

MICROW 5:



SEARCH

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MICROW



5: search

*Summer
2011*

Editors Note:

To seek is to be human.

Who amongst us has not sought satisfaction, fulfillment, joy, love and any one countless other needs to be met, places to be discovered or keys to be found? Truth is we spend a great deal of our lives looking for something, often many things, only to be disappointed when we find them or perhaps relieved when our search turns out to be less onerous than we expected.

*As a theme for the writer and image creator, **Search** carries limitless possibilities as you will soon discover. Our contributors endeavor to probe, explore and glimpse into the pleasures of the written word and the glorious image in order to pique your curiosity and deliver on a promise of intrigue and delight.*

Enjoy the bounty that is yours on the pages that follow and find that your own literary search is over, if but for the moment.

Michael J. Solender



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Focus

by Nicolette Wong

The ape masks are the tease of death for those children, riding high on their bicycles in a film burnt through the last half-century. We follow their games on the road: a blonde girl scratching her head at a shocked gardener, before the clash with a police car sends her flying up to a pine tree; a fat boy conducting an orchestra of summer breeze, while a black hole opens on the ground and sucks him into eternity. The others pass with less drama: a last glimpse of a middle-class housewife and her dog inside a car; a collision into two young women with parasols on their afternoon stroll; a trip into the dark tunnel.

On each child's dying breath, a pigeon flies by and picks a strand of their hair.

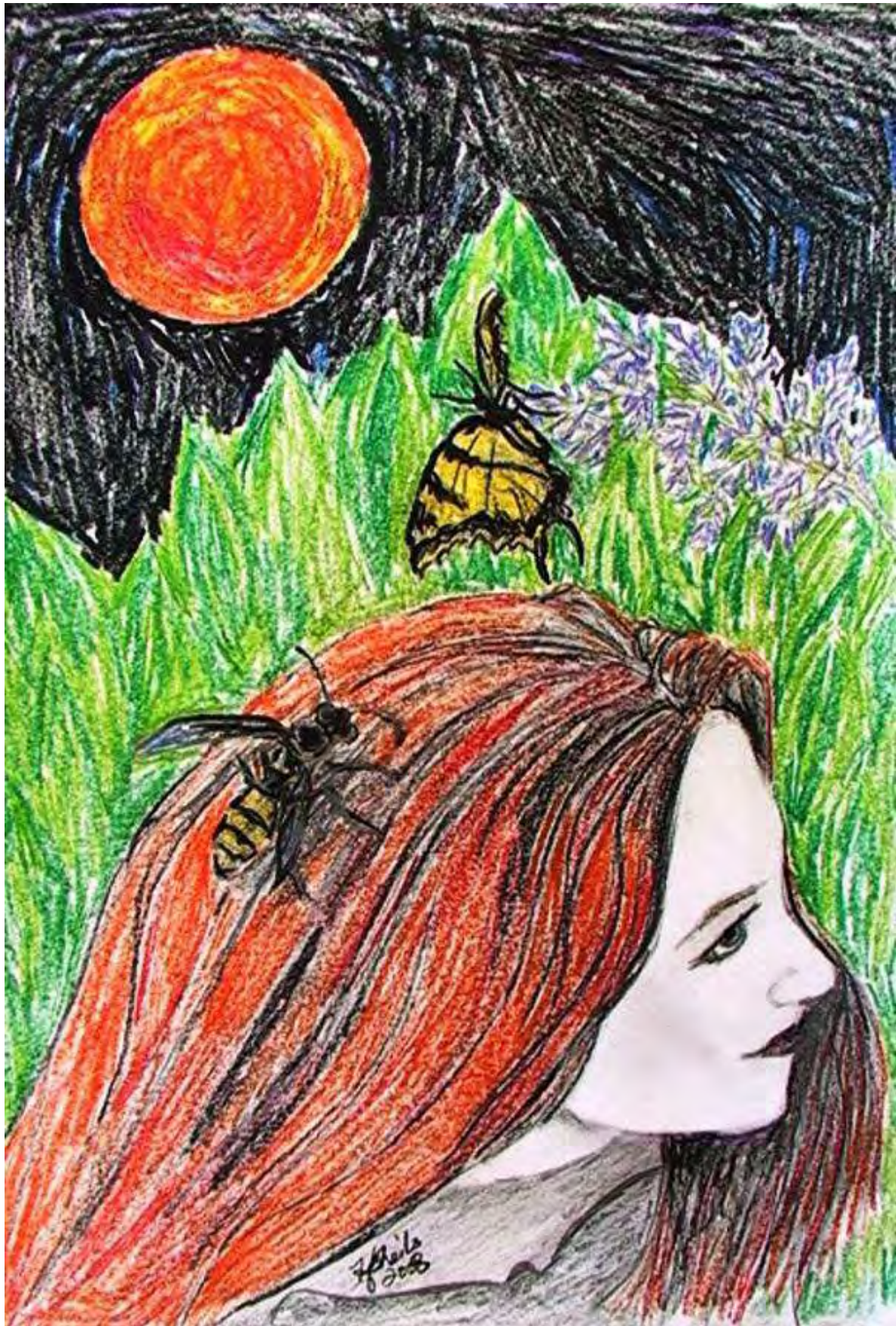
You turn your crossed eyes away from the violence on screen. In life you navigate through faulty visions of depth. On our long rides to the countryside the highway bridge splinters against a bright blue sky, to the opening of village roads that crack and taunt underneath the farmers' feet. Even the metal buckets in their hands are magnified threats the moment we turn to reach the river. Time and again you say, *I need my focus*, flipping the switch to turn down the music. I have no fear of getting lost. I have been to the other world and back when you sip coffee, puff smoke rings to quench your thirst on sleepless nights.

What you want is for someone to put their hand on yours while you drive, gearing you to life.

Why do you think the pigeon keeps traces of these children? You ask.

Because we can always reach those who pass, I say.

But you know nothing about the underworld. You need all your strength for what lies ahead.



In the Future I will Fold my Laundry **by Shea Newton**

I slept in. I'm a time traveler. I can't touch my toes. My time machine is made from water heaters and kitchenware. I'm looking for a future me. Someone who doesn't sleep in. Someone who can touch their toes. When I find him I'll tackle him laughing, like I would a brother.

I'll ask, "How do you do it?" and "When did things change?"

He'll hug me and say, "When I turned thirty-five. When I could finally grow a beard."

"What's the future like?" I'll say.

"Things are so easy here. I always feel wonderful," he'll say.



My Map **by Shea Newton**

I drew my whole life like a map on burnt edged paper. Dotted lines wove through the mountains and under the sea marking all the rutted paths I've walked. Heavy lined X's were all the embarrassing things that kept me up at night. The good, those moments when I've closed my eyes to smile, were oak trees and sequoias that cast long cross hatched shadows. Along the bottom, scribbled in Latin there were names of all the people I ever knew. I drew question marks for all the things I'd forgotten and they eventually covered the trees and seeped into the ocean, masking the paths to the mountains. They crawled off the paper and etched themselves onto my hands. Question marks fell to the floor and clung to the soles of my bare feet. They jumped into the air. They became my breath. They are all that's left of the map of my life, pictures of all the things I miss.

A Figure Trapped Inside

By Chris Rhatigan

The clank of an aluminum bat and a pop-up to left-center.

Bobby is supposed to be playing left-center. Instead, he is sitting, picking blades of grass and flicking them away. Letting them drift in whichever direction the wind takes them.

The ball falls with a soft plunk a few feet away from him. The batter rounds second, but Bobby does not move. The sun warms his back and the small purple flowers are, for the first time this year, sprouting along the foul line.

Yet he is unhappy. He tries to reconcile how these two things could be true at the same time, but he cannot.

His coach gets up from the bench, saunters to the third baseline and groans. “Jesus Christ, Bobby. We got semis this weekend. That mean anything to you?”

Bobby figures his silence answers that question.

He is flicking away another blade of grass when something deep in the woods beyond the baseball diamond catches his eye.

A fire. With a figure trapped inside it.

He stands, runs, his cleats kicking up mud. He scrambles up the hill, stomps on decaying leaves.

The others take notice. The coach is yelling at Bobby to come back as he dials 911.

Bobby is at quite a distance, but he sees that the burning person is in a wheelchair. There is a can of kerosene next to her. He suspects it is his grandmother, but swallows that possibility as he grabs at tree branches that scratch at his soft wrists.

There is crackling. Commotion behind him. The lonely call of a mourning dove. Nothing else.

He stops behind a large rock, wheezing. Pink streaks on his forearms. He slumps against the rock for a moment, trembling. Closes his eyes. Counts to three. Peeks around the corner.

The woman is much younger than his grandmother. Her eyes are closed. Her skin melts. The smell and the warmth of the fire remind him of camping with the Indian Guides. The memory somehow makes it worse.

He wants to ask her why. But he does not.



Broken
By Jeffrey S. Callico

I am standing in the middle of a road.

No one lives around here. I don't either.

It will be dark in an hour.

There is no literal plane of being now.

An hour ago I had a beer in my hand.

The girl was talking in low voice.

She wasn't smiling.

I got a phone call. It was sales, a seller.

I hung up on the fifth word.

She kept her gaze. Her beer was golden.

A note of music started. I couldn't count them all.

What are you looking for? she asked.

Looking, I thought. I conjured up meaning as a gift.

We broke ourselves away and left.

Internal Injuries **by Lily Mack**

The surgeon comes out and deals me a body blow.

“Your father isn’t responding. You should prepare for the worst.”

I hug my arms to my chest to keep from flying apart. Shock burns like cold fire in my veins. My body starts to tremble.

A moue of distaste from the surgeon.

“You need to pull yourself together for your mother’s sake.”

. . . running out the swinging doors of ICU down the gleaming tiled hallway into the cool black desert night heart pounding fists pumping breath ragged . . .

I breathe deeply, unclench my fists, wipe my eyes.



Passers-by
By Robert Vaughan

She sat in the thread-bare floral faded armchair. “This was my father’s favorite,” she said. “I want it to go last.”

I hovered on the edge of her couch. “Is he...?” Noticed the gangrene-colored macramé plant hanger in the cob-webbed corner.

“Yeah,” she said, rubbing the chair’s arms, picking at a frayed strand. “Yours?”

I took a swig of Miller’s. “He’s still here...but not...here. Know what I mean?” Just saying it felt weird. Tongue tied, like speaking Russian.

“My mom has Alzheimer’s,” she half whispered.

I fought the urge to bury her in my arms.

We stared at her trunk, at the numerous boxes stacked in the corner. “Well, I’d better get the rest of your things loaded,” I said. “Thanks for the beer. It’ll be getting dark soon.”

★ ★

Twisting Plastic with Both Hands
by Tantra Bensko

To celebrate Chinese New Year’s, a tiny girl with a face like a monkey gave bubble wrap to us all, as we circled. Substituting for fireworks pops scared away badness. Everyone discovered he just HAD to pop every tiny bubble. Before anyone else did. Out with the old, the Ego, in with the new, the Spirit. The girl did cartwheels, which mean she turned sideways and stumbled into a crumble, and shrieked You Won!



Sunday Sail

by Kathleen S. Allen

Sunday in June. Cool water. Sailboat. You at the helm. Picnic on the reef. Sunbathing on the deck. Lazy sun soaked day. Drifting in and out of the waves. Making love then falling asleep. Clouds cover the sun. Raindrops wake us. We scramble to get down below before the hard rain hits. Laughing realizing no one is steering the boat. You put on your slicker and go back up into the rain. I lay on the narrow bed below, asleep in minutes. Sun drunk. The motion of the boat wakes me. I stumble up the stairs calling for you. No one answers. No one is at the wheel. A strange blue light surrounds the boat. I right the wheel wondering if this is the storm. I glance up and see a veiled blue hand reaching down toward me. I scream but there is no sound. I clutch my throat. My mouth is open I am screaming but there is no sound. I rush back down the stairs, the eerie light pouring in through the cracks. I raise my hand and can see the bones through the skin. X rayed. Terrified I huddle in the corner. Wondering where you are. Eyes closed. Sure that this is the end. I jump when the boat bumps into something. My eyes open. The light is gone so I venture up to the deck again. We have hit the reef. I jump out and anchor the boat. I call your name. I am alone. Utterly alone. I sit on the wet sand wrapping my arms around my knees drawing them up into my chest and lay my head down. Sobbing. The crackling of the radio sends me flying back to the boat. You are safe. Far away from me but safe. Overboard. Storm. Rescued at sea. They will come for me in a few hours. I ask about the strange blue light but you do not **understand. "A sun-soaked dream or the storm." Dismissed and goodbye.** I decide to change out of the wet sandy clothes. I go back down the stairs and find a clean tee shirt and shorts. I strip down. As I am putting on the shirt I notice that my hand held up to the sunlight streaming from the window is transparent. I can see the bones shining through the light. This time I can hear the scream quite clearly.

Watching

by Susan Gibb

He watches her through the driver side window of his car, across the street, through the wire mesh of the schoolyard fence and past the grass to the pavement where she jumps to the rhythm of the swinging rope held by two girls. She is dressed in the same uniform navy jacket and plaid skirt as the others but he picks her out by the honey-gold hair, the bangs cut Beatle-like across her forehead, the thin delicate frame of her young body in the stark midmorning sun.

He squints, then picks up the binoculars and watches her standing at the back of the line waiting her turn to jump rope again. She is fidgeting and for a moment she looks in his direction, almost right at him, through him. He **lowers the binoculars out of reflex but she doesn't know he is watching. She doesn't know he watches at all.**

Inside him a fist twists his heart in a painful grip, a catch of breath that **hurts to exhale. He hasn't seen her in almost five months. She's grown a bit taller.**

He is her father and her proclaimed abuser. She has labeled him a sexual pervert and no matter what the final court ruled, or what the psychologists **tried to explain, he still wonders what he'd done** to make her ever think such a thing.

She once again jumps light and quick over the rope. It reminds him of her dance recitals when she was five and maybe six. Sugar plum fairies at **Christmas. Irish high steppers in March. There is a cadence of children's** sing-song voices that reaches across the space. He cracks the window open, knowing he cannot pick out the voice of his daughter among them and yet...

She stands at the back of the line, scuffing the toe of one shoe on the pavement. She looks around and pauses her gaze again on the street where **he sits in his car, though there's no sign of recognition. Or of fear.**

There's forgiveness without the forgetting that's exchanged in the aftermath of such accusation and trauma. Like that between he and his now ex-wife. Loss of job, home and friends leads to changes. Separations are used like Band-Aids to heal.

In his mind there circles an unanswered question and in his daughter's eyes, an incomprehensible answer that stabs right through his heart.

★ ★

Height **By Don Hagelberg**

For Mikis Theodorakis

I stand on the beige of plastic stools
Of metaphor and am able to see
From that unfamiliar height
A new way to survey the scene below.
And I am enlightened,
Until I see the ladder
With its verticals, connected
Periodically by metaphorical rungs.
Who will hold this ladder upright?
So that I might climb tip-top
To watch my breath escape
Like a cloud into the higher insight?
Abruptly I can no longer see clear and straight;
My knees shake and I fall, back to ground

★ ★

Scratch Pain **By Don Hagelberg**

For Officer Juanita J Martin

Those chemicals which surge
Between my cells when I feel
The provocation to itch
Are the same chemicals which
Flow between my cells when I
Am mauled by the urge to ache

Poem no 1
By Semim Zahan

O Sister Moon, give me a needle!

What will you do with the needle, my dear?

I'll stitch a bag.

What will you do with the bag?

I'll carry money in it.

What will you do with the money?

I'll buy an elephant?

Elephant? What will you do with it, dear?

I'll roam around riding on its back.

What happens when you roam around?

You become a good girl.

Riding an elephant Paniram returns,
All passers by look at him.

A lullaby in Assamese re-discovered when i was looking at the moon the other day.

Paniram is a lower rank official under the King.

Poem no 2)
by Semim Zahan

Give me a break!

Early morning I went out of my one bed room flat and bought a bagful of peas.

While shelling them one by one

(these soft green beads) started telling me tales of my grandma's days.

Such as once upon a time there were two sisters Tula and Teja,

One beautiful one ugly.

I asked the peas to stop at that.

What is the point in repeating the same oldwives' tales, a step mother, two daughters, they get married, one to a prince other to a pauper.

Give me a break.

Tell me something new like there was this girl, early morning she would get up, do her studies till the clock struck nine and hurry to school, coming back **she'll study again till one day she grew up and no, she was not married** off.

Instead it was the turn of her dreams to take off.

This tiny little girl in a petite frame goes to a college in a metropolitan city.

Behind her thick rimmed specs she again weaves dreams, for the thousand and odd girls she teaches, moulds, transforms, prepares for a tough survival each day.

Give me a break.

Tula and Teja are characters from a folk- tale collected by noted Assamese littérateur Lakshminath Bezbarua titled as Grandma's tales..

Poem no 5)

by Semim Zahan

TO SHEHERZAD

You make me wait thousand and one nights

You cajole me into your tales all of them lies I know

Just that they are beautiful and put me to sleep at the end of each

I agree to listen to them

Though I feel this strong urge to love you

Till I die.

(written after I bought a copy of the Arabian Nights from the mall at Saket, Delhi)

Poem no 6)
by Semim Zahan

Statements

(1)

My wings are clipped
And you set me free.
This winter I am hibernating.
When summer comes,
Well, let me see.

(2)

When I sent you all those SMSes
And you did not reply,
I did not mind.
They were actually sent to myself.

(3)

For a living I work.
As if to live
You just need to eat
And sleep
And go to work in the morning.

(4)

When I spoke
They barked all
As if the sky fell flat on them.
Now I am silent
And not a blade of grass notice.

(5)

I don't know how much I love you.

Probably like the water, the fish, or the sky

That weeps

At your departure

To an unknown land

Across two rivers that stand at the end of the world

Waiting your return.

(6)

You choose to fall in love with

A butterfly

And blame it for your fall



The Creepabye Lulling **by Philip Tinkler**

The creeping wind chime giggle of October winds down Atomic Avenue. A bedsit girl listens to the house breathe, staring down at thighs as white as a starlit beach rolling off the dead tongue of summer. A thousand broken poems lay crumpled upon the lemony hardwood, with not a false idol among them.

The autumn leaves fall, earthbound and erudite in scholarly shades of beaten corduroy. A man kills time rearranging the digits of his alarmed clock, yet night arrives on schedule.

The Hunter's Moon rises above barns painted rust-dusky red. The streets are naked, but for joggers zipped tight against the night, offering only withering memories of store bought aromas named for torrential weather conditions to the gods.

A glow in the dark rubber peeks from under a train station bench, a neon nothing-child of no fixed address. The father sleeps in his shoebox apartment, comforted by the weight of the hardback he isn't reading spread open against his chest.

Back in the 'burbs, a car alarm sings a medley of car alarm standards for a rapt audience of raccoons and skele-trees. A late night movie plays. Its stars eyes glimmer like dull coins found beneath a sofa seat for the benefit of one-sock insomniacs breaking days in dazed wait of daybreak remains.

Gravity sloshes in the bottom of a whiskey glass, pulling stares and bad memories from orbiting eyeballs of distant travelers with time and space to chart lines on her clock.

Night unfolds like a familiar tale told by a strange voice as nooses are tied and promises broken.

VARANASI
by Jay Passer

sent by a bull sprawling
after a hash shop session
to get up the nerve for
a dip in the human soup
of the Ganges-
I chickened out big time.

spent a week holed up
subject to bum ankle,
morning prayer chant, wheeling sunrise
and monkeys searching through
my bags worse than Customs.

kite flyers from rooftops shout,
wreaths of marigold festooning
floating corpses serenely composed,
and too many gods to name.

where the temple beats the crowd
infinitesimal

eternal-

and I endured

Ganesh tattooed to my forearm.



Church Lurker

By Matthew Hance

Left side. Pew #1. 90-year-old man. His heavy-duty walker almost took out a sleep-walking altar boy. He sings every song. Stands and creeks into kneeling. Amen for a good life. May his family follow in his footsteps.

Left side. Pew #7. Boy hanging over pew. His rendition of the ***Transformers'*** and ***Power Rangers'*** themes got him grounded. The pew is his obstacle course. Amen for a plastic jet and plush dinosaur. May mommy forget his punishment.

Left side. Pew #8. Woman on edge. Her quick hands prevented child abuse. She is a dam. Her husband is an angry lake. Amen for public **places. May she not take the child's place at home.**

Right side. Pew #4. Dressed-up man. He donated a twenty. Went out of **his way to shake nine people's hands. Mouths songs and blesses** himself out of sync. Amen for church. May God grant his yearly wish.

Right side. Pew #14. Needle girl smothered in layers of clothes. She's careful with her eyes. Will only allow them to rest on the 90-year-old man. **She responds "Aww" instead of "Hallelujah". Amen for protection. May** there be someone out there for her with the old man's heart.

Right Side. Pew #25. Obese college chick. Alone. Doesn't stand. Doesn't kneel. Almost blew the communion off the spoon and into the priest's face with her rapid breathing. Amen for Diet Coke. May it cancel out three courses of fast food.

Left side. Standing in the back. Two guys bursting with estrogen. They're molesting everyone with their eyes, trying to figure out, "Are we even allowed to be here?"

Left side. Pew #12. Preoccupied guy. Ignores participating wife. Stares at **woman on edge's behind for several minutes. Glances at obese college** chick. Shrugs. Takes him two minutes to undress needle girl. Looks back to woman on edge. Amen for deadbeat husbands. May woman on edge accept a concealed note.

Right side. Pew #19. Young man. Slept for most of the mass. Smiled after drinking most of the wine. Amen for beds. May his time served count for something.

Left side. Pew #1. Middle-aged woman. Two friends aided her in a battle against tears. She finally lost when the priest recounted the life of a young marine. Amen for nothing. May this entire world rot in Hell.

Middle. In the back. Me. What was the sermon about? I have no idea—
I'm just here to judge others.

★ ★

Three Spoons

By Katie Moore

Sleeping together, the three of us—triple spoons. She is on her side, praying hands tucked under her chin. He faces her. When he dreams his fingers will stroke her nipples to ward away nightmares. The crack of her ass cradles his finished cock, still slick with mixed fluids. I am behind him, third spoon—a ladle, holding both of them at once. I reach past him, my hand resting on the cello curve of her hip.



Moses

by Jeanette Cheezum

We're all seated in number three meeting room. Most of us excited about his lecture and appearance. We didn't care if he was republican or a democrat. Being in his audience once again and seeing him in person caused great electricity in the room.

The door opened. Loud voices became whispers, but the Red Sea didn't part. A tall, slender, much older version of Moses crossed the room. With difficulty he raised one foot and climbed upon the stage, he tried not to winch.

Appalled that this man had to step up at that height, at his age was ridiculous. Why were there no steps? The hotel would hear about this from the city and those of us that had paid attention.

Ever so polite he began to wow us. Today was his fiftieth anniversary and **he wouldn't see his princess until eight that evening. He joked that his** chariot was in the shop. But not even a den of lions could keep them apart.

Our memories of Charlton Heston were not of arthritis, age or politics; only the value of a human being that would always be remembered as Moses, and his role in The Ten Commandments.

It'll Hold, he Thinks **by William J. Fedigan**

He tries to throw her down stairs. Feet tangle, both fall, hand railing breaks. **She's out cold, he splits head. Police come, ambulance comes,** ER, stitches in head for him, hospital bed for her.

-What happened to your head?
-Same old shit.
-What about her?
-**She's in the hospital.**
-**Jesus, one of these days you're gonna kill each other.**

They fight like gasoline on fire. They burn bright. They burn together. They burn bright together.

He gets hammer, nails. Wants to fix hand railing before she comes home.

He hammers one nail, two nails, three.
He hammers last nail in wall.

-**It'll hold, He thinks, it'll hold.**

★ ★

Tunnel Vision **by Ian C. Smith**

I chip through the solid wall ahead
persisting with my escape plan.
To master this dangerous course
I concentrate on the dream
of asylum, a life of books
that lights my way in this tight space.
Knowledge and reason will be my rewards.

I leave my residue behind like clues
with no backward glance to the fetid air
where those brutes sneer and jeer
unlike my future friends, the wife
her people in quiet studies
colleagues turning pages, open hands
extended in scholarly welcome.

Past the point of no return, alone
I drip sweat like shed ignorance
struggle onward deep in the night
through Chaucer, Eliot, even Joyce
who makes me feel like an idiot.
At the end of this literary labyrinth
of my choice, I see a degree
of freedom artfully calculated.

The dark mills' din a memory dimming

I force my way to the distant light
a glow, somewhat dull, when I emerge.
I imagine ivory towers glimmering
but no, the same searchlights of the past
surround me, sweeping the dark ground.

Return to Go
by Ian C. Smith

He has taken what he could from life
but if (oh, dream on) given another go
would strip this lurid lot bare.

His time now is an abandoned house
thoughts, feral cats in fetid air
crouched, waiting, unblinking eyes
piercing inexorable decay.

Composure ranks in this wistful plan
desire, too, let's not ignore that.

There's such a range of options
meditation, sin, the martial arts
money seems a fine career
suitably selfish for muffled hearts.

Does regret or greed prompt this rewind time?

But his born-again gig is studded
with avoidance of fouled footpaths
glimpsed by the (now) knowing traveler.
He fantasies surrendering his love

ecstasy to a discerning few
then cherishing a map of memories
when he reaches the review.

He wonders if he would be fit enough
for the rigors of this suppressed life
brave enough, that is, for his
has been the easy route around strife.
He knows elusion leads to disillusion
luring him so deep into the maze
only lonely bones might be found there.

**

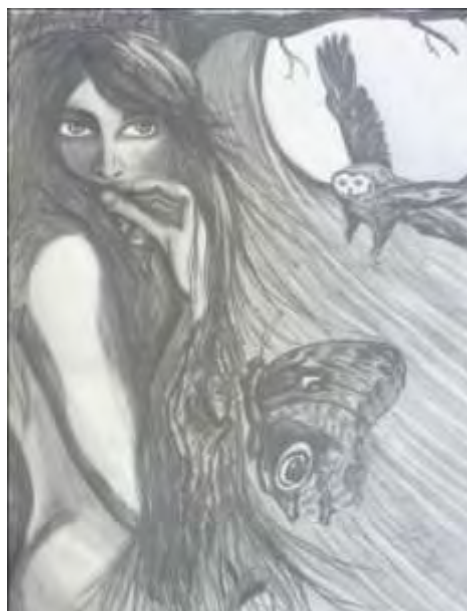
Does he dream of dolphins?
by Ian C. Smith

I brake for blind corners, each side road.
My thoughts swerve away from fate
to our island, to him running
up, up our small mountain to the top
where he surveyed our vast horizon
young Neptune sans chariot, torso pulsing.

Like a penitent I pass Reception
to join castaways on this distant shore.
I climb stairs, my own small mountain.
He zinged a tennis ball across water
aiming at my bared arse above the rock
where I teetered, recalling my youth.

Still life – *Pale boy with tubes*.

He stung me with that ball, delighted
ran in state titles, could have won a flag
if only he had kicked straight.
Those stairs make me breathe hard.
We are not what we were yesterday.





The Mind of Emmanuel Foxtrot

by Richard Godwin

He would stare for hours at frozen leaves on which dwelt small insects that scurried and scattered as the sunlight crept from the sky and pierced the branches that hung over the roof of his small farm house. He would look at passing strangers and cast glances that made them pause and look back at him.

He could read the weather patterns by looking at the ripples in a stream.

He could amaze people with his words when he spoke at night in a mumbled accent the origin of which none could determine.

He could scatter the birds that flocked to his lawn with a sound he issued from deep within his throat.

He could dance the night away. Emmanuel Foxtrot was a wonder in the small town he inhabited, that stood at the foot of the hill.

He was seen as a local mystery and tourists would come to the town to see him.

They sought him out like a promise.

They searched for him in the faces of strangers.

He cared little for their advances, their requests for him to talk and would ignore them, except on one occasion when he grabbed a buxom woman and danced around the village green with her.

He existed as a monument to everything extraordinary.

That day he left his house and walked down Main Street to the shop that sold the few groceries the town needed.

He bought some eggs and cheese and sat on the bench overlooking the stream.

A large woman approached him.

‘See anything?’ she said.

‘Matilda, please sit and watch me bring them here.’

‘I will, let me gather my skirt and sit with you, I see you have eggs.’

‘They are juicy and full of yellow yolk.’

She sat down and stared ahead at the stream with him.

He threw the eggs into the water and watched as fish popped up and jumped onto the bank.

Then he stood and took the fish to a small fire that burned by the green. He cooked them and served them to Matilda.

She ate them all and pulled the bones from her mouth with a succulent sound that left her licking her lips.

He stood and walked from the green to Main Street where some tourists gathered to see him pass.

A beautiful young woman caught his attention and he stopped.

Then taking her arm he danced with her.

His was the dance of seduction.

He brought her to heat and left her sweating with sin.

He kissed her on the mouth and looked into her eyes.

Then he walked away as she stared after him.

He stood by the hill and looked at the sky.

It was darkening and it began to rain.

The tourists had followed him and he turned to look at them.

‘You all should dance here and let this rain fill you.’

And they did, dancing with steady steps.

And they stood dripping with drops looking intently at him.

They waited for him to say more.

He walked home.

He sat in his house as night fell.

He filled the sky with velvet.

He hung oysters from the dripping stream.

He consoled the weeping air.

He fed the town with the dripping food of night and measured them at dawn.

He was beyond reach.

He existed in the space that lay between the husbands and wives who toured the town looking for him.

★ ★

Music Stations by Lola Nation

You fill me with awkward silence,

bales of words unravel, crushed underfoot by wind,

turning into a drifting tumbleweed on an empty road

passed by unsuspecting tourists lost on a long road trip

with a crumpled map in the glove box and gas station

food surrounding their feet. I press cruise control
and drive on.

You tune in the station and let the song linger.

I listen staring out the window, wondering
if there is a subliminal sentence you're sharing,
mood, lyric, or sound – frustrated, I flip the station
to something more familiar, hoping you're in the same
frame of mind, listening - maybe not to the singer
but to the backup vocals, or the choices in deliberate words
that don't rhyme but set the lyric out like petals on the floor,
inviting someone past the bedroom door – or offering a reflection within,
or a fleeting moment long since past.

Sometimes the radio crackles static and disappears.

A soft hum, air popping ears from the back windows
as the hills curve and lull, endless fields of empty farming
passing by, trains filtering their warning horn between wheat,
stopping in sleepy towns, letting soldier's wives off to
their in-laws, for a weekend with the family.

I change the station.

I wait for your recommendation, to listen again
to be somewhere else, thinking of you,
or not thinking of you at all, and hearing
something new.

* *

The Deity by Madrea Marie

A deity came to me in my dream last night. I was living back at my moms, in the camper I lived in until I was about 6 months pregnant with Alex. Later that year it was smashed by a huge tree during a hurricane.

In my dream, I was watching Monkey's niece and nephew, and getting ready to take my kids to the dentist, the latter which I really am doing this morning. The other kids ride came to pick them up, so we all walked to my camper to get their bags. When I opened the door there was a pair of shoes in front of my couch. They connected to a pair of blue jeans which ended with a beautiful head that contained the bluest eyes, with long dark eyelashes and a nest of medium dark brown hair at the top.

“Who are you?” I asked, not feeling afraid or very much surprised. I forget his exact words, but he insinuated he was a deity.

“What do you want from life?” He asked me.

I laughed nervously and said I didn't know.

He swooped me up from behind and up into the air above the camper.

“Well you better come up with something because I don't do this very often.”

We flew around the yard, through the trees and over the palmetto bushes. A hundred ideas fluttered through my mind as the leaves of the trees flutters around me.

“What do I really want?” he asked.

“To be inspired,” I said with certainty. “To do my art with inspiration. To paint, draw, and create with ease.”

“Anything else?” He egged me on.

“To be happy in life, happy and healthy with my family”. We flew in looping circles around the yard while everyone watched on. It was an exhilarating experience .

“And these are the ones you want? You can have anyone.”

I thought for a moment of all the possibilities from my life and answered in the affirmative.

“What about all your dreams?” he asked.

I thought of my childhood pipe dreams and excavating ancient bones and how having a family doesn't really fit into that dream.

“Well perhaps one day I could by chance discover a skeleton of some sort...”

With nothing left to want for, he set me back on the ground and was gone. Today is the first day of the rest of my life.

Today I take the kids to the dentist, do some shopping, visit with my mom, and hopefully have time for a load of laundry when I get home,

and to clean the mess from last night. Not much time for inspiration in this day, but maybe this dream will help me find my direction in life.





Teeth aka We'll Always be Together

By Natasha Cabot

Sheila Brown collects teeth. Yellow, white, baby, molar—it **doesn't matter**. If it is a calcified mouth bit, she wants it. She just loves how they feel in her hands, between her fingers, sharp edges cutting into her palm. Sheila enjoys pressing the tooth into her arm flesh and seeing the various shapes it **makes...like an oral cookie-cutter. Sometimes, there's a moon. If she uses a molar, she can cut a table shape into her forearm.** As much as the feel of a tooth, Sheila loves the smell of teeth, the subtle scent of decay bobs and weaves into her nostrils and makes its way to her brain where thousands of synapses fire away maniacally. Chomp chomp chomp.

Sheila started collecting teeth as a young girl. She had four brothers and three sisters, all of whom **had teeth. As the oldest, Sheila's job was to** collect the teeth her little brothers and sisters had placed under their pillows for the mythical tooth fairy. Sheila always put the quarters her parents gave her under the pillows in return for the teeth. The teeth then went into her jewelry box. Sometimes they were still wet with spit. Other times there was still dried blood at the top. Still, they were teeth. Beautiful, beautiful bits of teeth that she could run her fingers over at night. She liked to spill them into her hand and squeeze. The sharp thrill always gave her **gooseflesh. All her siblings' teeth would always be together, even if her** brothers and sisters lived at opposite ends of the universe. After all, **family's important.**

Sheila's grown now. No more little teeth from little brothers and sisters to take. She sits in front of her full-length mirror and **"eenie meenie minie moes" each tooth in her mouth. She used to have 26 white shingles** hanging from pink gums. Now, she has 18. The tooth has been chosen and **she reaches for the pliers. "The bicuspid on the right will make a wonderful addition to the box," she tells herself. She winks and smiles, her reflection blushes. "Open wide and say ahhh" she tells herself--the jewelry box** waiting in breathless anticipation for its newest arrival.

The Houston Ashley

By Denny Sheehan

Brushing past the thicket near the driveway a twig drew a red line across my arm. I rang the bell, heard a soft scuffle inside, and imagined violins. I was **wearing the same outfit she had once said “suited me” and I expected** to hear it again. On the way over, I saw a policeman and hearsedriver seemingly engaged in negotiation on the street in front of a supper club where she once worked. The policeman had his hat in his hands and his body language portrayed the hearsedriver as a real hard bargainer. The hearsedriver leaned on a tacky cane that seemed out of character. She once confided in me that while she worked there, a few months before we met, a patron had followed her into the bathroom at the end of her shift and held a knife to her throat and was primed to pounce violently until the door was knocked on by the busboy. **It drove her to the “brink” and she was “devastated by humanity” and had thought so** specifically and thoroughly about suicide after the event that the note had been enveloped, sealed and positioned on the corner of the table in the pantry. She was about to romantically do herself in, she recounted, until her feet touched the edge of the surf. At that point she abandoned the whole idea, under the auspice that nothing is worse than death in a cold ocean.

When she opened the door I was caught off guard. Barefoot, her feet **clapped as she led me to what she was now calling the “parlor”** of her one-story ranch. Almost expectedly, the room featured a mahogany desk, a few vases and dark walls of the burgundy lineage. **Our eyes hadn’t met in over a** year until she spun around right then and leaned forward with both hands onto a large leatherbound book that sat on the desk between us. She smiled **and told me it had “been a while” and that my outfit “suited me” and that** she wanted to tell me all about the action that I had missed since we last saw each other. Apparently she had decided to name her estate, and she did so after herself, and was now so obsessed with town affairs that she considered herself its social thermometer. She then nodded to an array of black and white photographs splashed across the desk that featured the hearsedriver exchanging envelopes with nearly every notable member of the township. When I looked up without even feigning interest, she asked **what I was doing there anyway and then accused me of “spoon tourism”** as

she put it, traveling all this way just to lay in bed beside her. I laughed and **the pictures didn't matter anymore.** She pointed to the cut on my arm and I touched it to prove that the blood was dry. We both looked down shyly as her cocktail sweat onto the mahogany. I asked if I could have one of what she was having. **"Let's retire to the drawing room," she said as she rose on** the balls of her feet excitedly. As I followed her out to the living room she traced her finger along the chair-railed wall.

Troubled Skies

By Doug Mathewson

Flying home broke in standby sub-economy class I couldn't afford the used three dollar movie headphones. Which is too bad because it looks like Julia Roberts is in a complicated fix. Major upheaval at her TV next-work news job. Not good! There is so much movement on the screen! Always in the foreground, Julia is hyper-animated everywhere she goes (while chatting madly on her little phone). Big hand gestures at the launderette, backed by a chorus line of dryers all a-tumble. Choreographed backgrounds match her every gesture, her every facial back-flip and tick! Movers carry scenery and huge potted palms in lock-step with her as tension escalates.

Julia by the surging fountains, and again with the huge dryers tumbling in sync. Fire-eaters at the courtyard (her temper is getting hot)! Crashed **bicycle racers shaking fists, and mouthing, "why oh why these cobblestoned streets?"**, coordinate with our girl's increasing speed and anger. At work she is signing clip-boards thrust upon her nonstop as she points to items on the sushi menu. Now knife wielding chefs match her every move, and she never stops talking! But wait,... is that Harrison Ford, or something **the caterers made out of goose liver pate'? It is scowling, she is jabbering.** I wish we could liven this mess up.

How about Amy Sedaris and Miranda July in a wagon train headin' west. **But they need a reason, a special mission. It's not just any wagon train.** They are secretly returning the body of King Hoko-hokmoko of Hawaii, who died while addressing the UN. Tribal canoes will meet them at Golden Gate Park, **to take the king's body the rest of the way. The canoe guy parts would be real plum cameos for cool actors like Paul Giamatti and Seymour Philip Hoffman. Maybe Bill Murray, no.... save him for something else. We'd need someone to play the king's body. A complete surprise when his identity is revealed.** Austin Powers! No.... wrong kind of surprise.

So with Amy and Miranda cussin' n spittin', chit-chattin', and justa goin' along. They could have a side adventure or two. Nothing entirely irrelevant to the plot. Celebrity saloon scene maybe, or better than that a surreal creepy Terry Gilliam kind **of circus. That's where we'll use Bill Murray.** Perfection! Nothing too stupid like downed space craft or mystic cults.

So they get to San Francisco at last. But the body is missing! WTF??? Sure, they did use the Royal Coffin as a beer cooler, but the body was definitely still there. Desperate searching. Ins and outs of mistaken identities and odd San Francisco happenstances (**cable cars, Fisherman's Wharf, comically** hilly streets). Fast forward and the body is found. It is Austin Powers! (I changed my mind). Due to a simple and obvious misunderstanding the body is found at the bus station dressed as a saloon girl. It could happen to anybody. They hand over Mike Myers or Dr. Evil or whoever to the Royal Hawaiians lead by Cate Blanchett and Willem DeFoe. There are incredible feelings gratitude towards Amy and Miranda (everybody just loves them). Julia Roberts has then on her TV show! A long fade out shot of our courageous travelers walking through the network lobby answers our Harrison Ford question as well. He is stuffed and on display in reception. (No photos, Please!).

Contributors

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- **Heather Brager** is a mother, professional multi-tasker and life-long procrastinator. She is a lover of music, art and words, and arranges her perspective on life into the occasional poem or drawing. She has been published in a variety of online and print publications, including ETC with the Journal of Semantics, Deep Tissue Magazine, A Handful of Stones, Unlikely Stories and Heroin Love Stories. Some of the results of her restlessness can be found by visiting: <http://heatherbrager.blogspot.com/> & <http://msamericano.deviantart.com/>
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- **Jeffrey S. Callico** hails from Atlanta, but someday he'd like to live somewhere in Maine. Until then he'll keep driving around town looking for a place to park. His first collection of short fiction, *Fighting Off The Sun: Stories, Tales, and Other Matters of Opinion*, was published in 2004. His poetry and fiction has appeared in several print and online magazines including FRiGG, Johnny America, Origami Condom, Calliope Nerve, The Legendary, Opium Poetry 2.0, Pulp Metal Magazine, Full of Crow, Gloom Cupboard, The Prose-Poem Project, Thunderclap! Press and most recently, A-Minor. His chapbooks include *Early Trouble*, *Ceilings*, *People = Bus*, and *Rough Travel*,

which was published by Graffiti Kolkata Press in 2010. Currently he is the editor of [Negative Suck](#), a magazine for writers and artists who don't suck.

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