst others.

Stephanie Blythe moved from West London to West Yorkshire in 2005 and is inspired by nature and life's enigmas. She has a strong interest in music and dance and feels this gives her an ear for poetic rhythm and form. Over the last ten years she has studied poetry with the Open University, at local classes and in a writers' group, and has self-published a collection of poetry.

Katja Brown is a university student at Leeds Beckett studying English with Creative Writing. She made her first debut as a Gothic novelist back in 2016 with her book *The First Bride* and is also an active poet appearing at open mic nights and involved in a poetry society. She is 21 years old and tries to incorporate both traditional and modern techniques into her work in both poetry and prose.

Louise Murray is a lover of the short story. Originally Irish, currently living in South Korea. You can find her work in *The Ogham Stone*, *THRESHOLDS*, and *The Erotic Review*.

Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon lives in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, and writes short stories and poetry. She has been widely published in web magazines and in print anthologies. She was Highly Commended in the Blue Nib Chapbook Competition [Spring 2018], won the Hedgehog Press Poetry Competition 'Songs to Learn and Sing'. [August 2018] and was shortlisted for the Neatly Folded Paper Pamphlet Competition, Hedgehog Press [October 2018]. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Newcastle University (2017). She believes everyone's voice counts.

Anna Saunders is the author of *Communion* (Wild Conversations Press), *Struck* (Pindrop Press), *Kissing the She Bear* (Wild Conversations Press), *Burne Jones and the Fox* (Indigo Dreams) and *Ghosting for Beginners* (Indigo Dreams, 2018). Anna has had poems published in journals and anthologies, which include *Ambit*, *The North*, *New Walk Magazine*, *Amaryllis*, *Iota*, *Caduceus*, *Envoi*, *The Wenlock Anthology*, *Eyeflash*, and *The Museum of Light*. Anna is the CEO and founder of Cheltenham Poetry Festival. She has been described as 'a poet who surely can do anything' by **The North** and 'a poet of quite remarkable gifts' by **Bernard O'Donoghue**.

Z. D. Dicks is the author of *Malcontent* (Black Eye Publishing) described as 'Uncompromising, sometimes controversial, but always entertaining' by Clive Oseman and 'Evocative, atmospheric, breathing new life into the everyday' by Nicola Harrison. Z. Dicks is the CEO of Gloucestershire Poetry Society and Gloucester Poetry Festival. His work has appeared in *Ink, Sweat and Tears*. He has read at poetry events throughout the country and this Spring read at Cheltenham Poetry Festival.

Darby DeJarnette is a poet and writer of many things who currently resides in Maryland, USA. She writes more theatre criticism and press releases than anything else these days, but her heart always returns to poetry.

Peter Clive lives on the southside of Glasgow, Scotland with his wife and three children. He is a scientist working in the renewable energy sector. As well as poetry, he enjoys composing music for piano and spending time in the Isle of Lewis.

After a lifetime as an NHS doctor, **Richard Westcott** finds his poetry often suffused with medical over – or should it be under? – tones. His pamphlet *There they live much longer* came out in 2018 with warm commendations from Philip Gross and Carole Bromley

<http://www.indigodreams.co.uk/richard-westcott/4594230918>

He blogs at richardwestcottpoetry.com and he's been pleasantly surprised to win a few prizes, including the Poetry Society's Stanza competition.

Ms. **Suzzanna Matthews** currently studies Creative Writing at Trinity College in Ireland. While she considers California home, she spent a better part of her childhood in New England and Canada and has lived, studied, and traveled abroad in Latin America, Europe, the Caribbean, and Japan. She lives in Dublin, where she is working on a collection of short stories inspired by her Native American upbringing and her second-generation Irish-American family.

Laetitia N. M. Beck is an MA student in Creative Writing at Lancaster University. Born and raised in France, she arrived in the UK in 2017 for her studies. She is a novelist, but enjoys writing flash fictions and poems as well. Her favourite genre is fantasy, and she also dabbles in magic realism, myths, legends and prehistory.

Molly Murray is the Outdoor Editor of Panorama: the Journal of Intelligent Travel, and the author of Today, She Is (Wipf & Stock, 2014). Her essays, stories and poetry have been appeared in Panorama, Litro, Ruminante, The Quarterday Review, The Laurel Review, The Wayfarer, The Windhover, and many other publications; one of her poems is nominated for a 2019 Pushcart prize. She posts poetry and creative inspiration on Instagram: [@atelierbliss_](https://www.instagram.com/atelierbliss_).

K.T. Slattery was born in Memphis, Tennessee, and grew up just across the state line in Mississippi. A graduate of Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, she now lives in the West of Ireland with her husband and an ever-increasing amount of rescue pets. When she is not throwing a ball, she can be found painting, writing, or exploring the ruins of ancient Ireland.

Paul Alex Gray writes linear and interactive fiction starring sentient black holes, wayward sea monsters, curious AIs and more. His work has been published in Nature Futures, Andromeda Spaceways, PodCastle and others. Paul grew up by the beaches of Australia, then traveled the world and now lives in Canada with his wife and two children. On his adventures, Paul has been a startup founder, game designer and mentor to technology entrepreneurs. Chat with him on Twitter @paulalexgray or visit www.paulalexgray.com

Frank McMahon is a published poet on-line (Riggwelter, I am not a Silent Poet, The Poet by Day, Fly on the Wall, morphrog) and in print (The Curlew, Cannon's Mouth, Brittlestar, Persona Non Grata.); a playwright: one monologue performed at Theatre Absolute, Coventry; play performed on local radio; and a prose writer: he has written children's novel (under consideration) and several short stories, one published last year. He lives in Cirencester.

Chloe Gorman is a copywriter, aspiring poet & author. Her poetry and fiction leans towards romantic, dark and gothic themes. She has an MA in Professional Writing from Falmouth University for which she received a distinction. As yet unpublished.

L.C. Ricardo lives in north Wales with her husband and two changelings. Her interests include photography, collecting obscure saints, crochet, siarad Cymraeg, and King Arthur.

Benjamin Davis is an American living in Saint Petersburg, Russia. He is a columnist for Russia Beyond the Headlines and author of The King of FU. He is loves magical realism and often writes flash fiction drawing from Russian folklore.

Clive Donovan devotes himself full-time to poetry and has published in a wide variety of magazines including The Journal, Agenda, Acumen, Poetry Salzburg Review, Prole, Stand and The Transnational. He lives in the creative atmosphere of Totnes in Devon, U.K. often walking along the River Dart for inspiration. He has yet to make a first collection.

Leah Mueller is an indie writer and spoken word performer from Tacoma, Washington. She is the author of two chapbooks and four books. Her latest book, "Bastard of a Poet" was published by Alien Buddha Press in June 2018. Leah's work appears in Blunderbuss, The Spectacle, Outlook Springs, Mojave River Review, Drunk Monkeys, Atticus Review, Your Impossible Voice, Wolfpack Press, and other publications. She was a runner-up in the 2012 Wergle Flomp humor poetry contest.

Paul Robert Mullen is a poet, musician and sociable loner from Liverpool, U.K. He has three published poetry collections: curse this blue raincoat (2017), testimony (2018), and 35 (2018). He also enjoys paperbacks with broken spines, and all things minimalist.

www.paulrobertmullen.com

Twitter: @mushyprm35

Artists

Wendy Holborow, born in South Wales, lived in Greece for 14 years where she edited Poetry Greece. Her poetry has been published internationally and placed in competitions. She recently gained a Master's in Creative Writing at Swansea University. Collections include: *After the Silent Phone Call* (Poetry Salzburg 2015) *Work's Forward Motion* (2016) *An Italian Afternoon* (Indigo Dreams 2017) which was a Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice Winter 2017/18 and her most recent collection *Janky Tuk Tuks* (The High Window Press 2018) She started painting in 2017 and has shown her paintings in various galleries and exhibitions.

The Carlie Nooka Martece Collective are a dissociative system working as a visual artist, model and independently published writer. Their books explore social issues and mental illness using rapid-paced storytelling and brutally dark comedy. Their eclectic artwork takes the form of drawing, painting, collage, photography, digital art and video, with styles including

traditional fantasy, abstract, conceptual, and pop surrealism. They can recite pi to two thousand digits.

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, and many other magazines. His photography has been published in The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review as well as other publications.

Karolina Andreasova is a South Molton based fine artist.

Find out more on her website: www.karolina-art.co.uk

FB page Karolina.art

Instagram _karolina.art_

Previous publication credits

Not a previous publication, but the details of the original text for the visual poem 'Nightmare Bed' by Janina Aza Karpinska are: *The Three Bears*, illustrated by Rene Cloke, Ward Publications, London

