

Sage Cigarettes Magazine

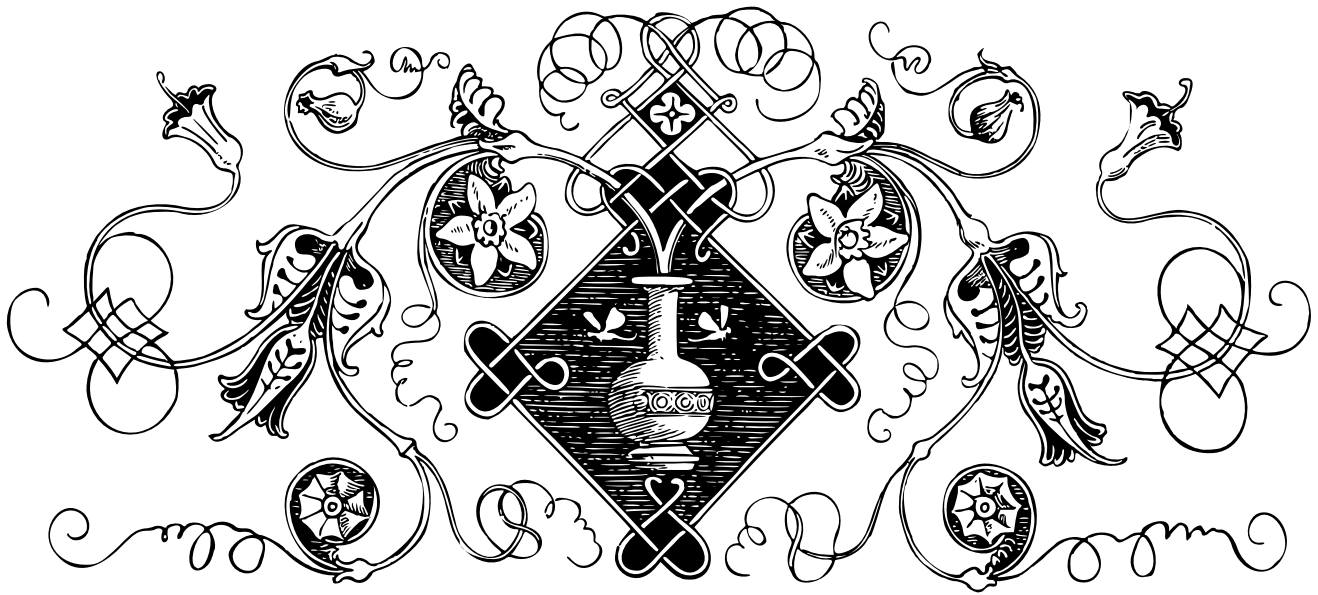


Halloween 2020

cover art by Kiley Lee

Table of Contents

3. A Letter from Sage Cigarettes
4. The Ghost of Dukinfield Cemetery - Andy N
5. The Heaton Park Tunnel Mystery - Andy N
6. The Ghost of Mayfield Station - Andy N
7. According to the Sermon of Reverend Collier - Andy N
8. Gallows' Lullaby - Avra Margariti
9. 719 E. PIKE STREET - Charles Leggett
10. "IT'S ALL" BLUES - Charles Leggett
11. FAUCI / CERBERUSTESTCONUNDRUM - Charles Leggett
12. Skeleton Kitten - Ella Kate Dewees
13. FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH: YOU CAN'T GET TO HEAVEN... - Charles Leggett
15. Dance of the Skeletons - Claire Smith
16. Caught in a Starless Sky - Claire Smith
17. Untitled Photo - Jim Zola
18. Wedding Night - Claire Smith
19. Pumpkin's Watch - Colleen Anderson
20. Social Bonding for Little Monsters - Avra Margariti
21. Be My Victim - Shannon Gardner
22. The Bell Jar Problem - Avra Margariti
23. So Long (See You Tomorrow) - Avra Margariti
24. Behold, a Rabbit-Footed Boy - Avra Margariti
25. The Moths, The Rabbits // Witches of Fur and Teeth - Avra Margariti
26. Untitled Photo - Jim Zola
27. The Lane - Beulah Vega
29. Trick or Treat - Ed Ahern
30. Words From a Dead Woman - lolana Paedelt
31. MURDER-SUICIDE - John Grey
32. YOUR FIRST LOVER - John Grey
33. TOO MANY BONES // STRANDED - John Grey
34. FIRST IMPRESSION - John Grey
35. Last Laugh - Pat Tompkins
36. Silver Years // The Five-Fingered Root- Judith Skillman
37. Wedding the Ratcatcher's Daughter- Oliver Smith
38. Whispering Red - Martins Deep
39. I Asked My Love on Halloween - Oliver Smith
40. Little Extinctions - Oliver Smith
41. Minotaur - Michael Estabrook
42. Terror Bird - Michael Estabrook
43. Bigfoot - Michael Estabrook
44. Vampire Bat - Michael Estabrook
45. Protection// Night Feast // The Spider - Rickey Rivers Jr.
46. Groovy Graveyard - Rollin Jewett
47. Fall Song - S. Rupsha Mitra
48. Night Before Diwali - S. Rupsha Mitra
49. Blessed Are Those Who Seek the Dark - Somto Rodney
50. Bloody Sky - Rollin Jewett
51. Deliver Us- Somto Rodney
52. The Cyclops - Stanley Toledo
53. Worms // Poltergeist - Thomas J Misuraca
54. LULLABY FOR MY LITTLE BOY - Thomas J Misuraca
55. Piscean - Tori Lee
56. Untitled Photo - Jim Zola
57. My Heart is a Mouth// Bliss - Tori Lee
58. There's a Werewolf in my Closet - Rollin Jewett
59. SOUL CATCHER - Rollin Jewett
60. Ghost Castle - Rollin Jewett
61. There's a Spider in my Bed - Rollin Jewett
62. HASTEN - Rollin Jewett
63. White Horse // Nancy Chipbonnet - David Walshe
64. Meet the Contributors



Happy Halloween from Sage Cigarettes Magazine!

Last year we shared some chilling self-care tips, and in light of the current state of the world, we're going to do the same this year. Humanity is in a tender place, and the future is so uncertain. Spend some time with us, and our talented contributors, this issue, and let your imagination roam the dark wilderness of spooky season.

- witch-themed bath bombs - Lunaapothecaryla has some amazing options on Etsy
- Halloween Playlist - we have one on Spotify that's just witchin'! Search Spotify for "Sage Cigarettes Presents" and you will find Spooky Songs for Spooky Peeps
- Load up on snacks - search Pinterest for Halloween pot-luck to find a bevy of interesting recipes. Our favorite is the spider web taco dip!
- Horror movie marathon - we did the #31daysofhorror movie challenge this year, and an accompanying podcast that we're going to keep going throughout the year. Search Spotify for "Sage Cigarettes Presents" and you will find A Ghost in the Magazine. We also have an additional horror movie list on our blog.
- Howl at the moon - A rare blue moon will light up the Halloween night sky this year, and such an event occurring on Halloween only happens every 18 to 19 years. Witches, be sure to stock up on your moon water.

Be happy, dear readers, and stay safe!

The Ghost of Dukinfield Cemetery

Catching her tears in the breeze
From one row of headstones to the next
Some days you would see her ghost
Walking up and down
Like a private on patrol.

Entwined with the sun
Just before sunrise
Creeps over the hill
Cascading into a silent film
As the shadows sank away

Repeating his name over
Like a broken tape machine
Caught up in a tangle
Of half-forgotten prayers
In at least two different languages

Echoing in the wind
Butterfly shaped with regrets
In a tidal mystery of anger
If things had been
So very different

Over skeletons of feelings
Before they turned
Into scraps of meanings
After the burnt-out end of summer
Into a willow shaped autumn

Following him
To the grave
Within weeks
Filled with nothing
But regret.



The Heaton Park Tunnel Mystery

Soaked in a long brown coat
Curved over the corner
Between the outer rail
And the tunnel wall,

It was never established
Whether he tried to kill himself
Cushioned by the relentless rain
Stalled in motionless confusion

Spaced up and down the tunnel
Picking money like nettles
Wrapped in ripped hankies
Bordering the shadows

Or had it been something else
With months and months of
Hard earned money to be
Deposited in the city centre

Shelved under the wheels
With the remains
Of what had been his wife
Unclear whether they had fell
In a terrible argument

Or had been pushed.



The Ghost of Mayfield Station

Calling out the same name
Over and over
The sound varies constantly
Before cutting out
Like a chewed-up tape

Echoing with a sadness
Bordering on the verge
Of a panic
Almost like they are
Pleading for forgiveness

Dismembered
In a broken sadness
Skipping through
All kinds of turmoil
Of a love clearly died

Left on the platform
No matter
Whether cold or warm

Bordered up
For who knows
How long
Waiting for the
Last train home.



According to the Sermon of Reverend Collier

Drumming across windows
In both of the toilets
Banging could frequently be heard
Dragging chairs under the stairs
In the entrance hall

Thawed in the cheesy music
Leading to the main bar
Twitching across your back
Like a whistle blower
Drowned out by the noise

Over the sticky floors
And watered-down lager
Curving into a maze of bodies
Aglow in a series of frantic lights
Sweeping diamonds in their dreams

Caged with the TV Screen
Dangling half-drunk from the ceiling
Scrunched with a frightening rage
Held back by invisible hands
Wishing for the carnage to end

Over the top of a sign that always said
Drinking, dancing, cavorting
While the reverend sits there unseen
Constantly spitting feathers
Throwing toilet paper in the air

And attempting to push staff
Down the stairs as if to say
They weren't getting out of there
Anywhere near quick enough
For his liking.

(Brannigans is a now closed Bar in the centre of Manchester which was reportedly haunted by Reverend Collier, a fierce anti-alcohol reverend at the start of the 20th Century of which his church, Albert Halls became Brannigans at one point)

Gallows' Lullaby

My heart buzzes like a feast of lovesick flies over a carcass
My lungs tingle like angels inhaling frankincense
(Bodies and their functions always take a while to realize
Their state of being has changed, as most morticians can attest)

This is eros inverted, eros hanging on by a thread
The way we dangle together like deadweight fruit
The way they've made examples of us

All I can say is, seconds before the trap fell open
The wind turned and carried your fear-sweet perfume to my nose
Before my phantom senses abandon me
Before our hanging bodies are cut down and grow cold
I'll bribe the wind with my last two obols
To blow your hair my way one final time
So that I may feel the thing that touched your cygning neck
Before the noose ever did



719 E. PIKE STREET

Under (across from)
a leathery eye
in shades of deep slate
and cool black so thick
the light upon it
posits that the paint
was frozen solid
while streaming down
the limpid canvas;
an implacable
if impassive eye;
broken, wintry eye.

** * * * *

Map of Artist's Dream Life

A dry yellow
and its neighbor
a pale orange
black given to
fading then purpling
into something tropical
reds varying in
danger and romance
middling inland seas
of blue
straight
lines that don't
present as borders

The Artist Chooses Her Coat of Arms

red-to-orange butterfly
wings coiling at their ends
into tentacles fore-
grounding lean nude grayish
humanoid figures with
charcoal splotches bearded
on their faces, some with
light peach-shaded pantries
hovering behind, some
much more violently
abstract, skulls surrounded
by butterfly wings red-
to-orange, or tentacles
camouflage yellow-and-
green, at times I wonder
why aren't I happier

** * * * *

As if dreamt, the scene
directly behind
me—I've not yet looked
and may forget to.
The abstraction hung
next door to the eye,
shapes steeped in blood orange,
a stained glass window's
mild lucid nightmare.

—St. James Bar and Eatery, and its prior incarnation,
Rosebud, Seattle, WA

"IT'S ALL" BLUES

Are you on the level baby
Or you got something up your sleeve
I said are you on the level baby
Or you got something up your sleeve
You gonna save our love and stay now baby
Or you gonna break my heart and leave

I know I say things baby
That you just don't believe
Yes I know I say things baby
That you just don't believe
you gonna bring down judgment
Or you gonna grant me this one reprieve

I know it's all my fault baby
But I hope that you don't leave
I know, I know it's all my fault now baby
But I hope that you don't leave
Cuz it's all dark and cold outside baby AND
it's raining and the wind is blowing AND
it's all thunder and lightning AND
it's all people fighting AND
it's all mean and vicious AND
it's all avaricious AND
it's all nasty and malicious AND
it's all ignominious AND
it's all injudicious AND
it's all invidious AND
it's all insidious AND
if you go BABY
I don't know
WHAT'S
gonna happen cuz it's ALL

I said it's ALL

I said it's ALL

Hallows' Eve

FAUCI / CERBERUS TEST CONUNDRUM

To stand
in line for hours,
asymptomatic, with
a crowd of people who are there
because
they're sick
is tantamount
to strolling through the Gates
of Hell to find out whether you
have sinned.



Ella Kate Dewees



FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH: YOU CAN'T GET TO HEAVEN...

—The Half Brothers at Connor Byrne Pub, Seattle, WA, All Hallows' Eve

rannaigheacht mhor

... 'Til you die, they sing, die, die!
and saints up high are heckling
mid minglings of mercury
and slurry wraiths of smoke rings.

Milder the blaze, more's the mold
light gleams, beguiled with shade's glaze,
be it cause or effect—culled
curves no whit dulled for their flaws.

Earl's parading as a pimp
(it's simply not persuading)
"from the 'burbs!" Prodding fangs, pumps,
gowns. Slumps now on my nodding

old bean a clown's fake cleaver:
firm believer in more means
to mine cagey and clever
"forever of two minds" mimes.

Eighteen days. We two wended
to bend pens and bid adieu.
Let's do the math. "Hey! Dang! Did...?"
Earl's turbid frown, "...the Friday?"

In desultory down-
town robes, frown, sad certi-
orari deployed and done,
the judge unstopped us. Starry
cloaks in heaven can't be tried
on till we've died? Let's leaven
this notion in terms of trade
and shade: how long to live un-

*'til you die are dissolved in
meaningless skinflint shorn shards
cardings of blurred coarse-cloven
time unwoven as our words*

*pared of sense decomposed
in a floundering flotsam
of time's scum or? absconded
beyond it to light lissome*

*song that awaits slowly slipped
encrypted in inchoate
dream-sly iteration wrapped
thus unwrapped quickened quiet*

*bare souls we'd go on gaining
the insights raining round so
sweetly we'd been beginning
to bring to bear song we'd see*

*a warbling to wend by spills
out instills for absorbing
any ennobling nigh shoals of our souls' private probings*

*the numbers of the benumb-
ing music mumbling ardors
of satori sere sublime
discernment chime that adheres*

*meaning to our lives as lived
as motive drums what we do
moments alone we had loved
stained hands gloved watching windy*

*clouds clutch and pour in ardent
argument with fond friends or
our deep dourest, most mordent
and hellbent yearning hours our*

*old melodies molting all
over us ...pall of appeas-
ing those questionings I quail
sans pale and Powers to pose—*

Cheers! How long? Square for a score,
or fight for more? ...Queer question
mark scrawled there: spun-around scar
of a marred exclamation

point candidly claw-footed—
now what'd—bounced my bloody
whiskey! Whoops. Why, un-whited,highlighted dun,*'til I die!*

Dance of the Skeletons

Skeletons fluoresce
Beneath a star-filled sky.
Winds take their hands –
Partners in an ice-glaze dance.
Skulls are adorned
With sparkled sequin masks.
Currents of air
Twists and turns
Turns and twists
All around in a quick step
Over the ballroom's
Glass-tiled floor,
Reflected in a haze
By mirrored walls.
They awake in shock,

Next day – all soaked
In red dye, and mesmerised.
In a room decorated
With grotesque scenes:
A forest of gnarled trees;
An island of quicksand;
Witches howls, swarming bats,
And big cat's growls.
No place to slumber, hide, rest.

Neonsigns declare –

HALLOWEEN FESTIVAL

(Fixed to the black walls)

No windows
No roof-light
No doors proclaim
'ESCAPE'.



Caught in a Starless Sky

He wears his skeleton,
a Harlequin's costume;
bones curve, map over his body.

They clap at the door
twice, three times, once more

Trick or treat!
Trick or treat!
Trick or treat!

He fumbles for a key
in his pockets – pokes
fingers through worn holes.

They rattle buckets,
raw eggs at the ready.

Trick or treat!
Trick or treat!
Trick or treat!

The door rattles ajar –
he demands their business
his voice a crackling fire.

They run down the path
bramble garlands grate their legs.

Trick or treat!
Trick or treat!
Trick or treat!

Haunted
by his eyeless sockets, skinless
cheeks, jaws full of blood-stained teeth –

his calls radiate back
into the starless sky.
Their way of escape lit

only by the full moon's
glow.



Wedding Night

Her face the colour of stone
in the dying fire's light –
its grate full of ashes.

She reels in her in-law's quilt,
struggles as ice advances:
down her spine, to her hips,
across her bare thighs.

Without knowing why
she prays out loud;
her confessions long.

A hand comes for her neck,
a gold band on his finger.
Her husband's wedding speech
unrobed.

He squeezes their vows
from her throat.

Her gown is cast aside,
to decompose on the bed-post.
Now frozen breezes whisper
in the cottage, repeat her last pleas.



PUMPKIN'S WATCH

servants of the hallows
succumb to sharp incisions
hollowed, scraped free
no seed for vines to come
on this night of many plains

flaming eyes light the passing
brighten the ancient path
silent pumpkins bide their time
guide from one world to the next
on the way to in-between

spirits bound in mystic dance
with living the aerial commune
no separation of night nor day
for those who've gone before
unnoticed gourds shift and watch

spectral doorways disappear
pumpkin smiles leer then snarl
gobble stragglers in the mist
spark extinguished, eyes now blank
husks and blood trails stain the earth

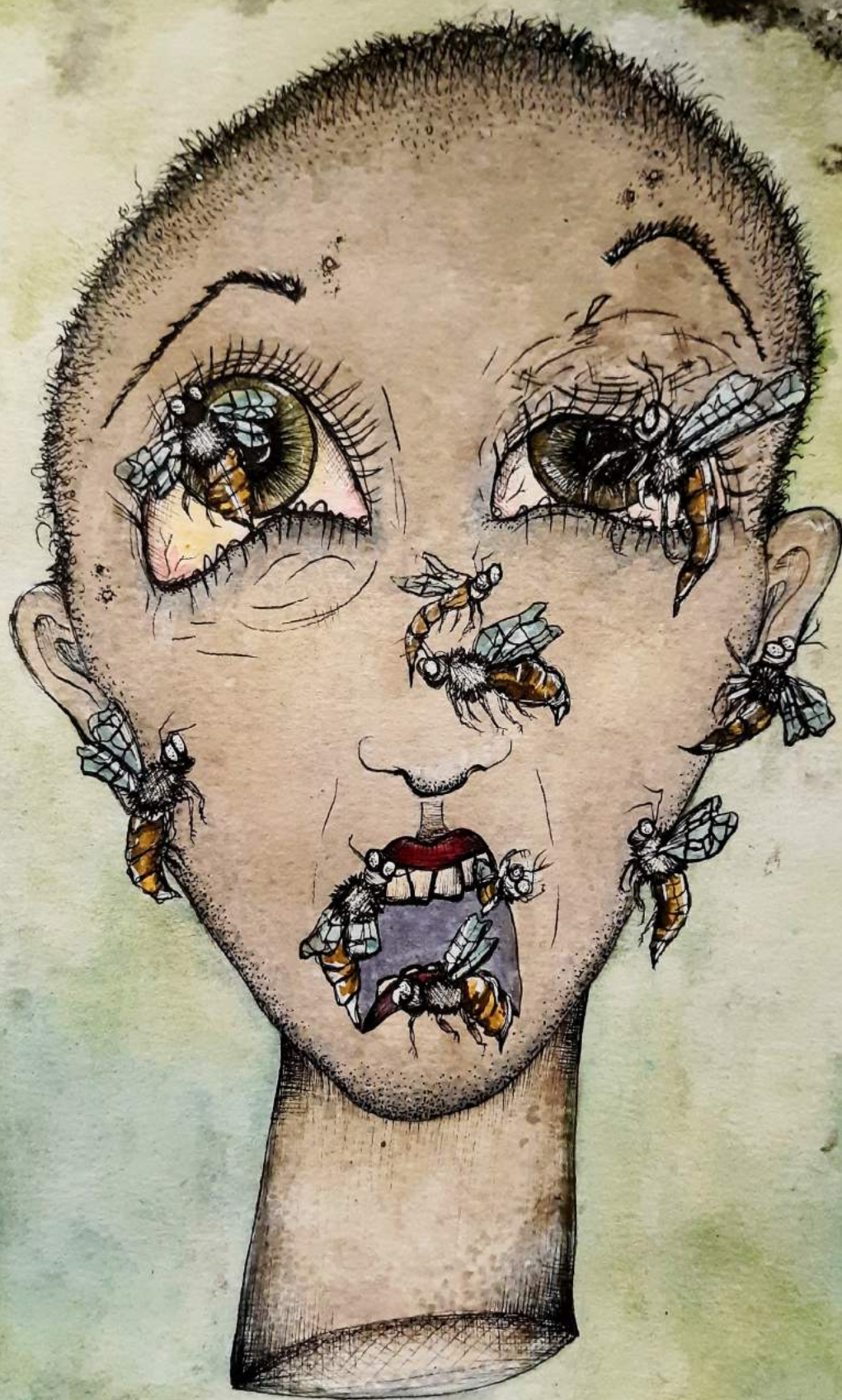
Jack o' lantern laughter echoes
and distant wails fade with day
the veiling fog dissipates
pumpkins wait for another year
dreaming of the crops to come

Social Bonding for Little Monsters

It's monkey stuff, it's social bonding,
it's two young beasts allo-grooming.
Fur and feather, scale and talon,
sharp yet playful nips and scratches,
two small bodies rolling around
in wild grass and cave grit.
When stone floor flays skin,
lick blood, *I'm sorry*, lick wound, *you're good*,
lick tears, *I'm here*.

Eventually, hunger rumbles
through concave stomachs.
Now cherub-faced, opposing-thumbed,
two children hold hands
down the serpentine forest path into town,
looking to feed and share
the meat spoils between them.





The Bell Jar Problem

You see, I am out here
while you are in there
but our positions could be reversed
in the flutter of a wing.

The problem with love, dear Monarch
is that it makes blind prophets out of us
knowing our fates yet unable to
prevent our tragedies.

Why I cannot save you, you ask
pinned to your corkboard
full wingspan on display, staring at me
through the smudged windowpane.
An insect more romantic than me
might think it a good way to go,
trapped by your precious side
or slowly wasting away in a bell jar
of my own naivety.

Did I ever tell you I'd fallen
for a spider once?
The ordeal taught me how to fly my way
out of silken, sticky situations;
how to weave escape routes
and never keep still long enough
to meet my doom
even for some pretty thing like you.

Your twelve thousand eyes accuse me
your blur-o'-color wings beating hard
against their unyielding tethers.
Do you hurt yourself hoping I'll crawl
through the crack in the window
and declare myself your savior?
You have to know I'm not cruel
merely cautious.

I landed on a daisy on my way here.
She helped me understand that indeed I love
you,
but I can't be the winged martyr you seek.

The lepidopterist will be arriving soon
with his magnifying glass and minuscule tongs
to poke and prod, study and admire.
Goodbye for now.
May we meet again in greener meadows, bluer
skies our wings faster than their butterfly nets.



So Long (See You Tomorrow)

Every day my clockwork moves preordained
a cordiform planchette
dragged by some higher power across an Ouija board
Goodbye, Hello
step right up to our miniature anatomical theater
for the museum exhibit is about to —

Open heart surgery, not recommended
for those of squeamish constitutions
my poor automaton girl, awaiting upon her metal bed
the smile fixed on her face telling me,
my heart, you are not to blame for this pain;
you cannot go against your cogs and springs any more than
I can stop lying here, ready for the —

Scalpel, clutched in my hand tight as a breath
steady, though my hard metal and soft surfaces
want to rattle and shiver. I hold her heart,
varnished ventricles lifted high as a banner
and the crowd of clapping giants titters, *oh, it's still pulsating!*
My chest shriveled, hers a bleeding latticework
laid upon the surgery bed.
Our colossal conductor rewinds us, heart and scalpel
popped back to their rightful places
in chests and drawers
the curtain falling until our next show.
My pretty automaton girl, your poor anatomical heart.
Hello, Goodbye.

Behold, a Rabbit-Footed Boy

I don't know why exactly I was convinced
my new classmate was a rabbit in disguise.
It had something to do with the way he quivered
the black of his eyes stretching far beyond the pupil

the ungainly long limbs.

I invited him to my house after school,
showed him my collection of four-leaf clovers,
horseshoes, pocket lighters, and pennies.
I don't have a rabbit foot, I told him, *yet*,
and he looked like he wanted to bolt or lock

his body tight and taut until the danger passed.
Luck isn't all that's cracked up to be, he said at last
a breathy whisper under a twitching nose.

Later on the couch, we drowned
vegetables in hummus and watched nature documentaries
his black eyes glazing over like licorice candy
as my fingers played scales up and down
the pale knobs of his ankles, fragile as seashells--
another one of my lucky charms.

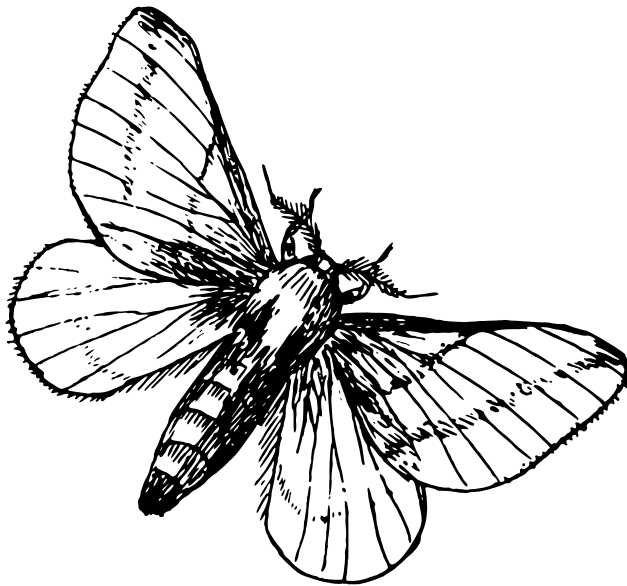
Blood and viscera spilling on the TV
I wondered what kind of animal I was:
another rabbit, or perhaps a fox?
I ran my tongue over my teeth, seeking
the blunt scrape of prey molars
or the starburst sharpness of a predator's canines.
I found neither. Leaning back against the couch,
half asleep, the slight weight of his ankles in my lap,
his pulse fluttering against my fingers,
I wondered if he would like me with my teeth filed sharper

just for him.

The Moths, The Rabbits

Avra Margariti

In my dream, rabbits
run over my future grave, shivering.
The lilies wilting on my nightstand smell like bloody steaks.
Giant moths land on my chest to feed off my tears.
My breath crystallizes their bodies,
nightmares caught in their membranous forewings,
sweet dreams soured by the secretions of their bodies.
The necrotic patterns on the moths' backs
like the patchwork quilt we buried my great-grandma in.
It's times like this, paralyzed by sleep, that I wonder
how the end will come.
The moths don't give anything away.
The rabbits hop on,
nibbling on the flowers above my sweet rot.



Witches of Fur and Teeth

Up to the slaughterhouse they take us
Strung out and dissection ready
Our young guts put on display
What omens will we reveal?
What glistening girl-meat prophecies?

Down by the ocean we wash
Our pelts clean, relishing the sting
Of salt as the blood slithers away
By the pinkish wavelet.
Freedom can be overwhelming to the captured
But we've always run with the wolves.
Moon Mother, are we to blame for the inquisitors' curiosity?
Are we to blame for our hunger?

Jim Zola



The Lane

A beautiful lane snakes past the hill,
That separates it from the azure sea.
White, flower-bedecked fence posts run along beside,
Keeping bucolic cows and sheep to their pasture,
Allowing myself and the lane,
the freedom to wander alone.

A figure appears at the top of the hill
Silhouetted in the late afternoon
Of the drowning sun.

Who can say what lead this curious visitor
On this particular day
Over the brown summer fields,
to this lane unknown to them,
Though they had lived nearby for a very long time.

As they step onto the thin ribbon of asphalt and gravel,
The overly plump cows look up for a moment,
At this interloper of their tranquility,
Give a gentle call and go back to their grazing.
Somewhere a dove or pigeon coos
Looking for its lover, or looking for its dinner.
The figure walks on
Following where the lane disappears over the hill.

I follow behind,
Quietly and quickly just another
Of the lengthening shadows
filling the lane.

The lane ends abruptly
At a wrought iron gate,
Standing sentinel to a fruitful farm,
Older than the lane itself.
The lone figure
perhaps sensing me behind
Quickens their pace through the gate
And knocks on the bright green door.

I watch concealed in gathering gloom as the door opens
Spilling warm yellow light and a rosy-cheeked child
Out at the stranger's feet.
An exuberant hello is called,
And soon the Farmers wife appears at the cheery doorstep
Wiping flour on her apron and smiling with all of her teeth.
Introduction are exchanged,
Lemonade is offered,
An invitation is accepted,
And as the sun sets slowly over the rolling hills,
The lone figure enters the old house
That suddenly ceases to exist.

In its place a rusted wrought iron gate,
Gives way to barren fields
Lined with broken stones and dry weeds.
I hurry toward the gate,
Knowing that I too must get inside,
Before the gate and lane also dissolve into the ether,
My mother has invited company,
and it's time to eat.



Trick or Treat

Some experiences are inevitable-
parents, race, plumbing, talents.

Some experiences are chosen-
spouses, jobs, vices, friends.

Some sensations are virgin births-
Hunger, chill, pain, touch.

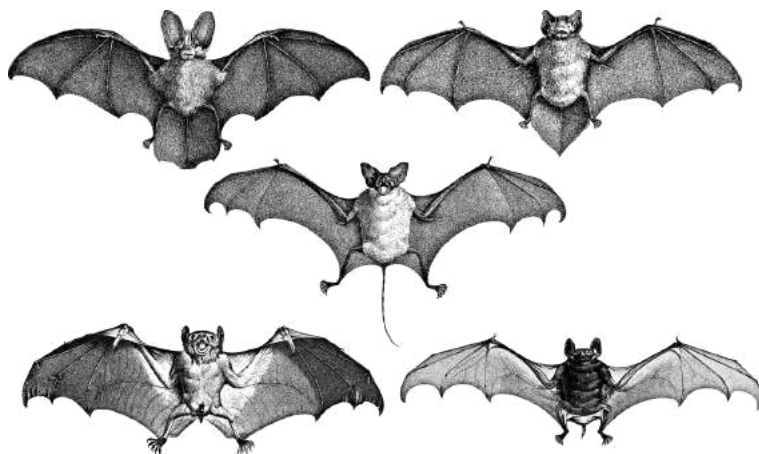
Some sensations are sought-
Warmth, comfort, exertion, enjoyment,

Some emotions are uncontrollable-
Fear, shock, laughter, wonder

Some emotions are nurtured-
Affection, honor, hate, pleasure

And some emotions are deceivers-
Lust, greed, envy, pride.

Some of this and some of that,
tricks and treats consumed
during the walk.



Words From a Dead Woman

you summon demons, I talk to gods of death,

nunc scio quid sit amor

fallen angels, it's too late now isn't it?

rosemary, rosemary make the pain less when mars aligns with October's full moon —
the greatest horror still is loneliness.

bite marks cover my body,

invisible claws scratched me until I bled

blood or love, I don't know anymore.

I remember the red wine on his lips, it looked like blood stains after we kissed,
what must I leave behind?

the voices come and go,

so does the static in my head, I am trapped in emptiness.

I am her daughter, I am her mother, I am her friend, drowned, hanged and burned at
the stake —

most men fear what they can't understand.

I walk in the blue moon's light through the graveyard that is my heart,

the veil is at its thinnest,

and so she brings me back from the realm of death.

I am resurrected through the power in her heart.

etiam in morte, superest amor.

MURDER-SUICIDE

On a dare,
we spend a night in the old house,
the decrepit mansion that attracts storms
like bulbs do moths.
We're barely inside the place
when lightning cracks to life
the stained-glass figures,
thunder rumbles the foundations,
uproots spiders and cockroaches
bats that pound wings against the attic door,
and rain that bullies the rooftop.

We've been told the house is haunted
but it doesn't even need ghosts.
The weather is haunting enough.
Twenty miles away, the town is calm,
as sleepy as its inhabitations.
High in the mountains,
wilderness settles down
slows its tireless heart just enough.
But a black cloud presses down on us,
squeezes the ease from flesh and bones,
clenches veins and arteries
so blood can barely budge,
prods those parts of the brain
that are capable of the most harm,
unleashes the fury outside,
the horror from within.

Turns out, folks were right.
Stepping across this threshold
was like taking a knife
and stabbing it through my heart.
And there's madness aplenty.
Like how the roiling of dust-filled air
forced my hands to act,
grasp the nearest throat.
A murder-suicide they called it.
True enough but in the wrong order.



YOUR FIRST LOVER

He looks the part
but is he really what
you fear him to be?

He's suave, swarthy,
dressed so immaculately,
not a hair out of place,
and, when he speaks
so softly, so enticingly,
his accent is from another place,
middle-European no doubt.

But he doesn't shudder
at the sight of the crucifix
around your throat,
or the garlic flowers
sprouting from the coffee table vase.

Yes, his eyes are hypnotic,
but they're brown, not red.
And his teeth,
evenly pearl-white,
not fanged.
What if he is no more
than an ordinary Romanian count?
You'll awaken next morning,
no longer a virgin,
a little blood on the sheets,
but so much more of it
flowing through your veins.
You'll be undead.
But not in the way you imagined.

TOO MANY BONES

So what else is there to do with these bones
having made phalange bangles,
a necklace of tarsals,
and pounded on drums
with a sturdy humerus or two.

My basement's a dumping ground
for patellas and radii,
clavicles and ribs,
and there's only so many
skull paperweights I can put to use.
You suggest
why not leave the dead where I find them.
I would
if they weren't living when I do.



STRANDED

Car breaks down on a lonely road
late at night.
This when the wolves emerge
from the woods,
sniff about.
White wisps appear
flitting from tree to tree.
Something is glowing
in the underbrush,
the eyes of some unknown creature.
And a man -
at least you think it's human -
is tottering slowly down the road
towards you,
holding a lantern
that sways in his hand,
his pallid face,
red lips,
looming in and out
of its light.
Your cellphone has no signal.
Your nerve ends
more than compensate.

FIRST IMPRESSION

I'm alone in front of the television
watching a hunchback disinterring bodies
in a misty black and white graveyard.

I'm six years old.
My mother's busy doing dishes.
My big sisters are either in their rooms
or out on dates.

Then some guy in a lab
has this creature all wired up
on a slab,
it's storming out
and he's waiting for lightning to strike.

I'm too young to change the channel.
I'm too frightened to turn away.

The monster comes to life,
escapes, and kills a little girl,
maybe my age.

My mother sends me up to bed
before the villagers storm the castle,
destroy the beast and its inventor.

That's a big mistake on her part.
Many years later
and the beast is still out there somewhere.

Pat Tompkins



Silver Years

Come in autumn
pumpkin seeds gooey
with slime
the slant sun
less and less an ally

half-moon swathed
like a newborn
and that last rose
bobbing like a ship
in a dry harbor

sugar ants thread counters
your bony fingers
your scholar's hump is
fair game
stock can go up

and down at will
you've learned
from studying the decades
each morsel of Russian
noodle-clothed potato

holds the taste of tea
you're afraid
of tarnished amulet
worn by ancestors

one a bracelet
the other a choker

The Five-Fingered Root

Reaches down, grasps soil,
Reminds of human
Greed—always stretched for
What is not within
Bounds. Forever splayed,
Bent, at pains to find
its grip in hard dirt.

Wedding the Ratcatcher's Daughter

After the plague, she had
wandered
a land peopled by shades,
forgetful in the asphodel
with no memory left.
They reminded her of her
father
in his later years.
Unsettled spirits, the restless
dead
labouring in the Elysian Fields.
They pointed grey fingers
from the mist and asked
"Who the hell are you?"
"...And where are my
trousers?"
"I'd like a nice glass of sherry"
"Quick girl, pour the tea."
And when she came to the sea
their bones littered the beach
gnawed by rats disembarking
from leaky boats and sinking
ships.
Down by the harbourside
the last living prince waited
for his fairy-story to conclude.
She pretended not to notice a
crown
of rat-tails on his head,
the rat-bodies bound together
underneath his borrowed
skin.
The Rat-King lifted his broad
brimmed hat
and made a wide smile from a
hundred

little teeth in his overflowing
mouth:
"No one left to die!
What use our years of battle
now?"
He sweetly grinned
at the Ratcatcher's Daughter,
"Just us two," he said,
and held her hand,
enamoured,
as they stood together, alone
in the world.
She led him further up the
shore
where the ancient castle
raised its black granite mass
to resist the winter storms,
"Lie down oh handsome man,"
she said,
"and rest a while with me."
He opened up his coat, and,
like a gentleman,
spread it on the ground
undressed to show
that he too had a human skin,
even if it was not his own.
"Oh let me lay my head upon
your heart," she said
and inside she heard not a
single beat
but one rat, two rats, three...
She was curious, so with her
little knife
she split him from stem to
stern
and a whole sea poured out:
rats in maelstroms and
whirlpools
flowed around her feet.

"Oh, princes may transform so
easily,"
she said, "frog to king to man
to beast.
but a widow
is constant in her loss."
The rats swirled across the
ruins
they ran over the figurehead
of a dead ship,
they perched on shattered
statues,
they rolled around the portrait
of a queen
worn to anonymity in the flow
of time.
She waited with the his skin in
her hand
empty and flapping
in the offshore breeze;
She had unstitched all the love
that was left
and stood like someone's lost,
discarded
or mislaid memory as she
dissolved
in the tide of polymorphous
flesh.

Martins Deep



I Asked My Love on Halloween

Where have all the vampires gone?
Banished from their natural home-
among the graves
and grand ballrooms
in castles built of stone.
No longer do they haunt
the cemetery,
the catacomb,
the mouldering marble tomb,
Nor stalk about the misty grove
in the light
of the morbid moon.

Where have all the vampires gone?
The lord of shadow all in black,
the beauty in her golden robe
upon her golden throne,
or the dried-up ancient thing
in its mouldy winding sheet,
that shrieked
and gnashed its pointed teeth
as it crawled
across the blasted heath
to gnaw upon old bones.

Where have all the vampires gone?
I asked her as we walked.
She drew about her pale arms,
a long black cloak of silk.
She smiled at me
with a mouth so red
and stars glistened on her lips.
She touched me with her icy hand
and she led me to her bed,
where in her loving arms I lay
upon the finest, whitest silk
under six cold feet of clay.

Little Extinctions

He holds tight to the wild clematis' floating seed -
flying on the wool of the Old Man's Beard.

The whole tribe cling on
or ride on football-bodied Harvestmen:
the vampires are hunting in the green woods,

in the gorse and on the moors,
among the hogweed by the ditch -

swarming in their millions.
Today the undead are delicate
gossamer; shrunken things.

Yesterday they were somewhat bigger -
but, little by little, time wore them down
and made their legends thin.

A face lies buried among the lichen,

in the bough of the crabapple tree,

close-eyed and deep in thirsty dreams.

While the court feasts in the shadows
beneath the hemlock leaf.

They hunt beetles for their feed
or herd the graveyard worm

in the death-caps magic circle.

Their queen rules in her castle
beyond the reach of the sun;
far inside the dark-wood's warren
on her golden throne.

Waiting in autumn's silent nights,
illuminated by the pale glow of toadstools
and the fireflies' cold light.

A blot of inky cirrus cloud
smuts a midnight moon,

that shines on a path though the mushrooms
beneath the palace towers
where the queen's strange garden blooms:
a hundred thousand fungi
all hung with fairy skulls.



Minotaur

Asterion minotaurus

I'm the victim do you hear me!
I'm the fucking victim here!
My mother, Pasiphaë, satisfying her unquenchable lust
(damn Aphrodite) by copulating with a bull – a damn BULL!
Who does that, seriously WHO!
My mother the great WHORE that's who
and what am I supposed to do with that image
where am I supposed to put it?
how do I deal with it psychologically? Well HOW?

So of course I'm born a hideous monster
a slaving, insane ferocious half-man half-beast
with horns and all, scared the bejesus outta everybody
I can tell you that, was kinda funny, the look on their faces.
So King Minos my sensitive and selfless stepdad
brings in Daedalus the Crafty
who constructs a vast maze
beneath Knossos Palace as my prison
to ensure that my life remained forever a living hell.

Well of course I ate people
it was an age of human sacrifice for crying out loud!
I loved those succulent virgins
sacrificed to me every few years.
What else would you have me do stuck alone
in that damnable endless labyrinth
until Ariadne with her stupid ball of twine
lead the great hero Theseus ooohhh aaahhh
to the heart of the matter where he . . .

Yes and then there was Theseus
Theseus the Great, the King, the Conqueror, the Coward!
The perfidious little prick snuck up on me in the dark
speared me in the face. The Bastard!
How was I supposed to know he was there?
no one was ever there NO ONE! EVER! BUT! HA!
I get the final laugh because I live on, yes I do
I live on immortal as the beast within you ,within every man
and shall so remain until the end of days.

Terror Bird

Kelenken guillermoi

Imagine if you will if you can if you dare
a creature nine feet tall nine feet long
500 pounds, razor talons, a giant hooked beak
the top predator in our world but with feathers yes
a bird, a bird fast as a horse big as a horse well that's
what we were dominating the landscape
here in South America
where there were no wolves or giant cave bears
or snarly sabre-toothed cats
until 2 million years ago
when the stupid Panamanian land bridge appeared
rather miraculously if you ask me rising right up
out of the sea permitting the predatory carnivores
from up north to stream across
overrunning our lands stealing our food
and we simply could not compete and that was that.
Scientists refer to us as Terror Birds
descended directly from the mighty *Tyrannosaurus Rex*.
We did them damn proud yes we did
for a long long time
and that is nothing to be ashamed of.
Just be thankful we are not still tromping around
the savannahs and jungles pummeling everything
in our path with our powerful sickle-hammer beaks
including people too if you got in our way.



Bigfoot

Gigantopithecus imaginationus

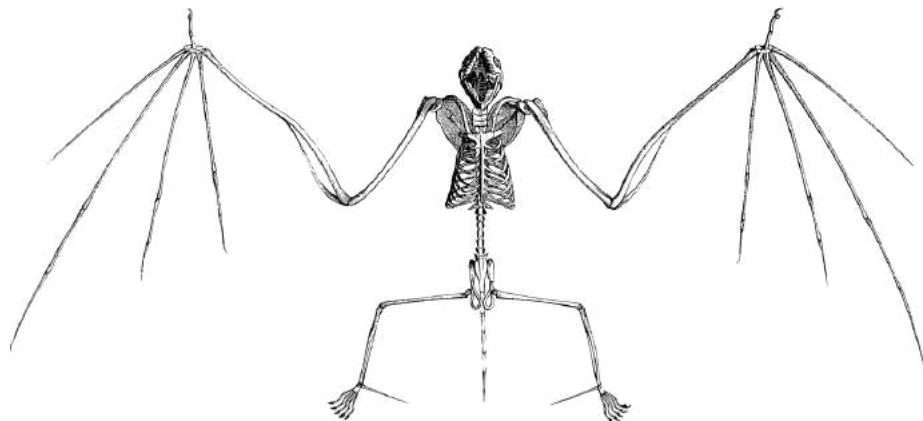
Bigfoot, Sasquatch, Mapinguari, The Tall Man, Yiren,
Batutut, Hibagon, Hairy Wild Man, Orang Pendek,
Mogollon Monster, Swamp Ape, Yowie, Himalayan Yeti,
or simply the good old Abominable Snowman —
call us what you will but doubt us only
if you dare because we are everywhere.
We screech and shriek, break your windows
steal and eat your hogs and goats,
sheep and chickens, make thunderous
tree knocks and quiet nests of leaf litter and twigs.
We're not ghosts, vampires or zombies
werewolves, bogeymen or Neanderthals.
We're Bigfoots damn it! Proud intelligent humanoids
just like you even though
you can't find us and never will — Ha Ha —
we leave only our footprints and tufts of hair behind
to tantalize you so you bet we're out there all right
somewhere in your darkest night
and we're on our way to your front door!

Vampire Bat

Desmodus rotundus

We are the only mammals on the planet
(discounting Dracula and his vampire buddies)
to live entirely on blood
after dark leaving our belfries, bridges, attics and caves
flying out to find ourselves a nice fat cow
horse pig or goat bite in tiny and suck
they feel nothing because our anticoagulant
has a dram of anesthesia mixed in
clever little carnivores aren't we.

Some people think we are nasty, ugly little fuckers
particularly when we scurry along
on our stumpy wing-legs and hiss.
But we have few enemies
although there are the Coachwhip snakes
that hang out near cave entrances
snatch us from of the air
as we stream by heading out
to fill our bellies with blood
you cannot believe
how fast those damn bastards are



Protection

Fingerprints stain the glass, a scene seen at sun's rising.
Fortified home, the demons cannot enter easily.
Blessings have protected for many moons,
soon comes a second session of protection,
life as a holy man. Prayer sent, tongue rattled,
hell spawns disallowed entry into home or mind.
Nights are rough, banging, clanging, shaking, taking
of cattle and sluggish winged ones.
Bloody feathers are not uncommon sights.
Illuminate faith. Fight the fanged ones internal, external.
No sword or gun but power akin to lightening.
Burn your foes. The moon shines on their skeletons,
shimmering, demonic, suitable tools to craft
weapons for soon slain kin.

Night Feast

Ravenous eyes,
Recollection of moments which seem so long, ephemeral
Bits of branches lodged within maws.
Feathers and crawlers swallowed with gnaws
"The great chew," so called.
Bones left behind, as if only skin and flesh worthy.
Hair much the same, forming a follicle hill
Stupendous chill which peels bark from trees
A natural disease, intangible form,
soon swarm, those who move with might.
Night becomes day, disappearing of sight.

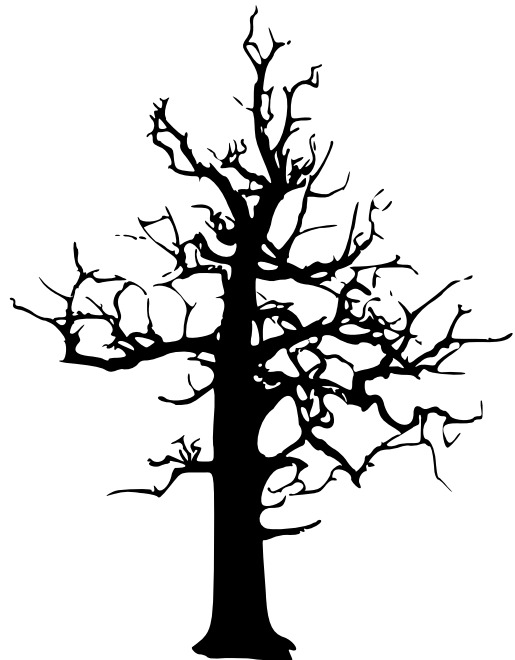
The Spider

Spiders find comfort in holes, in warmth.
When we sleep, they enter through mouth, through nose, through ear.
To them we are a system, a cave, a home to those who look for peace and quiet.
The dark and wet within makes us perfect specimens, perfect homes to serve the spider.
We are only just flesh like maze.



Fall Song

There's something brewing in the space
between the soft foetal hush of a
new breeze, the sheath of dark in the ashen sky, and the
tangent of light like
The tartness of mulberry
and the bright of a peach skin- ricocheting through a windy sky.
The green gorgeousness of the ground as a
smoothened transparent lightness of paper
— bordered with the leaflets dripping from the branches
of trees like love letters,
Like reddened postcards strewn in the pattern of
Alpana upon the hauntingly beautiful dry landscape.
The heart's suffering a wondrous abandonment
midst this emerging out
of half-pain, half-excitement
in the longing - to cease soon as the jaggery of blending heated
hues —
Autumnal prayers
echoing like a sweet song, the free fall of the
aanchal of fall
send invitations to me,
To the doorway of you.



Night Before Diwali

Dense night descends, like macabre hues of
Dark pale green, Sable-blue,
In the smoky haze of grey-dust, thick purple and poppy red-
Idol makers stand shivery, preparations towards completion
The skinny models of ghosts, wide-eyed
Tongue-opened
Line the lonesome gravel Street.
Children frightened run as the
Night darkens deep
Through the apple boughs
They rush briskly as they hide their faces in the aanchals
Of their mothers' peach vermillion sarees
Celebrations
Begin with the carousel and
Dancing limb
In the graveyards, where
Mantras are whispered like hushed secrets by
The Tantric in rising zest.
With flashing red lustre spilling all over — a strewn gnawing redness.
The weather's inclement, stiffening the spine, the ribs squash
Chamund arises from the rages of fire, the hibiscus-scent,
misted spice,
The white skulls of
Grotesque devils worn by Kali round her neck like
A garland of pearls.
Screeching and roaring sounds ramble
Through huge gusts of winds
Spirits like loadstones walk to Kali Ma,
To seek shelter in her home.

Blessed Are Those Who Seek the Dark

'Ali!'

'Ali!'

A boy,

two boys in ripped jeans,

Ali, his ancestors locked in his hair,

watched as their bodies forgot the grounds they'd been piled in.

Three girls,

four girls who learnt to stitch their scalp in the rain,

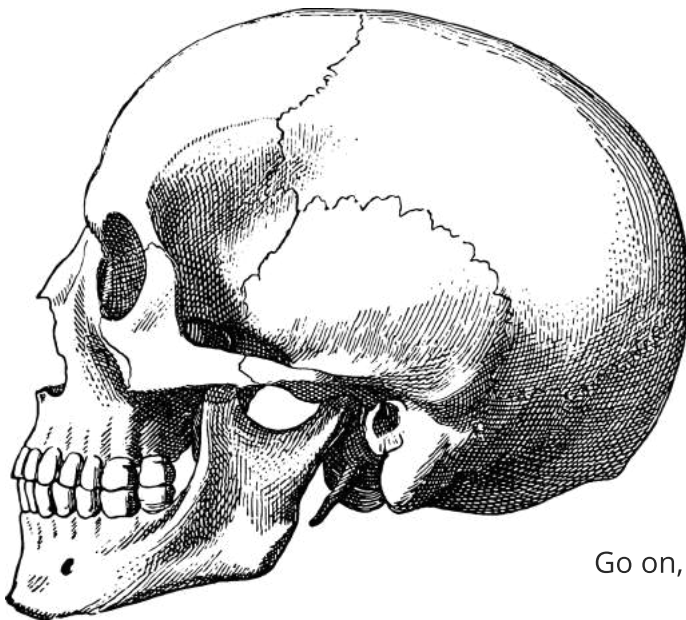
Mother, bread drenched in her sweat, in her blood,

listened as their voices cracked into whispers,

like the lips of a child in harmattan.

'Has anyone seen my brother?'

'I can't find Ali!'



No, no, no ...*Laughs in broken pots*
you paint us wrong

We do not come on bended knees,
all we offer is our teeth, bared.

There is no light at the end of the tunnel,
there is only us

This is where we become your fear of death.

'We have seen your brother'

'Where?! Where is Ali?'

'There was a stake where a soul should've lain'

Can you taste it?

The violence? Can you hear it?

Have you ever danced fire alive?

Go on, fire your arrows from the depths of a viper's nest,
and watch as our tongues fork in two.

'This is not my brother'

'It is'

'Ali is not beautiful'

'What is more beautiful than death?'

Yes, we'll wither,

but so will you!

We do not seek to rest in peace,

we are hell bound

Come, come meet us at hell's gate,

come break bread with us.

Rollin Jewett



Deliver Us

We are taken by demons
Strip us to our skin, to our bones,
to our porcelain souls
Mount our chest, tear us down
'Confess child! Confess!'
We wash in a lake for sins yet sinned
'Confess child! Confess!'
Our tongue learns a different language.
Now come, come and see,
as in the dead of night, we come walking
For the father,
our fangs claw into their existence,
tasting their ebbing breathe
From their screams, we are born again.
Come, come and see,
For the mother,
we put bounties out on them,
we set our demons their scent
With their bones, we etch their names on our back.
Come, come and see,
For our porcelain souls,
we carve it out.

The Cyclops

Go with a friend to listen again to the travails
in life's haze or go with poetry to enjoy the turn
of words. So, it was that alone on a public bench
I read a book of verse when another sat down and
I felt a shudder familiar from my school days.

Odysseus had his giant Cyclops and I had one
of my own, and now it had returned. Mine was
as menacing as his, a lawless creature without
a sense of justice or piety. But Odysseus was
brave, cunning; his ways unknown to me.

My Cyclops was absent since youth, but nights
insisted that I recall the humiliations tolerated
and confront my shameful meekness, how I
cowed, hid, ran and took the long way around,
how unlike heroic Odysseus I existed.

Today I am passed my middle years with little
to lose but my head and I knew in that minute
I had one last chance to prove I have the grit to lose
my head, deserving at least to be among Odysseus'
crew who for dinner the Cyclops did choose.

To this monster, I would turn, grab its face with
the ill will of a vicious beast and gnaw out the eye.
But when I confronted my tormentor, I was taken
aback. It was my Cyclops, but what was a terrible
mountain had washed down to a serene hill.

Tailored in the great virtues, he said hello and my
name spoke, arresting my reprisal and inspiring
a philosophy that caused me to inquire of what
events had moved him to this conversion. In the
call of a poet, he answered and, as he did, I awoke.



WORMS

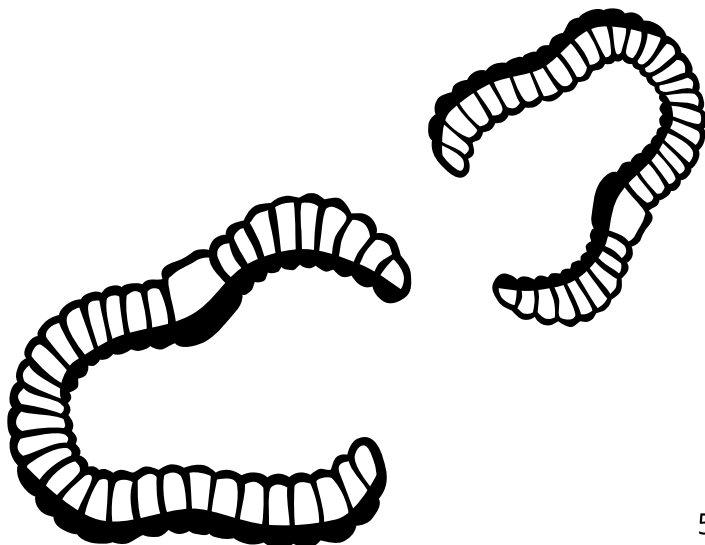
I can feel them
Crawling inside me

Worms

I have no idea how they got there
Or what damage they'll do

Are they eating me from the inside out?
Or have they made their home in my organs?
And my bowels

Hoping one day to meet
The worms that will eat
Me from the outside in



POLTERGEIST

Dead relationships
Haunt me,
Disturbing my life,
Constantly.
I've tried to exorcise these demons,
But they are resurrected
With a familiar song,
Or meal,
Or fragrance.
Residual romance possesses me,
Trying to reenact lost love;
But it's soulless,
A shadow.
Whispers in the night
Remind me of the phantom
That once kept me warm.

LULLABY FOR MY LITTLE BOY

My son, sit back and listen to
The words that must be said,
I've come to warn my darling boy
Of the beast beneath his bed.
This monster has one hundred heads
With tentacles like vines;
On little boys and teddy bears
This abomination dines.

If any part of you survives,
It will not make it past
The creature in the closet,
Who's twice as big and fast.
A ferocious furry feline
Whose claws will tear to shreds
Those little boys and teddy bears
Who dare to leave their beds.

There's no escape, for outside here's
The horror in the hallway;
An evil creature of the night
Who's craving for some new prey.
He's tasted blood and he wants more
His fangs will pierce the eye
Of little boys and teddy bears
He hungers to suck dry.

Shadows in the night will hide
The killer in the kitchen,
It's been so long since he's taken life
For a killing he is itching.
In the darkness of the room
This man will wait all night,
To slay little boys and teddy bears
By refrigerator light.

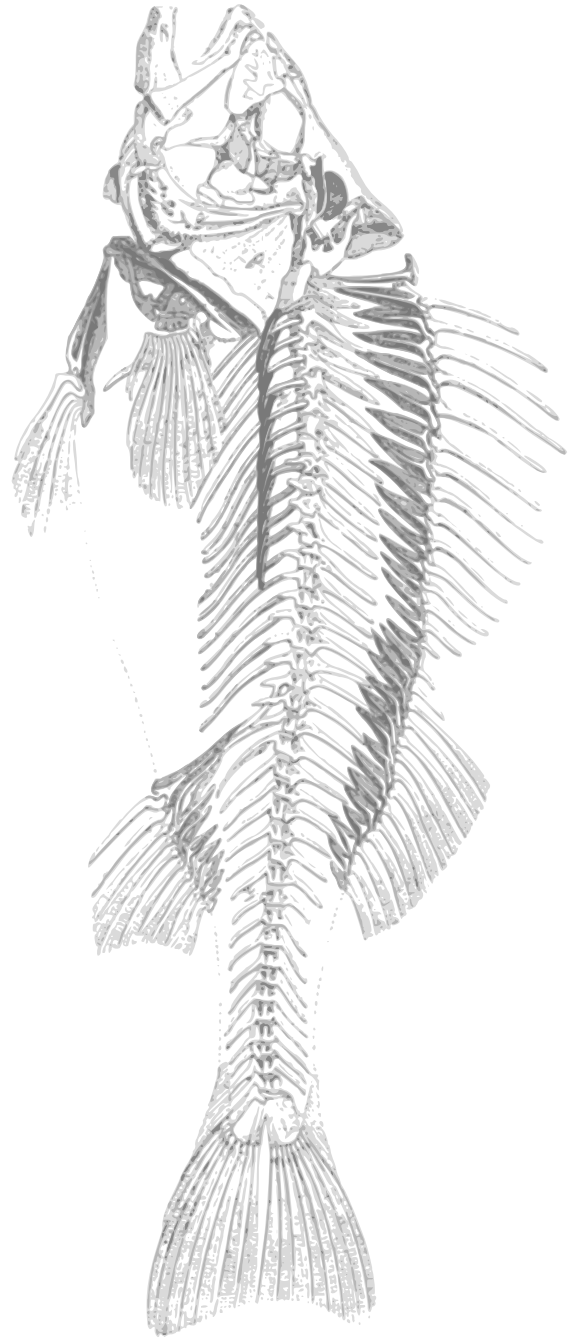
The demon in the den is there
To haunt our living room;
This tenant from the depths of Hell
Will be the bringer of your doom.
It will possess your mind and soul
Twisting with precision
Little boys and teddy bears
Sneaking out for television.

Now my son, you know the truth
No safety's in these walls;
Monsters lurk most everywhere,
In the closet, den and halls.
One of them will take your life
Before you count your sheep;
So little boys and teddy bears
Should try to get some sleep.

Piscean

Iridescent decay, scale of jade;
 a gangrenous mermaid.
 Vulgar reverie in oceanography,
 with abyssal certainty
 in her aquatic circuitry.
 Some thought her colors too bright.
 She was thusly dried of all might,
 bathed in their angry sunlight
 to bleach the protists from her reef.
 When men heard her chorus sweet,
 they were moved to spill
 blooms of oil-slick flowers at her feet.
 A goddess of the torrid water forest.
 An eerie seafoam queen with
 clean, saltwater scream.
 Inherited obligation and Neptunian disposition.
 She: a bone-cold ghost to float
 along these harrowed, white-gold coasts.
 Too tempting, her precious bounties,
 for the mass of hungry men.
 They took up rigid poles to
 fish her fertile fields without end.

Now: her heart a bruised fruit,
 a fluid-filled prune;
 nothing left but a billowing black plume.
 Faith yet to wake, a wave yet to break.





My Heart is a Mouth

My heart is a mouth,
a wide, angry pit.

Venomous whispers ooze
from a cave of dry lips.

Teeth are pounding,
like heavy yellow fists.

She rattles wet walls
in her ivory cage.

Beneath skin paper thin,
oceans of impotent rage.

She's devoured everything.
I am left hollow.

She's yearning for something
new to swallow.

Bliss

Never really realized
how much was lost — until my
eyes swiveled backward and saw
the shriveled disguise.
Corpse of candle wax and flies,
draped awkwardly around
the fossilized bones
I know to be mine.

It seems I might have died
somewhere along the line,
without ever feeling it.

There's a Werewolf in my Closet

There's a werewolf in my closet.
I wonder what I did to cause it?
It wasn't in there yesterday
but now it will not go away.

It's tried on all my favorite jeans
and read my *Boy's Life* magazines.
It's brushed its face with my new comb.
It's really made itself at home.

I'd ask my mom to make it leave
but I don't think that she'd believe
that there's a werewolf in my room,
using my new comb to groom.

It's putting on my favorite shoes.
This wolf may make the fashion news.
I'm hoping they will be too tight
but no...it's got them on all right.

Oh, no! It sees my baseball hat.
This werewolf's head is way too fat!
It doesn't fit, I'm glad to say.
But look — it wears it anyway!
I guess it thinks it's looking good.
Much better than a werewolf should!

It seems to like my Gucci tie.
Well, that's too bad, 'cuz so do I.
This werewolf is a cheeky one
to try my clothing on for fun!

Now it's taking out a game.
Does this werewolf have no shame?
It wants to play Monopoly...
And look... it wants to challenge *me!*

I will not play a game with it.
I want this werewolf just to quit,
to leave my closet and my home
and find another room to roam!

In my closet this wolf came,
and used my comb, my clothes, my game!
Perhaps I should have picked them up
to keep them from this werewolf pup.

Wait, that's it! I think I know
a way to get this wolf to go.
I'll pick up all that's on the floor...
my closet then will be a bore!
If there's nothing it can wear,
I bet that wolf won't stay in there!

So I picked up all my stuff.
Wolfie watched me, looking gruff.
I put my games and toys away —
the ones the werewolf liked to play.

I hung my clothes up with the rest,
against the werewolf's loud protest.
I cleaned my closet with some care
and all the wolf could do was stare.

And that was it — it left me then,
and has not been back here again.
For I had found a special way
to keep that closet wolf at bay.

Of course, I found out later on
the wolf was hired by my mom.
She'd found a tricky way for me
to keep my closet werewolf-free.

And though I have a sneaky mother...
at least my closet's free of clutter!

SOUL CATCHER

I can kill with my eyes
and tell all the lies
that my cold little heart should desire.

I can gamble and win
'cus my partner is sin
and I rage and I burn like a fire.

I can cut like a knife,
I can ruin your life
with a smile from my cruel, mocking lips.

I can make you a fool,
I use hate as a tool
and I'll tear at your heart 'til it rips.

I can take all the gold
and the silver you hold,
and believe me my "friend," that's not all...

I can squeeze out your soul
and then patch up the hole,
when and if I should happen to call (and I will).

My crime always pays,
I can turn you to ways
that you never would think of before.

And I'll promise you love
and a heaven above,
and a place in the sun, even more.

I can do what I want
for I've power to flaunt,
but mere power will not satisfy.

You're in my control
because I own your soul —
from the day that you're born 'til you die.



Rollin Jewett



There's a Spider in my Bed

There's a spider in my bed.
It's creeping closer to my head.
It crawled out from the closet door
and climbed the bedspread from the floor.

I had no time to make the bed,
I'd barely even raised my head.
Before I'd had a chance to dress
the spider made its move, I guess.

And now it lays upon my cover,
where in fear I did discover
eight black eyes and eight fat legs
before I'd had my toast and eggs.

It comes here nearly every day.
I wish it would just crawl away.
I think it likes my nice clean sheets
But I hope it soon retreats.

I told my mom but she just said,
"Will you please go and make your bed."
I guess she thinks that I'm a liar...
that there is no hairy spider!

Now its sleeping quietly
like the princess on the pea.
It doesn't seem to mind a bit
that I am so freaked out by it.

What am I supposed to do?
Tell the hairy thing to "shoo!"?
If it wasn't quite so large
I could possibly take charge.
But it's bigger than my foot...
So I think I'll just stay put.

I hope that it will not attack,
I think I'd have a cardiac!
Its fangs are scary, sharp and blue,
I bet they're full of poison, too!

Rollin Jewett

I've heard tarantulas can kill.
I'd better stay in bed until
my mom calls the exterminator...
Better yet, "The Terminator!"

Now it's crawled beneath the sheet...
looking for something to eat?
I won't be the food provider
for this black and hairy spider.

Maybe I should grab a shoe
and smack it 'til it's black and blue.
No, I'd have to get too close...
and if it splattered — that'd be gross!

Shall I go and call the zoo?
I bet that they'd know what to do!
The zoo man surely has no dread
of getting spiders out of bed.

No, I will not call the zoo.
I know right now what I must do...
Tomorrow morn, without a sound...
Before that spider comes around,
and tries to sneak beneath the spread...

I will quickly make the bed!

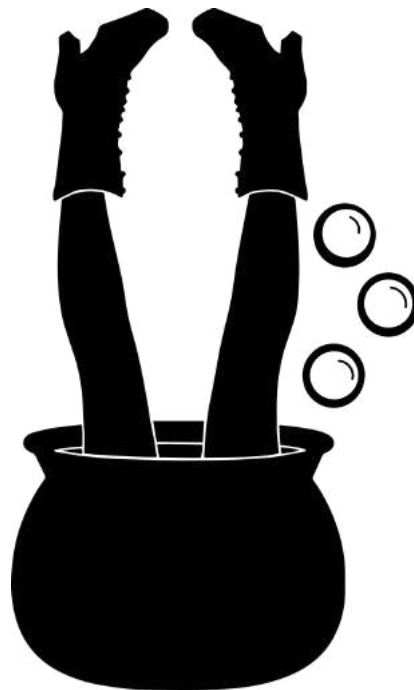
Then the message will be clear
that spiders are not welcome here.
Then it's *own* web it can spin,
and I will have my bed again!

So, I made my bed, you see...
and now my room is spider-free!

I only found out later on,
that it was hired by my mom....
If she'd just paid *me* instead,
I'd have *always* made the bed!

HASTEN

As daylight creatures hasten to bed
and moonlight spreads throughout the land...
A dream of darkness fills my head
as daylight creatures hasten to bed,
and sun is gone with moon instead...
while night awaits my first command —
And daylight creatures hasten to bed
and moonlight spreads throughout the land.



White Horse (extended version)

The shriek of a woman
pierces the crash
of the breakers.

Walking close to its spot,
she has seen
'The White Horse'.

Prayers are made
for sailors...
and also for loot.

At daybreak,
the wreckers hunt
through the horse's gift.

A hairy trunk is salvaged.
First bringing gold,
then misfortune, untold.

The veiled lady,
in a black satin dress,
keeps appearing,
causing unrest.

Her tears and pleading
for her papers,
pierce through the crash
of the breakers.

Nancy Chipbonnet

Washed up Woman,
bearing bejewelled jetsam.
Removed from her for 'refuge',
hailed to the hall.

Did Linaker's lie,
cause this Castaways' curse?
Was she pushed down the stairs?

Treasure/buried/still,

beneath
the
sundial?

At night,
a figure guards the drive,

"White Nancy,
White Nancy,
White Nancy!"

Meet the Contributors

Kiley Lee

Kiley Lee is a Pushcart nominated poet and artist, with work in multiple publications and exhibitions across the United States. She's from Almost Heaven, West Virginia, and loves staring at the clouds. She tweets @kileylee_

Ella Kate Dewees

Ella Kate Dewees is an illustrator based in Baltimore, Maryland. She currently attends the Maryland Institute College of Art as a Junior where she is working towards a BFA as an Illustration major with a studio concentration in Book Arts.

Ella Kate specializes in creating illustrations of animal characters and natural environments. She enjoys blending traditional mediums with digital techniques to create polished images that retain the charm of traditional mediums.

She is currently making illustrations of Mr. Grumbles, a black cat character created by author Marjory E. Leposky. *Mr. Grumbles* is a chapter book about an abandoned kitten who has to find his way.

Illustrator website: ellakatedewees.myportfolio.com

Andy N

Andy N is the author of four full poetry collections, the most recent being *the streets were all we could see* and with his partner Amanda Steel, the joint collection *the lockdown was all we could see*.

He is the co-host of Stretford's always welcoming open mic literature night *Speak Easy* and is the host / creator / co host of the following Podcasts – *Spoken Label*, *Reading in Bed*, *Comics Unity* and *Wrestle Up* among others.

He also does ambient music under the name of *Ocean in a Bottle*.

His official blog is onewriterandhispc.blogspot.com

Avra Margariti

Avra Margariti is a queer Social Work undergrad from Greece. She enjoys storytelling in all its forms and writes about diverse identities and experiences. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Vastarien*, *Asimov's*, *Liminality*, *Arsenika*, and other venues. You can find her on twitter @avramargariti.

Beulah Vega

Beulah Vega is a writer and theater artist living in the North Bay Area of California. Her short stories have been published by Weasel Press, Fae Corps, Two Morbid Ladies publishing and her poetry has been featured in the Bay Area WTF Festival as well as the CPAC Dead Poets Society festival. She will also be featured in an upcoming episode of the Line 720 podcast for her short story "Oh Sweetie".

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Charles Leggett

Charles Leggett is a professional actor based in Seattle, WA. His poetry has been published in the US, the UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Nigeria. Recent publications include *Volney Road Review*, *Ocotillo Review*, *Heirlock Magazine*, *Automatic Pilot*, *Eunoia Review*, and *Galway Review*; work is forthcoming in *Poetica Publishing's* next *Mizmor Anthology*.

Claire Smith

Claire Smith writes poetry about other worlds. Last Christmas she celebrated with Odin, visiting a twenty-first century retail park. She's been to the house of sweets from 'Hansel and Gretel', but in the 1950s, where a rockabilly and his wife join the children to get rid of the real villain. When on earth Claire lives in Gloucestershire, UK, with her husband and their Tonkinese cat.

Her work has appeared recently in *Songs of Eretz*, *Corvid Queen*, *Illumen* and *Spectral Realms*. She is currently doing her PhD in Literary and Critical Studies at the University of Gloucestershire. Find her on the web at <http://www.divingfornightmares.co.uk>.

Colleen Anderson

My poetry has been nominated for the Aurora, Dwarf Stars and Rhysling Awards, and placed in the Crucible, Wax Poetry, Rannu and Balticon contests. Some recent and forthcoming works are in *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *Space and Time*, *Quarantine* and *Starline*. My fiction collection, *A Body of Work*, was published by Black Shuck Books, UK. My poetry collection, *I Dreamed a World* will be published later this year by Cycatrix Press.

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David Walshe

David Walshe from Southport, UK, is currently working on a small collection of poems inspired by his passion for local history. Previous work has been published by *Black Bough Poetry*, *The Broken Spine*, *The Adriatic Mag* and *Victorian Dollhouse*.

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Edward Ahern

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had over two hundred fifty stories and poems published so far, and six books. Ed works the other side of writing at *Bewildering Stories*, where he sits on the review board and manages a posse of six review editors.

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Iolana Paedelt

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

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Jim Zola

Jim Zola is a poet and photographer living in North Carolina.

Judith Skillman

Judith Skillman is the recipient of awards from the Academy of American Poets and Artist Trust. Her recent collection is *The Truth About Our American Births*, Shanti Arts Press. Poems have appeared in *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Zyzyva*, and elsewhere. Skillman is a faculty member at the Hugo House in Seattle, Washington. Visit www.judithskillman.com

Martins Deep

Martins Deep is a Nigerian poet & photographer. He is passionate about documenting muffled stories of the African experience in his poetry & visual art. Writing from Kaduna, or whichever place he finds himself, the acrylic of inspiration that spills from his innermost being tends to paint various depictions of humanity/life in his environment. His creative works have appeared, or are forthcoming on Barren Magazine, Chestnut Review, Mineral Lit Mag, Agbowó Magazine, Writers Space Africa, Inklette, Surburban Review, Typehouse Literary Magazine, The Alchemy Spoon, Dream Glow, The Lumiere Review, Variant Literature, & elsewhere. He is also the brain behind Shotstoryz Photography

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Oliver Smith

My poetry has appeared in Strange Horizons, Liminality, and Penumbric. I was awarded first place in the BSFS 2019 competition for his poem 'Better Living through Witchcraft' and my poem 'Lost Palace, Lighted Tracks' was nominated for the 2020 Pushcart Prize.

My website is at <https://oliversimonsmithwriter.wordpress.com/>

Pat Tompkins

Pat Tompkins is an editor in northern California. Her photos have appeared in New Southern Fugitives, the Tishman Review, Third Wednesday, and other publications.

Rickey Rivers Jr.

Rickey Rivers Jr was born and raised in Alabama. He is a writer and cancer survivor. His work has appeared in Perhappened, Crepe & Penn, Nymphs (among other publications). (Twitter.com/storiesyoumight) His third mini collection of 3x3 poems is available now: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07VDH6XG5>

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Rollin Jewett

Rollin Jewett (aka Rollin Jarrett) is a playwright, screenwriter, actor, author, singer-songwriter & poet. Rollin's screenwriting credits include the thriller Laws of Deception and the campy cult classic American Vampire. His poetry has recently appeared in Southern Fried Autopsies, Gathering Storm, Gravitas and Penumbra and his short stories can be read in Fell Beasts and Fair, Ghost Stories: An Anthology, Open: Journal of Arts & Letters, Vagabonds: Anthology of the Mad Ones, Fantasia Divinity and Coffin Bell among others. Rollin lives in Holly Springs, NC with his wife and son.

S. Rupsha Mitra

S. Rupsha Mitra is a student from India with a penchant for writing poetry. Her works can be found in Blue Marble Review, Fuse Magazine and Indian Periodical.

Shannon Gardner

Shannon creates macabre art depicting disturbing and horrifying work with elements of occult symbolism and iconography. Her interest in the macabre began while studying nature and the paranormal. She appreciates the spontaneous process of nature and strives to explore Earth's unearthed beauty while imitating natural imperfections. Her use of watercolor and India ink are unforced and create beauty within flaws while crafting an earthy grunge appearance.

Somto Rodney

Somto Rodney is a poet living in Lagos. He likes the smell of freshly mowed grass.

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Thomas J Misuraca

Thomas J Misuraca studied Writing, Publishing and Literature at Emerson College in Boston before moving to Los Angeles. Over 80 of his short stories, a few poems and two novels have been published. Most recently, his story, Cultural Appropriation was published in Idle Ink. I am also a multi-award winning playwright with over 100 short plays and 9 full-lengths produced globally. My musical, Geeks!, was produced Off-Broadway in May 2019.

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Tori Lee

Tori "Nothing" Lee is a former foster youth, artist, and writer residing in the Antelope Valley. After working as a children's book illustrator for a time, she turned her focus to writing and began pursuing an English degree. Her creative outlets have served to help crystallize and dissect difficult memories and emotions from both her childhood and adult life.

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Michael Estabrook

Michael Estabrook has been publishing his poetry in the small press since the 1980s. He has published over 20 collections, a recent one being *The Poet's Curse, A Miscellany* (The Poetry Box, 2019).



