

ISSUE 1 SUMMER 2017

ground  
floor  
drinkers

## Introduction

Well, it's been a long road for all of us, but here we are!

Cameo and I are both so delighted to finally be able to present you all, readers and contributors alike, with your very first edition of *Ground Floor Drinkers*. GFD was a twinkle in our eye one cheeky night at the pub, when I tried to go up the steps at our favorite local Glaswegian pub, *Curler's Rest*. "Laura!" Cameo shouted over her dram. "Don't go up the stairs! You'll fall!" The distress on her face was very real. "We're ground floor drinkers, Laura! Wait in the queue for the toilet!"

First things first: Cameo was correct. I have a horrible habit of falling over and breaking things (wine bottles and my own glasses) when I've had one too many gin martinis at the end of a stressful week. More to the point, however, was my enchantment with the phrase that Cameo had coined. "Ground Floor Drinkers, Cameo," I said when I (safely) got back to the table. "We need to turn that into something."

And, so, turned that into something we have. Neither Cameo nor I have experience with running our own literary magazine on our own, and we apologize sincerely for the many delays. We also promise to have a tighter schedule for Issue Two! But it's been a fun road. Cameo and I are best friends, and I'll tell you the story of how we discovered that.

I came late to Glasgow to enter our program at Glasgow University. After our first class together, when I was suffering from so much anxiety that I hadn't eaten all day, Cameo kindly took me aside afterward and struck up a conversation.

Exhausted me, lonely and scared and with no filter, blurted out within the first five seconds: "I'm a witch and I have a familiar named Spock. He's a black cat."

"And that was our meet cute," Cameo said many months later. "I knew I wanted to be your friend as soon as you told me that you were a witch with a familiar named Spock."

Cameo and I have been through it all together, thick and thin, and now we've been through the task of creating our own literary magazine. We set off on this journey knowing that we wanted to create a magazine for people like us: women, queer folks, the frantic artists caught in the whirlwind of the artistic scene. We wanted to open doors when so many doors of publishing are firmly shut, especially to the marginalized. And we hope we've done you justice, dear readers and contributors. And we hope to continue to do you justice in the future.

So, for all of you who haven't made it to the top steps just yet, we want you to join us here on the ground floor. We want you to read and to write your own experiences and to send them to us. Because we aren't highbrow here—we're just interested in real art that comes from real people. And we are so proud to showcase you in our first edition.

And with that, dear readers, I must beseech you to read on! And to consider sending us

your material for later issues. We want to hear from you.

With much pride and love,

Laura R Becherer  
Co-Editor

## About the Editors

**Laura R Becherer** is a DFA student of Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. She has been published in poetry, prose, and creative non-fiction in multiple literary journals. Laura is the co-author of the book *A Drink of One's Own: Cocktails for Literary Ladies*, published by the Scottish publisher Freight Books. Laura is from Wisconsin and lives in Glasgow with her husband and their two American cats.

**Cameo Marlatt** is a Canadian writer living in Scotland, where she is studying towards a Doctorate of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. Currently, she is working on a collection of poetry and essays on the topic of zoopoetics. Her poetry has been published in *Lighthouse* and *Plumwood Mountain*, and she is the co-author of *A Drink of One's Own: Cocktails for Literary Ladies*.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
About the Editors.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
“Fried Chicken and Chanel No. 5,” Victoria Shropshire.....	5
“That Poem about the Sun,” David Linklater.....	12
“On John Bellany’s Painting,” Gordon Gibson.....	13
“A Drawing of Drapes,” Stella Wulf.....	14
“The First Flush,” Stella Wulf.....	15
“The Fruit Basket,” Quinn Ramsay.....	16
“The Ones We See Again,” Quinn Ramsay.....	18
“As the Light Recedes,” Rachel Johnson.....	19
“Apple-picking,” Savannah Marlatt.....	21
“Garden,” James Jackson.....	22
“Close,” Beth McDonough.....	23
“Red Rock Chronicles,” Rachel Lewis.....	24
“Father,” Emeline Morin.....	29
“Moths and Jung,” Joanne Harrison.....	31
“Speechless,” Elora Flack.....	33
“Life Essay,” Tricia Conahan.....	37
“Skimming words,” Nikki Robson.....	39
“Approaching York from the North,” Jo Young.....	40
About the Authors.....	41
About the Artist.....	44

## **Fried Chicken and Chanel No. 5**

*Victoria Shropshire*

The first time Lee saved me was the day I was shot in the parking lot of an *El Pollo Loco* after surviving my first group therapy session in a Lutheran church basement.

I had moved in next door to Lee on the sixth floor of the DuBerry - a renovated 1920s hotel in LA's Koreatown - only a few weeks prior, and our exchanges had been instantly comfortable. He was my tribe, though I couldn't have put a name to it then.

Lee was the kind of person people say "commands" a room, but he was really nothing special to look at (when he dressed as a man). He didn't have an imposing air the way, say, a celebrity, or someone in full military dress, would have. The mask of Normal is something we've all worn, with varying degrees of comfort and success.

His energy, though, was an unmistakable disturbance, a magnetic occurrence. Like when you feel someone staring at you and you deliberately rotate around until you discover them. Or when you feel vibrations in the cocktail you're holding, as if a Tyrannosaurus Rex is moving into close proximity.

Underpinning that personality was a current of bitterness and despair that I recognized immediately. Lee's practiced self-control over his identities was to have a profound impact on me.

Both cops and medical personnel declared that I did not remember anything *of value* from the day. Oh, but I do. I remember the striped auburn waves of a bad weave as they sailed unnaturally upwards in the air, like gravity had been reversed. I heard popcorn. I saw a blue sundress with purple flowers on it, and a small pink shoe sliding across the ground towards me. Only then had I realized that I was eye-level with the shoe, the asphalt under my belly oddly comforting in its warmth, like a towel left in the sun to dry.

I remember the screaming.

Several people were screaming but it was the little girl's drum bursting shrieks that made me start breathing again. On my knees, I inhaled the lower strata of the parking lot, a mix of piss and canola oil that made me retch. Someone dressed in white looked into my eyes, but I don't remember their face. They draped a terry towel on my shoulder. When I wiped my mouth with it, the smell of grease and burnt matches made me retch again. Little bits of filth and tar were left on the white cloth when I wiped my hands.

Another white figure helped Weave Woman, pleaded with her to release the small writhing child she had pinned to the ground, whose cries had hit the crescendo of pure hysteria.

I do not remember driving myself home or hitting a column with the front bumper while parking in the garage under the DuBerry. I do not remember getting in its elevator, nor on which floor Lee joined me. I was unable to speak when he questioned me about the blood

on my shirt. I shivered even though it was always 100 degrees in that old ass elevator.

I do remember Lee was suddenly present, talking at once to me (indirectly) and to my pups (Lucy and Ethel), and (as was his habit) to the TV.

He loved reminding me in the following months: “I combed your hair, fixed your make-up and slapped you in a clean t-shirt, then loaded you, smelling of Chanel No. 5 and a chicken fryer, into your car and drove you to the doc-in-a-box on 9<sup>th</sup>. If I’d known where you hid your jewelry, I would have selected something better than those beady things you had on. A mug shot is still a photo, dear.”

Even when he thought I might be implicated or arrested, Lee insisted that I look my best.

I remember the constant burning in my throat as Lee fabricated a lie about being a California cousin. He observed closely as they put four perfect tiny stitches in my arm.

I remember sitting on that exam table wearing a paper shirt, clutching the small pink Mary Jane shoe. Its once sturdy tread was paper thin and its Velcro strap, once white, was dingy hand-me-down grey. I evidently threatened the nurse who tried to take it from me. I must have looked like I meant business because I was restrained, then sedated, and the shoe put into an Evidence Bag.

Mostly I remember that Lee was shouting. Even in my haze, I was impressed with the way Lee delegated with a booming, theatrical voice. Clear and menacing and protective, the way my mother’s had often been in my childhood. Like a well-rehearsed role.

Later, sitting in the parking lot of Deb’s Handi-Mart, I concentrated on feeling my heart beating under my stitches and thumping inside my eyelids. Lee bounced into the car, bringing in the smell of roasted sweet corn from a nearby food truck. Lee plopped the paper bag in my lap and waited for me to inspect its contents.

He had purchased a tube of Max Factor mascara, two cans of dog food, three cans of tuna, a roll of Necco wafers, a bottle of white wine, a bottle of tonic water, a bottle of vodka, three limes, a box of Ritz crackers, and a dime bag of marijuana. I held up the Necco wafers.

“Impulse buy,” he said, and shrugged.

Back in the DuBerry elevator, he doled out directions. “I’ll take the pups out, you get in the shower. Don’t get those stiches wet.”

I replied dryly. “Have a good hold on Lucy if DelMar’s in the lobby. She’ll rip your arm off for a treat.”

“Who the fuck is DelMar?” he asked.

“Our Super? With the glass eyeball? I don’t know his real name, doll. I just call him DelMar because that’s what he looks like his name ought to be. You know, like even if

his name is Steven, I would think he changed it because he was trying to convince the world he's not a DelMar."

Lee laughed at me. "I'm gonna borrow some of your drugs later, girl."

"You haven't already?"

"True story."

He opened my door and the pups pounced, asses wagging. Ethel's whole head went inside the bag before Lee could get it to the coffee table. Lucy sniffed my bandaged arm and pressed her chest on my thigh, looking up with worried eyes.

"Goddamn that dog is smart."

"Dobermans are smart. And percep-tective." My brain and tongue were making up new words in their sluggishness.

But Lucy understood, and I felt better the moment I touched her.

The shower was hot and tingled my scalp, breaking through the numbness. I washed with little regard to my bandage and was admiring my damp, exposed stitches when Lee returned with the pups and scowled at me.

"Sorry. Sometimes I suck at directions."

"Evidently."

While Lee prepared dinner, he prattled on about DelMar.

"I have never asked," Lee said. "I mean, I never see him. I'm sure he's there, but I just don't notice him. I'm always late, you know, so I am racing out the door, or I leave through the garage and just don't see him. *Jaysus*. I sound like such an asshole."

Lee's accent was strictly evening news Midwestern nondescript, but he preferred to blaspheme and cuss with a southern twang, because he believed it sounded more dramatic. He once told me: "Southerners are great cussers. When you swear in a California accent you just sound like a douche bag, but when a southerner cusses, it's the real deal."

"Who is worse?" I asked. "The man who doesn't even see our Super with the glass eyeball? Or the woman who makes up a fictional name for him?"

"True story. Have some tuna," he said.

I dipped a hunk out of the can and plopped it onto a Ritz.

"Thanks. You don't need to babysit me. Really."

“Puh-lease Hunty. This is the most drama I’ve had since Carlotta set her wig on fire doing Lady Macbeth at a fundraising dinner in Brentwood. I can snack with you and drink dinner with Bells.”

Lee snuggled on the floor between Lucy and Ethel, back against the couch, watching the news.

“You know, I used to have a \$20 bet with a friend in college for whoever had a family member appear on *COPS* first,” I told him. “You think if I appear on the news tonight that counts? Can I collect?”

“Not gonna happen, doll. I wouldn’t let you sign any of the release forms.”

“Damnit Lee. Then you owe me \$20.”

“Shee-ut. I could have given them the bloody t-shirt and just dumped you off with a note at the curb, like a sack of kittens.” “True story.”

Lucy growled with purpose at the door. Seconds later, Belladonna burst into the room. (Back then, living with two big dogs in the DuBerry, it never occurred to me to lock my door.)

Belladonna (Bells) was the first queen I met who used her stage name all the time, effectively forging one that was completely pliable rather using than the one two strangers had given her.

“*D’accord, D’accord*” I said firmly to the pups, giving them a hand command that looked like I was tapping an imaginary dog on the head.

Lucy put her teeth away, looked at Bells down her long prim nose, then pranced around the coffee table next to me. Meanwhile Ethel buried her muzzle in this stranger’s crotch, because she was the world’s lamest guard dog.

“Hi Vivi! Bells. Bitch you’re cute! You should come out with us tonight!”

Belladonna could also command a room, with this wild-eyed charisma that gathered people to her like pagans to a bonfire. She wore a striped shirt with a boat neck collar and blue jeans rolled delicately into capris, showing hairless calves and spring green toenails that matched her dime store flip flops.

Lee yelled back, “There is only one va-jay-jay here and she is not going out. You’re not either.” Ethel snorted lightly in response. Bells straightened her legs, leaning back with her muscular arms over her head in a mock faint, filling the entire corner of couch with his lopey body. Then he returned to the note on the coffee table.

Bells read a note in Lee’s hand-writing: “Vivi got shot. Down in 606.” Lee came in from the kitchen, drying a mason jar he’d clearly rinsed with very hot water. I saw steam coming off the glass and a pink tinge to his slender fingers. I recognized in his eyes the

kind of respect that only two fucked-up dying people can share. And I started to cry.

“Well. Doll be damned.”

Lee could deliver a dry line that would make a well-made martini smack its lips.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Bells was flush with confusion.

I felt pitiful and dizzy.

“Fuck. Oh Fuck. Fuckety-Fuck!” Bells used the F-word like most people use Febreeze. Everywhere.

I felt the hole in me, where my cancer lived. The exact spot. In a red gooey warm space, where it was cozy and confident. I started shaking.

“Get it out, doll. Get it out. That’s scary shit,” Bells said to me, her voice soft but firm, so much in that moment like my father’s.

I considered reaching for her hand, but I didn’t know if that would be appropriate. It occurred to me that I didn’t really know these men very well. Why were they here?

After a few moments, Lee said, “Bells, get yer a-yuss in here,” and they went into the kitchen.

The pups moved to me for reassurance, head-butting me gently. Dobermans, as a rule, are too arrogant to believe that the law of physics apply to them, which is why they believe they will fit curled into your lap.

I tried to hear the hole in my center, but instead I heard stage whispers, then Lee singing:

*“Oh Lord won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz... Bells’s baritone added: “My friends all drive Porsche’s, I must make amends...” A dishtowel snapped someone’s ass.*

*“Whoop!” And then together: “Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends...”*

Their singing almost managed to muffle the sounds of the faucet, the cabinets being opened and shut, the squeaks of the fridge door, the hinges of the tiny window being opened, the shuffling of flip flops and on the Spanish tile flooring.

*“...Dialing For Dollars is trying to find me...”*

Those nosy queens knew every cranny of my kitchen in two verses or less.

*“I’m counting on you, Lord, please don’t let me down...”*

My voice slow and drug-addled, I added:

*“Prove that you love me and buy the next round...”*

This was met with quick applause and loud Whoops of appreciation. Bells entered with a

tray of mason jars filled with clear fizzy cocktails and floating lime slices, three joints and a spray of Necco wafers. The attentiveness and competition for affection in the room, both two and four legged, calmed me and I could no longer hear the hole's thrumming.

"I don't know what the proper cocktail is for someone who's been shot," said Lee, curtsying. "Technically, I was burned." "By a ricochet *bullet* that would be in your belly right now if you'da been two inches to the right."

"Details, details," I waved my hand in what I hoped was a nonchalant movement. "Fucking Hell," Bells crunched a licorice wafer. Since there was no mention of a silly white girl fleeing a crime scene on the late news, we decided to watch an X-Files episode to Latina music from a local radio station. Bells loved Scully's red hair and Lee loved the Cancer Man.

"No offense, doll," said Lee. "I just like his character."

"Right? It fucking sucks. Cancer Man. And today, I was more or less shot trying to get fried chicken on the way home from the world's weirdest group therapy session. My girls would be orphans. So fucked up." They gazed at me openly and I told them everything.

"First off, you can't have cancer. I mean, really, right now you're the only RG I like." Most things in Bells' life were all about Bells.

There was a pregnant pause in which no one made eye contact except Lucy, who watched Bells shake herself from the top down, like a wet dog before beginning a staccato monologue: "You can't be sick... And fried chicken will make you WalMart fat... And your pups will never be orphans... Ethel already loves me best."

Lee exhaled loudly. We all breathed.

"How did you get Ethan to let these dogs live with you?" asked Bells. "I thought he didn't like the big ones."

"Who?" "Ethan," said Bells. "The Super. I thought he was scared of big dogs." Lee took a big hit of the pipe and said "DelMar!" "You know. Glass eye? He did all these tours in Vietnam," said Bells, ignoring Lee, "Got stabbed in the eye by a little VietCong girl who thought he was gonna rape her. He has a grown daughter who I think is playin' him. She's pregnant by some idiot. Ethan's just waiting for a chance to kill the loser. One eyed or not, he's a tough summbitch. His dope isn't the best, but government dope is better than no dope at all."

Lee and I folded into laughter. We laughed at Bells, at DelMar, at ourselves, at the cops, the nurses, the cancer, the psychotherapist, the quick revolution of identities.

"DelMar is a Hammer! Bwa ha ha," I said. "What the fuck? "Hammers! Hee hee. As in hammers that drive nails? Blunt tools? Get the job done?" It was the first in a long line of military terms that I would have to explain to these queens. I begun counting moments of joy on a mental tally sheet, marking them as I imagined God does in his Great Book of

Deeds. For every laugh, I imagined that my soul grew richer. “If you can laugh on a day like today, little miss hammer and nails, you’re gonna be just fine. But for fuckssake you gotta do something with that hair.” Bells examined my right hand and added, “And those nails. Fuck.” “She’s tough on them. I had to stop her from punching a nurse today.” “Fierce. Fuck.” “Ha. You her drag mama now?” “I think maybe I am.” Lee’s voice was defensive and a little too loud for the timbre of the conversation. There was a yaw in the room that Mulder and marijuana couldn’t fill. It was the exact moment when I was allowed into the support group that would save my life.

Acceptance is not to be taken for granted when you’ve been labeled Unacceptable for much of your life. No one knows this better than my tribe. When I was really suffering, they kept me from spinning out in my depression and despair. When I had a meltdown and my eyebrows wiped off my face with a single swipe of a washcloth a few months later, there was no pity, no judgement. They waited with a practiced patience for me to breathe, gave me a martini, and taught me how to draw those suckers back on.

I was not clear on what a drag mother was, but it felt like the moment your dad let go of the bicycle seat and you were suddenly peddling with all your might. You were scared, but you knew he was behind you. It had a smell, too (jasmine in the breeze) and a taste (laughter and limes in the vodka).

Lucy, the smartest bitch in the room, felt it too. She sat up, alert eyes on Lee.

“*D’accord D’accord,*” I said to her. She eased down slowly, like a gangster, watching Lee and emitting the tiniest of sighs.

Bells, luxuriously stretched by Lee’s vodka and my muscle-relaxers, examined his green nails. “Seriously, bitches. Who the fuck is DelMar?”

## **That Poem about the Sun**

*David Linklater*

Where the buildings were now there are none,  
no winking from the sun on their glass.  
Where bricks and beams stood,  
now only this hot blue music.  
And the people drink and turn red  
and undress, all the leaves and curbs amplify.  
He must've only been 19 or so,  
hung up, nailed down or nothing at all.  
I passed him with a thousand others  
and didn't look back once. His paper cup,  
light pressed among a few coppers.

Aye, work was work, the bagel was the bagel,  
the photocopier failed three times  
before finally producing verbatim.  
The man with the slick back comb  
denounced millions in the street.  
I passed him with a thousand others,  
people ate steak bakes, drank coffee.  
The sun had people in t-shirts and skirts.  
One man had his top off, another hung his head low.  
There's a sadness in the day the sun does a fine job blinding.  
Drink up friends, this will not last forever.

**On John Bellany's painting, *My Father***

*Gordon Gibson*

When I was wee, this is what men were like:  
in boiler suits and bunnets, grim-faced, knowing  
how to pour cement, fashion a dry-stane dyke,  
build a locomotive or a house, capture a glowing  
rivet from mid-air, or from the boiling tide,  
a seine-net, full to overflowing.

Men who could swing a Mundy hammer:  
fitter, armature-winder, welder, turner,  
adept with a cold chisel, a ratchet spanner,  
a lathe, an oxy-acetylene burner.

In factory, field and harbour, they could be found, astride  
truculent machines, heads bowed behind the plough,  
or, with awkward shifts completed, quiet with pride.  
Grandfathers, fathers. Distant, departed now.

## A Drawing Of Drapes

*Stella Wulf*

Drawn to the shadow of walls,  
she hangs back at the window  
while luminaries stream in  
from the outside world,  
blanching her edge.  
True to her grain  
she gathers herself  
into corrugations of habit,  
belted and braced,  
to face the shades of day.  
At each coming and going,  
each opening and closing of doors,  
she flurries - reaches out,  
settles back into her place,  
held back by the ties of decorum.  
Let loose, she would clear the sill  
in a swoop, escape the open window  
like a wanton strip of voile,  
lifting her skirts to a lick of sun,  
the stroke of a breeze.  
But she is bound to the day,  
waiting for night to turn her inside out,  
draw her smooth, sateen skin to his dark breast.  
As the moon rises, she lets him slip between her folds,  
opens herself up to the stars.

## **The First Flush**

*Stella Wulf*

She went with the startling murmur  
of the first flush, left you low and dry,  
clutching at the brittle bones of beauty.  
You caught a glimpse of her heels  
rounding the corner of your mind,  
grasped at her skirt as she slipped,  
fleeting as days, into the lie of shadows.  
You played a daily game  
of hide and seek; tried to coax her out  
from the hollow of your cheek,  
sweep her back in with a blusher brush.  
You huff the glass to a frosty moon,  
trying to read the lines she wrote you.  
Epiphany shuffles in, slipper-shod,  
stuffs the shapeless pulp of your heart  
into a stranger's body - knits a baggy blouse  
from the ravel of your brow,  
casts you off with the yarn of youth.

## **The Fruit Basket**

(After the artwork of Giuseppe Arcimboldo)

*Quinn Ramsay*

Her hair is first to go.  
She plucks each thin and weedy strand  
and hangs plump grapes  
in lavish bunches  
bursting from her scalp.

Her ashen cheeks begin to sag  
on their weathered frame of bone.  
She lets them fall,  
and in their place plants blushing apples  
with dimples in their flesh.

Seeing how her thin lips stretch  
tight across the hollow of her mouth,  
she unpins it with practiced care.  
Plump red tomatoes with shimmering skins  
add a certain youthful glow.

And still, she thinks, their fullness  
makes her chin look weak and wilting.  
She picks it from her jaw,  
twisting at the stem,  
and reaches for a pomegranate.

Soon her too-ripe eyes grow soft,  
dropping from their sockets,  
rolling to a place too dark to see.  
She gropes for them with stiffened fingers,  
under the table, under the stove,  
but makes do in the end  
with dark, mysterious olives.

Stepping back, she smiles,  
her features fresh and smooth  
in the dust-flecked window light.

When the pits of her eyes  
spy the fruit bowl in the mirror,  
she sees her old face staring back,  
familiar, well-loved, worn.

## **The Ones We See Again**

*Quinn Ramsay*

They spent that evening on the hill that overlooked the sound, watching the sun pressed down by blankets of

yellow and red. She, with arthritic hands woven with little veins, knob-knuckled, thin-skinned, sliced bits of cheese for him

to eat. He lay on his back, belly rising and falling, watery eyes staring upward.

Only she had the heart, now, to look out to sea, from where their son might someday return, seawater dripping

from the oars of his ship, his beard grown long, garbed in skins and bound with golden rings. Each day, the thought of his

return ebbed farther, like the edge of her little knife, sharpened over the years until only a sliver remained.

They stayed a few minutes longer before she helped him to his feet. As they looked up toward

the house, they chanced to see a figure approaching. She wore a red smock, its sleeves trimmed with

ferret, splashed by mud, baggy and shapeless. It had been let out many times, and never taken in. Their

daughter was reduced, her hair thin as spidersilk. A bundle in her arms cried out, and she stared at them

as if to say I, too, had gone.

## **As the Light Recedes**

*Rachel Johnson*

*This piece is a celebration of the Autumn Equinox, a time of Thanksgiving. At this time we recognize that longer nights are upon us and a time of stillness has begun. As one who worships nature, this is a libation of words given to honor the Second Harvest.*

And now the time has come  
to find ourselves  
at the balancing of the light.  
Perched upon the edge  
of a silvery blade.  
Sun and moon made equal.  
With Great Sickle in hand  
The Wise Crone reaps  
the ready harvest.  
A time of darkening has come.  
He is changed.  
From Greenwood, to Corn,  
to now the Dread Lord  
of Shadows.  
She is changed.  
From a Maiden in youth, to full  
and heavy with child.  
Now she must depart.  
Return to the deep earthen wells.  
We take with us  
their power and life.  
The bountiful harvest  
they have given  
sustaining us.  
But they must,  
as so many do,  
make their journey.  
Falling golden  
and rust to the earth.  
To be swept  
along until they reach the end.  
There to transform  
and start again.  
Let us see

in them the story.  
Our Horned God  
and Mother Goddess,  
traveling from woods  
so green and alive  
to the dark cauldron  
of the Underworld.  
Great time of balance,  
mystery, and lore.  
Give us space of remembrance.  
Thinking on their sacrifice,  
their Death.  
Through this cycle,  
ever onward,  
let our hearts  
and spirit be strong.  
Gifted sustenance  
and fertility  
which will carry us through.  
Through the Dark of Times.  
Through the Waning Sun.  
Through the Place of Night.  
To come through again  
And rise as the Sun.  
New but the same.  
Changed but forever sure.  
Reborn.  
Renewed.  
Rediscovered.



## **Garden**

*James Croal Jackson*

You cannot gut a tomato without first  
remembering the garden. The mud-rutted  
fingers pulled at weeds; silver shovels spiraled

to and from the sky. The spit, the rain. It took months–  
years– didn't it, to differentiate? To grow into something

unrecognizable? You knew what this would become,  
the way a person finds her own shadow  
insufficient. A broken silhouette of scarecrow.

It was then I could not see you– with your bangs  
of hay, the ground sprouting milkweed.

Those tired hands milled 'til the sun had no meaning.  
You wore dark clouds as a cape stained  
with mud the work helped us forget.

## Close

*Beth McDonough*

Weather we'd always called close  
checked like a too tight coat, only loosening  
with a slide of skins. Push  
into tide's green prickle view.  
Hushful ears hear  
our unfused hour,  
split by buttled steel.  
Under a downturn bowl  
black rolls, clichéd by rainbows. Now  
this ebb rushes past  
fast with grasses and sheds.  
Checked like a too tight coat,  
weather we'd always called close.

## **The Red Rock Chronicles**

*Rachel Lewis*

Sometimes when I remember that day, I am alone in the car. And sometimes I remember my sister being there, also. For some reason, I don't remember my mother being there. I know she was there - painting or napping in the front passenger seat - while the three of us waited for the rest of the group to return.

I attribute these faulty impressions in the memory to my youth and the passing of time, but I also blame Ray Bradbury. I stayed behind because I was tired (or maybe I was just bored) but I used *The Martian Chronicles* as my excuse. I had a book report due at the end of the holiday break. So I stayed in the car with my coat zipped up and my mittened hands splayed into a poly-blend bookstand for my paper back novel. Perhaps I remember being alone in the car because I felt alone in the pages. The American astronauts had failed yet again to establish a settlement on Mars. They killed all the Martians with their chicken pox germs and then turned on one another. I found myself alone on the red planet, which I imagined as quite similar to the deserts of Southern Utah, where my family was that day.

Little Wild Horse Canyon is a red sandstone slot canyon, not far from Goblin Valley, in the most Mars like expanse of Utah. It was New Year's Eve sometime in the early nineties. I'm not sure which. I was in my early teens. I was maybe even a tween, but we didn't have that word back then. My parents had planned a day trip with friends. My Mom's friend Donna and her son were there. My father had invited his colleague Fred and his wife, Isla, who had their toddler grandson in tow.

Even at that difficult age, I was an amenable daughter. I enjoyed hiking and camping and being in the outdoors with my family. That said, I was never able to share my parents' enthusiasm for Native American rock art, the prehistoric paintings and etchings that can be found across North America, especially in the American Southwest. My parents were eager rock art fanatics and we went out looking for sites at least one weekend a month. This day was not meant for exploration, though. My parents were introducing their friends to our hobby, taking them sites that we had visited many times before.

We had hiked around the Green River area all day and were ending our excursion at this last site. It was unusual for me to have asked to stay behind; I'm a little surprised that I got away with it in retrospect. My parents didn't allow us to "wimp out" of hikes. But I wasn't alone. As I said, my younger sister Andrea was with me in the car.

"I was in the car, too," my mom reminds me. "That's what I thought," I say. "But I wasn't sure." "I stayed behind because I had a cold," Mom says. That's it. Mom was sick, and so was Andrea. I was only able to stay behind because they had a good excuse and because Dad was distracted by his friends and his role of tour guide. There wasn't much light left and the pictographs were a mile or so from the trail head. I remember there was a bustle to get going so my father didn't take the time to press me.

They were gone an interminable amount time. Much too long. The time stretched on

more delicately by each moment that we waited for one of the others to say what we were all thinking. “*Shouldn’t they be back by now?*”

The shadows grew slowly and the retreating sunlight fell in filtered pink and lavender shades on the sandstone and patches of snow. The cold became more insistent. It pushed through the Plexiglas of the window beside my cheek and filled the open space behind my seat in the Subaru’s hatchback. Eventually it became cold even on Mars, where the astronauts’ argument about the ethics of colonization was turning violent.

Sarah, my older sister, was the first member of the expedition to return. She opened the car door next to Andrea and pushed in backside first, bringing the insulating swirl of cold that surrounded her body with her. “Dad fell. He’s okay, but he dislocated his arm,” she said, and Mom was out of the car before we heard another detail.

Even as I trudged down the trail toward the shadowed figure that was a Dad-Fred conglomeration, I knew there would be nothing I could do to help. Just getting out of the car was an act of putting myself in the way. Now that they were emerging up the last few feet to the parking area I could see that Dad was leaning on Fred for support, and that Fred had an arm around my father’s ribs, but I couldn’t see what use that was to a banged up shoulder. Maybe my Dad was leaning on the man to allow him to feel like his was helping. The only thing that was giving direct assistance was my father’s own left hand cradling the disfigured right arm. What was needed was transportation to the hospital, which was 120 miles away in a town called Price.

“Jane, you are going to need to drive,” Fred told my mother. “Is that okay?”

“I can drive,” my father said. “Jane, I’ll need you to shift.” That line is now legend in my family. We invoke it whenever someone’s stubbornness has carried them beyond the realm of reason. To this day that person is usually still my dad, which makes the sting of the phrase that much brighter and therefore pleasurable for the rest of us.

“I’d never driven so fast,” Mom says.

“I remember,” I add. “And I remember how awful it was, trying to get over that dirt road with your arm bumping around. We propped it up on Mom’s purse, but you were in so much pain.”

“Yeah, that was uncomfortable,” Dad allows, but I can tell he doesn’t want to admit it, even now.

“The other thing I remember... I was in the seat behind you, and you were holding the space where your arm had come out of the socket, and you told me to feel it. I didn’t want to. I was scared. But then you yelled at me when I refused so I reached up and felt it. You said something like, ‘there, doesn’t that feel weird?’ And I was like ‘*yes, it feels weird. Glad we established that.*’” My dad laughs at this, but clearly doesn’t remember the exchange.

“Then they gave you those drugs and you were so out of it...” my mom has skipped ahead

to the ER now, but I'm not ready for that.

"Wait, wait... tell me what happened. Where were you when you fell?"

"We were almost to the rock art panel, up on the ridge above the creek bed." I can picture this. The slot canyon opens up and the sides of the canyon stack up in levels. From the creek bed, a rising wall of sand and sage brush climbs up to where it meets the sandstone wall of the canyon again. If the canyon had a third story, they would have been walking along its balcony.

"Were you at the most narrow point?" I ask, trying to remember a trail that at one time in my life I knew well.

"No, it wasn't that narrow. We were walking across the top of a large bolder that sloped down away from the trail. It's was steep slope. And there was a thin layer of snow. So thin that it was looked grey on the sandstone. Not white. That's when Fred's grandson – he was maybe three or four. And he was having a really good time, but he wasn't being careful. It wasn't his fault – that isn't what I mean. He was just so little. He didn't have the best balance yet. Anyway he was walking next to me and he slipped and knocked my feet out from under me..."

This is incongruous with the story that I "know," but I try not to react. Hadn't Fred told me that the boy fell and started to go down the slick rock, so Dad dove for him? Or had I invented that?

"I landed on my shoulder and it dislocated," Dad is continuing. "Then we were sliding together toward the drop off. I was able to get a hold of him so that I didn't roll over him and I used my body weight to stop our slide before we went off..."

"Donna told me," Mom interjects, "that the little boy was going over the edge and that you grabbed him with your good arm and rolled over, flinging him uphill before he could fall over." I smile. We have both cast my dad as a superhero: the caped defeater of death and gravity.

"Maybe," my dad says. "But I think I had him tucked in my good arm and we were sliding backward on my side and my limp arm." I cringe a little picturing that.

"But we came to a stop and we crawled back up – he was pretty shaken but he was fine. But then no one wanted to see the rock art! We had come all that way, and they just wanted to turn around and get back to the cars." My dad raises his arms in the retelling, still bothered by the squandered opportunity over twenty years later. Knowing my dad and recalling the thought and seriousness he put into those day-trips back then, I realize for the first time that Wild Horse Canyon was intentionally saved as the last site on the trip. The grand finale in his carefully composed mix tape of cherished archeological desert spots selected to share with his friends.

"Finally Fred went the last bit up the trail and took a few photos of the panel." Dad says and I realize that perhaps Fred got my father out of that canyon after all. Someone had to

climb up and take a look just so they could leave.

“We all went up to see the rock art,” Sarah says when I ask her to tell me the story the day after I heard Mom and Dad’s versions.

“It actually wasn’t that big of a deal,” she recalls. “It was one of those things where we all went... Gah!” She gasps and puts her hands to her throat in imitation of one of those pearl-clutching gestures we all make when we want to stop time and prevent what is happening from happening. “It was really scary for a second. But it happened so fast. By the time I could form the thought that they might go over the edge it was over.”

“Where were you standing? Do you remember?”

“I was behind, but not right behind. There was Dad and then one more person and then me.”

“Okay, so what happened?” I ask, excited to hear this. “You were the only person in the family that actually saw it.”

“I was?” she asks. For some reason it surprises me that she doesn't know this. “I didn't remember that. Well, the little boy was walking in front of Dad. And when he slipped, Dad grabbed him, but lost his balance and they both went down. And it was this steep slope, but it evened out just a little bit before the drop-off. That’s where they stopped sliding.” She says this and takes a sip of her wine and I decide that I like this version best. My father: the clumsy hero.

“But then they came back up to the trail and they seemed okay so no one knew anything was wrong. Well, Dad knew something was wrong obviously. I think he said his arm hurt. But it didn’t sound bad and we were almost at the paintings. So we walked the last little bit up the trail and that’s when Dad finally said something.”

“What did he say?” I ask. I don’t think I've heard this part of the story before.

“He realized that his shoulder was dislocated and he was trying to get Fred to shove it back in the socket. But Fred wasn’t having any part of that.”

“Oh God, I can imagine...”

“He wouldn't have been able to do it,” Sarah said. “Remember, at the hospital, they had the doctor and two nurses trying to shove it back in, and they still couldn't get it?”

“Yes, I remember,” I say, but I know don’t. I’ve heard the story so many times I can picture it. The nurses in their pale blue scrubs holding my dad by his legs and his good arm. The doctor trying every technique conceivable including (according to Mom) putting his own leg on the bed next to my Dad’s chest to try to get a more leverage on the useless arm, which was resisting all of the man’s training and good intentions. That was when they gave up on the local and just knocked the poor man out. It was the only way to get the muscles to relax enough to send Dad’s arm back home into the socket.

I couldn't possibly remember any of this. I was in the waiting room. It's one of the more notable days of my childhood, but I don't have a speaking role in the story. I don't have unfabricated memories of the dynamic moments. The hike. The fall. The relocation. I spent it waiting. Waiting for the hikers to return. Waiting as my mom drove to Price. Waiting for hours in the ER's room for waiting – feeling both frightened and bored and wishing there were something I could do.

What I do remember is being in the ER and sitting next to a man with a bloody hand. There was a rag wrapped around the palm and he was clasping the bloody fingers tenderly in his uncut hand, cradling it in his lap and sitting very still with his eyes closed in meditation, as if transporting himself away from the pain of it. "*None of our expeditions went as planned,*" I thought looking around the waiting room, still thinking vaguely about the wayward Americans on Mars.

"By the time we got home, it was a new year." That is how my mom ends the story. Sarah said something similar. We weren't a family that stayed up for New Year's, so it might have been the first time we all spent that midnight hour awake together. I don't recall anyone mentioning it at the time. It fits somehow. Or at least for me it does. My role in the story was to witness the passing of time. It seems right that, somewhere in that day of waiting for the next thing to happen, waiting to be a character in the story and not just a reader of it, the year changed, imperceptibly shifting all of us into the future.

## Father

*Emeline Morin*

### One: He breaks it all

He's angry again:

heavy sighs half formed swearing words you pretend you can turn invisible clutching the table til your knuckles turn white shutting your eyes chin against chest alone with him still hearing nothing but **thumps** and **thuds** the computer keyboard **breaking**

purposefully

relentlessly

endlessly

hard plastic against hard wood **bursting** his unfathomable anger

**s p r e a d i n g**

**flooding** the walls **climbing** up the ceiling **clasp**ing at your heart gasping for air as the curtains

s

w

and

d

e

r

a

i

t

p

over the floor

the sickening fear **swamping** your head **rushing** clammy palms and blood **runs** cold keys scatter about hiding recoiling under furniture in flower pots falling through the cracks under floorboards in fissures and buckets of tears to be found

for years to come.

### Two: Breaking free

He's angry again:

Pretend not to hear the heavy sighs, shouts, and screams,

His everyday violence, it will not last.

Open your eyes,

unclench your tiny bones,

watch

as letters fly about the room, floating words, future stories brightening nights,  
building up dreams. The unexpected offspring of diseased selfishness. He cannot rob you  
of *your self*, of *your voice* forever.

Stop shaking,

breathe anew,

make the instant *yours*,

pick up the scattered letters.

Know one day you try. One day you escape. One day you become *you*.

Not just the daughter of the loud cheery man everybody admires, not just the daughter of  
the monster who bruises **inside out** those he should love.

## **Moths and Jung**

*Jo Harrison*

Maybe  
the moth just wants to  
understand the  
lightbulb.

She  
sees it  
burning from  
the corner of her eye  
like a big, incomprehensible news story  
and she is pulled in  
like the  
tide.

Maybe  
the wire filament  
looks interesting and she feels  
capable of analysing it, if only she circled  
closer, messily orbiting this thing  
which is bright like information,  
hot like her  
feelings.

Or  
maybe  
she is just a moth and not  
a rape victim. And the small electrical glow  
is not news article after news article about rape and  
excuses for rape and swim-times of rapists and  
Presidential-candidate gropers  
and non-apologies from  
rape-apologists,  
but the  
magnitude  
of the sun. To her primitive  
insect brain, the sun is her world,  
her reason, her innate

reflexive

mechanism.

My lightbulb has become  
her mythology, the hawk flying overhead  
to duck, the nipple to turn her cheek towards.  
An archetype, an imprint, an example of  
the collective unconscious  
of moths.

Rape

is my lightbulb.

I want to stop singe-  
ing my lashes on the glass of my laptop,  
but I can-  
not.

## Speechless

*Elora Flack*

I lay there for only a couple minutes longer, before I was able to move. I pushed my body up and instantly felt the bruises beginning to form. So many places hurt. When I was finally able to get up, I looked around. The woods were covered in a deep purple; sunrise would be coming soon. I could not recall sensing any of the other vampires' presence—no one had come back tonight. It made perfect sense, after all. I carefully put the coat on. My skin prickled under the fabric. It even smelled like him. I turned in the direction towards camp and began walking. It was painful to do so; my inner thighs and pelvic bone were thoroughly bruised, and I could only take in shallow breaths. If a wolf wants to catch a maiden from up in a tree, it does little good to bark and scratch at the tree. The best solution is to keep a safe distance and wait in the shadows until the maiden comes down. He probably told the others to make themselves scarce tonight and then waited until Christian and I were together, vulnerable. He planned this to the last detail and I fell right into his trap without even a second thought. I let him do this to me and Christian, and I couldn't feel like a bigger fool.

I made it back to camp just as dawn broke. I avoided the patrolling councilors and ran right into the girl's bathroom. I cranked the hot water and sank down into the corner of the shower, letting the searing heat wash over me. It was only then that I cried, not whimpering or half-assed tears, but blubbing and headache-inducing tears that quickly gave me a migraine. I cried until I had no more tears left and my eyes stung.

April was the first in the bathroom and that's how she found me. She turned off the water and wrapped a towel around me.

"Who did this to you?" she asked, over and over again. I looked over to Asarath's coat lying in a nearby sink. She followed my gaze and let go of me. She had only met its owner once, but you never forget someone that terrifying. The coat was all the answer she needed. She looked back at me and I averted my eyes to the tile. "You look awful." She didn't speak, but I could read the words in her gaze. I glanced up at the mirror and saw myself, truly saw myself, and it made me shudder. There were countless bruises riddled across my body and there was a ring around my neck where he had held me up. Even my wrists and ankles were black and blue. My body looked swollen, distorted. My skin was no longer my own.

If this is how much he can hurt me when I think his touch is moderate, I am nothing compared to his power.

April helped me back to our cabin and I threw on a black turtleneck and loose fitting jeans. This would hopefully cover my bruises, most of them at least. Nothing could hide my face, though. My cheeks were devoid of color, under my eyes were rimmed with black, and my eyes themselves were glazed over. April tried putting makeup on me, but it did little to hide the fact that I was damaged. When we entered the kitchen, Darrell noticed immediately and rushed over to me. He didn't have to ask who did this to me. He knew perfectly well and there was nothing he could do to alleviate my pain. I worked on the silverware so I had the least amount of contact with everyone else. After work was done, I told the councilors I did not feel well. They insisted I go to the

camp's doctor, but I told them I just needed to lie down for a bit. I returned to my cabin and crashed in my bunk. I didn't wake back up until well after nightfall.

When I did wake up, I couldn't form words; they were gone, spent. There was nothing to say, as if all the words in the world had been used up and everything else was trivial, pleasantries for the sake of formality and nothing more. My words had been stolen in those woods.

Even my mind wasn't entirely there, as if the pilot had been stabbed and the plane had been set to auto heading straight for a mountain. I could feel myself slipping away and it terrified me. The only thing I was capable of was reliving every last detail of what happened last night over and over again in my head, trying to find some reason or purpose to it all, but I had nothing to show for it. It had been senseless and violent. I still felt naked, though I was wearing clothes. I still felt dirty, though I had showered. I still felt violated, though it had been several hours since the encounter. Last year I had been violated too, but I didn't know the creature that had done it. This was different. I knew the monster that did this to me. He took advantage of my weakness and I let him. I let him use me. It wasn't about the sex, not really. It was the power he had over me. He proved last night that he was more powerful. He proved that no matter how much I struggle and fight back, he will always be stronger. I could not beat him, so I may as well give in. That was the message last night and, for once, in a deep dark pit of self-hatred and despair, I believed that was true.

When I finally got dressed again, I was able to make it just in time for dinner. I sat with Darrell and April, but ate nothing. Darrell kept asking me questions in my mind, but I just tuned him out. He knew what had happened, April no doubt told him, but still he asked his questions. He was concerned for me. Good, he should be. *I have been brought to a level of hopelessness I never thought myself capable of*, I thought. *Anything can happen at this point.*

When it was time for bed, April sat on my bunk and tried to talk to me, tried to coax out anything that resembled a conversation, but I wouldn't acknowledge her. I just stared out the window watching the moon rise. It was full again and beautiful. By the time everyone was fast asleep, the moon had disappeared behind the trees. I needed to see it. It was something solid, something safe, something I could always rely on to be there. I needed to see Christian too, but I couldn't feel his presence anymore. He hadn't returned since last night, maybe he never would. I couldn't blame him. It would kill me to see him in the same state I'm in now. I would want to kill who had ever done that to him and I would be killed in return. Maybe it was best that he was gone. He needs to stay away, at least for now, but the thought of it saddened me. He is the only person I'll talk to, the only person who knows all my secrets, the only person I'd want to spend the rest of my unnaturally long life with. He is my everything and he is gone.

Even if I could talk to him, what would I say? That it was my fault? That I was sorry? That I had already broken our vows before we were ever wed? That I had been violated and was now damaged goods? Sure, Christian hadn't been my first, but I wanted him to be the only one, my only one for the rest of time. But of course he knew this, knew all of this, he always has and always will. That just leaves the emptiness, the hole that's been ripped between us, the nothingness that has been created inside of me. That is all there is to say, nothing, absolutely nothing. Asarath has left me speechless.

*'If I can't even talk to my lover, than the moon shall be my confidant. She is pale, silent, and observes without judgement. She is beautiful and knows what it means to be rejected. She is of the earth after all, one of this planet's many children. She was cast out though; ripped from our mother's very skin, left to fend for herself. Yet, every day, she circles the earth, always close, and every night she returns to bring light and beauty to an unforgiving darkness. She understands me, knows my pain. If I am to speak to anyone, I want her to be the first. I know she won't say anything, but all she must do is listen. She saw what had happened to me, she'll believe me and know what I tell her is the truth. Yes, I shall do that. I shall divulge to her everything and maybe, with that weight off of my chest, I can learn how to speak again. But, no, the moon has disappeared through the trees. I can't speak to her like this. I have to see her, feel her sensuous light against my skin. That is what I must do. I cannot stay here for another second. No one else will understand, but her. I need her this moment more than ever. I must go, for she is my everything now.'*

I rose from my bunk and floated out of the cabin as if in a trance. If anyone had been there to see me, I must have appeared to have been an apparition, a ghost-like thing. No one was there to stop me. No one could stop me. I followed the moon's path and finally I saw her in all her glory as I emerged by the lake. I stepped onto the docks and I could scarcely feel the wood underneath me. When the dock ended, I reached out both hands and grabbed for her with everything in me. I could hear the footfalls approach from behind, but it didn't matter. No one could interrupt me. Now that I was determined, no one could stop me.

"Well, now." I knew his voice, I always knew his voice. "I thought after last night you would want a break, but I guess I was mistaken." He stepped just behind me, but I paid him no heed. He grabbed my wrist and I let him. "Come now. This will be far easier for you if you cooperate." He turned my wrist over in his hand. "And you will have far fewer bruises to conceal." He let go and my arm went limp back to my side. 'Eliyah' He tried probing my mind, but I wouldn't let him in. I had learned a long time ago how to block him out. I was speaking to the moon and I didn't want him to interrupt our conversation with his ugly thoughts. "Eliyah?" He shook my shoulders and spun me around, but I just kept trying to look at the moon. "Why will you not look at me? What is wrong with you?" He grabbed my neck so I couldn't look away anymore, but now it's done. I confessed to her everything. My eyes stared back at him coldly, no recognition. His squeeze became harder. "You always fight back, why are you not fighting back?" Tighter and tighter. It was becoming harder to breathe, but it didn't matter, none of it matters in the end. "Come on, Eliyah. Fight back." Everything was becoming dim. I made no effort to even try. If this is to be the end, then so be it. Everything became dark and I embraced it fully and completely.

I awoke the next morning in my bunk with a wicked sore throat, along with all my other ailments. Laid across me was Asarath's coat. He didn't kill me after all. He can't kill me, not here, not now at least. Next to my bed was an impression where someone had sat. April was standing near the door watching me. Everyone else was still asleep. This morning was the last morning for our kitchen detail. I shut my alarm off. She hadn't said a word, but there was a tiny whisper in my head. Her voice was barely registering, but she kept repeating herself over and over.

*“He was here...he was here...he was here....”* I looked down at the coat still laid across me. It smelled of pine, and dirt, and moss, and of blood which just barely came through at all. I bunched the coat up into a ball, staring at it until something deep in my diaphragm crept up into my lungs, which crawled up my throat, which cartwheeled onto my tongue and I couldn't hold it in any longer. A laugh exploded from my lips. It wasn't a trickle or a snicker; no, it was a full-blown, gut-wrenching laugh. The other girls groaned and threw various insults my way, but I didn't care. This was all too funny, every minor detail was hysterical and I couldn't control myself anymore. In April's eyes I probably looked deranged. I frightened myself, really. Somewhere deep inside of me I could see all of this playing out, but instead this psychopath took control of the wheels and decided to go on a joy ride. All I could do was watch.

I kept chuckling periodically throughout the day. Even Darrell was overly concerned, wanted me to confess to Kathy that I had been raped. He said they would figure it out eventually, that I could only wear so many sweatshirts and turtlenecks before someone finally notices. His concern was touching, but I just didn't see the point of anything anymore. My conference with the moon made me feel only slightly better, but I still chose to remain silent. I stayed this way for days afterwards. I could tell it was making the counselors nervous, it was written all over their faces, mixed in with their awkward glances and pushy conversations. They didn't know what was going on, but it was big and they weren't going to let up on it. Even Darrell and April remained close, but stopped trying to talk to me, either physically or mentally. I was a lost cause for now, nothing seemed to be working. Asarath still kept watch, but at a distance. No one knew what to do with me, so the only course of action was to wait. I waited to feel like myself again, the counselors waited to see what was the matter, Darrell and April waited for me to open up to them, and Asarath waited for me to fight back.

## Life Essay

*Tricia Conohan*

For all of my life, I have been very lucky. I was adopted by great parents at the age of two months, the only people close to me that died were grandparents, and I had a wonderful childhood where I never went without. I attended prestigious schools, made friends easily, and played many sports. I met the man of my dreams at an early age, married him in a wedding that closely resembled that of Cinderella and Prince Charming, and we are now expecting our first child. It may sound like I have had the perfect life, and when I think about it, in some senses, I have. That's not to say, however, that my life has always been without pain or fear.

During the fall of 2012, I was spending the night with my boyfriend, Corey. We were both living with our parents after graduation, and we liked to find time to spend at least one night a week together. It was a fairly uneventful evening, with a nice dinner and a movie, followed by an early bedtime- I had to be on the road rather early, as I was planning on driving up to Wisconsin Rapids to watch my college golf team play in the final tournament of the year. I woke up at about 6:00 a.m. to find Corey violently thrashing next to me. I knew right away he was having a seizure. I had experienced this once before, in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at a friend's sleepover. Watching someone have a seizure is never an easy experience, whether you are 9 or 23.

I immediately grabbed my phone, ran into his parents' room, screamed for his mother to call 911, and then I proceeded to call 911 as well. It was tense—I felt like my heart and the clock had stopped together—and I didn't even realize both of us were on the phone with 911 until afterward. My voice was trembling on the phone with the 911 operator, and my whole body was shaking so badly I tripped and fell over nothing. My teeth were chattering so hard I thought I was going to chip a tooth. The ambulance finally arrived, after what felt like forever, and the EMT's rushed into Corey's room. At this point, he had stopped seizing. They gently started to wake him up, so as not to startle him, and it took him a really long time to figure out what was going on. Once he realized that the EMT's were in his room because his mom and I called 911, he wasn't sure he even believed what had happened. He thought we were exaggerating, and oh, how I wish we were. Corey signed the waiver papers stating that he did not wish to have further medical treatment, and sent the ambulance on its way. He promised us he would go in to the doctor's office with his mom later in the day, and that was that.

Corey and his mom left for the doctor's office a few hours later, and I hopped into the shower, figuring I could still get on the road to head up to watch my friends play some golf. While I was in the shower, Corey's mom called, but I didn't know until I saw the missed call on my phone after I got out. She hadn't left a message, so I thought that was a little odd. I tried calling back, but no one picked up. After about 10 minutes, I decided to trust my instinct, and drove the 5 minutes into town to the doctor's office. Upon getting there, I saw Corey's car, and figured they must have still been seeing the doctor. I also saw an ambulance in the parking lot, but didn't think anything of it. I walked inside, and sat down in the waiting area. After about 15 minutes, the receptionist asked me if I was Tricia. At that moment, I got chills. She told me that the ambulance in the parking lot had been for Corey, and that it was hurrying him to the hospital because

he had had another seizure in the parking lot. I immediately ran out of the doctor's office, my legs feeling like Jello, and proceeded to race to the hospital, which was about 25 minutes away. Upon getting there, I burst through the doors of the ER, and found Corey and his mom. Corey appeared delirious and frail on the gurney. We waited all day, as he had MRI after MRI, and then we were finally told the news we had been dreading- Corey had a brain tumor. I thought, "This can't be happening. It just can't". It didn't seem real. Surgery was to be scheduled a few weeks later, and they put him on anti-seizure medication to halt the effects of the tumor on his brain.

The surgery had to be re-scheduled due to his neurosurgeon being sick. Despite the fact that I didn't want to see the man I loved go through a dangerous surgery, this made me furious, as I just wanted to get it over with, and I wanted our lives to go back to the way they were. That would never happen, though. Life was never going to be the same, no matter what the outcome. Three days before Thanksgiving, Corey had his first brain surgery. It was the longest day of my life. The surgery lasted about 12 hours, and every time I looked up at the clock, it seemed like only a minute had passed. Corey's parents were with me in the waiting room, as was his sister. She had brought games along to play, and we chose Catchphrase. It's the silliest thing, playing Catchphrase in a hospital waiting room, while the man you love is lying on a table somewhere with his head cut open and his brain exposed to the same air we were breathing.

When we were finally able to see him, he was very shaky and extremely "out of it". We thought the worst was over, but as it turns out, his neurosurgeon was unable to get everything out that he wanted to. After 12 hours? How could that even be possible? So, they called in the top dog- Dr. Mustafa Baskaya, a neurosurgeon who hailed from Turkey. He is considered the "best of the best", because after completing his residency in Turkey, came to the United States and was forced to go through residency again, because for some reason it didn't count. So, Dr. Baskaya specializes in many different areas of neurosurgery, and he is the one they call in for hard to reach tumors, seemingly impossible cases. He had a second surgery, this time much shorter thankfully, and Dr. Baskaya was successful! We were overjoyed. Corey was able to go home just three days later, on Thanksgiving Day. He was even feeling well enough to go to dinner at my family's house! The course of treatment following his surgeries was an oral chemo pill, which he took for a little over a year.

Corey's MRI scans remained stable for three years, until this past February when we got some scary news- his tumor had returned, and he would need surgery again. By this time, we were pros- however, I felt even more worried than I had during the first two surgeries, and I think it's because this time he was going under the knife not as my boyfriend, but as my husband. We got to the hospital early, and because they had caught the tumor's regrowth so early thanks to the frequent MRI scans, the surgery was extremely short and we were able to see Corey right away. I spent the night with him, on the pull-out couch in the Neuro-ICU, and thanked my lucky stars that I have such a strong, brave, amazing husband who never fails to keep a positive attitude. His health scares me a lot, as I don't ever want to lose him, but his incredible strength and ability to keep his head up during the hard times rubs off on me. No matter what happens in the future, I can never be unhappy with the way my life has turned out, because I was lucky enough to find "the one", and nothing can ever take that away- not even cancer.

## **Skimming words**

*Nikki Robson*

Disease has made them stones between us:  
palm-weighed, smooth  
and hope-rubbed.

For years we scoured  
the lough shore, searching  
for the one to skip

across the bay where waders  
preyed the shallows  
of Inishmakill.

We clacked and dipped  
the water's edge, wrist-flicked  
in rhythm with the spinning world.

None ever bounced  
far enough. At dusk  
the heron gangled away.

In the shadow of its span my words  
silt-settle, their clumsy ripples  
break against the island.

## Approaching York from the North

*Jo Young*

The stray willow was a snapped hammock for hanging man  
then an unspoken dare between kids.

The stray willow shivered as a woman melted into vale mist  
on her final morning walk -  
lifting one of its thousand fingers  
to coax her back.

The stray willow still has something to say about that  
but makes all its points to mute, common clay.

The stray willow stands target for hounds and terriers  
belting over the echo of heath,  
unsnapped from the suburbs.

The stray willow tracks the woman's dad  
in a hunch steepening at every discarded sock and ciggie  
after eight years and more.

The stray willow wraps Viking weapons  
and Roman tokens, corrodes them in earthy knots &  
cries its own pond, squat as a gargoyle  
sluiced with the deluge sent down

past fresh-laid foundations,  
slicing through the crust  
placing neat hints around the city walls.

## About the Authors

**Gordon Gibson** lives in Troon, on Scotland's south-west coast. He worked in higher education for 20 years, and now writes full-time. His work, prose and poetry, has appeared in a number of print and on-line publications. His severe mobility difficulties prevent him from taking part in the usual literary networking events.

**Jo Harrison** says, "I'm a 30 year old woman who lives in Edinburgh but is originally from Northampton, which, yes, is north of Southampton - I am not French. I started writing poetry a couple of years ago, to distract myself from (i.e. indulge completely in) a particularly bad break-up. I've performed in various local spoken word nights around Edinburgh since then and I mainly enjoy poetry which is authentic, dark, funny, and not even slightly sentimental. I'm unpublished, which is probably for the best. Hello. My name is Jo, and I am a bleakaholic."

**James Croal Jackson's** poems have appeared in magazines including *The Bitter Oleander*, *Rust+Moth*, and *Columbia College Literary Review*. He is the winner of the 2016 William Redding Memorial Poetry Prize via The Poetry Forum in his current city of Columbus, Ohio. Visit him at [jimjakk.com](http://jimjakk.com).

**Rachel Johnson** says, "I grew up in Chicago, where diversity abounds, and I am now living in Las Vegas. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville with a degree in Professional Writing, minoring in Creative Writing. I have always loved to write and knew that one way or another I would be an author. I am also a bisexual woman and an outspoken member of the LGBTQIA+ community. Currently, I'm a priestess at the Sehkmet Temple in Indian Springs, NV and I am working on my Newborn City Series. These are paranormal/urban romance novels which include diverse relationships and ethnic backgrounds. I live in a new home with my husband and two needy cats."

**Rachel Lewis** lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. As a playwright, she had six short plays produced in showcases and festivals in Manhattan, Salt Lake City, and Austin. Her full-length play, *Locking Doors*, was presented by Wordsmith Theatre Company in The New Lab Theatre (University of Utah) in 2005. She recently co-wrote a teleplay with writer and podcaster Daniel Beecher titled "Thank God I'm Atheist." Their script won the 2015 "No God But Funny" contest founded by the Center for Inquiry and the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The teleplay was performed as a staged reading in Los Angeles at the Steve Allen Theater in December 2015. Rachel currently works in pharmaceuticals professionally and writes recreationally, but dreams of making the transition to write professionally and do pharmaceuticals recreationally. She is working on a collection of humorous non-fiction essays and blogs at [onlifeandlemons.com](http://onlifeandlemons.com).

**David Ross Linklater** is a poet from the Highlands of Scotland living in Glasgow. He is currently studying an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. He is the recipient of a Donald Dewar Arts Award and was shortlisted for a New Writers Award in

2015. His work has appeared in *Glasgow Review of Books*, *Freak Circus* and *Ofi Press*, amongst others. You can follow him on Twitter@ @DavidRossLinkla

**Beth McDonough** trained in Silversmithing at Glasgow School of Art. Following an M.Litt at Dundee University, she was Writer in Residence at Dundee Contemporary Arts (2014-16). Her work is strongly connected to place, particularly to the Tay, where she swims. Her poetry may be read in *Gutter*, *Northwords Now*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Interpreter's House*, many other journals and anthologies. She reviews poetry and edits at *DURA*. *Handfast*, a poetry duet pamphlet (with Ruth Aylett) was published in May. There, she investigates her experience of her son's autism, as her co-poet considers that of her parents' dementia. The poems ask questions and find parallels. *Handfast* is published by Mother's Milk Books.

**Emeline Morin** just finished her PhD on fairy-tale rewritings at Glasgow University and is currently teaching at the University of Southampton. Say hello @EmelineMMimie.

**Quinn Ramsay** is a native Oregonian currently based in New York, and recent graduate of the University of Glasgow. His prose and poetry have been published in *Paragraphiti*, *From Glasgow to Saturn*, *Santa Clara Review*, *The Magnolia Review*, and *Gemini*, and he has been a recipient of the Amy M. Young Award in Creative Writing. He was recently a co-editor and designer for 'Williwaw: an Anthology of the Marvellous.'

**Nikki Robson** is from Northern Ireland and lives in Scotland. She holds an MLitt in Writing Practice and Study from Dundee University and her poems have appeared in journals and anthologies including *Acumen*, *Under the Radar*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *Lunar Poetry* and *Obsessed with Pipework*. In 2015 she was awarded First Prize in the Elbow Room competition and Highly Commended in Wigtown and Carer's UK.

Indulging earnestly in her Mid-Life Crisis, **Victoria Shropshire** moved from North Carolina to Glasgow in order to pursue a few more letters and devote herself to her creative writing practice. Becoming a student again after 18 years as a university lecturer has its perks; Victoria and her Hubby -who she worships with virtual rock star status- are enjoying the adventures of expat living. She is a cancer survivor, a derelict debutante with a twisted sense of humor, as well as a lover of dogs, cigars, books, shells and shellfish, traveling, all kinds of art, most genres of music, and Netflix. Victoria's pet peeves are seahorse birdbaths, cypress clocks, and velvet paintings of Elvis.

**Stella Wulf** lives in South West France and has just completed an MA in Creative Writing with Lancaster University. Her work has been widely published, both in print and online magazines and journals, and has appeared in several anthologies including *The Very Best of 52*, *three drops from a cauldron*, and the *Clear Poetry Anthology*. She is also an artist and her work can be seen on her website: [stellawulf.com](http://stellawulf.com)

**Jo Young** left the British Army in 2014 and has been writing ever since. She is mum to two young sons and a doctoral student on the University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Programme.

### **About the Artist**

Cover art and illustration by **Savannah Marlatt**, an illustrator living in Vancouver, where she is currently working towards a PhD in Art History at the University of British Columbia.

