

MICROW 8



*Luminous
Winter 2013*

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Editor's Note

*Welcome to this special edition of MICROW 8 – **Luminous**.*



The publication is comprised entirely of flash fiction and black and white photography. Each carefully crafted piece was written specifically for this theme and tells a story in less than 500 words.

The theme for our semi-annual publication shows up quite literally in the spectacular photography that accompanies our illuminating stories.

Light is often the muse of both the visual and literary artist and here you'll find her inspiration in many fine tales and captivating imagery. But don't be afraid of the dark – we find much to intrigue us amidst the shadows as well.

Nuance, subtlety and vagaries dance their melodic jigs in the margins of awareness. Our writers and photographers have found success in showcasing these very elements for your enjoyment.

Our hope is that you glow from within while enjoying LUMINOUS, MICROW'S 8th edition brought to you this winter of 2013.

*Michael J. Solender
Editor
March 15, 2013*

Jason **by Tikuli**

It was a special day for St. Luis Hospital. The conference room was filled with medical students, support group volunteers, media people, friends and well wishers of Drs. David & Jane Brown.

Jane's eyes scanned the packed 80-seat room. Most of those present were familiar with Dr. Jane's captivating presence and they listened to the story of her courage and pain in rapt attention trying to imagine how a child could illuminate the lives of millions. She stood at the makeshift podium under the spot light; everything else was flooded with soft darkness.

A year ago they'd lost Jason. He was two years old and terminally ill. As David listened to his wife speak about their dying child, their hopes and despair during the two years that Jason lived he recalled his child's gradual decline and his wife's courage.

"I knew it was just a matter of time as I leaned against the nursery door taking in the sights and smells of my baby's room I felt a profound sense of emptiness. As I ran my fingers along those untouched things we had collected for our son I felt that I didn't know myself. I could hear Sara playing and blowing soap bubbles with her father in the garden. Sometimes I would find her perched on a stool near Jason's bed talking to herself or watching her brother quietly. She seemed to understand that her time with Jason was almost over. When Jason smiled it illuminated the whole room and brightened our lives but I needed more, I needed a sound from him before he was gone forever."

"I went and stood near Jason's bed and watched the light filtering through the blossoming branches of a cherry tree. As I watched his face lit up and his eyes moved as if following something. My eyes followed his gaze and saw that a soap bubble had floated in through the window. He was fascinated as it drifted around him glistening in the sunlight. Slowly Jason's hand lifted towards the bubble and then he chortled. My eyes filled with tears of joy."

Jane stopped speaking, took a book from the table and held it up.

"This is a story of the two years we spent together, 'Jason - A Mother's Account of Letting Go'."

She clicked a button and a large photograph of Jason smiling, filled the screen behind her.

"This is the picture my husband David took of that one precious moment."

David and Sara joined her on the podium. They hugged and for the next half an hour she read passages from the book, finally she said: "I hope my book will help all those with a

terminally ill child cope with their loss. David, Sara and I would like to thank everyone for their support; you offered it when we needed it most.”

There was a moment of total silence, then a ripple of applause grew louder and louder. Jane listened with tears shining in her eyes.

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Glitter Blues
by Linda Simoni-Wastila

The Shop Keeper

In the front window, the blue high-tops sparkle with glitter and sequins, the only shiny thing in the worn-out store. Baumstein sips his coffee, already cold, the radio murmuring the Orioles game. The front door buzzes. The kid everyone calls K swaggers in. Baumstein recognizes him from the hard edge of his eyes, the chains draping his chest like gaudy medals. What does this punk know of horror? Baumstein thinks. Of valor? K holds up the shoes. One hundred, Baumstein says. K smacks four twenties on the counter. Take it, old man, K says. Baumstein's stomach pinches but he wraps up the shoes. K laughs.

The Child

Sweet Jesus, what's that boy doing in there—taking a bubble bath? This one's weird, cleaning himself before and after, but he's gotta go, before Keshon comes after his money. Cuz I am off the clock. I tie on my new shoes, all glittery blue. They make my legs feel real good. "A gift for my best sugar doll," Keshon said. Well he better find himself another doll cuz I'm outta here, mama's gonna take my sorry ass back. I rub the locket she gave me for luck, my only goodness inside, and sit on the mattress, wait for Johnny-boy to freshen up and go.

The Healer

In between ambulances the orderly mutters, “Worse than fucking Afghanistan.” I’ve no idea, all I know is I’ve been on call 36 hours straight, running triage on shot-up whores and gangbangers OD’ing on whatever crap they pump in their veins. I need some goddamn sleep, but gurneys line the hall, this one with a ridiculous blue shoe wedged between sheeted feet. Still conscious, her brown eyes stare at me, scared. I should pat her hand, comfort her, but she smells like a sewer, they found her in the garbage chute. Besides, with all those stab wounds no way I’m betting on her odds. Another ambulance pulls into the bay. I squeeze her foot as I rush past.

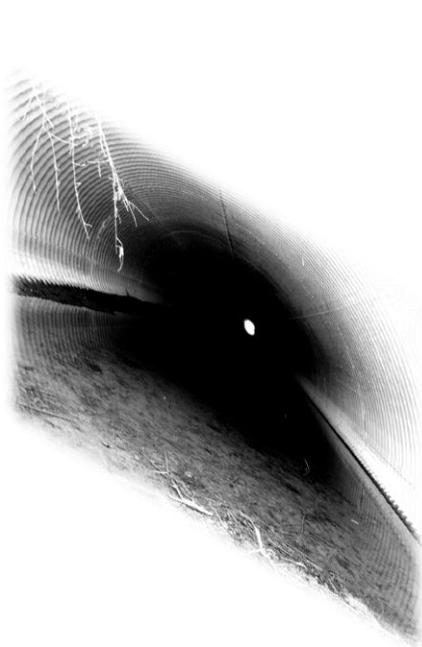
The Chronicler

He studies the body, measures the depth and width of each slash. The camera flashes. No ID, no clothes, no suspect, just like the other prostitutes in the mortuary. Only a single blue high-top and the necklace. He photographs the evidence: the shoe, the locket, the infant smiling from inside.

The Old Woman

One sneaker, toe up. Glitter blue, hi-top, in the middle of the A-Plus Pawn parking lot. My, my. Might fit Baby Girl. She needs new shoes and Lord knows you’re broke. You kick fresh snow, dig for the mate. Closer, you see—red stains the silver laces. A crow caws from the dumpster. Flakes sift from the sky.

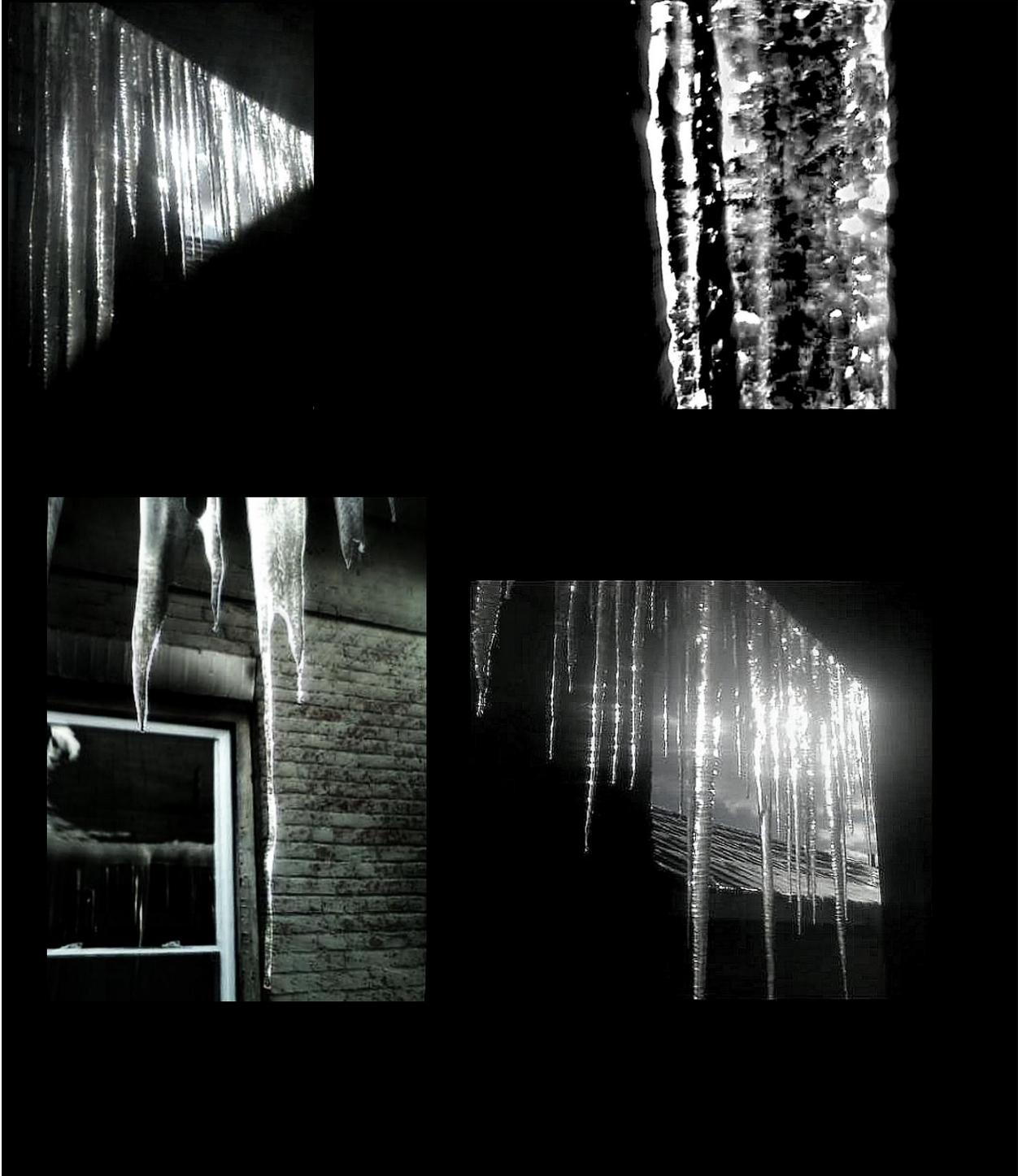
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Ecstasy
by Sara B. Chaney

The first time was in a dingy student apartment with some friends of friends. The awkwardness was powerful, even more so than usual, since these people were cool types. They had on-trend haircuts, and face piercings, and loosely grasped cigarettes. The guy was a fast talker with too much neck jewelry. The girl was a human ice pick, swimming skinny and sharp in work pants and a wife beater. That fine snow of childish freckles didn't fool me; she was meaner in her coolness than some girl ninja-in-training from an arty movie I hadn't seen but would pretend to know, a film best referenced by the last name only of its obscurely hip director.

One minute, I was sitting next to these two on a stained couch, covering my own lack of razor quick quips with a performance of squinty-eyed silence. I had not yet tried and failed to make a joke, and I didn't plan to. In my limited social experience, it was better to fail quietly to be liked by refusing to try. Better still to win cool points for the stunning dignity of your withdrawal. So I toyed with my options-- reshape paper clips into abstract shapes or burn shreds of paper with a lighter. Both said "I'm not here to be your friend;" both barely and inadequately veiled my loneliness.

And then, like the lights flick on after a long power outage, almost offensive in their ease after such a long stretch of absence and want, I was burning and beaming with joy. That abrupt surge of nuclear compassion streamed out freely, landing on the first thing I saw. Which happened to be this little girl, the freckly scarecrow in the wife beater, who I suddenly noticed was cowering, crouching, shivering, in her corner of the sofa. A bony forest child lost in the city and far from the familiar. I was shining with patience, I was an illegitimate Buddha with more than I needed and plenty to give. It seemed natural and right to share with this girl the abundant and the obvious: That she was a wonderful person, a beautiful person, full of good, and glowing. That she should love herself.

The condition of happiness lingered through the night and the next day, mostly in the form of trace hallucinations, a kind of lucid dreaming in which I thought I saw visions of a past life: Feet stomping through green grasses, a courtyard viewed from above, a thousand covered heads bowed solemnly. I tried, with little success, to hold onto that sense of peace.

Silver with Frost
by John Swain

Four quarters shone in David's palm before they fell to the cold grass. He wanted quiet. The hill to the entrance of the train bridge was silver with frost. Step after step each step upward was another dull ache.

Thoughts of the accident passed through his mind. There are never really accidents. Someone is always at fault. Was it the crush of metal and glass against bones breaking when the car left the road- or the anguish he and Rachel both felt when his words turned like a hand and crossed her face? Failure upon failure and even worse, the eventual inevitable violence. With no victims left, like grinding teeth, he hated. And David's thoughts flashed to boyhood.

The moon trailed his labored ascent into a winter sky like black milk. The rails extended through a rusted arch and out over the river. The river had always provided him comfort, but like everyone, the river was always leaving. The stars climbed onto the back of the water and followed the river away to the end of the world. He remembered this bridge. Nights drinking with friends. Those soft risks and kisses and brave laughter. When did the monster enter? Was it with him then and what is the use now of this knowledge?

Each cross plank creaked under his feet. He could not feel himself moving like a sleepwalker. He could not feel at all. A dreadful clarity had long replaced guilt and shame and pain. The girders seemed to move around him like atonal music. And the moon fell through each truss like a woman's body spread in prisms. David felt the metal vibrate. He heard a train. He saw the headlamps and ditch lights. He was not afraid. He wanted no other involvements. He wanted quiet. He looked through an opening down to the water reaching upward.

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Phosphorous Love

By Abha Iyengar

I am a doctor of bones, an orthopedist.

I can feel under your flesh and know your bones, cracked, frail, strong, young or old. You do not need to get an x-ray done for me to know what is wrong or in need of repair or replacement. I am an authority on this. For me the bones glow through your skin.

I do not have x-ray eyes, though many people who I have successfully treated may tell you this. They may tell you I am amazing. But actually, I owe this ability to childhood trauma.

That sure does catch your attention, does it not, much more than my introduction. It is a long story which I will make short, for who has the time for stories now, especially not me. I did crave stories as a child but there was no one to tell me any. All I had, when I got into bed to sleep at night, was a huge life-like skeleton that was placed in a corner of my room. It gave off a luminous light. It was my father's present to me, to keep my room glowing in the dark.

Light is reassuring, even if it comes from a skeleton. It did not frighten me. When I was scared, I just walked up to it and carried it to bed with me, felt its various parts and got to know them so well that when I grew up, the only call I heard was the call of the skeleton. I passed my medical exams with flying colours. It was co-incidental that the main question that year focused on the human skeleton. I had identified the parts long ago.

When I touched someone, all I wanted to feel was the strength of his bones, the flexibility of his spine, the mobility of his joints. The flesh was immaterial, for me the bones shone through the skin, luminous, green, glowing, inviting.

I was connected to bone like to my mother. For the skeleton I held on tight to, in my room every night, exploring, kissing and loving, had to be my mother. She still stands in my room, frail and worn with so much loving, but mine. I never held a woman the way I hold her. No other woman has allowed me to explore her down to the bone, so I have let the idea go for the time being.

*

Father died a year ago, in another city. He was buried there and I did not attend his funeral. However, a few days back I did visit his grave. I dug him out and lay next to him for a while, reassuring him that he had done alright by me.

**



Wanderer
by Michelle Elvy

They met on a mountaintop in the Pyrenees. When she slipped and he steadied her, his hand on her elbow, she jerked herself away. *Got to keep moving.* It was the truest thing she ever told him. He followed her around Europe for a year -- floating on the Dead Sea so salty their afterward kisses stung; reviving their bodies in Iceland's massaging mud baths; climbing ancient hills in Greece that made them giddy with history. By the time she started admitting they were a couple they'd been through three bedrolls. The other gear had held up well – their backpacks, and her tent, which had become their home.

Come to New Zealand with me, he said, for the third time. This day he thought she might say yes.

Maybe.

I have to go home. I've left things long enough.

I know.

*

Three months later she flew to Wellington but she didn't stay long. *Got to keep moving.* She trekked across the South Island and camped along the Abel Tasman trail. She made her way from the black sands of Muriwai to the soft beaches of the Bay of Islands. It was when she was in the far north, at Cape Reinga, perched at the edge of a cliff off to the side of the crowded tour buses come to see the jumping off place for travelling souls, that she felt something move inside her. She didn't call him for two more weeks.

When he found her, she took his hand and led him down a hill to a small cove. Her hand felt small but sure, and her fingers laced gently in his. At the sandy beach, she pulled a canister from her backpack. She unwrapped a green scarf tied around it, unscrewed the lid, and tossed the contents out to sea. The breeze caught the grey dust and swirled some of it back on them; other bits plunked into the water at their feet. They stood silent together for a long while, their heartbeats working in time to the waves breathing in and out along the shoreline. Some of the ashes stayed floating in the tide at their feet.

There, she said. It's done.

You never said.

I never could. But my children belong here. That one and – she placed his palm on her belly – this one.

A fierce southerly blew that night through their tent at Taputopotu Bay. Tears finally came in the morning: at the ashes still streaking her jeans, at the Pacific which now rocked her first-born away, at the blood-orange sun already warming her forearms. She recalled what someone had told her: that the sun shines brighter here, that you must be careful not to get burned.

He found her swaying at the water's edge. He was sure she would drift away with the tide or float back north on the wind if he touched her.

Finally he said, *And now?*

And she turned to face him and smiled, *We begin.*



Zahara and Her Sultans

By Kristin Fouquet

“Hi, Miss Lillian,” she said. “I’m glad I caught you. I have the rent check.”

The aged woman squinted at her, then nodded. “Annette. Hello.” She nervously pulled strands from the left side of her white bobbed hair across her cheek.

Annette recognized she was obscuring the tiny, deep scars.

Miss Lillian whispered, “*Zahara and Her Sultans* will be performing tonight at eight, if you care to watch.”

Annette smiled. “Terrific. I’ll bring my camera.”

Tapping the side of her nose, she reminded, “Eight sharp.”

*

The damp slate tiles of the carriageway reflected flickering gas lamps. Shutters were closed over French doors. Annette checked her wristwatch: only five minutes early. The key was on top of the door frame, as usual. She let herself in, closed the shutters and doors, then took a seat on the velvet Queen Anne sofa. Two heavy drapery panels concealed half of the room. A light scent of musk could be detected beneath burning frankincense. Annette pulled her long platinum hair and flipped it over her shoulder. Opening her black purse, she took out her Filmo Sportster and began winding the crank.

Within seconds of starting her camera, she heard the phonograph being wound. The familiar snake charmer’s song “Streets of Cairo” played as the draperies parted, revealing two tall baskets under radiant lights. Miss Lillian appeared wearing a white beaded belly dancer’s costume. Her sheer white skirt matched the veil covering half her scarred face. Annette kept the camera still, directed at the act in front. After a few shakes of her hips, Miss Lillian removed the lids from the baskets. In perfect synchronization, two black King snakes rose, slithering up her wrinkled, aged arms. She puckered her lips to each one as she slowly moved her hips. Her sultans twirled around her shoulders as she lifted them out of the baskets. They were nearly as long as she was tall.

Annette focused her attention on camerawork. She had been privy to this private performance for two months, but had never dared film it. Anxiety set in as she wondered how Miss Lillian would react when she saw the footage. Her moves were still sensuous after all these years, but her skin was sagging. The black snakes were dramatic against her pale flesh, white hair, and pearled ensemble. Their taut bodies kindly helped conceal her midsection. Annette tried to envision Zahara in her twenties performing this act fresh to new eyes. She wondered if she’d always used the black Mexican snakes or if they were a new addition. Just as the song came to an end, the star escorted her companions back to their baskets. Without a bow, she closed the draperies.

*

Two weeks later, Annette left the developed reel with Miss Lillian. She was certain it was the first moving picture of *Zahara and Her Sultans*.

Night after night, Annette heard the putter of Miss Lillian's projector.

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Summer Rain

by Cynthia A. Williams

Memories are not really of events, but of moments. A moment in time can represent for us an era, a life. Why we remember one moment and not the one that preceded or followed it is a question for physiologists, philosophers, physicists and meta-physicists. They all have answers and, of course, they are all perfectly correct. Truth is all there is. We cannot invent it; we can only discover it. But when we have the explanations in our hands, they simply dissolve again into the memories of perfect moments. The dream-like quality of our brilliantly analytical minds stubbornly persists.

Oddly enough, when I let the memories of my perfect moments come, I find that rain is falling gently through all of them.

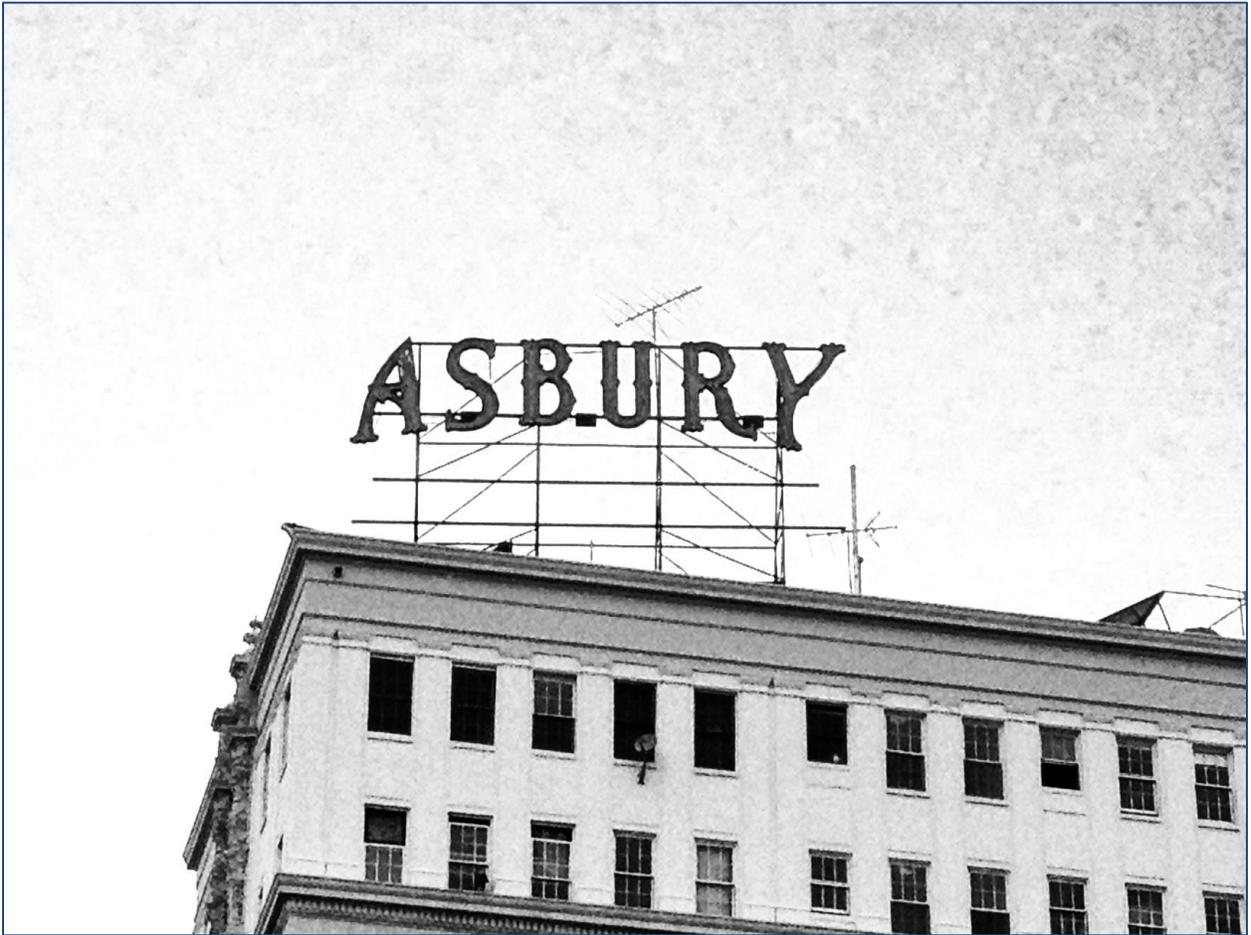
The first of these memories is of a summer afternoon on my cousin's farm in Evergreen, NC. After noonday dinner, as we were resting in the parlor, my mother's cousin Nan said, "We're going over directly and dig some potatoes. Want to come?"

Nan's husband, Whitey, drove the tractor and we followed along behind, picking up the little pink potatoes as they foamed out of the earth in the wake of the tractor and dropping them in the burlap sacks we dragged along with us. The soil was soft, warm as a cake fresh from the oven and the potatoes, nestled in it like eggs, were dear to the palms of my hands.

We were working quietly, the tractor snarling softly along, when the first rain drop touched my back. A second drop darkened a crumble of dirt by my hand. Then, finding me, quickening drops tatted the back of my hand. One found my scalp and another. I straightened and discovered that the late afternoon sunlight had turned the earth and our faces and hands and Whitey's straw hat to gold, the rain sparkling as delicately as points of light in the glow. I closed my eyes and lifted my face to raindrops soft as baby kisses.

Then I opened my eyes, saw the raindrops twinkling along the brim of Whitey's hat as he bounced and jerked along on the softly putting tractor, and I was looking at a Rembrandt. Only Rembrandt, who dipped his brushes in crusted gold, could have painted that scene.

I can imagine the moment of dis-incarnation, moving swiftly down the long, dark corridor toward a lighted room, toward a gilt-framed picture on the far wall of the room, the golden Rembrandt looming larger and larger until I am in the picture, straightening to discover that the late afternoon sun has turned Whitey's straw hat and the raindrops twinkling along the brim to gold. I close my eyes and feel raindrops soft as baby kisses on my face.



Summer, 1981 by Kate Mahony

When they arrive at Gare du Nord late evening, it's crowded. William says Sophie should wait with their luggage in a café while he looks for accommodation at a Pension, as he calls it. He orders coffee for Sophie, strong, black, in a small cup: 'Un Express.'

She and William became friends in their last year at Auckland University. Since she's moved to London, she has missed his smile, his shyness, and his nerdy spectacles. She loved it when he phoned all the way from New Zealand, asking how she was. He told her the newspapers had reported people fainting on their way home from work on the Tube in the summer heatwave. A girl had fallen onto the tracks and was rescued by three bystanders.

When he said he was coming to Europe, she said they should go to Paris together.

She sips her coffee in the café and thinks, here he is with her. In Paris. Now, at last, there's an opportunity for their friendship to turn into something deeper. Even more special.

William returns forty minutes later, breathless. He has walked and walked. He's finally found accommodation. 'It's nothing special but- '

On the third floor of a narrow hotel, he flings back a door. 'Voila.'

She sees that the room is tiny and there's only a double bed. She feels her heart race. 'It was all I could get,' he says. Apologetic. 'But look at the view.'

It's a scary feeling, suddenly as if things have moved too fast. She looks out, stalling for time. 'Beautiful.' She smiles. 'But we're just sharing a bed, right.' She makes a play of putting extra pillows down the middle, to divvy it up. 'No funny business, eh?' Stern.

William bows. 'Non, Mademoiselle.'

Even so, when it comes to going to bed, after they have explored the nearby streets and had a Pastis in a bar, it is awkward. The curtains are thin and the light from the moon keeps them awake too long.

Their limbs bump in the night. Once she feels his breath warm against her neck.

In the morning, safely back out on the street, they admire a beautiful building, a glass-fronted bakery, and a man cycling with an easel strapped onto his back. They don't mention the shared bed.

They're climbing the steps to Montmartre, when William, beside her, clears his throat, as if to make an announcement. Then he tells her he's gay. He adds, apologetic, almost. 'Just thought you should know.'

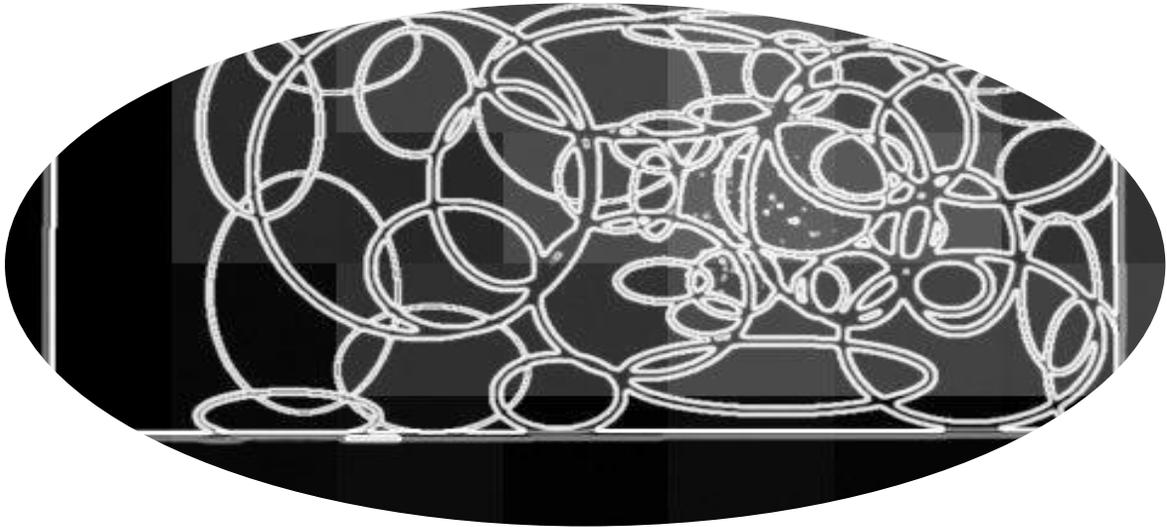
Sophie thinks of how she has longed to see him again, her sternness the night before. She feels herself blush.

William climbs on ahead. He turns back. 'I wanted to tell you before, but - .' He shrugs deftly like a Parisian. No longer apologetic.

A good-looking boy passes by, brushing against her. Sophie can't help it: she checks to see if William will glance after him.

She wonders if he knows how to say, 'Nothing changes' in French. Except it must.

**



Thanatos

by Jessamyn Smyth

She pulls herself up, swings a leg over the lowest branch, sits there just out of reach.
Below, he stands with his back to the tree she's in, stares out over the water.

You asked me to come, he points out.

Yes, she says.

Why'd you stop me?

At the lake-edge, he'd stepped in, slid his hand up the back of her neck, gripped a handful of her hair in his fist. Her joints had turned to goo, gone liquid in an instant. She'd stopped breathing. Taken two steps backwards. Turned. Climbed the tree. Considered the rarity and hazards of a lover whose touch can do that.

Got scared, she answers after a while.

Why?

Because I'd mean it, apparently. I hadn't realized.

He comes to her, stands beneath, holds her ankles. Full of thick heat and intensity. I want you to mean it, he says.

That's what they all say, she answers. But it's usually not true.

The wind comes up fast, whips the lake against shore. Pushes him closer. He pulls her down.

Fuck, she says.

Now, he answers.

Yes, she says, sphagnum impressions already lettering her bare back.

Later, they realize they've bedded in a scatter of owl pellets. The bones of mice have perforated them both. Matted hair clings; tiny, regurgitated dreads.

He pulls a Sharpie from his cargo pants' pocket, connects the bloodied dots in her skin into constellations. Andromeda sprawls across her hip and into the small of her back. Gemini connects her ribs.

Don't leave, she says, when full dark falls. I can't stand all this leaving.

Above them, a great horned emerges from the tree, calls. Deafening. Flies silent across the lake and away.

I meant it, he tells her.

Yes, she answers. I wanted you to.

When she notes the deepening cold, he answers: don't leave.
The owl returns, mouse in talon. Eats it. Watches them.

When he says he's hungry, she rolls astride him.
The owl flies out again. They'll soon be gone.

At dawn, the lake goes silver, then pink, then silver again, in glinting alternate until the sun crests the pines and hits underwater forests, turning everything green, illuminating sunfish hotly guarding nests.

Mourning doves in the laurels the first cries. Crows next, their corvid laughter instigating chickadees.

Under the owl's tree: a fresh pellet of bone and hair, a permanent marker in the moss.



His Light, Lost to Stars

By Erin Cole

Some people need saving, usually the same who think they don't want it. For too long I dog-eared hope between the self-help pages of dependence and compulsion, foolish in my presumptions that I would be the one to bring him back. Restore the light snuffed out in his eyes. Eyes as dull as old, graveled snow.

Tonight he sits on the sofa, boneless in pose. A charred spoon rests against a half-empty needle and a rubber tie. I wonder if he is burying dreams or chasing the past. I miss him in the present.

I miss the way he used to travel the bones in my hands, plotting each blunted knob as though claiming territory. He knew all their names, *proximal phalanx*, *distal phalanx*, *scaphoid*, and *pisiform*.

I miss how we basked beneath the twirl of *Ursa Major*, *Capricornus*, *Andromeda*, believing each grain of light was a gateway into another world, skies of phosphorus purple, oceans AC/DC red. Maybe he is there now.

Next to him, I sit, afraid I won't waken to the dilated gleam of another sprawling dawn. My skin wrinkles at the knotted rubber tie, veins bulge with hunger and greed. A slight sting of the needle, then a sudden surge of radiance pushes me back into the sofa. Floating. Warm. Boneless.

His eyes meet mine, and I'm wounded to discover that his essence still bleeds before me, the beacon of his spirit a sinking mast. But he reaches for my hand, navigates its structure, slowly breathes in the distance between us. I close my eyes and see my own stars. And him, adrift in malachite clouds and seas of tinsel and rose.

When I wake, he is no longer boneless or warm. The only shine in his eyes is that of daylight behind me. Tinsel roses crash against my shores. Phosphorus clouds rain AC/DC red. I brush his eyes closed, make a phone call. Then wait beneath a prismatic dawn. Maybe he is there too.

Stargazers
by Angel Zapata

Kayla spotted someone famous everywhere we went.

“There’s Will Smith,” she said at the coffee shop.

“Oh my God, Ryan Reynolds just walked in,” she said at a small, Italian restaurant.

My responses were smiles accompanied by semi-interested groans. During one of our Friday night dates at a Tapas bar, I hinted at her obsession.

“You’re just jealous they notice me,” she said. “Do you think anyone in this place was excited to see *you* walk in?”

“Besides yourself?”

“You wish,” she dismissed me with a wave of her hand and ordered another Sriracha martini.

As usual, we went back to her place for sex. There was a new movie poster on her bedroom wall. Some melodrama called *Australia*.

“Hugh Jackman likes to watch,” Kayla said and unpinned her long, blond hair. She was wearing the lingerie I bought her. “Well? Are you going to fuck me or daydream?”

I was seated at the edge of Kayla’s bed in a plus-size t-shirt and boxers. Hugh was busy holding and kissing Nicole Kidman on the surface of the glossy paper. There was no gray in his beard.

“Sorry,” I said. “I was wondering what it would feel like to kiss a movie star.”

She laughed and her breasts shook up and down. “You’re such a sad, sad man.”

An hour later, I climbed into my BMW again. I passed twenty-three movie billboards on the freeway home.

I took a shower and crawled into bed.

My wife curled herself around my backside. The diamond on her finger flared like a comet tail.

“Will you be able to take Maggie to school?” She said. “I have an early morning audition.”

I stared straight ahead. Moonlight threatened to ooze right through the empty spaces in the window blinds. I could almost touch the stars.

“Sure,” I said and closed my eyes.

The Light of the World **by Joseph Grant**

The end of the world as predicted by the Mayan calendar had been an overdue bust. Those with any respectability in the archeological world stayed far away from the ridiculous issue and even when the bright lights of cable network came to get any quote they could, Adam Reynolds remained in the shadows. While a few of his starry-eyed colleagues good-naturedly took the bait, Adam was busy in the field excavating his latest site.

"So much for the end of days." Adam muttered as the interest in his colleagues faded along with the camera lights once people realized the world would not end. His most recent discovery was something that excited him but was an impracticality to his fellow archeologists and therefore; a waste of time. The site was just a stone's throw from its sister city, the ancient Mayan city of Xultun. Like Xultun, this Guatemalan metropolis was once a densely populated complex complete with two large plazas that held statues of the Mayan deity and kings, as well as a two pyramids, altars, ball courts and standing stones. It never failed to amuse Adam that these stones proclaimed only the victories of the ruling house, never defeats. In doing this, the kings entitled themselves to immortality.

The city, like others before them, was mysteriously abandoned long before the Spanish conquistadors set armored foot into them. As far as archeologists could determine these were mostly abandoned around 900 A.D. There had never been a satisfactory explanation as to why. Theories ranged from sickness, warring factions or a great calamity but there had never been any concrete evidence. It troubled Adam and his associates. He knew that only a few thriving capitals in the Yucatan remained up until around the 14 Century. In these cities, there was more of a complete history found on a few crumbling birch barks, but never an explanation as what proliferated such a mass exodus.

Buried beneath an interior pyramid wall was a small chamber looters had exposed hundreds of years before but had failed to gain entry. Adam and his team were able to decipher hieroglyphs painted on a wall in another Yucatan temple thousands of miles away and enter the compartment. Inside they found evidence of a people obsessed with calendars and cycles. It suggested that the world would end in three years. Also found inside were 7 luminescent stones that when touched, seemed to cure the bearer of illnesses such as malaria, of which Adam had suffered.

News leaked about these healing stones. It was determined that the 7 stones represented the seven continents. Tensions rose between the powers when it was deemed some governments were keeping the crystals far too long. Armies were amassed and battles fought to gain these precious stones. Cities were abandoned in lieu of advancing troops. For once, the Mayan calendar was right when nuclear weapons were launched. The Earth glowed luminous from the vast reaches of space; the world ending three years to the very day.

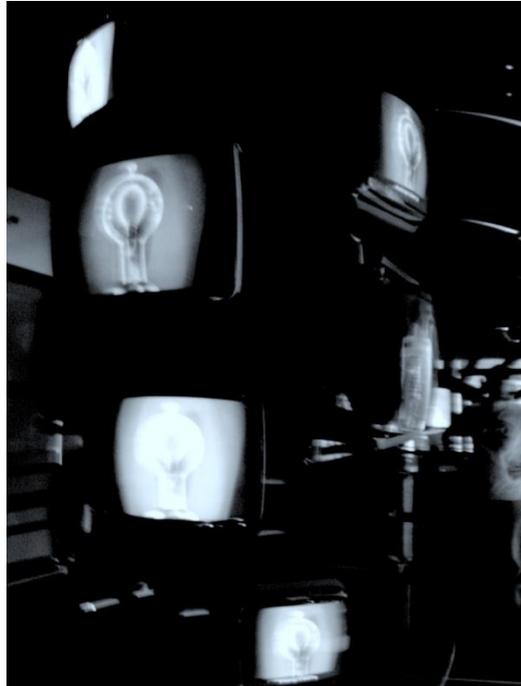
A Different Light

By Joanne Spataro

Sleeping in a cardboard Frigidaire box isn't all that terrible. I get to watch the sun rise every morning. Most people who work are too busy to watch a sun rise. They are too absorbed in stuffing lunch boxes for their kids. Or they resent getting up in the dark and going to bed in the dark, so they skip the experience out of spite.

Not me. I watch the pink and orange light ignite the uptown skyline every day. I tingle at the ethereal wisp of something bigger than me on the horizon. I sniff it out like morning breakfast food smells from nearby restaurants.

Light is my best friend, the bubbly gal I gossip with alone in my little house. She tells the truth on all the people who walk by me during the day. Morning people have a certain sag to their under eyes, heavy from too much or too little sleep. They clutch Styrofoam coffee cups. I like to imagine they are drinking vodka, but the way they blow on the top of the container tells me it's hot coffee.



At lunch time, most people are smiling. It's time to eat, and who isn't happy about eating their second meal of the day, knowing they will get a third when they get home from work. I get one meal a day on the corner of 3rd and Mint. This nice couple hands out ham sandwiches and bags of Doritos to homeless people at 5 p.m. on weekdays.

But Lady Light tells lies when the sun goes down. People benefit from her gentle erasures, softening wrinkles around the eyes and tense grooves above the mouth. It's why people go on dates at night. That old pock mark on your cheek is gone, or at least the other side of your face (pock mark-less) is illuminated by a candle at your table. Your date can only see the good side of your face. They might not see you in daytime light for another two or three dates. This gives you time to win them over with your personality.

I used to only see people in fluorescent lighting when I was among the working people. I was a paralegal at a white-shoe law firm. My attorney, Henry, walked to my bay from his office to give me papers. He was pale and had a garden of pock marks on his forehead. Sometimes I see him in the early morning walking to my old office. He doesn't see me. Some strangers will stop and give me a dollar. I save the dollars in a corner pocket of my down jacket.

I go buy Ring Pops on Fridays because I like to look at my face in the red, cherry-flavored reflection. I like to see myself fragmented in the diamond shape. Then I lick away the edges so I can forget what I really look like.

Lava and Light

By Len Kuntz

(Near Mount St. Helens, May 1982)

In the morning they woke to find the sky a dark purple, not so much the color of a bruise, but something strange and dire, like an admonition from God.

Each of the young men was nervous about it, but they would not say so and instead they exclaimed minor wonder or made jokes about an apocalypse.

This was years and years ago.

They loaded their car quickly and headed back to the university. It was a three hour drive but they planned to make it in two.

As they drove, the sky grew darker, even though that seemed impossible, the morning looking like dusk at 10 am.

On the radio they learned what had happened, and the news filled each young man with individual relief or disappointment, depending on their desire for danger.

They talked about their friend they'd left behind, the one who had dropped out to get married at the questionable age of eighteen. Each said they would never do such a thing. Two of the three friends said they would never even marry. All said the groom was a sap, though secretly each of them was astonished by the groom's determined leap into the real world, a place they greatly feared.

They could not see the regal volcano, but an hour into the drive they saw the remnants of her power and anger and resolve, ash falling as wide gray leaves, clotting the sky, then blinding them like a blizzard.

They played a Jimmie Buffett tape, singing along because it seemed perfectly fitting. "*I don't know where I'ma gonna go when the volcano blows.*" They played the song several times until the radio went dead and the headlights turned useless against the insistent storm of falling ash. After a while, the motor began to whine and cough and one of them said they should pull over and another said no way, are you fucking nuts, we don't know what's out there.

It took them seven hours to make it back to campus. They'd later find out the car's engine was ruined. They'd later learn the groom's bride was pregnant. They'd later learn more about life than they ever thought--certainly more than they required--and through this they'd discover disillusionment.

But that night, alone in his bunk, one of the friends lay under a great swath of blankets, teeth chattering, lights off but for a luminous lava lamp that burped eggs of assorted shapes and hues. He hadn't known why he was so afraid, but the lamp's glow soothed

him. The different globules of color became capsules of his future. In the yoke-yellow blob he saw himself a happy groom. In the moss-green bead of goo he skimmed stones across a lake with a boy who liked to squeal and say Good one, Papa! He watched his life form and reform, and in doing so decided from then on, he would build himself a life predicated on light.

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Miracle

By Janice D. Soderling

Afterward, he gave a little grunt and went straight to sleep, but the woman lay awake with her thoughts. A cold night, a dark night, snow stretched for miles, smooth as cream.

Soon she would have to tell him about the child that had quickened that very day with a sharp kick against her belly. He would not be pleased.

Later, she woke with a start as if from a gentle touch or subdued exclamation. The room was drenched with light. She walked barefoot to the window to see the dull landscape transformed. A full moon shone stronger than she had ever seen it. Snow glittered silver, the icicles on the outbuildings were prominent as a row of unsheathed swords. It was a cold dazzling light made brighter by the whiteness of the fields and filigreed trees. She felt that the light was palpable, that if she opened the window she could touch it.

She was seized by the idea that it was an omen. Angel wings, she thought, looking at the spreading trees.

She went to the bed to wake the man and show him. "Come. Look. I have something to tell you."

He hit out, pushed her away angrily. "Tomorrow," he mumbled. "Leave me alone." He flopped onto his side with a snort, began again to snore.

She went back to the window. The illumined scene was the same, resplendent, silent as glass. "It is an omen," she thought again. "It doesn't matter if he loves me or not. The child will love me. Children always love their mother. It will be a special child. Surely this is an omen."

This thought supported her as her belly and the man's anger swelled at the same pace. It gave her pluck when she gave birth and they put the boy to her breast. The memory remained strong and shining in her mind as the boy grew older and became selfish, demanding, cruel to flies and small animals. It seemed to some that he was born knowing how to lie, to steal, to hit whoever disagreed with him, even his mother.

She clung to the memory of that night as the boy grew on what she fed him: beans, and onion soup, and cheese on hard-crust bread, sometimes a pickled fish. She thought of it in later years when the boy was much taller than she was and had learned to like strong drink. The vision dimmed, but was never completely extinguished. For years she watched her son and waited patiently for the miracle.

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Her Face wasn't Drawn by Rouchswalwe

Sitting in my hundred-year-old oak chair sipping on a pint of *Altbier* here on the second floor of an urban apartment built in the early 20th century, my eyes stray to the ceiling. There is water damage there behind the cobwebs. It is visible even outside as a dark stain on the brick.

The cat's been dead for almost a month. The place is so quiet I overhear the neighbors downstairs making babies. At least when the man isn't yelling, "What's wrong with you!" The walls of the old apartments are as thin as the walls of my heart. "It's all over the house! What's wrong with you!"

Her response to the ructious question is a mystery. No doubt she speaks softly. Sitting here, I wonder if there is anything wrong with her in actuality. There have been times we have met on the stairwell. She always smiles when we bump into each other. The timbre of her voice is unknown to me, for she doesn't say a word. She only smiles. And then her face colors the foyer the brightest gold and forces me to smile in return no matter my mood.

Last summer, I went to the window to draw the curtains when I noticed her sitting down there on the stoop with pencils scattered in the grass and a large pad of paper on her lap. Her back was towards me and so I saw what it was she was working on. A simple pencil drawing. Not of the scene before her. At least not the scene I saw there before us. She was sketching a landscape of the mind. A place of light and delight that was perhaps far in the future. Or far in the past. A place where questions with no answers are not asked in a belligerent voice.

I stood watching over her like an angel of the ether. Watched the sketch take form as she sat there on the concrete steps facing an unseen city street. Joggers ran past. A fire engine blared by with lights of emergency. Yet she calmly sketched on, smudging the lead upon the creamy paper like a violinist pushing notes into the air of a gilded concert hall. I stood there in the clouds behind her, awed. Watched her hands. Saw that she didn't seem to need religion to illuminate the neighborhood with spectacular silence.

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Contributor Bios

Lynn Alexander is the producer and editor of web and print content for Full Of Crow Press And Distribution, which includes MICROW, Full Of Crow, Blink Ink, Fashion For Collapse, MUST, and other projects in addition to distribution of zines and independent publications. Additionally she is the Head Fiction Editor for [Red Fez](#). Visit [Full of Crow](#).

Walter Bjorkman was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, now residing in the foothills of the Adirondacks. His poems, short stories and photographs have appeared in Word Riot, Scrambler, Poets & Artists, THIS Literary Magazine, Blue Fifth Review, Connotation Press, Foliate Oak, Wilderness House Literary Review, A-Minor, Blue Print Review, Metazen and many others. His collection of short stories, *Elsie's World*, was published in January 2011. He has been an editor at Voices, 52|250 - A Year of Flash, Thrush Poetry Journal and Thrush Press, now Managing Editor at A-Minor Press. Acoustic blues guitar is another of his passions. <http://aminorpress.com/>

Ron Burch lives in Los Angeles, where he works as a screenwriter. He is originally from Columbus, Ohio, and attended The Ohio State University and Harvard University. Over the past year, his plays have been produced in the UK, Seoul, New York City, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, and in many other cities. Ron is also a published fiction writer: he's been nominated for "The Pushcart Prize," and his first novel, *BLISS, INC.*, was published in 2010; his flash-fiction collection, *MENAGERIE*, will be published by Aqueous Books in 2014. For more information, please visit www.ronburch.net and <http://lifesbitchslap.blogspot.com/>.

Sara Biggs Chaney lives with her husband, daughter, and dog in Vermont. She teaches writing at Dartmouth College. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Downer Magazine*, *Front Porch Review*, *Red Ochre Press' Category 2: Installment Two*, and *Apocrypha and Abstractions*.

Erin Cole is a writer of dark and delicious speculative fiction. In her spare time, she turns the clocks backwards and claims that she has all the time in the world—for what, she is still deciding. She lives in beautiful Portland, Oregon with her three precious 'walkers,' her Romanian lover, one gargantuan black cat, and a 99-year-old Chow. www.erincolewrites.com

Aleathia Drehmer is a collector of angles and shadows and all the small things people forget to photograph. Her work has been featured in several online magazines and graced the covers of over 5 chapbooks throughout the small press. She makes her home in the pastoral Finger Lakes Region of New York.

Michelle Elvy A manuscript editor, writing coach and sailing instructor, Michelle Elvy edits the online journals [Blue Five Notebook](#) and [Flash Frontier](#). She also keeps busy as a judge of various writing competitions, most recently for [Flash Fiction](#)

[World](#) and the South Island Writers' Association, and as coordinator of New Zealand's [National Flash Fiction Day](#). A Pushcart nominee, Glass Woman Prize finalist and 2012 recipient of the NZSA/ Auckland Museum Library Grant, Michelle has published stories and poetry in numerous print and online magazines. She lives on her sailboat in New Zealand. Tropical waters are calling her north this year.

Kristin Fouquet photographs and writes from lovely New Orleans. Her photographs have been published online and in print. She is the author of *Twenty Stories* (Rank Stranger Press, 2009) and *Rampart & Toulouse* (Rank Stranger Press, 2011). You are invited to visit her virtual abode, Le Salon, at the web address <http://kristin.fouquet.cc>.

Jack Galmitz was born in New York in 1951. He attended the public schools and received a Ph.D in English from the University of Buffalo in 1985. He is currently a collaborating editor at the prestigious *Roadrunner Journal*, a position which he intends to vacate after the next issue. He has written extensively, particularly minimalist verse. He just released a book called *Objects* (Impress, 2013) and shortly before a book called *Yellow Light (Yet to Be Named)* (Free Press, 2013). He has always loved art and has been practicing alongside his writing for the last year or so. His work has appeared in such journals as *Otoliths*, *Spinozablue*, *Red Fez*, and one image was chosen as the premier book cover for a journal called *Bop Cool City*.

Joseph P. Grant As a Pushcart Prize nominee, Joseph Grant's short stories have been published in over 230 literary reviews such as *Byline*, *New Authors Journal*, *Underground Voices*, *Midwest Literary Magazine*, *Inwood Indiana Literary Review*, *Hack Writers*, *Six Sentences*, *Literary Mary*, *NexGenPulp*, *Is This Reality Zine*, *Darkest Before Dawn*, *strangeroad.com*, *FarAway Journal*, *Full of Crow*, *Microw*, *Heroin Love Songs*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Writing Raw*, *Unheard Magazine*, *Absent Willow Literary Review*.

Abha Iyengar is a poet, author, essayist and blogger. Her writings have been featured in *Muse India*, *Bewildering Stories*, *The Asian Writer*, *Danse Macabre*, *The Fabulist*, among others. Her story, 'The High Stool' was nominated for the Story South Million Writers Award. She won a Special Jury Prize in Patras, Greece for her poem-film 'Parwaaz'. She was the Lavanya Sankaran Writing Fellow 2009 – 2010. Her poetry collection "Yearnings" was published in 2010. Her flash fiction collection 'Flash Bites' and fantasy novel, 'Shrayan', are available on [Amazon](#) and [Smashwords](#). *Shrayan* is available in print [here](#).

Her website: www.abhaiyengar.com Her blog: www.abhaencounter.blogspot.in

Laurie Kolp is an award-winning poet who likes to find inspiration outside with camera in one hand, pad and pencil in the other. She believes each given moment is a gift that holds potential for new poetry and begs for the immediate capture of images all around. She is the Vice President of the Texas Gulf Coast Writers and Assistant Creative Writing Editor for *The River Muse* <http://therivermuse.com/>. She is married with three children and lives in Southeast Texas. Laurie tweets at

<https://twitter.com/KolpLaurie>. You can find her poetry here-
<http://lkkolp.wordpress.com/> and <http://lkharris-kolp.blogspot.com/>.

Len Kuntz lives in rural Washington State. His writing appears widely in print and online at such places as Camroc Press Review, Juked, Cynic Online Magazine and also at lenkuntz.blogspot.com

Kate Mahony has an MA in Creative Writing from the Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand. Her short fiction has appeared in Best New Zealand Fiction (Random House), Turbine, Takahe, the International Literary Quarterly, Flash Frontier, Tales for Canterbury (Random Static), and Blue Crow magazine (Australia), and will be published in forthcoming issues of Blackmail Press and Blue Fifth Review. One of her short stories was a finalist in the BNZ Katherine Mansfield Award, New Zealand, in 2008.

Thomas Morgan is the producer of [These Storied Streets](#), a documentary film about homelessness in the United States due out in the fall of 2012. Find on Facebook, @storiedstreets on Twitter and read Tom's blog posts at www.onefootonlifesbananapeel.com

Rouchswalwe hails from Frankfurt a/M. As a girl, she'd fly about the neighbourhood, returning home disheveled, dirty, but happy (thus her nickname which means 'Smoky Swallow' in Middle High German). Things haven't changed much. Her stories have appeared in BluePrintReview - issue 28 and StepAway Magazine - issue 6. The latter piece has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She welcomes you to visit the 'Fünffingerplätze' at <http://5fingerplatz.blogspot.com>

Linda Simoni-Wastila writes from Baltimore, where she also professes, mothers, and gives a damn. You can find her stuff at Smokelong Quarterly, Monkeybicycle, Scissors and Spackle, MiCrow, The Sun, Blue Five Notebook, The Poet's Market 2013, Hoot, Connotation Press, Baker's Dozen, Camroc Press Review, Right Hand Pointing, Every Day Fiction, and Nanoism, among others. Senior Fiction Editor at JMWW, she works one word at a time towards her MA in Creative Writing at Johns Hopkins and two novels-in-progress. In between sentences, when she can't sleep, she blogs at <http://linda-leftbrainwrite.blogspot>.

Jessamyn Smyth's writing has appeared in [Red Rock Review](#), [American Letters and Commentary](#), [Best American Short Stories/100 Distinguished Stories of 2005](#), [Nth Position](#), and many other journals and anthologies. She has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and her poetry collection Kitsune is coming out from Finishing Line Press' New Women's Voices Series in 2013. She has recently finished several other books which she hopes will be in your hands soon. Her dog Gilgamesh is epic.

Janice D. Soderling's flash and fiction appear at literary magazines such as 100 Word Stories, Penduline Press, Boston Literary Magazine, Thrice Fiction, and Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine. Forthcoming poems/translations at Raintown Review, The Centrifugal Eye, American Arts Quarterly and Literary

Bohemian; poems are included in the 5-year anthology recently released by *The Centrifugal Eye*. A villanelle was nominated by *Tilt-a-Whirl* to *Best-of-the-Net 2012*. Janice is assistant fiction editor at *Able Muse*.

Michael J. Solender is the editor of *MICROW*, a semiannual collection of very short stories and prose. His micro-fiction has been featured online at *Bull Men's Fiction*, *Calliope Nerve*, *Danse Macabre*, *Dogzplot*, *Full of Crow*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *The Legendary*, *Right Hand Pointing* and others. Solender's thriller, *Pewter Badge*, was awarded the 2011 *Derringer Award for Best Short Story* by the *Short Mystery Fiction Society*. He is the author of the short story and poetry chapbook, *Last Winter's Leaves*, published by *Full of Crow Press*. His essay, *Unaffiliated*, is featured in the anthology, *Topograph: New Writings From The Carolinas and the Landscape Beyond*, published by *Novello Festival Press*. <http://michaeljwrites.com>

Joanne Spataro writes in Charlotte, NC. She is a regular contributor to *The Huffington Post*, *Creative Loafing*, and *The Charlotte Observer* with her stories about equality, local characters, and the arts. She also covered the *Democratic National Convention* in 2012 for *Creative Loafing*, where she had an awkward moment with director *Rob Reiner*. On her blog *Look it's Joanne*, she takes readers behind the scenes of her sometimes wacky, always real-life exploits at <http://lookitsjoanne.com>.

John Swain is an American poet who lets his work speak for itself. Eight of his poems now turned into *The Feathered Masks* - a short poetry collection, available both as pdf-download, and as online [Isuu version with flipping pages](#).

Tikuli is a blogger, freelance creative writer from India. Her work has appeared in both online and print publications including *Troubadour 21*, *The Enchanting Verses Literary Review*, *Le Zaporouge*, *Mnemosyne Literary Journal*, *The Smoking Book* etc. She blog at [Spinning a Yarn of Life](#)

Cynthia A. Williams is senior writer and editor in Communications at a Fortune 300 company headquartered in Charlotte. Cynthia graduated from *UNC Chapel Hill* with a degree in Communications. Her professional writing career includes creative non-fiction, fiction, narrative history and television copy writing. She has published a novella titled *BANYAN*, available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Smashwords, Lulu, and in paperback from *CreateSpace*. Cynthia has also recently completed a child's storybook and a screenplay for an animated film. You may read more of her work at www.cyn1020.com.

Angel Zapata grew up in NYC, but now resides near Augusta, Georgia. Some of his fiction and poetry has appeared in the *Toe Tags Anthology*, *Long Live the New Flesh: Year One and Year Two*, *The Best of Every Day Poets: Volume Two*, and the zombie anthology: *Putrid Poetry and Sickening Sketches*.

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*Luminous
Winter 2013*