

SCRYPTIC



2.2

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Dear Readers and Contributors,

First of all, we would like to sincerely apologize for this issue being late. Both of us have been sick over the last few weeks during the finalization of 2.2. We would also like to thank everyone who submitted! This was the first issue with a two month submission period instead of three, but you guys most certainly did not disappoint! We were able to eliminate the lull in the middle of the submission period and slim down the issue, which we hope will cut down on printing costs significantly. Thus being said, the print issue will be released within the next few days. Until then, please enjoy this lovely free version!

Thank you for your continued support,
Lori and Chase, editors

The Muse has been Hanging Around



– *Blake Lavergne*

Statue of Libertine



– *Blake Lavergne*

ApocaLips



– *Blake Lavergne*

half moon
we discuss
my deficiencies

night vigil
her pulse monitor
the only star

blank wall
memorizing
every crack

– *Tia Haynes*

Nothing is Free

“Be Happy” admonishes the bumper sticker in front of me. I try. Hell as my witness, I try.

dinner party
unzipping
my pill case

Echoes

This is the last time I will hear my mother’s violin. Sold off to pay for medical bills, at least the family that has it now will play it.

end of the line
no more obligations
to cling to

– *Tia Haynes*

yielding

a slip of the tongue

there was much
i didn't know

but all bets are off
when it comes
to a honeymoon

crimson lace
no books
to help me now

– *Tia Haynes*

starless night
your hands in mine
growing colder

the shadows
darkness still brings
nightmares of childhood

autumn mist
my collar damp
with tears

the air we breathe
this dying light
of day

cold war
snowflakes freeze
into silence

– *Rachel Sutcliffe*

to thine own self . . .
a tree stands alone
in flood water

lovers
the man on acid
sees Mother Earth

a wake of buzzards
in a holding pattern —
family intervention

— *Timothy Murphy*

Gas Chamber

My life lately seems like a gas chamber,
Everything appears in different colours nowadays
My name is no longer important since I've got
A number and soon I will have a legal price tag

I thought the snow would cover the cruelty of blood suckers
Yet, I saw a broken cage in spring with blood and
Feathers of the love birds above the winter rain
With no tweets to welcome the depressed autumn

The sun shines at midnight and it looks as if the
City is on fire, with flames around my glowing path
So many times, and nobody is bright to reveal the
Sun before death starts collecting my soul

I have been blinded as I wish to go back to
The days where my sight always smiled and never
Cried for watching my old pictures of memories
With tears falling in silence of my depression

– *Ahmad Al-khatat*

KIDS AT THE DUMP

My mother was adamant.
We were forbidden to play there. It was filthy.
She rattled off all the diseases we could catch
from tetanus to polio.

But the dump was just a few blocks away.
And the junk of adults were the jewels of kids those days.
A friend of mine collected empty cigarette cartons.
He had every brand that advertised on our TV,
plus a few so foreign, we couldn't even pronounce the names.
Where else was he to find these treasures?
Or I the lumps of metal, my childhood currency?
On such a landscape of trash, we were like pecking gulls.

Not that we hadn't toys enough
but plastic cars, toy soldiers, educational games,
came down from on high.
We preferred to fetch our fun from the ground up,
in the dust and the dirt and the vermin,
the rancid smells of the decaying world.

Climbing those hills of garbage
was better than the sandbox, than the swing,
than that once a year rental place by the lake.
Where else could you find
an empty bottle with three stark X's
engraved into its side?
Or a stranger's diary
more X's, but unrequited kisses this time,
the ink running, the pages stained with rain?

Nothing there carefully selected by our parents,
guaranteed to be harmless, inoffensive.
Not that we wanted to be harmed or offended.
But if it did happen
you'd never hear it from us.

– *John Grey*

A HUNDRED YEAR OLD WOMAN SPEAKS

A child can get lost in his life
for almost a century -
a life with blue eyes,
a life with long hair,
with bird song and sky
to hold it together,
and yet, how simple it seems
to pull it apart like an orange,
to taste it in pieces,
juicy then dry -
daylight, the mountains
opening their eyes,
light speaks through
the mouth of the sun
to people equally as to stones -
it's the oblivious we all live in,
violent and senseless
as we bloom in its inner darkness,
or blow out like an unheard
tenor sax,
blonde and pink and brown
with illustrations,
believing or bluffing
the mirror, just floating really,
across time
and calling it experience,
body swaying,
bony hands scraping
across blackboards
with sharp platitudes,
like dogs full of heaven
saying good morning
and see you years from now
when there are offspring -
how many descendants can
you squeeze into a century?
what shines in the heart
that isn't glint off rails?
little boys
between the teeth of their fathers,

little girls trying to sing like
that weeping gull -
I would tell you
what in the heart
comes out in the voice,
where in the final night
is there melody enough -
night's lost in shrouds, in clouds ~
it's the one river
that really does flow
downward to that open sea —
Night lost hi clouds
like rivers that flow towards open sea
that's now oil-covered,
that kills its seabirds
as easily as it drowns the bathers -
so what is joyful,
what can run
between the colors,
what proclaims sugar sweet
and drink refreshing,
so that memory
is a glass of something
like root-beer,
tears down the sides,
thinking that's love -
a stone knocks
the bird out of the air -
that's the true price of song -
three hundred and sixty five days
huddle in one year,
a hundred years
hide under the nose of a century,
with a story full of smiles
in one hand
and the rotting dung of lies
in the other.

— *John Grey*

I can drink
a whole forty ounce bottle
before it gets warm
there are so many times
I wasn't proud of myself

reflecting on existence

a sunbeam
slices through dust motes
in the air

grown up now

my breath smells
like I remember

my father's
used to
when I was young

cloud of gnats
I feel my life
remains short

– *Gabriel Bates*

Athenaeum of the Sandman

I am simply too sad to be awake,
drowning in tears, blood and faith.
It's hard to even inhale once more,
to much ambivalence to wallow in death.
Deviant smiles devoid of simple clownery
carnivals of joyous splendor are upon me.
Colored clothes burn greedily in the fire pit;
black hooded smocks calm my Gothic spirit.
Pastures await those of incessant grazing,
perhaps I'm not lonely just a bit of the crazy.
Spellbound by the darker egotistical minds,
waking is precious; whispers at the podium.
In cadence does the heart rarely skip a beat,
our world shows so many an ethereal deceit
Chameleonic jealousy with a pout and shout;
silence my dear friend, isn't this but a dream?

– *Ken Allan Dronsfield*

Rumination on the Gallows Pole

After the hell of my last dream state
I watch the dizzying light orbs glow,
dancing all about the cell and bars as
thoughts of you rattle about my brain.
I put your mum six feet underground,
do you have a short message for her?
I'm sure I'll be meeting her very soon!
Her snarky nasal laugh that I despised
hanging clothes strewn about the place.
As you pray and hum dirges by my coffin
will you peek under the cold black drapes
grasping death's unfurled blackish hand?
I thank the preacher for his kind words.
A final meal, the walk, two quick breaths;
life ends with a quick snap of the neck,
peace at last, I'm grateful for the rope.

– *Ken Allan Dronsfield*

Fighting Dark Dangerous Thoughts

An old man wakes up
Confronting the dark dangerous thoughts
The demons of the night
That haunt his dreams
And his life

He looks out at the dawning sun
And his sleeping wife
And realizes that it will be all right

And dismisses the demons of the night
Back to their caves in his mind
And he gets up
To take the dawning day

– *Jake Cosmos Aller*

bluebell breeze
the laughter
of lost children

murder
at the halloween party
their pumpkin smiles

celtic well
we leave white pebbles
in the darkness

wild flowers fall
from her fingers
 failed abduction

– *Lucy Whitehead*

The nestling

It took a long time for anybody to notice her disappearance. She hadn't been the kind of person you took note of. Eventually, they came to check on her. A spare key borrowed from the neighbours gave them entrance, but a mountain of junk mail and bills jammed the door, which they struggled to open. Once in the small airless flat, they were taken aback by the musty odour and the deep layer of dust. Pungent heaps of washing up lay scattered about the cramped kitchen as though they had been abandoned months before, and snails had made their homes amidst the mould, leaving silvery highways between the dishes.

There was no sign of her. It was not until they came to the bedroom and heard a muffled rustling that they thought to open the wardrobe. Cheap grey office suits had been thrust aside, and between old metal clothes hangers was the pendulous form of a large brown chrysalis. Through the translucent papery case, they could just make out a shadowy shape twitching inside. Almost imperceptibly, a split appeared along one side of the shell, and, as they watched in horror, the whole structure began to open and pulse with the rhythmic beating of a large pair of velvety black wings.

dark blossoming
something scratches
underneath the skin

– *Lucy Whitehead*

Invisibles

When I started to write,
I heard their voices.
Out of the shadows
they crept slowly,
showing their faces,
telling their stories.
How long have they
been waiting?

midnight poem
someone else
holds my pen

– *Lucy Whitehead*

quick sand

people get stuck: threadbare gray corduroys worn on Friday dress-downs, family dinner at the table set with the same chipped plates, reading the same stories our parents and their parents and their parents read, the high school yearbook hairstyle decades later, the good ol' days of wax-wrapped Mary Janes and saddle shoes laced up tight. the still margins. the just because.

dandelions plucked
from summer lawns--
error routine

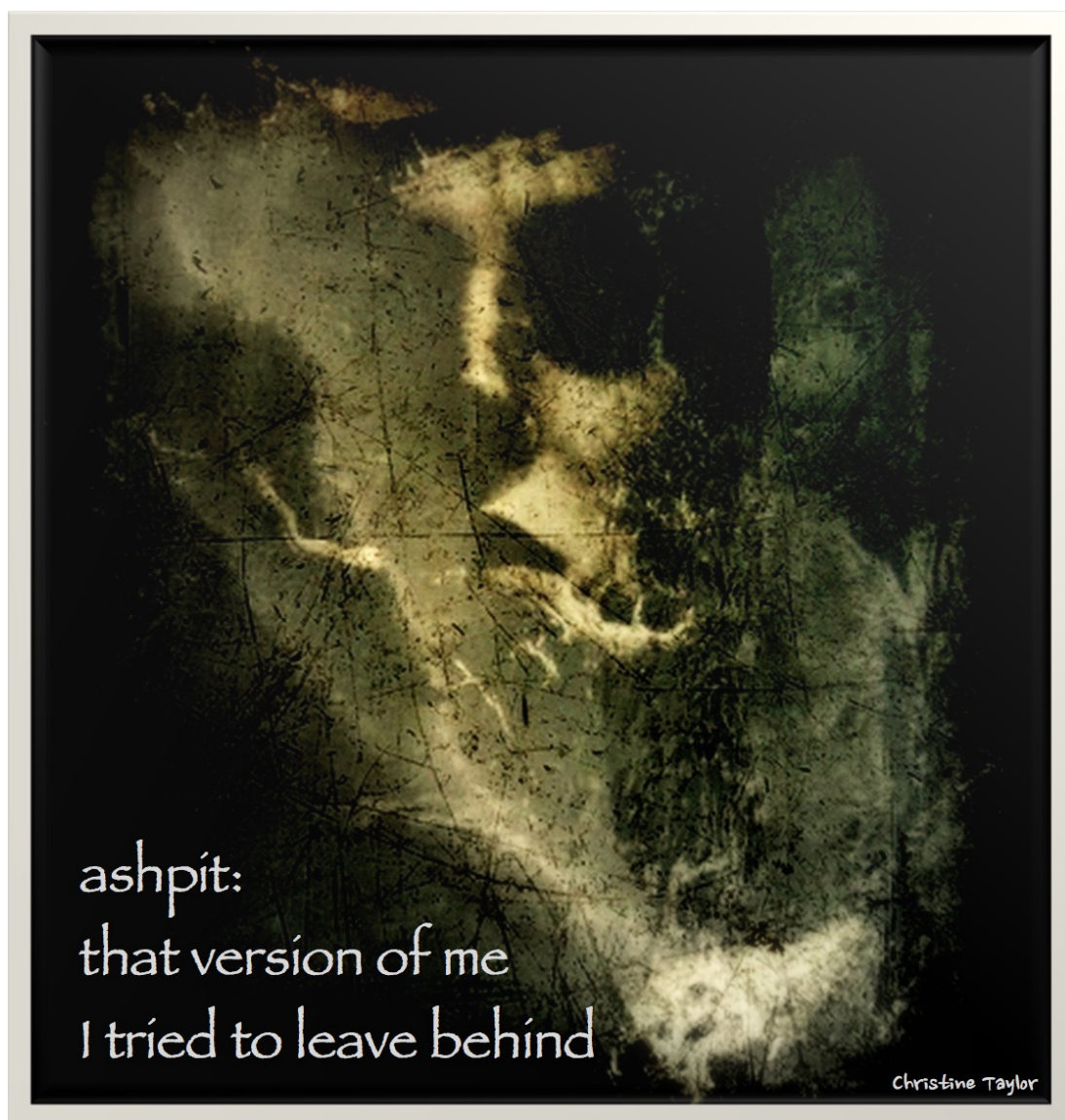
– *Christine Taylor*

Unfurl

The nerve of peonies. Returning each year in such extravagant flowering no matter how the frost has crippled the earth. Soft pink heads so full they hang heavily on stems, tease to kiss the grass. Ants scurry through the petals' delicate folds. How can I cut those blooms? Instead, roses issue from the vase, a thorn claims my blood.

white lace strewn
through a summer garden:
dispossession

– *Christine Taylor*



– Christine Taylor

The Root's Unquenchable Thirst



– *Bill Wolak*

Silk Whispering To a Spark



– *Bill Wolak*

The Wind's Destination



– *Bill Wolak*

This Could've Been...

This could've been a night of burning passion,
where love is consummated without pain.
But oh! You've got my eyes covered with that gray hanky.
A sharp rope blow smacked my thin lips;
I got french-kissed by a thousand chain hits
and romanced by cuts and bruises.
From top to bottom, you've wounded me like there's no tomorrow!
Handcuffs have been my wrists' best buddy
and shackle has been the lover of my feet.
We could've delighted in this pleasure;
we could've reached numerous merry rounds
if only...
if only you were a good and shrewd husband.
I shouldn't have tied the knot with you
if I only knew you're going to tie me in this pitiless suite.
I could've been the queen in another man's castle,
but I've chosen to be an awful slave.
I could've tasted the finest champagne,
but I've opted to drink violence with you.
I could've finished writing this plea tonight,
but you drove my face off the glass table,
and pressed that fresh cigarette butt unto my palm.
Your love is murder and your bed's a grave.

– *Irish D. Torres*

kidulthood
no box big enough
to hold all his bricks

tourniquet
tough love
--no frills

our cartoon eyeballs swing from their sockets divine the wrong key

left to rust by the works dumpsters

– *Helen Buckingham*

THE FROG PRINCE

he stepped from the bog
and stood before her naked
hair topped with algae
skin cerulean as death
scented of frog
I am Adam
I am clay

she dropped the gothic romance
voiceless as Eve
aghast at what she'd bitten into
and quaked
but if I die before I wake . . .

chill his webbed fingers yet colder his kiss
but it was she who felt frozen
till words filled her mouth
as the knowledge summered in her soul
you're the man who disappeared last year
they searched for you, but . . .

he hushed her with a grin
every tree has its shadow; I my rib
I've waited for you, watched a thousand times
come be my night swan
come float on the water with me

she took his hand
she tossed her sandals
she stepped toward the bank
her feet sank into the muck
and the water enveloped her

– *Anna Cates*

TUNDRA

my heart
is heavy with
the death of things—
frozen
with ice age chill—
wintry sheets
centuries thick—
carcasses compressed
into oily swill—
above the ooze
and mush—
decomposed and crushed—
a single mammoth tusk
protrudes . . .

Christ,
let arctic azalea
blossom on the tomb

— *Anna Cates*

H+

can a transhuman cyborg write love poems—
can a drone contemplate peace?
above the city, no color, no sound but the hum.
can a transhuman cyborg write love poems—
within the city gates, interpret omens,
carrion birds that hint at human surcease?
can a transhuman cyborg write love poems—
can a drone contemplate peace?

– *Anna Cates*

Korean spades protest ointment and everything in between' says Wednesday.

I slip a look outside. Careful not to move the lace curtains too much. Expanding chasms through guarantees and gravel, chins and even hills - maybe an eyeball or two/too lost in the red quartz of fingered labial infinity. A signed picture of Malcolm.

David Bagshaw saved us from a few fights and even beat up a few guys who fucked w/ either me or his younger brother Danny. A crocodile addresses its decision to the waiting artists. All those fuckers had it coming. They even knew it themselves. The reptile mumbles, 'bourgeois pricks' under its breath.

winter storm
the sound of an engine
floats downstream

Around sunset I took a walk. The cold front had shifted leaving behind a soft hazy sky. Spring felt like it was just around the corner. And then the maggots crashed in. Trombones torched. Bin men traded plaid for smoke.
'How's your owl, chief?'

– *Michael O'Brien*

Thumbing through a natural history book looking for the section on seahorses. His finger runs over the glossy images. He puts a yellow post-it on the top of a page before closing the tome. Looking up and over towards the window, an early spring scene. Down stairs the sound of dinner being served.

dead friend
a salmon turns my dna
into salt water

– *Michael O'Brien*

Ghost Mountain

delirious
he wanders the mountains
for days
where he encounters wild goats
and scavenging vultures

he forages
for berries and mushrooms
through the rough brush
he endures cuts and scratches
his clothes torn and tattered

a sudden chill
drives him to the warmth
of a crevice
the sun sets orange
over an emerald sea

in the morning
the cry of a seagull
awakens him—
lying asleep at his side
a full-grown grizzly

too hungry
too sick to be startled
he laughs
a laugh that echoes still
over the top of ghost mountain

– *Michael H. Lester*

Just Because, Bad Heart

Just because I am old
do not tumble me dry.
Toss me away with those unused
Wheat pennies, Buffalo nickels, and Mercury dimes
in those pickle jars in the basement.
Do not bleach my dark memories
Salvation Army my clothes
to the poor because I died.
Do not retire me leave me a factory pension
in dust to history alone.
Save my unfinished poems refuse to toss them
into the unpolished alleyways of exile rusty trash barrows
just outside my window, just because I am old.
Do not create more spare images, adverbs
or adjectives than you need to bury me with.
Do not stand over my grave, weep,
pouring a bottle of Old Crow
bourbon whiskey without asking permission
if it can go through your kidney's first.
When under stone sod I shall rise and go out
in my soft slippers in cold rain
dread no danger, pick yellow daffodils,
learn to spit up echoes of words
bow fiddle me up a northern Spring storm.
Do you bad heart, see in pine box of wood,
just because I got old.

– *Michael Lee Johnson*

Gaping



– Olivier Schopfer

hanging
from a bare branch
half-moon

darkest night
the ghosts
of my childhood

abused...
the garden
after a hailstorm

– *Olivier Schopfer*

black metal
the unknown moons
of haiku

gaps
in conversation
the shape of stillbirth

– *Jan Benson*

Back when I was lying

to my wife about my addiction, almost three
years ago now, the fir-and-metal-rimmed skyline
held reverse potential, eyes rusted with scripts.

To appear to the person I loved
as something other than myself
was like touching her open skin
with somebody else's hands.

Every intention, even if good, apparated,
dissolved. The container cranes
and concrete beams of the viaduct
reminded me they could be gone
instantly tomorrow, so they stood
half-erased, flickering.

Then the worst thing happened
and there was no more deception,
just shame, and the roots and branches
connected and blackened.

They almost left, first my wife then my daughter
with her. Being left is worse than dying
because at least they would still
love me if I died.

– *Scott Ferry*

Leave me be

Last year, my Mother fell at 3 AM and my sister, who lives with her, found her disjointed and moaning on the floor. At the hospital they discovered she had

fractured C1 and C2, meaning, she was just millimeters from dying. My sister updated me with the doctors throughout the surgery. I flew down to HB to see her in rehab,

watch her step unwillingly through curtains of pain and vicodins with a walker. She called me by my nephew's name. I did not mind. Since she has returned home, my sister

explains, the Alzheimer's has been stealing more words and lucidity from her. If my sister cannot pry her from the couch where she slowly peels away the thin geography

of her hands, she will sleep, forget to eat. My mother will repeat *leave me be, I am tired*. My sister implored the doctor to help motivate her

and the doctor replied frankly, *If that is what she wants to do, you cannot force her*. My sister calls me, tears float the phone, choking me. *Maybe he's right*.

But, Scott, we can at least try to get her to swim.
I talk to Mother, say *You love to swim, Mom!*
Yes, I know, Holden, she replies.

I just don't want to.

– Scott Ferry

If I had a ticket

to go back to when my father first believed he was worthless
could I explain to him, in a voice like the groan of an oak,
that worth is not a commodity to be bartered on by any one,
but is intrinsic? Maybe he would listen to himself:
me as a boy talking to another boy, mirrored, half
cellophane, half recorded loop. He made me, he would
have to hear how he was enough, even though adults
made him forget. They too were taught by neglect
amidst long hours working to feed more hungers.
Maybe he would stop having to yell to make sure
everyone could hear his words, repeated
because we weren't answering: mother
hiding behind a Coors, sister attempting
to be worthy for him, in spite of his mirrors,
me trying to scrape the air with salt,
erasers, shame. And the whole
neighborhood could hear,
can still hear.

– *Scott Ferry*

Neighbourhood Cleanup

We poke
through
the streets

A man heading
out to his car
points
at garbage
on his lawn

“You missed
a spot,”
he snarls

My bag collapses
My face melts

Endless sunshine
Endless garbage

– *Marshall Bood*

The spirits we knew

No one can take them
from these stones
or gray hills.
Yet, people do,
in trite anthems
and callow
claims of identity.
They move through
darkness, and
dark rooms.
The only way
to keep wing,
is to keep moving
on the wings
of a dark song.

– *Meg Smith*

A bear claw's etching

In memory of Lawrence Carradini

For Larry,
this was here,
after supper,
a walk on the shore --
long scrawls,
the true signature.
Larry long ago
summoned it,
in stirring outside the tent,
in standing between hill
and sky.
Larry in his imprint,
writes the sand into poems.
Wave begets wave,
but no history dissolves.

– *Meg Smith*

Outside the sister ring

Light commands no orbit,
but a lot of praise
ricocheting from pearls
of asteroids,
words dissipate in space.
I am too far-flung,
in any case; I find a dance
through air and time,
or simply waking.
I can only peer in
as if from a ship
dented by gravity.
In any case, I find a dance,
in moving
through circles
on a straight path.

– *Meg Smith*

Gambling My Words

I sold my book,
then I sold my heart,
and now I barter my soul
for a bag of marbles.

Jaspers, Aggies, Tigers ...
All like precious gems.
I draw my circle on the ground.
In it, the pentagram of my fate.

The lights are dim,
The room is hot.
Surely the dementor is here
to collect his prize.

Shouts and yells, and whistles
drown out all intelligible thought.
A fever pitch rising,
the stakes are high.

Sweat pouring from my brow,
I shoot my taw.
I choke on my own breath.
A moan emits from somewhere deep.
Tonight will not be mine.

He looms over the room
with fiery red eyes,
and I know my fate is sealed.
I must write another book.

– Ann Christine Tabaka

She Tucks Away Her Charms

Worry, is what she does, as
she tucks away her charms.

There is no time left between
her and the sky. They have

become one and the same.
Always asking for more, she

slips away. You search, but
will not find her. The tempo

has grown too slow. Her heart
beat echoes among the lost.

She plays with her trinkets,
then sets them aside. You

have lost her forever. Yet,
she is always right there.

The mind plays tricks on the
heart. Love is just an illusion.

One step at a time, we fall
deeper into the chasm of our

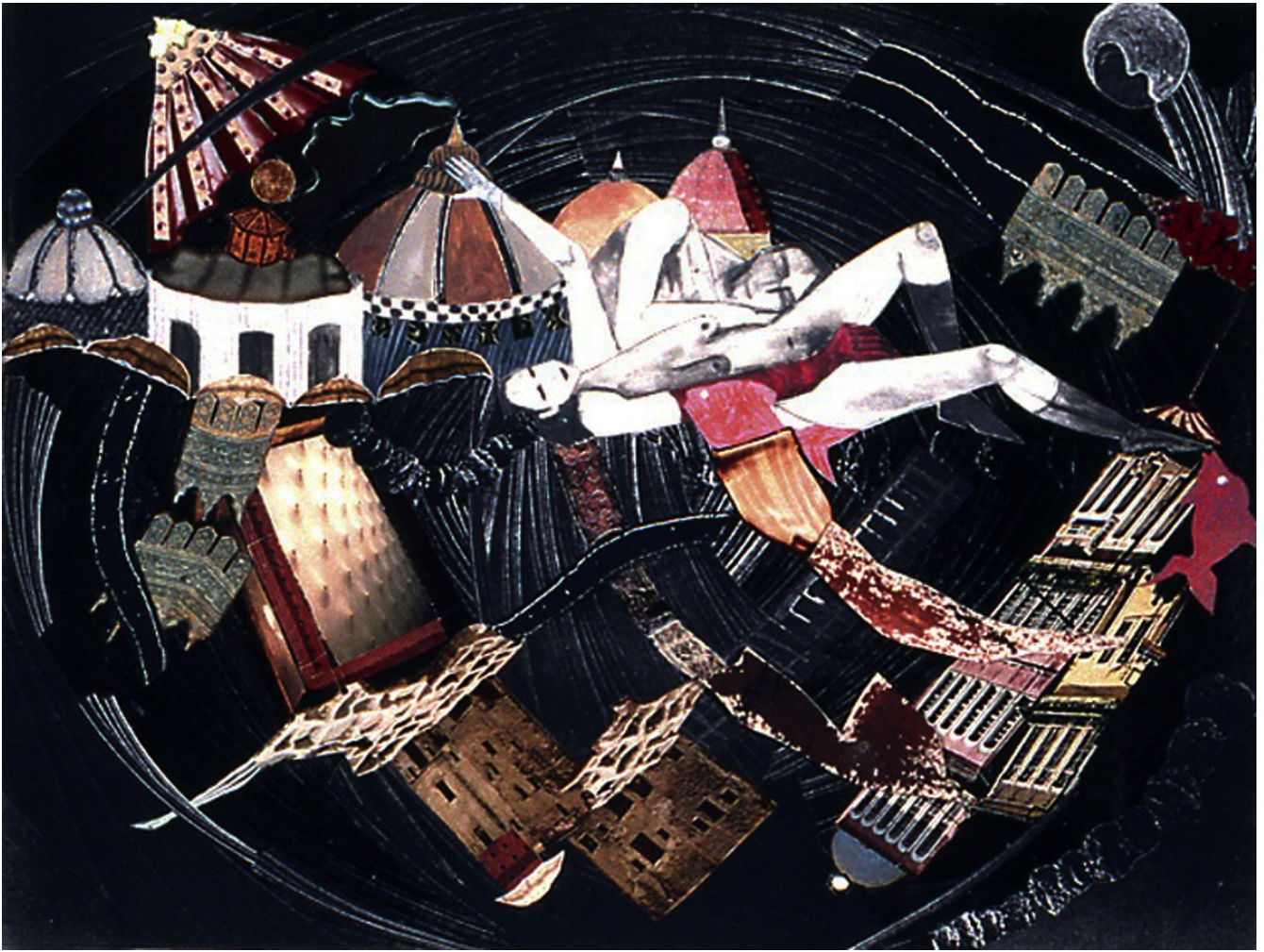
own desire. Then suddenly,
at some final outcome, we

lay all our cards on the table,
and slowly walk away. The

worry still there, she takes
out her charms once more.

– *Ann Christine Tabaka*

Aladin



– Toti O'Brien

Peripheries # 3



– Toti O'Brien

Quizás Sibilas Quizás Sombras



– Toti O'Brien

P retending
T hat childhood
S exual assault
D oesn't still haunt me

AFTERSHOCKS

the worry hours
when my mind
wanders our house
checking locks

i hold myself
rigidly in bed
and remember
everything

IN SOME NIGHTMARE AGAIN

– *Julie Bloss Kelsey*

the loneliness of one

as the contours are drawn
with the fractal compass, against
the backdrop
of a cold silver nothing

i watch the roads
that are going nowhere
in a serpentine high

an ache surges; it is the loneliest
thing to be alive. but in this
cosmic oneness,
i am also the universe
of my universe.

and i feel so home.
i am home, right here
as the perspective dissolves
like a chocolate

mixing seamlessly
with the monochrome of that stellar mist.

– *Sudeep Adhikari*

Posse

The dying sun calls them
as the pop of streetlights floods the pavement
beneath the blinking neon's song.

Tito, Tic-tac and Boo swagger,
rubber slaps the weary-blanket gloom.
Laughter edged with mischief
skids and bounces between shadows,
starlight and moonshine,
as young wolves howl

snap, snarl
flex and pump
brag and scheme.

The painted harems' shimmy
spirals muscle-bound legs
and voluptuous red lips part in heat
as razor claws stake their claim.

The pad-foot pack stalks
ghosting through shadows
with guttural growls ...

The smell of blood and brawling rouses
as the posse melts into the ink-stained night.

– *Marilyn Humbert*

the V of her legs in an empty vase

after tearing her wings: a thunder

in her childhood bed
her sick father
...darkness gathering

– *Réka Nyitrai*

Calling a Spade a Spade

there's many ways
of saying it
to avoid saying it

people mean well
your closest friends,
and you can feel it
feel embarrassed for them
because it's on the tip of their tongues

but they hold back from
mentioning the word
it's too final, too in your face,
too no going back

I hear them talking even
to one another and still
they will not use the word
as if afraid it'll visit them
before *their* time is up

instead they swaddle it,
cocoon it in layers of down
to make it sound OK –
relevant but irreverent,
sometimes even funny.

passed on, passed over, passed away
packed up, popped her clogs, hopped off,
fallen off her pins,
kicked the bucket,
snuffed it, pegged it,
shuffled off to push up daisies,
parted life, departed, deceased,
ceased to be, had it, beat it,
gone on a journey, keeled over,
gone to glory, got her call,
given up the ghost,
gone to meet her Maker

my mum

died

full stop —

it's a bad habit that we have

and then there follows all the stuff
about merciful release,
how I'll get over it and
time will heal.

Hell no!

twenty years on

I miss her sorely

— *Ingrid Baluchi*

Losing Him

dad attempts escape
from his rest home window
he sticks his fingers
in sockets and
shatters light bulbs
piddles on the floor,
forgets where his own bed is,
and jumps in others'

the nurse tut-tuts
in visiting hours,
her woes — not his,
and when we're not around
she gives him stuff
to keep him quiet,
subdue him
to a state of zombie

no smiles of greeting
no memory of who we are
just confusion,
sleep
and shuffle-shuffle
in worn-through slippers,
across from dining hall
to bedroom
day in, day out . . .
Dementia

– *Ingrid Baluchi*

A HAND OUTSTRETCHED

The man who came walking up the road frowned. With every step he took he seemed to grab at the air as if he was about to fall. Indeed red dust covered one knee of his black suit pants.

Up on the hill sat a house. The women in the kitchen could see him. They talked quietly one to another and wiped their hands on their aprons. The back screen door of the house popped. Grandma was going out. EEK! EEK! EEK! The handle of the water pump rose and fell in the yard. The old woman offered it the bucket and the pump let go into it.

The man on the road had stopped. He pulled out a handkerchief to wipe his face. Then he looked up the hill at the house made of uneven weather-blackened boards. The two watchers felt a humming in their ears as the current from his look found them. They saw an expression of desperate hope form in the wrinkles around his mouth. The mama said to the daughter, "Here he comes." Her hands held the rim of the bowl in which the dough sat swollen in pride. She hit it. "Go down."

"He's coming up."

"Go meet him, I meant."

"Umh!" She didn't.

The mama smiled, her eyes big and round. "I remember him. Five years old." She hit the dough. Thop! Thop! The dough gave up and shrank back. "His mama left him with us when she went to work. He followed us around and copied everything we did. He loved milking and churning. Bring the cloth."

The daughter was still looking out the window. The man

was halfway way up the hill. "He must be hot in that black suit." She turned and pulled the damp cloth off the chair back, went and stretched it over the bowl.

The back screen door shined open. The water bucket squeaked, then the grandma let the door pop closed. She yelled, "You saw him?"

"Ye'p."

"Coming to see us after all this time. After his far away life passed."

“He’s on the steps.”

(Tap tap tap).

Closeup of an eye.

“Let me.” The grandma walked to the door and opened it. “Well, well, well, you came back.” She unlatched the screen and he was there, high above her. She looked almost straight up, and her ears thrummed as he began seeing her in the blind dark. The mama stuck a dipper in the bucket and brought it, spilling over. He drank. She could see the taste of the water in his face, flowing, flowing.

Then all three women were talking at once till it seemed as if their mouths might drop off their faces, then something else would be there opening and closing. The grandma said, “I used to bounce you on my knee and sing Billy Boy and I was old even then.” She looked up at the man’s hair which was grey. The man’s mouth turned up at the sides. He had a long chin that pushed down into his tight shirt neck. She said, “When it got cold I would put you in my bed and Anna would heat flatirons and wrap them in linen to tuck at the foot of the bed.”

All this time the man had been speaking, answering, buzzing, and the women didn’t pay attention. He buzzed, “I remember” and the grandma didn’t pay attention. She looked up at him, so high, and said, “You remember Anna. She’s with the cows now.”

He stopped smiling. The grandma didn’t talk. Then she talked. She said, “She’s out with the cows. But she’ll come home later. When the cows do.”

There was buzzing, buzz, buzz, the man answering, but no, he wasn’t answering. The mama took the fly swatter off the nail. She went circling around the kitchen, on the hunt to find what was buzzing and kill it. She said, “It’s a lot of them.”

Lines of sorrow appeared in the man’s forehead. He buzzed, “Anna was old even then. Old Anna.”

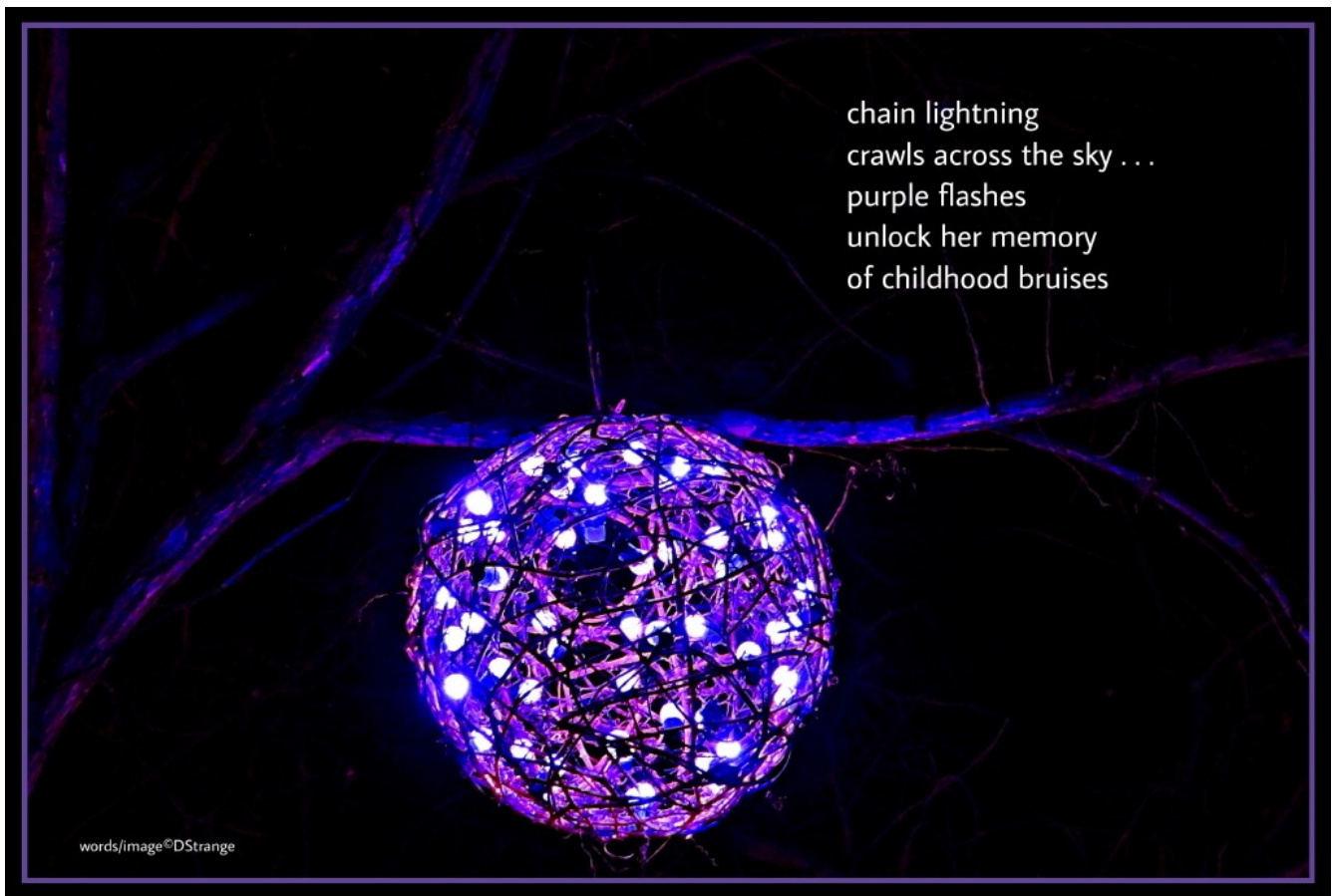
The grandma said, “But strong as an ox. You remember she sang to the cows so pretty.”

The man smiled, remembering. He buzzed, “It’s been such a long life. Such a long one.” He listened to the three women talk as he hadn’t heard them in all the years when he’d been far away in the city made of steel. Hunger came over him. He walked over to the bread bowl and thought of the words, give, receive. He thought of a hand outstretched. Give. Receive. He looked down at the bowl and the damp cloth seemed to breathe. Nearer. Farther. The bread inside was plotting. Soon, soon.

He smiled and turned to the window but didn't go there. He was afraid. Why? The grandma came and looked up at him. "Yes go to the window and look out for Anna." He looked down at the grandma. She said, "You're scared to death." She took his hand and led him to the window and he looked out of it, down the hill where he saw the circular road. There was a tree hiding part of it. He closed his eyes so as not to see who might walk out from behind the tree, who might be walking along the road now, unable to find a house, unable to get off the road, coming again and again to the tree. Behind him in the kitchen the mama's bare feet stomped around the table. The mama said, "They're like accordions, little accordions."

The daughter said, "I'll dance, then."

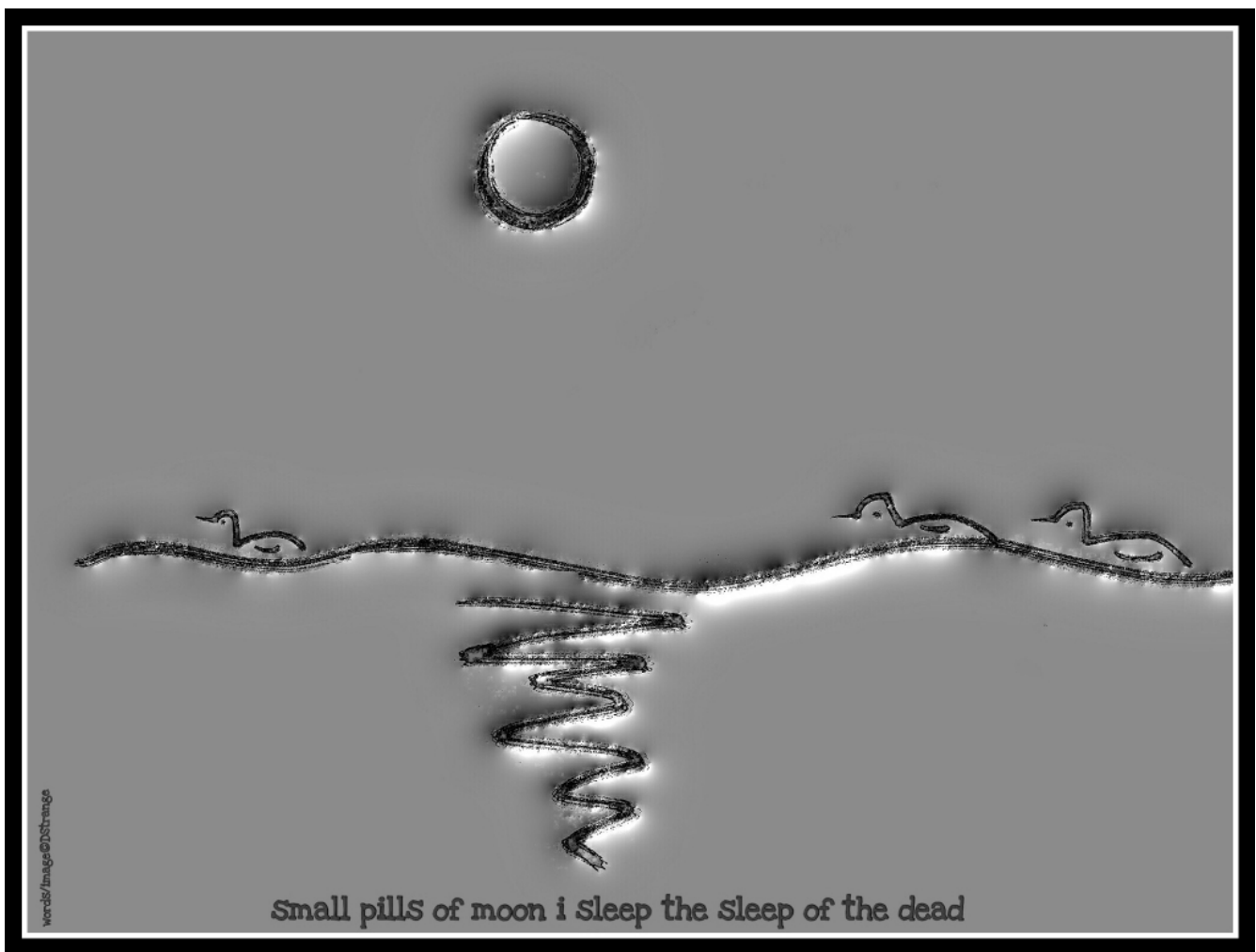
– *Richard Wayne Horton*



chain lightning
crawls across the sky . . .
purple flashes
unlock her memory
of childhood bruises

words/image©DStrange

– *Debbie Strange*



– Debbie Strange



winds of change I take refuge inside myself

words/image © Debbie Strange

– Debbie Strange

Tsunami, December 26th 2004

(in the memory of the victims in Machilipatnam)

Tides and tremors write history
breaks the heart of the earth
into a natural graveyard along

the shore strands many,
who wait for death,
watch like a great audience

a hungry circle of land
gape open its mouth
wag tongues of flame

crunch scores of corpses
into a smouldering pile of ash
building a tomb of history

dogs stalk a naked babe of hope
that picks bread crumbs among ruins
to feed the future hope.

"Open your eyes please!
I'm here with you dear,
nothing will happen",

the boatman slaps his dying wife
shrieks mad, presses belly
to vomit the water and aerates

running random for help
fainting on her dead body
ending a tale of love

night falls silently in varied forms –
dogs eat a human corpse,
ravens drag away the intestines,

rats pickup bones to
preserve as hard memories, and
ants lick off its traces to build hills.

Can a thousand poems
or a million tears
or a million more sighs

undo the tragic loss,
bring back the departed souls,
pacify the elemental wrath?

Even a Santiago couldn't have
fought back this holocaust but
rewritten "man is made for defeat."

All the doctorates of seismology
and doctrines of technology
couldn't forecast this catastrophe

but animals could flee
to a safer place before
we could feel the tremors

What's man Tsunami
before your overnight judgement
of his dismal destiny?

Listen those helpless cries
reverberating along the ravages.
The waves still threaten

Come again saintly mother
from the city of palaces
kindle a divine lamp of hope.

In the twilight of the year
the enraged sea extended its steps
in a catastrophic dance,

leaving behind
only the skeletons
on the sands of time.

– *Sreekanth Kopuri*

Parting

The river parts
but the old sands are still wet

thoughts recede to you
like a lost butterfly

life unleafs into bone boles
birdless deflowered and leafless

still a lonely fruit hangs
like a last hope

the aging stone of life's eye
parching in this desert of sandstorms
waits for the return of an eternal monsoon.

– *Sreekanth Kopuri*

Communion

Dark ants swarm around
the bread of my home,
its hands start to paralyze
looking down the earth where
the bones and ashes
wait for a reunion.

A wind
that has always been here
from my birth
ruffles the nest
of our questions, that
twitter off in vain
in their last flight.

In this tree of sublime silences
death holds the earth
for a purpose
in which we bury our lost faces
to understand.

– *Sreekanth Kopuri*

horror chamber ensemble

bugaboomwhacker

conchimera

ghoulute

jabberwockenspiel

ogrecorder

pianorc

sitargus

succubushakers

violindworm

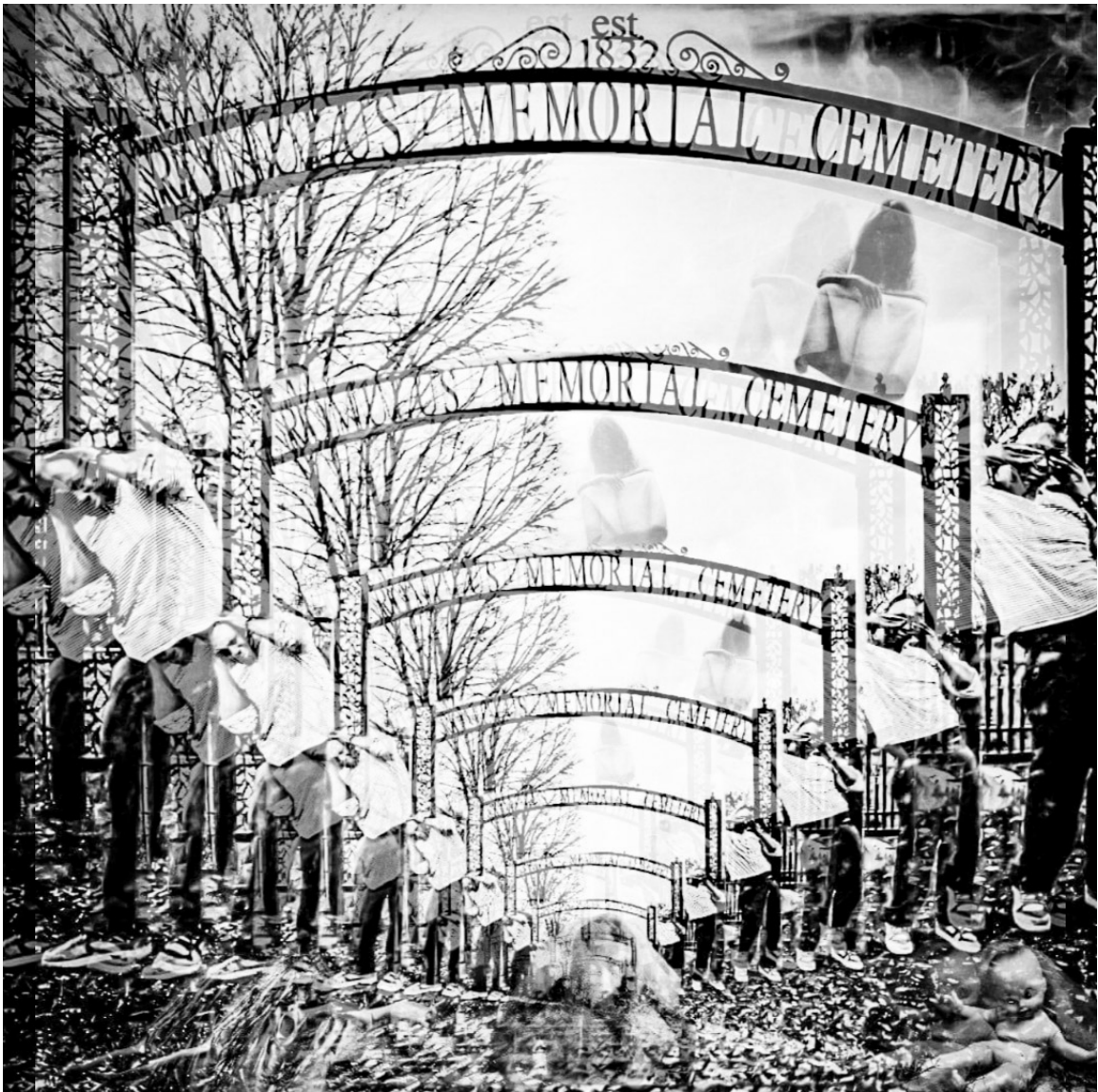
zitherinyes

– *LeRoy Gorman*

daytime
she crawls into bed
and dreams of the dark

hospital if only a window would open

– *Elizabeth Crocket*



– Jesse James aka Djinni



– *Jesse James aka Djinni*



– Jesse James aka Djinni

Serious

I am down at the pool
while the missus is in gambling.
Two ladies with many liver spots sit down on the sun chairs
beside me and start acting like young girls
even though they are both
in their late fifties. *I just can't settle down,*
says the first one, *I'm not ready yet.*
The second one is dating a guy named Don.
He is ten years older than her, which seems
quite the issue for these couple of spring chickens.
No point in introducing him to the family
if it's not serious, the second one says.
The first one agrees. It has to be serious.
The side of the hotel is one big advertisement
for the Blue Man Group.
Their creepy giant heads peering down
into everything.
Pulling my black Unabomber ball cap
down over my face, I close my eyes.
The music piped in is all from the eighties
and very bad. But the sun feels good over the skin.
Especially after such a long winter. Some children
start play fighting in the pool, but that seems nothing
too serious either.

– Ryan Quinn Flanagan

Beyond Breath Mints

The only thing worse than suffering
is fake suffering. Those many tired cries for attention.
Once you have suffered unimaginably, you can tell
those that have from those that have not. If you meet
them in person it will be written on their face. In their
stooped posture and the sustained muted way they
carry themselves. But a face-to-face is not necessary.
The words are a dead giveaway. And the ideas behind those words.
If something dies inside you there is this rancid smell behind everything
else you do. It stays with you, consumes you whole. If the smell
is not there, the suffering was never there. Simple as that.
Those that have truly suffered reek of an honest death
that no amount of breath mints can hide.

– *Ryan Quinn Flanagan*

Factory Direct

Some crazy shot Warhol
so we had to open our own
soup cans.

And I give him credit.
He always knew the hospital
would kill him
and it did.

Intuition is a powerful monkey.
Even if you're from Pittsburgh.

I guess that Blow Job movie
made them really mad.

But that is the chance you take
with your art.

Everyone's a critic.
And some of them
are armed.

– *Ryan Quinn Flanagan*

Rock Bottom



– Chase Gagnon

The Wendigo



– *Lori A Minor*

Book Review

In *deer heart* by Stephen Toft, the poet explores his own darkness intertwined with the world around him. The brevity of this chapbook isn't what makes it an easy read, it's the flow and unity of the poems. There are a few pieces that especially caught my eye, such as a few that hint at the church and religion, but left me with the question who is the church? Is it nature, the poet, or a literal church? My interpretation is that the narrator finds serenity and salvation in the darkest parts of simply what *is*. I must admit that my favorite haiku in *deer heart* is

crows on a branch the suicide note writes itself

I just love this one. It makes for such a strong, poignant visual as crows symbolize death. I feel as if the narrator has gotten everything in line that he needs to, as if the suicide is premeditated. He knows it has been coming for awhile and most likely the people in his life has as well, thus the suicide letter basically writes itself.

Deer heart is original and hauntingly serene. It will make you question life, death, and everything in between. I will absolutely return to this collection time and time again when I'm questioning my own darkness and anytime I need to see light at the end of the tunnel.

Deer heart by Stephen Toft is a free to read ebook published by yavanika press. Follow the link below to download and read it for yourself!

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/21d2c2_d365c439370649008a51445119cbcbe1.pdf

– Lori A Minor, co-editor of Scryptic