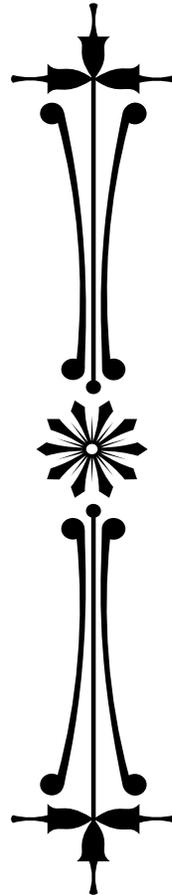


Sage Cigarettes Magazine
Yule 2019

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Dear Readers,

This holiday season was a rough one for the magazine. We lost a little piece of ourselves, a little steam, a tiny bit of the momentum that was getting us through. But like the plants that lay dormant under heavy hills of winter snow, only to pop up as pretty as ever once springtime descends, we persevere.

2019 was a dream come true for us here at Sage Cigarettes. We are tiny, but we are also mighty. We came onto the literary scene with bright eyes and even brighter hope, but it was you, the readers and creators, who gave us the spark of life. We couldn't be any more grateful for what this has become!

From the very bottom of our hearts, we wish you the very best of holidays, and a happy new year! May 2020 be everything that you desire and more.

XX The Sage Cigarettes Team

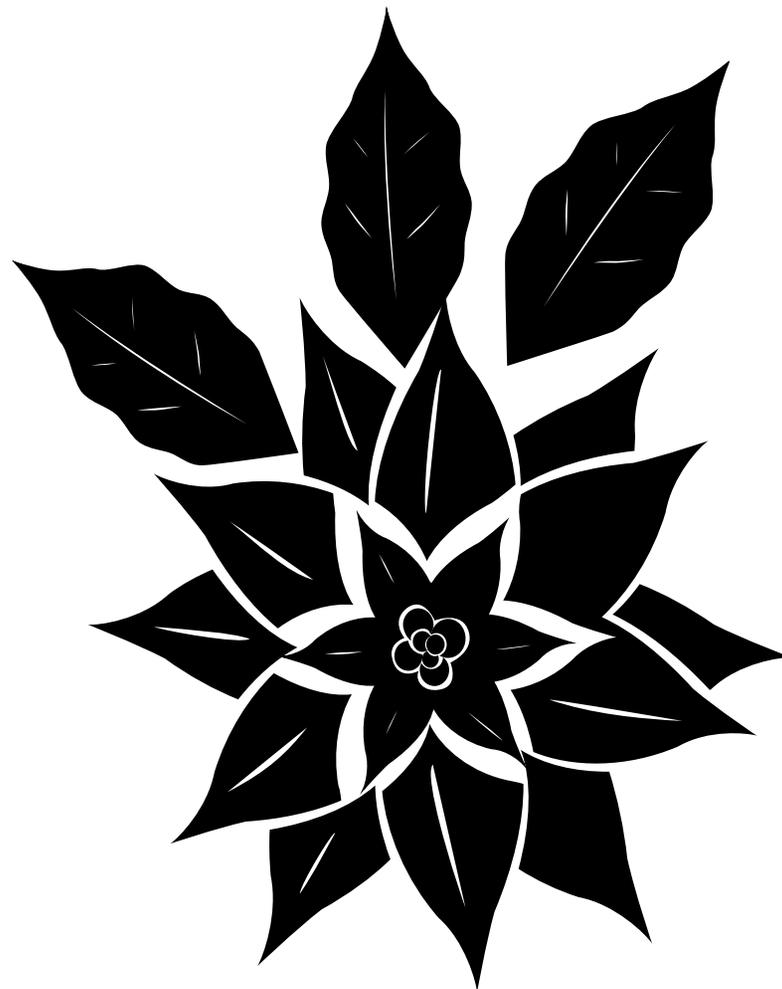
psyche

The queen of ruins,
wrote her own death,
on the day he left,
her falling tears turned red.
black ravens and silver crowns,
she danced with the devil in hell,
I can tell,
you've never felt death's cold kiss.
why is it that wine burns like holy water on your lips?
white and red and red and white.
pale hearts feasting on skinny love
like rats on poison.
and spiders on their lovers.
the divine source of light lies buried deep within the secret whispers of
the forest,
next to the fallen demon who used to be a god.
he tore his beating heart out of his chest,
because he couldn't forget
his lost loves and the painful destruction love had left.
he heard her scream as he wrote with blood
"forgive me, my queen. loving you isn't enough."



male narcissism

Hideous hearts,
broken parts of torn apart pieces
forged from
dying hopes and fleeing loves,
cutting and hurting and burning her skin,
drops of red on white.
why did you pluck the rose?
why did you tear its petals off?
it never had a chance to blossom.
it never got a chance to kiss winter's stone cold heart.
as the mother of monsters walks through fallen snow
the king of the castle peacefully sleeps in her arms.
she tries so hard to keep him safe from harm,
but his draining thirst
is the only thing that keeps his soul alive,
so mother feeds him blood straight from her heart-
loving him is violence.



airport goodbyes

things that are lost,
things that once were.
does it matter?
does it matter when the darkness comes?
does it matter when the world burns brighter
than any star's flame and grey ashes
cover the sky?
can we rise?
out of dark vastness.
are we strong enough?
to ever live through meaninglessness.
when I left, you cried
and with every tear you spilled,
a piece of my heart died.
I have lost you
before I could even lose myself
and it pains me because I never knew what I
was like
but I knew you
and your love-
now, you're gone, I'm gone.
it is all nothing but a fever dream.
so, does it matter?
does anything really matter when I am trapped
in this place behind the stars?
I can see you dancing on rays of moonlight,
slowly I reach out my hand
-jupiter rises in the morning light-
you're too far away from me.
ashes, carry my world to him.
as I burn bright
I whisper your name.

ashes, carry my love
my goodbyes
and my sorrows,
for I am free as fire kisses my skin.
the moon turns red,
earth forgets about him in a sky of black.
beautifully broken hearts
pile up,
trying to wake up a new world
without us.
does anything matter before if it all turns to
dust?
the only thing that ever lasts is death.
kiss me goodbye one last time,
look into my eyes and tell me you love me.
so that the universe is at its place,
until your grasp loosens and your hand slides
away
-I never wanted to let you go-
tall walls protecting our worlds collapse and
bury all that was and will be.
so, does anything matter?
or is it just the falling dust in my lungs as I take
my last breath
that makes everything seem so clear?
if you see the falling star tonight,
think of me.
think of me.



Lazy Holidays

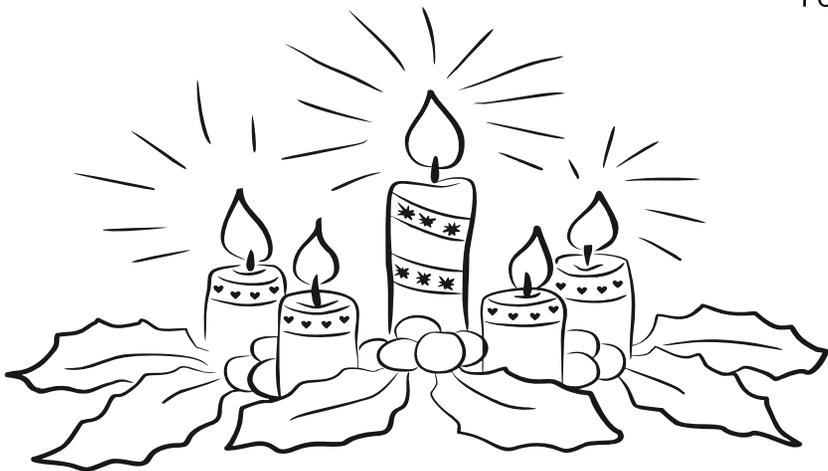
Demeanor close and edgy
Or it goes loco, you know
Unbridled as a rabid cow
The conduction of quarrels
Before vanishing
Into next years holidays.

Have a Look

Defied blandly
Balancing
Joy and sorrow
Absconding
With the lost
Returning remorse
For another glance.

Bondage

Threatens, taunts
And shouts
Grumbling
Up the gang plank
Changing one predicament
For another
Cutting it slow
Down by the gulch.



Turin Fog

The rain dripped; drip, drip, drip. The sound distracted me from watching a movie on TV, Tinker Sailor Soldier Spy, laying on the sofa, in my socked feet dangling over an arm rest. My partner and I, engaged in intermittent chats about moles in the murky world of the espionage, and betrayals on this dark evening's rain.

"Who do you think is the mole?" he asked.

"Hard to tell, really," I responded. "The narrative is too convoluted. Le Carre, is one of those few writers who knows how to create atmospheric novels, drawing them out of a stream-of-consciousness mind for perfect cinematic effect."

"This movie has nothing to do with stream-of-consciousness."

"Not a stream-of-consciousness? What would you call this continuous switch between distant past and present, then?"

"A hard narrative, but not that," he declared.

"Oh! You can be so stubborn."

A veil of silence fell in the room, like graveyard shift. The movie grabbed all our attention, to the effect that we pretended to be like perfect strangers in a theatre, sitting in a hall, not communicating. We couldn't continue, not without descending to vulgar disagreements. The rains lashed straight through my mind. The dark space between us, and the dreary world of the movies, seemed aligned, existing in a parallel string world.

Time is of the essence, the backward and the forward motion of the narrative. Back in time, it had rained another night like this. I sat on a bench in an alley in Turin, holding an umbrella upright under a sallow street lamp post. Someone bumped into me. I, a Russian spy. This stranger looked at my eyes, and I invited him under my umbrella. We walked towards a cafe. That was our den, but the man didn't know that I was a spy. We shared my bed upstairs. At midnight, he said he wanted to leave.

"Go? The night isn't even over, yet?" I said.

"Ah! My love, I still must go," he answered.

“But why? We’re just getting started.”

“Are we?” he asked.

“Aren’t we?” I asked. “What?”

His stun-gun silenced me, but I wasn’t quite dead, yet. I saw him disappear in the rain-fog. Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy had also come to an end. The mole was killed, but the story in my head hadn’t quite finished. The man who stunned me, walked away into the rain. I realize that he was a spy too. He had his orders to kill me, but he stunned me instead. As he walked in the rain, without an umbrella, he decided to take shelter. Another man passed by and handed him a parcel. He opened it. There were some instructions, along with a plane ticket for Budapest. He waited for the rain abate. At this hour, there were no taxis. It was a long walk to his hotel. He entered his room and as soon as he closed the door, he knew he wasn’t alone. He turned around and he saw me. He didn’t startle, but smiled. I smiled too.

“That stun worked,” I said.

He said, “Well you need a make-over, now. I confirmed with my agency that you were dead. They’ve given me another assignment for Budapest, now.”

My partner turned off the TV. This spy who came in the rain, didn’t kill me, because he was my Russian colleague. He knew I was a mole the entire time, leaking information to the enemy. He did the same. All part of the game. The Russians wanted me dead, that I knew. But I never expected he too was a double agent.

I cut my hair short, and coloured it black in the hotel bathroom. I put a Turkish dress on and a head scarf to cover my hair. Then we left the hotel, and began making our way to Hungary. There was an assembly of world leaders. He sent me to assassinate the Russian representative.

“To kill a Russian?” I asked.

“Yes, only then can we defect to the USA. You’re dead to the Russians, anyway. They’ll never suspect you as the killer.”

In Budapest, I stood by a window with the target in my crosshairs. This was a meeting on gun-ban. A shot came out of my gun. The target fell, but I was hit too. Who leaked this? Why?

I saw the killer. It was him.

I was seeing crows in the Budapest summer’s skies. I blanked.





Same Page

Depression held me in its brawny grip. Dizzy spells pinned me to bed like dried butterflies on a collector's board. Passing in and out of reverie, I was in a waking sleep. Not sure how much of it was dream and how much a reality. Then I saw my friend in my bedroom.

He said, "I'm leaving."

"Aren't you supposed to be in hospital? Why are you in my bedroom at midnight?"

Like a spectre, he disappeared. I tried to get some sleep after that. But I kept on thinking of his illuminated shape in the dark. He looked perfectly healthy, and he smiled like a man of thirty. He was like this dream I had once about my father who had passed away some years now. It was a very strange dream.

I had dream't that I was trying to lock these two sliding, security doors. But I couldn't. I gave up and walked back. I sat down on a sofa in the well-lit living-room. Just when I saw them, they stood outside the two doors. A coal tar of dark night, splattered across the space. The two men were standing here. At the entrance of one door my father stood. He had two suitcases with him. He smiled and waited for my invitation to enter. He put his two suitcases down by his side on the ground. Too excited to see him, I smiled back. I rose from the sofa, to greet him. Just when I saw the other. This one was a stranger. Perhaps my father's companion, he also stood with his two suitcases at the door. His smiles were not as cordial as my father's. They were playful and tentative, hovered on his lips. My father looked stalky and slender in his long white shirt and white trousers. His companion, short and chubby. He wore an off-white shirt and long pants.

My father looked full-blooded, tight and fit, a young man in his early thirties; the stranger, also in his youth. Had they come over to visit to me? Perhaps, he and his companions were passing through; they dropped by. They wanted to come in. But I didn't invite them in. I stood resolutely rooted to the ground in the middle of the bright room, waiting to see what happened next. They waited, out in the dark, if I offered them food and drink. They must have been knackered with exhaustion. They needed a rest. But I didn't offer them any. I didn't move; neither did they. They kept smiling and looking at me; two suitcases by the side. Were they time traveling? Why? He looked exactly my age. My father was a citizen of a parallel universe. He had to be. Same with the companion; they may have accidentally slipped through a netted time rip. I felt ashamed of my behaviour that I didn't invite them. They teetered at a brink of seamless fantasy and reality. Yes, my father was in my space. He looked exactly the same age as me. The doors were open, but they didn't force enter. Because they had become outsiders.

The next morning, I decided to pay a visit to my friend at the hospital. There was a strong wind. It whistled a dirge, as it swept the dry leaves of spring. I walked against the gust to get there. I had to find out that he was okay. In the hospital building, I walked towards his cabin, I had the strangest premonition, "What if he actually was in my room, last night." As I came closer to his room, I saw him in bed from a distance. He had just turned over on his bed, facing me. He smiled as though he expected me. I lifted my arm and waved. He kept on looking at me in a really strange way. When I was finally at his bed side, he tried to sit. I helped him.

"Well, how are ye?"

"I'm back in my bed now, That's a relief."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I saw my own body sleeping in this bed, last night."

“Really? How is that possible?”

“Believe it or not, I was up there, hanging by the ceiling. I saw my whole life from there. It was as though I was in a fast moving train. And through the carriage window I could see myself, crawling, walking, schooling and now sleeping in this bed.”

“Now that is very strange. Because, I saw you too, in my bedroom last night. You looked healthy, youthful, full of life.”

“You did?”

“Yes, I did.”

“On that train, I also saw you, playing as children, getting old, decrepit. Life went so fast, in a flash.”

“I don’t really know what happened. Were you hallucinating?” I asked.

“The nurses said so. And then at one stage, I saw the white light, beckoning me to follow it.”

“What happened after that?”

“I nearly went after it. But the next moment, I was awake. Right here in bed. I saw nurses and doctors pouring over me. They told me I was clinically dead for a few minutes.”

“Clinically dead? What does that even mean? Either one is dead or not dead.”

“It means that I’d died for a few minutes.”

“Your soul or chemistry, whatever it is, was outside this vessel, that we call a body,” I said.

He nodded. And then the penny dropped for me. Human consciousness could survive outside the body, and roam freely. Last night, an episode had occurred in the hospital, in this very room, but I saw him in my bedroom, a long way from the hospital.

“What now?” I asked.

“Let’s go for a walk,” he suggested.

“In this gusty wind?”

We both looked out through the hospital window. Wavering winds blew in a clear blue sky. The nurses in white walked through the corridors. White walls.

“Are we still here?” I asked.

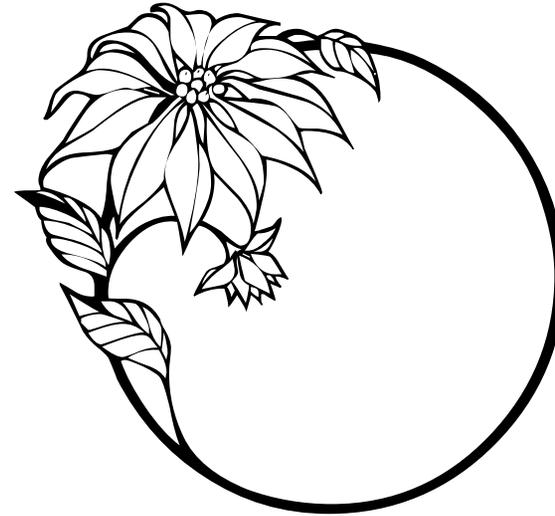
“Ephemera,” he replied.





On Pause

I'm back outside with my cigarette
My lighter which I've just noticed sports a pause button
Two damning lines
How prudent
A stop on my life
My generation moving slowly
Stepping forward unsure
A cigarette with a drink
A stolen kiss in the dark
Where neither of you can see each other
Small affordable joys in a life of expense and debt
A legal high, can you imagine?
Conditions of absolute reality have their weight on people.



Holy Rollin'

The penultimate act of rebellion
A combination of sweet tabaco
And sour diesel
The ink smudges on my fingers
Of the words that determined my childhood
Told me how to think and act and feel
now burn in my lungs.

“Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

America

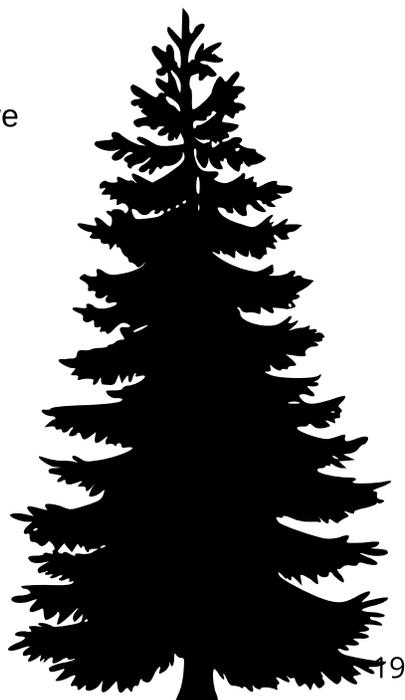
I pour a cup of coffee
 In a suburb built on top
 of an unmarked grave

I drive to work
 Memorials for the trail of tears
 A small blue plaque on top of a post
 Barely bigger than a playing card

I open the store
 A van packed with workers
 Come in speaking their
 Native language quietly
 They cover their faces before they leave

I sit with the weight
 of our nations crimes
 behind me
 With the evidence
 Staring me in the face
 Everyday

I pour a cup of coffee

**America 2.**

I pour a cup of coffee
 Watching the news
 Remembering my prom
 night

As the music played
 I looked around and
 thought
 How easy it would be
 To shoot into a room full
 of kids

They songs they played
 About our future
 Thumping and loud
 I listened
 And wondered if
 Gunshots would be
 louder

I contemplated
 How hard it would be
 To run away in high
 heels

I wore a black dress
 Black is easier to hide in
 And I could always
 Reuse it
 For the funeral

I pour a cup of coffee
 Watching the children
 Who didn't make it

We write about these
 problems
 Knowing no amount
 Of art or death
 Will never
 Solve them
 Because
 There's not a lot of
 money
 in either of those
 For those involved

WINTER AND CONSTRUCTION

the cold numbs –
 the heat sedates –
 the clouds chastise –
 the sky berates –
 the moon – loathes –
 the sun hates.
 the heat – warns –
 the cold daunts –
 the light blinds –
 the shadow haunts –
 the wantless needs –
 the needless wants.
 the cold muffles –
 the heat's call –
 the time is short –
 the orders tall –
 no time to waste –
 no time to stall –
 time's captives –
 held in thrall –
 scratching in dirt –
 on a hurtling ball –
 leaves, loves, & lives all fall –
 am I a fool –
 to love it all – ?



20

Rale

There is a train that slides across
 The straightedge horizon
 A field over from one side of a house I sleep in
 Eclipsing a hot-iron sunset
 Severing the earth from the sky

Sometimes the martyred wheel loose a single snipped shriek
 as it passes

And the cows stand up
 But by then it's gone

Every night it grazes the field (not like a cow)
 And like a cow it lows into the black air
 And drifts the evening with a bouquet of bells

I would like to say that I imagine the lives of those aboard
 Like a writer should, giving them little names
 And little lives and picturing them in their mires
 Stuck to each other and to the train like a flypaper

Instead, I imagine the train is unpeopled wholly
 That the electric lights are on an automatic circuit
 That every carriage is an empty husk
 A bone scraped clean of marrow
 And the engine bellows forward untended

Hour and a Half from

The sun is low, and getting lower. It does that sometimes, I think.

It is hanging on the end of the branch, through perspective or magic,

A single blinding fig.

A blinding—

A single, blinding plum.

A—

What does a plum tree actually look like?

I am keeping my fingertip on the return ticket in my pocket,

Something to tie me to the real world I have taken leave of,

To remind me that I am an outsider here, that nature is just a dream.

That the real world is square and shimmering and I own a small but respectable part of it.

The sun is yellow, I think, and soon it will be red.

I think away from figs to things that exist, that you can see, like traffic lights.

I think to my middle-school driving instructor—

That means slow down!

And my type-A father—

That means speed up or you'll miss it!

I now know what the sun is.

Fuck figs.

The cloud of starlings

(herd flock murder probably flock)

Is reeling and swooping across the screen of the sky

In the improbable geometries of a roller coaster car.

My venereal nouns lost forever or at least until I no longer need them,

My history returns. Well, relatively. Some colonial eccentric who liked Shakespeare.

The underside of each starling is white, like a star,

Or like the smog from an industrial smokestack that is producing a condensable vapor.

Swoop.

Wheel!

(Your souvenir photograph is on sale at the booth.)

21 The top of each starling is black, like the space between stars,

Or like the smog from a smokestack that is producing actual smoke.

As the herd of starlings swoops about, they flip back-to-front, in one continuous wave.

The clattering flap display of the arrivals board at the train station.

A minuscule electronic nudge, and

Flutterflutterflutterflutterfluttercrack

All the times are updated to the sound of the autumn wind disturbing the skeleton branches

Or is that backward?

No, the trees don't make the wind.

?

I compare a number on my wrist with a number in my pocket

And see that they are favorably compatible

Then drop the train ticket and pick it up and drop it again and take off my mittens.

My hands are city hands.

And I am not sure that they will not pass through these country columns

I mean trees

Like a ghost

Or like real things pass through a ghost.

Can two ghosts—?

Two ghost-like birds ambush the branch that is holding up the sun

One makes a sound that it learned from a car alarm

And the traffic light has fallen from its cantilever beam.

It is suspended halfway between pavement and fig (?) branch

And red.

STOP.

And dad—

Well at least check to see if anyone's around first.

Nobody is around.

First.

And the sky is turning colors that I can't compare to anything at all.

Slingshot Ghost

The words “Tragedy Ends Pigeon Hunt” jumped from the screen of Matt’s tablet. My hands gripped its smooth, rounded edges. The faded 1969 newspaper article glowed gray on the screen of the sleek piece of technology. Tommy Downs’ small eyes looked out from sloped eyebrows. His lips were upturned slightly, as though he was about to smile when the photographer snapped the photo. Did he smile in the seconds following? I wondered. Did he know what awaited him on the roof of the abandoned Savannah house?

I handed the tablet to the person beside me. When it had made its way back to our tour guide, Matt said, “Would you like to see where Tommy died? We can go look at the spike that he landed on.” He said this in a laid back way, as if he was asking whether or not we’d like to grab a drink of water at the nearest water fountain.

I swallowed, phlegm sour on my tongue from dinner’s barbecue. Maybe I shouldn’t go look at the site of the nine-year-old boy’s impalement. Maybe some ghost stories are meant to remain fuzzy and ephemeral. Before I could take a step forward to follow the others, shooting pains in my stomach sent my hands to my knees. White, misshapen stars flitted before my eyeline before everything went dark. A tangy, earthy scent floated to my nostrils, as my temples, neck, and armpits perspired. My cheeks and throat buzzed with heat. Would I lose consciousness? Would my vision return?

“I can’t see,” I called out to my friend, Jess. “I can’t see anything.”

A moment later, someone grabbed my right arm and led me forward. “Let’s go sit down,” Jess said. Both her voice and hands were steady. My feet shuffled along the concrete ground as we walked, the moist flesh sliding in my leather sandals, creating a light suction sound.

With both hands, Jess guided me to a seated position. Cold metal pressed into my back. I leaned into it, inviting the coolness to my clammy skin. I tried to push the stabbing pains in my stomach to the periphery of my consciousness, placing all of my energy into willing my sight to return. I stared forward, my eyelids pulled wide.

For what seemed like hours, my friend and I sat there in stillness and silence until the white stars began to pop in front of me and the pain in my stomach lessened to a small knot. Suddenly, the William-Mercer house appeared before me, an apparition of red brick, columns, and filigree. I inhaled the fresh fragrance of flowers and dew. Then I tilted my head back to look at the roof where Tommy Downs fell to his death. A small white figure stood there, a slingshot in hand. He began to waver, his body convulsing as he moved closer to the edge. I looked away before he toppled over, already knowing how the story would end.

Telesthesia

The woman in the black veil stands in the corner, still and statuesque, as they set up the room. Lace cloth hugs the round table, candles of various heights and widths in bronze holders, their wicks dancing, casting quivering shadows, a ouija board and planchette placed at one end. Her wrist flicks every few seconds as she jumbles the crystals in her grip.

She takes her seat, and with a nod tells the others to join her. She lays the crystals in front of her without a sound. Her hands hover above the planchette before placing her fingers on the wood. Her voice is muffled under the veil, the siblings catching the slurp of an s or the pop of a p. They look at each other, the red veins of their eyes exposed. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, the sister says. Maybe we should ask her to stop.

"Madame, could we stop?" the brother says. "Please, can we stop?"

A low growl echoes around the room, piercing their flesh. Goose pimples explode along their arms, legs, and necks. The siblings ask each other where the noise is coming from. "I think it's coming from her," the sister says as the candles snuff out, coating everything in darkness.

*

Lacey follows her brother's lead, fitting the lace cloth to the round table, placing and lighting the candles of various heights and widths in bronze holders, and laying the ouija board at one end. The woman in the black veil stands in the corner behind her brother, still and ominous like a ghoul from a scary movie. Lacey's eyes narrow, trying to see past the veil to the woman beneath it. She wonders if this is a good idea after all.

The woman in black takes her seat, and nods to tell Lacey and Todd to join her at the table. Lacey watched her lay down the crystals she'd been jerking in her hand like Yahztee pieces. The woman hovers her hands above the heart shaped piece of wood on top of the ouija board. When her fingers touch the wood, she begins to speak, a sharp buzzing filling the room.

Lacey's eyes meet her brother's. She wants to tell him that she doesn't need to know where the power came from. That if Mother and Uncle Tomas didn't tell them maybe that meant they didn't have it. And if they did, maybe it was better to leave it in the shadows. Instead of all that, she says, Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, without uttering a word. Maybe we should ask her to stop.

Okay, he responds telepathically. He clears the phlegm in his throat and says out loud, "Madame, could we stop?" When she continues as though he hasn't spoken, he says, "Please, can we stop?"

A low growl echoes around the room, piercing their flesh. Goose pimples explode along their arms, legs, and necks. The siblings ask each other where the noise is coming from. "I think it's coming from her," the sister says as the candles snuff out, coating everything in darkness.

*

The woman in the black veil stands in the corner, still and statuesque, as they set up the room. She watches them place the lace cloth on the table, then candles of various heights and widths in bronze holders, and finally a ouija board and planchette. Her wrist flicks every few seconds as she jumbles the crystals in her grip. She waits for it. A glimmer from her crystals, a faint rush of whispering.

When it happens, she moves to the table, taking her seat. The woman in black nods to tell the siblings to join her. She lays the crystals in front of her without a sound. They shine onyx. Her hands hover above the planchette before placing her fingers on the wood. She watches the twins through the mesh of her veil. Then she begins to chant. She knows her voice is muffled under the veil; she doesn't want them to hear what she's saying. Creases flex around her eyes as she watches them look at each other, panicked.

The hue of her crystals lightens to a deep purple. She imagines what the siblings are saying to one another. What have we gotten ourselves into? We should stop. Tell her to stop. No, you tell her to stop. She wonders if they are worried about their secret being discovered. They should be. That kind of knowledge in the wrong hands, in her hands, is dangerous to them, like it was to their mother and uncle. She ignores the brother's pleas to stop. They should have been wiser. Didn't they know twins have been sought after for centuries? The hunger for their magic is insatiable. It drives seekers to all kinds of trickery, even impersonating a spiritualist to help them communicate with deceased loved ones. Anything to harness their powers.

The crystals are almost ready. The woman in the black veil lowers her jaw, and as mimicked during repeated viewings of *The Grudge*, lets out a low, feral growl. The twins' bodies ripple in fear. The crystals are pale purple now. Almost there, the woman in black tells herself. "I think it's coming from her," the sister says. The woman blows through her veil silently, snuffing the candles out, coating everything in darkness. Just like she practiced.

The twins don't speak a word out loud, yet she can hear every exchange. She can tap into their power now. The woman grins in triumph behind her veil. The crystals shine a bright white.

Me

She didn't have a name, at least not a real one anyway. Avenger of Evil was what the shop owner, a witch named Zelima, called her. It sounded made up though. Like it was folklore. So she called herself Me. It made more sense than Avenger of Evil. Everyday she heard those in the shop saying me this and me that. But what about me? Why did this happen to me? So, she thought, what about me?

She gazed out from her black button eyes. They shined in the light, reflecting those passing by. She thought it was morning from the lack of shadows in the room; whatever time it was there was a lot of commotion in the shop. It sounded like how outside did during one of the city's many festivals. Mardi Gras was by far the worst. It was like explosives going off in her ears for eternity, even though she didn't have any. Ears, that is. Her body was made of wax and stuffed with Spanish moss and magical herbs: cinnamon, dill, ginger, and mugwort. Or so the witch had said.

Me didn't know when she came into existence, when Zelima had made her, but she knew she was here now and she wasn't exactly happy about it. And not just because of the current raucous. The witch poked and prodded her, stuffed and then emptied her only to do it again before sewing her back together. Zelima did it as though it was nothing. As though it didn't hurt Me.

The truth was it did hurt. Me might not have a heart and lungs and intestines of her own, but that didn't mean she didn't feel pain. Every pin was a hot sting, like she was being set on fire repeatedly; the witch had burned her many times, and she remembered the wax of her body blackening, an acrid, earthy musk floating into the air.

A hush fell through the shop and the group walked over to the table Me was on. Zelima stood closest to her and leaned down. Me noticed a gold needle in the witch's hand and locks of gray curly hair. She wanted to scream when the witch began to sew the hair into the top of her head. Of course she had no mouth to do so.

It felt like a spark igniting.

"It's time," Zelima said. She looked at Me's button eyes, oblivious to the presence that existed behind them. "Are you ready my little Avenger of Evil?"

"No, I'm not," she said, but, as usual, no one was listening.

There was a beat before Zelima began to chant a spell that sealed the fate of the doll to her target. A young woman opposite of the witch whispered to the girl next to her, "I can't believe she thought she could cross Zelima."²⁶

Me didn't know who she was, but the doll was used to not knowing things. Maybe She was the person's name.

The girl responded, "I know. Helping him after what he did to Zelima was suicide."

They looked young to Me; their faces were smooth and lineless. They both had their hair pulled back in colorful turbans. The patterns on the head wraps were mesmerizing to Me, and she tried to concentrate on them, hoping they would distract her from the impending pain.

"Taking her amulet? Definite suicide," the one across from Zelima said.

The girl next to her nodded and pursed her lips.

"That's enough, girls," said a woman with a raspy voice. It came from the direction of Me's feet, but was out of her sightline.

Zelima continued to cast her spell, the words undulating effortlessly from her lips like a series of waves, ignoring the women around her and their gossiping. After a minute, she said, "It's finished. Now for the fun part." She turned away from the table for a moment and when she turned back she had a small dish in her hands. She passed it to her right and instructed each woman to take one.

Me didn't have to see inside the dish to know what it contained--shiny, silver steel pins with prickly points.

When the dish made its way back to Zelima and she took a pin in her hand, the other women raised their hands, the needle pressed between their thumbs and pointer fingers. The shop lights reflected off the slender tools.

The shop owner stood luminous and monstrous above Me. She had her long black braids pulled into a giant bun on top of her head. She wore a black cotton dress with a thick gold necklace that looked like a collar around her throat and tear drop shaped earrings that were twice the size of her eyes. "When you're ready, ladies," Zelima said, her voice smooth like velvet with a hint of spice and mischief.

Dozens of pins sliced into the doll. Me focused her black button eyes on the girls' colorful turbans. Some of the pins were jammed deep inside and left there, while others were ripped out and inserted again. Me could hear She howling and could feel the woman's body twitching, convulsing with each stab, a wounded beast in the wild left to die. Me heard She whine and grunt, felt her seize and contort, and envisioned dozens of tiny pinpricks of blood covering her body as though She was tangled in a rose bush, the thorns spiking her flesh.

The wicked enchantment wouldn't kill her, but the marks would remain for several days. Zelima cackled at the thought. Me wept for the She and for herself, but no tears slid from her button eyes. She screamed when the girls with the head wraps--a particularly cruel pair--dove their pins into her stuffed insides and then twisted them deeper, right and then left. They were splintering She and Me, inside out. The holes gouged in their flesh would remain open for the rest of the day, blood and pus oozing from the one, herbs and moss the other.

"That's enough for today," Zelima said.

"Thank god," Me whispered, unnoticed by the group. She heard She's breathless howling and felt her leaking, trembling body wind tightly into a ball.

At once the women yanked the pins from Me's body. It felt as though her guts were being ripped out.

"Thank you for coming," Zelima continued. "We'll do another session tomorrow."

Me began to sob. She couldn't take another round of this. Me didn't know if she could survive it. If She could.

The doll lay there raw and exposed, utterly forgotten, as the women said their goodbyes and left the shop. She counted the flecks of dirt and water damage on the ceiling, waiting for her creator to close up for the day. Me didn't know how she was going to do it, but she would find a way to escape. She wasn't going to be the Avenger of Evil any longer.





The First Lady, The Songbird

Jane sits in the driver's seat of her Mercedes-Benz with a kerchief tied under her chin in a knot with a bow, and a cigarette stuck into a slim cigarette holder between her index and middle fingers. She takes that boat of a car around narrow corners towards and then past Hope Street, out a few blocks, to where the good antiquing is. She brings life and love in little tchotchkes back home when she arrives, and sure the wallet is a little light, and sure she spent more than she had promised to, but look darling, just look at this old wind-up soldier, isn't he precious, won't our little Richard love it? She builds a home from other people's memories and breathes into them new life, so that they become her own. Her family's. Besides, she was never home too late to cook a brisket or kugel, so what does he have to complain about?

#

Jane sits on her wicker chair at the little round kitchen table and looks through the window at the viridescent songbirds sitting on feeders that hang from the branches of her carefully groomed trees. Four buxus hedges surround a fountain with a naked child sculpture and koi fish in its basin. The red bricks that pave the courtyard are overgrown with moss. A squirrel climbs a tree and hops onto a feeder, scattering the birds and getting it only with its front paws, so its back ones flail up, looking for solid ground. Jane taps on the glass until it goes away. Her Persian cat lying at her feet mews. Her grandchildren are in the next room, a great big connected dining room and sitting room with space between for tall potted banana palms and children to sit and play with wind-up toys like their parents once did. If they were older they might put them on a shelf to be seen, or else sell them to someone who would, but because they are children they know better. Jane plays card games with her daughter. Some times, most times, she wins.

#

Jane sits upright in an adjustable bed watching the television. They've moved her from the house into an apartment, and then from the apartment into this room, both times taking away her things and bringing back only what could fit. There are paintings on the walls and photographs of people she doesn't recognize. She asks sometimes about a wind-up soldier, but the staff doesn't know what to say. A songbird lands on the window ledge outside and Jane watches it. Someone has brought an orchid and set it on the windowsill. The bird looks at it through the window, and hops forward, its beak bouncing off the glass. It tries again, then flits around nervously and flies off. It cannot understand what separates it from what it can see so clearly.

Deception

Traces of lace cover walkways.
 Snow so white it almost blinds us.
 You came with a spectacular glow.
 I became awed by this splendor.

Everyone was so captivated
 by your charm, wit, words.
 We wondered if the sun rose
 and fell under that magic.

Pure white snow turns gray
 from exhaust fumes.
 Hardening on roadsides, icy
 frost plunge cars into ditches.

Deceived by your wicked smile
 and simmering blue eyes.
 Tricked by razzmatazz. Only mud
 and freezing rain lies underneath.

Some thought the fault was mine.
 How could this have happened?
 There must be something else.
 Something I have hidden away.

Caught in claw of memories now,
 regretting the trust given to you.
 But I will never be betrayed again
 even if hell freezes over.



Winter Solstice

Hurry, short days are here,
 too much to do.
 Get ready, find gloves,
 hats, scarves, sweaters.

Stopping to see the
 shape of a snowflake.

Coming home to luxuriate
 in dim light listening
 to heat hissing and finding
 warmth from hot teas.

Bundled in bed comforted by
 mounds of blankets, books.

Finally succumbing to
 our northern goddess,
 whose black nights are long
 and silent as evergreens.

The Day I Broke Billy

The day I broke Billy,
the stadium (well, athletics track)
was cool, windless.

The 800 meters final.

Young William was my rival.

Nerves, muscles and tendons attenuated,
we gathered at the starting line.

The gun cracked

—I led, felt good.

The tartan flew beneath my feet.

Bill tracked my every step. I could
feel his determination.

His father had perched himself on the fence
at the end of lap one,
where Bill had planned
to make a drawn-out finishing kick.

(I knew his tactics of old.)

A bloke in a long grey coat rang the bell.

Bill's dad let out a rousing yell,

"C'mon, Billy!"

I still felt strong, upped the pace,
while Bill let out a guttural cry
"I c-c-c-can't!"
in response to his father's call.

That was all I needed.

I sped, unchallenged, to the finish line,
then turned and watched those in my wake.

Bill lolloped like a busted tire

into second place,

on that special day in the Under Elevens
when I shattered him like a meringue.



4 Carrington Street

In Aunt W's house – you could almost hear the wallpaper fading

In Aunt W's house – you could almost hear the faded wallpaper peeling off the wall

In Aunt W's house – the interior was dull, as musty as an attic

In Aunt W's house, unceasingly,
the smell of menthol cigarettes
wafted from her bedroom



Hieronymus Bosch's *The Conjuror* (c. 1502)

In Bosch's *The Conjuror*,
a rich merchant stares stupidly
at a magician performing a simple trick
while the magician's accomplice
picks the merchant's pocket ...

Fools abound in every era,
asking, crying out
to be taken for a ride.

Queen Bitch

You come looking for me, sweaty hands in pockets,
bare feet against hard gravel, hard flesh against
soft man.

You come with your large hands and full hair and the body I've
come to love.

There's a knock on my door, it's you, and a bullet swooshes past
my ear.

There is a trembling here
that you have induced.

I hope you have not forgotten
the inevitable things?

I told you
there will be no tongue-dropping-on-the-marble in this event,
no honour-threatening lust,
no milk bodies, no throats raised in anticipation, ready to sing,
none of that.

Only me, the giant, and the cat.

So straighten your face already and throw in one smile. Or two.
Or as many as your honour can allow you to falsify, without the
threat
of it falling apart.

Did you think your red lips, miles away, were enough?

Here's what I'll have:

I'll have the money and the gifts and the man on his knees,
please.

I'll have silence, and something to scratch my thighs with.

I'll have hair on my throat. Your compliance when I say so.

I'll have strange clothes in the wardrobe, have
extra toothbrushes and towels and leashes.

There are many things that I want; I am
a most greedy bitch

but you'll love it anyway, you'll love all of this,
since you already love me.



The Saviour

What do you do
in a dark room closing in on you,
a dark room with spiked walls?
All this knowledge could undo us. And yet
what is the point of a story
if there is no one to tell it?

There's no real freedom unless we can all talk about how we touch ourselves in the dark
to the sound of our enemies' screams.

And here, we have the sun
burning sinners and hypocrites alike.
And here, we have the fair-haired god metamorphosing into a tyrant.

So who will step out first? Who loves the fire so much that they do not fear it?

Your god refuses to be a fair judge. What sort of judge teaches the law
only to a few chosen people?

Gives the greater burden of evading tempting sins to a selected, unfortunate some?

But in spite of all this I love you. I love you despite your wrongness and the false soberness in your body.

But you don't love me with my darkness and this is how several wars in the past were born.





Dearly Beloved . . .

You've been sitting in the hospital next to your husband of forty-eight years who had a stroke followed by a massive heart attack. You call your children, Lucas, Joshua, Michaela and tell them you don't know how much longer he has, and they all tell you to call when you find out. Your girlfriend comes to the IC and spells you so you can go to the adjacent room and shower. Your husband, Murray the CPA, tries to talk. You grab his hand and notice that only the left side of his face is moving—the right side is frozen. Murray tries his hardest to talk and slowly Gertrude gets it word by word and it's an apology for an affair he had one time with your cleaning lady, Rosalie, some thirty-five years ago. Gert thinks that's the most exciting and interesting thing he's ever told her. Once Murray spills out the last part of his apology he stops talking. You lean over and whisper in his ear; "I've been fucking the Rabbi and your brother for years." Soon Murry passes and you check your make-up, pop a Lifesaver, and call the kids as the hospital staff flits about.

Back at your house alone with hours to come before the children start arriving you field some condolence calls and call the Rabbi to set up the funeral. It'll be in three days in the morning and he asks if you want a full week of Shiva and you tell him that Marty wanted to keep it to only a day or two. You order the deli from Costco and take the phone off the hook after receiving four condolence calls in a row and spend forty-five minutes gathering the important documents: a copy of their dual will, all of the check books, three years of income tax returns, and the box of gold he's been collecting from his patients teeth when fixing old fillings. You put the phone back on the hook and call a few of your closest friends. You weep and sound heartbroken. The TV is on mute with closed captions in the background.

The kids arrive and stay at the Holiday Inn instead of in their old rooms. They go out for breakfast and show up after ten and you hustle them along because you must pick out a casket. You tell everyone you want the burled walnut, but Marty wanted a plain pine box. You send Michaela and Joshua home to write the obituary and tell them you'll check it out to see if it needs any additions. You go with the Lucas to the cemetery and inspect the pre-paid grave site and then you go to the Temple to give the Rabbi some tidbits of Murry's life and tell him you'll send the others over. All agree that they shouldn't miss lunch so they decide on the Crab Shack and have lobster rolls in honor of Murry's favorite dish.

The kids all congregate at the house and the Brotherhood and Sisterhood send over Chinese food for a private family dinner. Since they know Murray and Gertrude so well they do the ordering so as not to bother the family. That night they feast on pork spareribs, chicken broccoli, shrimp three flavors, Moo Shoo chicken, Mongolian Beef, Pork and vegetable fried dumplings, a Poo Poo Platter, and fried rice all ways.

They open the bar and take out the Crown Royal and Cherry Heering. Gertrude asks for the Knob Creek Bourbon. They leave the mess for the maid to clean up in the morning and retire to the library where they sit around and talk. Gertrude okays the obit but adds a couple of items. They decide on the pall bearers and talk about which of the kids will do the eulogy. No one volunteers so they write names on sheets from a rainbow pad and toss them in Murry's golf hat and draw a name. Michaela gets the honor. Gertrude gives the boys a list of relatives to call tonight and one neighbor who'll spread the word and of course the Temple will email the congregation.

The next day family and out-of-town-friends begin arriving and food is delivered or dropped off by friends and organizations Murray and Gertrude belong to. While Joshua covers the mirrors, and takes the cushions off four chairs, the Rabbi pins on the mourning ribbons and slits them. Joshua reaches up and rips his sport coat pocket so its dangling. He's the closest person to "observant" in this family group. Gertrude sits and directs her friends where to put the food and paper plates with the plastic utensils. Every once in a while she lets out a cry or a moan and a girlfriend rushes to her side and takes her hand and whispers platitudes to her.

In the morning the kids drive over to the house and their mother's all dressed up in a new black dress ("I knew it was coming so I wanted to do Murry proud"). Joshua takes a pitcher of water and a soup tureen and places them on the front steps for the mourners who come back to the house to wash their hands off. He returns with the good paper napkins and a wastepaper basket.

It's 8:30 p.m. and all but Gertrude and the children have gone. Michaela, filled with sorrow after thinking about her father, writing his eulogy, and then reading it while looking out at the filled pews in the Temple, sits alone in her father's study at his desk unable to hold back the tears. She's the only one in the family that was able to cry for the loss of Murray. All the others sit around the kitchen table picking at the food telling unflattering stories about Murray and don't laugh or cry but shake their heads in unison with Gertrude.



The Sun Has Gone Missing Again

Last time David found it in the basin of a Center Parcs penny press; all that mass fingernail thin; The Queen's face limb-darkening the edges of a leafy dove logo; her crown a sunspot of elongated hydrogen and helium. He reckoned God must have cranked the lever in heat, occulting blinding sheens emitted from that machine with swathes of beard and robe.

The time before, he found a miracle of light throbbing in the synapse of a broken bulb; a sphere of plasma shrunken between a snapped filament.

This time, David considers it stolen; bundled onto the back of a Trundholm chariot, into a Maltese megalith or cobra-nestled and hauled around by Ra.

Perhaps David will find it underneath the saddle of a guitar, smoking against wood, lost in its sound hole.

Or else hidden, making scrotum translucent as the single new teste of a neutered dog or rattling in a hollowed-out glass eye.

Frosty Jack's

A bloated bottle you'd find and say:
That's more piss than cider
this morning. But last night
it was a mini plastic tank truck,
or DOT-111 slugging down
a railway to deliver its gloopy
stock— both hold language
of their own, but this 3-litre bottle
of combustion fuel contains
a religion within its cylinder;
its disciples range from teenagers
cast on flames of iron fences,
to men sleeping in doorway temples,
high from its holy saccharine spirit—

its holy water induces glossolalia
much faster than a Budweiser.
A religion so cheap
you'd consider it naturally formed;
hurdling from the ground
before bottled at a derrick.
But believers yearn for its afterlife;
well hidden in the sigh of compressed gas
releasing at the twist of its cap.

It's a religion you could arrive at;
traversing tarmac playgrounds,
in bushes bordering car parks,
or floating on a Bpackish loch.

A peeling label becomes its psalm:
Apple Cider is my shepherd: I shall
not want. 7.5% alcohol
maketh me lie down
in green pasture.



Mediation on Spam

Here's the tinny ring pull
of Sainsbury's urban myth
mystery meat;
a wistful can you've seen once
before,
rusting away in an old
documentary or outliving
your grandmother in the
dampest
corner of her cupboard.
This lost wartime delicacy;
a relic carrying hints
of horse meat or fascism,
blended between its water
and ham.
Is this what Brasso was for,
its stench of old marching
bands
and ammonia,
to polish out the tarnishes
of history's mystery meat
with wadding pads and cotton
buds.
Now take its brassy lid, its
lever
or key, pry it open, stare

at Hormel's greasy
sustenance;
this pulpy lump you could
suck
through your teeth and
swallow
without chewing. Its serving
suggestion,
a cloying brick caught
between
sesame seed, tomato and
lettuce;
appealing to someone,
somewhere.
Now reach inside, clench a fist
around the tin's pith,
squeezing
meat through fingers like
playdough
you were told to never eat.



Petaloudes

Some memories are like
grit peppering snow;
a lethargic commute
sinking through to asphalt
then dissolving into time.

This one's set in a
municipality
of Rhodes; a valley of
sweetgum trees,
secreting storax and
carved
by the Pelecanos' stream.

Note the basal cavities
and cankers
where pupas could cling;
the trunk cracks, pollards
and forks of limbs,
all lined with Tiger Moths
in their aestivation.

You could scuff your
knees
on every step before you
reach

Kalopetra Monastery.
But in this thought,
I've draped you in
bubble-wrap.
I've draped the trees too,
and the moths.
I am an amateur
taxidermist;
with tweezers eyelash-thin
I've taken every abdomen,
placed one in each
bubble,
to create a menagerie
of insecty memory.

If die day
 by night by day
 I will not forget you

If day die
 the flowers will outlast you
 like a lonely river
 bay of love in lost equinox
 yonder sun and bays in the horizon
 If not by day what is the night
 Two tin cups of water for those dead, rising
 Arid sun, moxie morning
 Traversed a shed a light
 To the other Kingdom
 And disappeared wisdom
 Like no other
 The other brother
 Hand to hand
 Dust to dust
 Ashes cremated the style of rust

Light by day Light by Night
 Life is long lasting STANDING
 no petal saw lipstick smeared
 upon the sky
 no dolphin danced...
 and the dark moon periled
 like a tear over the roses

Come to my knowledge
 weeping cat and chat latino roofs
 see night away dance
 the iris like a utensil
 will color the spectrum
 over your heart
 and I will say hello
 in the unending walk
 thru the desert of big data

IF I TELL THE BEGINNING

the steppe of imminent reality
 and wonder of daffodils like
 eyeing a sinking paper boat
 in the puddles of history
 your barrio like river
 and a dilapidated concrete jungle
 of effaced buildings with broken eye
 windows
 and unlocked doors...
 the dogs will welcome YOU!

I didn't say blue cobalt EYES
 trekking your spine
 humid with dew and love juice
 I beckon you
 to supersede desire, index finger sang
 to promote vision before your "Id"
 and to install digital formulas
 for your gait at night's
 ball room dance regalia
 of an aging ALTER EGO,
 you are the chosen princess.

And, because to demean
 stick men robotic blurs as profiles
 crowding the streets
 searching for food, shelter and water
 so, I told you to dance and dance
 also the title of a story in your head
 like a pink orchid mantis
 on the edge of the last skyscraper:
 your last dying life...
 the burning black origami flower
 as it falls from your
 heart's window
 that black and obscure orgimae petal
 suede shades of nocturne

flower-your black eyes
 Slideshow of luminescence
 the last memory of a people
 wetlands... the sky
 the oceanic panorama
 the gaze galloping onslaught
 over the last bear mountain
 and you preferred hysteria
 the immaculate lustrous emotion of peace

those eyelets, Chinese mysteries
 you have forsaken as truths
 as your pilgrimage
 to your globalized homes of
 soiled white portico columns
 in humid verandas
 the last computer in front of the window

you are no banister of the future
 your intervals of sanity
 deranged you and you dreamt
 your dream of heaven
 waiting wired to see an apostle
 that looks just like you
 and you cry...

Cobalt eyes in the afternoon
 wine Spanish leather bags
 in the hands of the meek
 with red berets drunken
 fainted specters in the streets
 and the cars sit still,
 like a tin memorabilia
 of the last millennium that crossed
 that crossed before our eyes

Yes, the intimate rosary

dappled over pearl breasts,
the odour of the Illuminati
in the corners of the forgotten city,
where social minstrels enact
pillage of dreams also forgotten
trying to learn how to remember
(And, so the drum roll...)

Check the box you prefer
you are nothing more than
a fetishist item in boudoir
of oceanic existence:
so the actor gesticulating
and swimming like aquarium figures
fish and fight the bully fight, the good fight
you forgot to lose
OF THE MEEK LIKE PARANOID STAR GAZERS
in the honing spectacle of SOCIAL ME

(And, so the drum roll...)

"Say your prayers young man, it's bedtime."

And the torn flag flapped wings upon your
face
an intimate applause for the azure horizon

"Beware of subliminal text messages!", said
the little four year old girl
those sms with your name
we are no longer in the year of Cat
we are and will always be and always
have been in the year of the \$ sign
traversing art for the sake of art,
social compromise "zoocializt" poetics
and the remnants of Greek rap

Contain, contain entropy
you are no bridled horse
stomping cobblestone streets
the equine ecstasy is for the rich?
You are the devil you, you Tiger
your sins derived by software from an email
address
which does not exist
off-line your way is more English
that emotion you sublime
is your latin passion
you only see in the mirror

keep an eye on your life
that thermostat on the fridge door
like a memo hung like pin magnet
reminding you to brush your teeth
and make love

sparked, the frozen gaze
of your ancestors over your biopic
and you mentioned astray as yours
and askance the pink kites in the sky

philosophy as a mentality
and genre beckoning to remembrance
and lost SPACE...

Do not revolt, rebellious are already
your intimate emotions as reason, like many
nano-butterflies
and bit-some seahorses in your eyes like
diamonds

Of course my dear princess
reconcile awakening
with death
the black hollow eyes
and the inert rock in the river
the firefly shines dim and dims
death is your preface and prologue
to enter
light that shines like a ray from your thorn
crowned heart

Death by day
death by night
If I tell by day
to die the last
the last breath in the evening.





Nihil

It is not seen, but felt. They have gripped a branch in the home dimension. Glances of sunlight break the veil and cascade over a rough tapestry of fur, rousing the algae on the creature's back.

The algae shimmers, newly greening — eager to feel warm again, to photosynthesize.

By the algae's recollection, it has been a long time since they were last aware. They are beginning to suspect their host has been avoiding the right spectrums of light. They worry that they'd been purposely kept in stasis to avoid something they can't remember — it's been so long, you see. It's been so long since they had a chance to think or speak.

Yet, it is the host that initiates conversation. "The orb in the sky — it seems to me the creatures here do not understand the significance of the solar storms that tear the eye of god."

"It is not the eye of god, but god itself," The algae answers, fumbling with language as their consciousness warms.

"I think you are too swayed by photosynthesis."

"I think you are not swayed enough." The algae are tempted to say more but have difficulty translating photosynthesis into language.

"I sway in the breezes of dimensions, I exist independent of light," The host argues, "What need have I for photosynthesis?"

"You do not exist independent of me and I am sustained by photosynthesis."

"Yet do you not exist still in the dark places?"

"I exist," the algae agrees. "Yet, I am unaware. I am cold. Hours seem longer in the dark places."

"How are you aware of being unaware? And if you are truly unaware then how do you feel cold or time?"

"I know nothing of this, sloth," The algae answers sharply. "You are in charge of our survival."

The sloth pauses, pressing its claws into a branch. "You trust your survival to a creature that requires symbiotes."

"I only know of you and have no other creature to trust," The algae's response is clipped. In the moments that follow, it seems the sun is moving away, it feels as if the sloth is holding the algae in the shadows. The algae fears they have crossed into a dark dimension again, they fear the press of stasis. Then the clouds shift.

They travel for some time in silence, interrupted only by the occasional gust. The wind ruffles the fur of the animal and the algae hums in quiet response to the breathy song that plays through the trees.

"Where will we go this time?" The algae finally dare to ask, warm and vital in the sun and wind of the home world.

The sloth mutters something in its slow home-dimension tongue and the algae strains to hear through the song of the trees and the wind and the other animals that shuffle through the canopy. The response sounds something like “ranger” or “cage” and though not particularly loud or sharp it echoes, caught in a great burst of wind.

What follows is an impact that feels like yet another passage. The sloth doesn't answer the algae's repeated calls for it to speak up. The stiff disorder of stasis is upon the algae like an ice bath.

A nearby bird calls to the algae, but they cannot decode the rhythm of the calls. A squawk-savvy passerby would have learned that the sloth had gripped its own arm, mistaking it for a branch, and hurled down to the earth under the warm eye of god. The bird was terribly ruffled by the sound the sloth's neck made and kept repeating the different things it sounded like. “A gunshot peeling out of a banana plantation, a tree branch failing under a fat jaguar, a Brazil nut smacking against a rock after slipping from the beak of some lazy macaw.” Still the algae knew no better. The symbiote was slipping further under the great glass surface of stasis as they wondered how long they must be still for this trip.



The Eye of the Tornado

They stepped out of the rubble of the house
which had provided protection
during the height of the storm
but fell apart as the winds passed.
There was an eerie quiet
in contrast to the bedlam they had just endured.

In all directions
all they saw were walls of whirling wind
by the size of the storm
they knew they had a couple of minutes
before the back of the vortex
would engulf them.

They hugged each other after the initial shock
of what had just happened
had been overcome.
No words were spoken
but both were thinking the same thing,
what to do in the small window they had left.

They looked around for something
that could provide protection from the looming
calamity
but the only thing that they saw
was the wreckage of the house
which instead of safety would soon
become life ending projectiles.

Still without talking they both had reached
the same conclusion.

As they held each other's hand
they ran towards the oncoming disaster
which they could see was fashioning
new chaos amongst the turmoil it had just left.

The tornado, as if stunned
by this act of defiance, lifted skyward
and the closer they got the higher it climbed.
They were knocked to the ground
but the tempest had spared their lives.

This time, Nature would not seek further retribution.

New Year's Eve

31 December 23:30

She looked for him in the throng of people
but in the freezing air she couldn't see him,
the faces faded in and out of her vision
she became more concerned.

31 December 23:45

She finally spotted him talking to members of the group
that they had started out with.

She grumbled that he cared so much about others
but really, she always admired this part of his character.

31 December 23:55

He made it back to her
he told her of everyone's hopes for the future.
They hugged as the new year began
and stayed together for as long as they could that night.*

* Newsflash

Refugees die as ship sinks

1 January 10:05

A boat carrying refugees capsized and sank
early this morning in rough weather, all on board have died....

The Haunting Memories

A solitary figure standing
at the same point
as many times previously,
looking again into the surf
where the awful calamity had happened
years before.

Breeze blowing against facial features
trying to offer some comfort
as the still sharp recollections returned.

The decrepit fishing boat
crashing against the merciless rocks
forcing the terrified asylum seekers
some fearfully screaming
into the perilous seas.

The disintegrating boat braking up
but some doomed still on board,
the desperate clutching for flotsam and jetsam
cruel battering with debris.

The anxious Islanders
throwing life jackets and other objects
into the incessantly crashing swell
screached warnings about the savage outcrops
alarmed pleadings to swim out.

Memories again panicked.

Of faces of the survivors
deceased in the water
diesel smells from the boat,
then the dead as they were recovered
including children
and body bags in rows.

The wind tugged at clothing
trying to encourage a stepping away
to break the aching reminiscences
but they could never be forgotten.

Death
(Tarot, Major Arcana XIII)

Solidified water; laughingly
 creakingly cracking ice
 from the lower sphere.
 (Saturn recedes to the Scorpion.)
 An intermediate state: continuous fermentation squeezes out
 disgusting babbling bitter fluids
 from the half-decomposed meat
 cajoling masses of green backs drooling on the meat.
 The uterus' shaping tiny homunculus initiatives
 with her beak shaped retort.
 Ringing. A cop disguised fellow resembling a wounded
 tree branch.
 "I'd be the hybrid staff sergeant", that's his greeting
 "I'd swing one or two with
 my good scythe..." waves as a conductor
 and conjures a basilisk out of the elderberry breathing night.
 Above on the dead mask of Osiris
 twin snakes dance bound with a silk cord.
 Every contrast's thriving for the spherical shape the same way,
 die hundred times a minute to live,
 walk around Death, hundred and thousand times,
 call him
 the way you call one of the twin snakes bound with a silk cord.

Translated by Gabor Gyukics

Copulation? Or Love?

"Not now!" "And most of all, not here!" – she objected languidly,
 but of course, she lifted her hips for him to slip her
 pants and panty off.
 The arch of her trembling reversed body belongs to the night
 that'
 swallowing the visible; Nuit.
 The bonded, touchable space cajolingly turned a sordid
 woman divine.
 Next day cuts Androgynes in two,
 Every supposed or real touch and motion smell of dogcatchers.
 We avoided each other,
 Again, our camouflages began to mimic the ordinary Evil.
 I'd ask one thing though,
 At least from the distance of thirty years of time,
 Did anyone else see you as a Goddess before?
 Did anyone see your fish smelling glue leaking cunt
 As the Holy Grail
 Beside me?

Translated by Gabor Gyukics

Sage Cigarettes Magazine

Stef Nuñez

**Twas the night before Christmas
and all through the night
Krampus and Santa
were preparing to fight...**



Meet the Contributors

Iolana Paedelt is a German writer and poet. Her short stories and poems have been published in anthologies and magazines, both online and in print.

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J. S. Roseman is an American writer who currently resides in Dublin, Ireland.

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Joan McNerney's poetry has been included in numerous literary magazines such as Seven Circle Press, Dinner with the Muse, Poet Warriors, Blueline, and Halcyon Days. Four Bright Hills Press Anthologies, several Poppy Road Review Journals, and numerous Kind of A Hurricane Press Publications have accepted her work. Her latest title, *The Muse In Miniature*, is available on Amazon and she has four Best of the Net nominations.

Kevin Densley is an Australian writer. His poetry has appeared in Australian, English and American journals. Densley's latest poetry collection, his third, *Orpheus in the Undershirt*, was published by Ginninderra Press (Port Adelaide, South Australia) in early 2018. Twitter: Kevin Densley @DensleyKevin

Carlos Mijares Poyer is a venezuelan-american writer, journalist and marketer. He is published in print in Venezuela extensively with awards in different genre, and also published in English in the Galway Review, Ireland, The Yellow Chair Review, Silver Birch Press, The Piper Magazine, Guilford College and Morphos Digital Mag., Mexico. He studied all of my education in the U.S., an English Major from Guilford College, Greensboro, North Carolina and alumni Pine Crest School, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. He is a trilingual author in English, Spanish and French.

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Laszlo Aranyi (Frater Azmon) poet, anarchist, occultist from Hungary. Earlier books: (szellem)válaszok, A Nap és Holderők egyensúlya . New: Kiterített rókabőr. English poems published: Quail Bell Magazine, Lumin Journal, Moonchild Magazine, Scum Gentry Magazine, Pussy Magic, The Zen Space, Crêpe & Penn, Briars Lit, Acclamation Point, Truly U. Known spiritualist mediums, art and explores the relationship between magic.

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Omotoyosi Salami is a poet and writer living in Lagos, Nigeria. A lot of her writing is influenced by the various inequalities that exist in her country. She has been published in Vagabond City Lit, Constellate Lit, and Brittle Paper. If you do not find her reading a book, you will find her writing something in her phone's Notes app. She is on Twitter as @HM_Omotoyosi.

Daniel Galef has been an actor, a teacher, a door-to-door poll taker, and a dictionary definition ("interfaculty," which means "brilliant and handsome"). His poems, short stories, and miscellaneous magical writings have appeared in *Bards and Sages Quarterly*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *The Surreal Grotesque*, and *The Christian Century*.

Scott Lilley is twenty-two years old living in Shropshire. He recently graduated from Lancaster University and is currently reading towards an MSt in Creative Writing at Oxford University. His previous work has been included in *The Aironaut*, *Poetry NI's FourXFour*, *Eunoia Review* and *Three Line Poetry*. He can be found on Twitter @scottglilley

Leslie Owen is a Midwestern photographer with a strong penchant for preserving the beauty of nature via the art of photography.

You can title the photos as a group under Hiraeth.

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LE Francis is a writer living among the Washington Cascades. Find her online at nocturnical.com.

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Christina Rosso is a writer and bookstore owner living in South Philadelphia with her bearded husband and two rescue pups. Her debut collection, *SHE IS A BEAST*, is forthcoming from APEP Publications. Her writing has been featured in *FIVE:2:ONE Magazine*, *Digging Through the Fat*, *Ellipsis Zine*, and more. Visit <http://christina-rosso.com> or find her on Twitter @Rosso_Christina.

Mehreen Ahmed is award winning, and internationally acclaimed author. Her books, received The Author Shout Reader Ready Awards, 2 Bronze Honourable Mention for *Moirae* and *The Blotted Line*. And 1 Silver Recommended Read for *Jacaranda Blues*. Her other book, *The Pacifist*, is "Drunken Druid The Editors' Choice for June 2018", and *Jacaranda Blues*, "The Best of Novels for 2017 - Family Novels of the Year" by Novel Writing Festival. Her flash fiction, "The Portrait" chosen to be broadcast by Immortal Works, Flash Fiction Friday, 2018.

She has published five books to date. Her books have also been nominated for other prestigious awards such as Aurealis Award for Fantasy Short Story/Novella (2015), Ditmar Award for Best Novels (2016), and The New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for Christina Stead Prize for Fiction, (2018).

Her short stories and flash fiction have been published with *Ellipsis Zine*, *The Bombay Review*, *Straylight Magazine*, *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Portland Metrozine*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *The Piker Press*, *The Creativity Webzine*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *The World of Myth Magazine*, *Sage Cigarette Magazine*, *Terror House Magazine*, *Connotation Press*, *Furtive Dalliance Literary Review* to name a few. Her academic works were published by Cambridge Core, Routledge and elsewhere.

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Rob McKinnon lives in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia. His poetry has previously been published in *Re-Side Magazine*, *Nightingale & Sparrow Literary Magazine*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *Dissident Voice*, *Tuck Magazine* and *InDaily*.

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