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Three Poems

Cassandra de Alba

At The Science Fair Of Your Heart

No one can wrestle their posterboard upright.
The construction paper is cut crookedly
and smeared with glue; the baking soda volcanoes
are stubbornly dormant.

I set up in the cafeteria corner with three glass jars,
labelled with leftover Christmas tags.
The first is full of dirty marbles
from under a tree in the front yard, the ones
I used to believe grew there.

The second jar has a crack along the side
so fine it's almost imperceptible.
Inside there is nothing but a pin
clinging to a scrap of your favourite shirt.

The last jar has a reindeer on the label.
It appears empty. A crudely drawn speech bubble
is coming out of the reindeer's mouth.
It says *Sorry*.

I win honourable mention.
The principal rests his hand on my shoulder
a second past comfortable.
I smile with all my teeth.

Legends

When they set the forest on fire, everyone in town was asleep. Blair stole his older sister's station wagon and they drove out the back way, avoiding Main Street and the one sleepy cop. The neighbours woke up to the smell of ash and a haze that lingered for half the week. Blair's sister found the kerosene under the passenger seat and called their father, then the police. The trailer park insomniacs remembered three boys laughing over cheap beer and a box of matches at the side of the old logging road. Their lawyers tried, *they were just young and reckless, judge, that's all*, but arson got you three years in county even then. Steve went back to school when he got out. Aaron got married. Blair walked into the half-grown woods dressed in kerosene and struck a match.

Sever

The night before my father dies, I dream that I have cut off my own hand. The bones in my wrist are blue like coloured chalk, the edges perfectly smooth. I am not concerned about the loss of function, all the simple actions I will have to relearn or give up; I am worried about having to tell. I am worried that people will say stupid things to me, point out that I don't have a hand any more, like I didn't already know.



Three Poems

Gregory Heath

Pig

"Pig" first appeared in Snakeskin

I thought my brothers deserved it.
House of straw! House of wood!
When they came banging
on my good strong door,
I said No.

I thought Your fault, not mine;
I got myself a beer,
turned up the telly when
the squealing started.

But later that night
there were voices saying:
What sort of an animal are you?

And what about that wolf?

They said:
Maybe there's more than one kind of wolf.
They said:
Maybe we summon our own wolves.

And the more I tried
to ignore them, the

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louder they got until
I couldn't stand it and

when I shut my eyes
to make them stop

I saw my wolf,
picking his way through the darkness,
stopping only to show
the moon his teeth,
and to sniff at the air for pig.

Transformation

"Transformation" first appeared in Obsessed With Pipework

A man is walking
down the street whistling when his foot turns
into an orange. The transformation is very swift and
very painful. One moment he's lifting his foot from the ground,
the next he's replacing it to find that it has become soft and round
inside his shoe. As his body weight transfers the thick but tender skin
of his fruit-foot splits and he screams. The sticky juice-blood fills his shoe
which quickly detaches itself from his person. He hops in agony to the
side of the pavement and collapses against a wall. He examines the
stump of his leg, trying to see where the scraps of bruised
fruit attach to his flesh. But he cannot see a join.
Fruit becomes meat as day becomes
night, without a join.

It Is Not True

"It Is Not True" first appeared in Anon

It is not true,
that you must reap as you sow.
You may wake in a cold sweat
with a changed mind,
scream into your garden,
claw at the earth
with your bare hands
and scrabble up those seeds.

You have made your bed
but you do not have to lie in it.
No one has to lie in it.
Go back into the house with an axe
and smash the bed to pieces.
Drag it out into your
freshly clawed-at garden.



Two Stories

Jones Jones

Other People's Gardens

When he woke, she was already up. He propped himself on an elbow.

She was in her work clothes, putting on make-up in front of the big mirror.

I'm late she said.

He pushed the covers off and heaved his legs out of bed. The blinds were closed but he sensed it was a clear sky. That it would be another hot day.

I'll get you some breakfast he said, pulling on the shorts and shirt at his feet.

He was leaning with his back against the kitchen surface, drinking tea, two hands around the mug, when she came down. She ate her cereal quickly, standing next to him as they looked out the window.

I'm late she said again, putting her dish in the sink.

As she gathered her car keys and handbag, he picked up her heavy box of files from the hallway.

The car was on the opposite side of the street and he carried the box to it barefoot. He helped load up and then kissed her.

I'll be back at six.

I'll have dinner ready he said, closing her door.

He stood in the road, feeling the warm tarmac. She did the things she always did before pulling off. At the bottom of the road she waited at the junction. Then she was gone.

He spent most of the morning upstairs in his study, writing overdue reports. But for a long time he stood by the window and smoked, looking out over the garden, over other people's gardens. He watched a cat on a shed and a man painting a fence. The woman from next door dragged her bin down the alley.

He ate lunch in the kitchen listening to the radio and reading a section of newspaper. And then he went into the garden to smoke.

Afterwards, he went to the study again. He wrote more reports and looked out of the window, watching the swallows high up over the town and the light softening and yellowing. He smoked some more too, and drank tea.

He was pan-frying salmon and drinking white wine when he heard her key in the lock.

In here he called.

She stood in the kitchen doorway.

The boss's son hanged himself she said. Howard's son hanged himself.

Then she cried.

As they ate dinner, she told him about her drive to work, about the hold-up on Furnival Street. She'd thought it was rush hour traffic, but then she'd seen a police car and ambulance outside Howard's house.

They finished the wine and talked some more, first about Howard and his son, but then about her brother coming to stay, about how it had been another hot day.

They washed the dishes and she turned on the television. He poured himself a whisky and went upstairs to the study.

Let Me Show You

I call in sick. But I'm not sick.

For god's sake don't lose this job my wife says as she leaves.

Someone needs to be in I say.

A man has arranged to view our apartment.

I clean. I stuff clothes into drawers. Throw toys into boxes. I vacuum and spray perfume. I try to fix the drawer in the kitchen.

I stand at the window, waiting.

The intercom buzzes.

Second floor, I say into the phone. I unbolt the door and listen to his footsteps in the stairwell.

So this is it the man says.

There is no natural light in the hallway. The window looks onto a ventilator shaft.

So I lead him to the kitchen.

Is there nowhere else to keep that he says, pointing to my bike.

There are tire marks on the paintwork.

He walks to the sitting room.

I stand aside so the room seems bigger. He looks around.

Would it be for you I say.

He slides a toy box aside to get to the window. A red and white soft toy falls to the floor. It's a baseball with a mechanism inside. It makes its noise: a crash and then tinkling like broken glass.

The man tosses it back into the box. It makes its noise again.

It would be for my daughter he says.

He walks into the bedroom I share with my wife and our boy.

I pick up the baseball toy. I want to throw it at the man's head.

He walks back into the sitting room.

I won't take up any more of your time he says.

Don't you need to see the bathroom I say. It's big. And there's a room for storage.

I won't take up any more of your time he says again.

Please I say. Let me show you.

This is no place for my daughter the man says.

I squeeze the baseball hard and it makes its noise again.

It takes nearly a year for someone to take the apartment.

My wife tells her father we're moving.

Thank god he says. It was no place for a child that place.

I find the new place in a newspaper. Small house with 800sqm garden/orchard. There's no picture of the house. Just of the garden. It's a strip of land with long grass and old fruit trees.

I go to see it on my bike. The estate agent is waiting in the kitchen eating red currants he's just picked. He offers me one.

Are they safe to eat I say.

It needs a tidy-up he says. She died six months ago the old woman.

Her mail is in the hallway and her bed is in the sitting room. The blankets are drawn back like she just got up to make tea.

The net curtains are yellowing and the bathroom smells of piss.

It's more money than our apartment. But maybe I can take out a loan to tide us over and fix things up.

We move in time to catch the end of the harvest. We miss the apricots, but my wife makes chutneys and jams from the apples and damsons.

I hang a swing from an apple tree.

Our boy helps dig a vegetable patch.

Tell that to your father I say to my wife.

In November, the weather turns.

The heating system is old. I buy firewood and light both stoves. But the house is cold and damp. The wind gets in through the window frames.

Mould is growing on our boy's bedroom wall.

It's an old house the estate agent says. What do you expect?

Our boy has a cough that won't shift. His chest gurgles at night and he coughs until he wakes himself up.

A week back, he coughed until he was sick.

In the early hours of New Year's Day, he coughs himself sick again.

There is blood on his sheets.

We sit on the edge of his bed. My wife wipes his face with a wet cloth. She cradles his head.

This is your fault she says to me.

My wife sits in the back of the car with our boy on her lap. He is wrapped in a blanket. I hear her humming to him between his coughs.

I drive slowly through the dark and the snow.

It's a small hospital but I find it easily.

I fill out a card at reception and hand it to the woman. My wife is with our boy in the waiting area.

The woman checks the card.

Number three Ziegelofengasse the woman says.

She is surprised.

That was old Pescha's place she says.

Yes I say.

We thought they'd knock that place down she says.

Please I say. Not now. Our boy is sick.

That place is rotten she says. Rotten.



Two Poems

Alexandra Smyth

Shore

Your vomit hit the sand,
the sound proof of life
against the dark.

We cut the night with flashlights,
found a shark's head wrenched
from its body, decaying despite the cold.

I touched it, sandpaper skin,
flesh flaking: tenderized meat.
The smell caught in my throat

and lingered there for days.
I wanted to give it back to the ocean.
You said it would wash up

over and over until nothing was left. I thought
you understood, until you guided me
back toward land.

Tree Cancer

The trees in the backyard are rejecting their roots. Tree cancer, the botanist said. He blames new chemicals in our rainwater for the neighbourhood blight. The branches no longer point to heaven or God, whatever it is that lives up there--they can't. Without roots, the trees slouch, they slant, they fall. If there are leaves, they are the green of a child's face during the flu. Our neighbours are fleeing the neighbourhood. Soon, one strong gust of wind will bring all of these oaks down on the houses, the power lines. Homeowner's insurance doesn't cover slow disease, slowly exposing us to the sun, hot honey on our shoulders, whispering promises of understanding to us in the form of melanomas twenty years down the line. The woodpeckers don't know what to do, their vertical world flipped horizontal, red crested heads bobbing in confusion. Their necks don't bend that way. Hammocks cover the ground like bedclothes kicked off in the night. There are foxes in the tree house. My body swells and stretches in the night, reaching for something that is no longer there.



Three Poems

Liz Bowen

Charlie's Son

You don't let people know you own a gun. When a branch screeches across your bedroom window, you think about karma spiralling like DNA. A broken-legged bird laughing.

The day you met your birth mother, she told you about the orgy. She had dead tobacco hands and only looked at *Jeopardy*.

What is: The summer of love?

There were four men with faces of winter animals.

He was the leopard.

His tongue gave me rugburn.

When he came, he left a tooth in my back.

My insides felt like rapids freezing over.

What is: Synaesthesia?

When I look at you, I see black spots.

You cook yourself red beans and rice five nights a week. The other two, you drop bottles off the roof to hear them shatter. There used to be someone who loved you. You try, but you can't remember what colour her eyebrow ring was.

Your father sends you a letter about a black dress and a closet full of cleaning fluid. If you think about him, you send one back. You stand in front of a mirror and pick at your pores until they bleed. Sometimes, you hire a woman. More often you run up and down the stairs of your house, pursued by your own gut's growl.

Snowblooded

I

I am not shivering. I stepped
on a porcupine, you know,
that'll do it. And there's ghost
pepper stuck under my finger
nails. You're supposed to put
on latex gloves before you cut
them. When I bite my cuticles
a carnival comes clanging out.
Popcorn stands and sexy sword-
swallowing young women, and
the elephant stomping might
shake my bones. But I'm not
cold, or afraid. I am never cold.

II

Orange juice, if you could.
There's more sugar in the
snow than in my blood.

III

Once the shaking stops I am
going to run a marathon. Or
climb a black mountain slicked
down with olive oil. I will be
luxurious like that: only extra
virgin, hold the crags, hold the
hungry pumas. When my legs
can hold my breath up again,
I'll go to a place so cold the air
chatters, with my little blue coat
and a bag full of strawberries.

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Feed my whole bones, feed
the glacier's whining belly.

IV

I might starve, right here, you
know, right now. Where is the
ibuprofen? The strawberries?

V

When I was small and I shook,
I stretched between two kitchen
chairs. The shivers gathered in a
cloud and passed through my
hands like ants flying, because
I was twelve and I had ESP. I
stared at the oven until death
got locked inside. Not much
later, the cold stopped hanging
around, asking after his friend.

To Your Health

in time you will know what it is
to have organs
rattling around the flimsy cave of you
like paper bats

it is not a question of whether,
but when

the outer layers of your body
will not seem the neon-hard shell casings
they once did

when the out-things start sneaking in
suddenly you go looking for your keys
under your lymph glands
one day you wake up to your gall bladder
perched on your nightstand like a pair of glasses
and it will be as possible for your pancreas to be
a newborn deer in a moth-eaten tree stump
as it will be for your pancreas
to be a maimed deer in a sunflower field
it will be possible for your abdomen
to be teeming with spooked game animals
without the help of metaphor
it is not a question of whether,
but when
you will kick a beer can on the street
and your own bile will fizz out
come see me when your stomach feels heavy
with passports, syringe caps
when your organs feel so distinct
and uneasy you could name them
after dead pets
come see me
I'll help you find your keys



Three Poems

Chloe N Clark

Genericide

It was a blank card
that he tossed down onto the table,
said he was feeling topsy-
turvy like an eight ball jumped over
the pool table. The card, pressed
to lips, tasted sweet like
Butterscotch and how if only
it could melt then it might coat the tongue,
make one weep for water. He said
to tell everyone that it was the flavour
of sunlight, of miracles, of divine inspiration
and that he had the idea for it,
once while peeling
back a Band-Aid and watching the blood
sprout forth like trees growing up out
of combs in fairy tales. Then when
he left, the card stayed unwanted,
only so much divine that any one
person can take, until finally it
was tossed into the dumpster with
yesterday's paper--a headline reading
God was born today.

Basement Isotopes

We go down the stairs
until we can't. She's
got it under her nails.
She says, only ever
in whispers, that it feels
just the same as watching
forest fires on television. They
are a thousand miles away
but the wind can still carry
that ash to your doorstep. We
wash it off her with milk-
thinned water and she
says she thinks she can
make it. The bowl fills up
with bits of her as she reminds
us that dust
is mostly dead skin anyway. After
we might go outside
and toss the ball around, hear
it thud the concrete
and send echoes into our
palms. She tells us
to go back up the stairs
now. And so we
do until we can't.

Faces In REM

Lady's bathed in ice, again.
Scrubbed her skin raw with snow,
the ice blushes her red.
And why am I so concerned
with that orange silk curtain?
It's the colour of fire, if fire
were trademarked by Crayola. I burned
my hands, again, against
the fabric, let it lick my fingertips. My skin smudged
soot. Lady's plaited her hair
with walking sticks, again,
their legs fold into her skull.
I used to think she swam
in dead leaves, pooled like
rain water collected under the trees.
And why am I so concerned
with that orange silk curtain?
Sometimes it moves but she's
never behind it.



Two Poems

Alicia Hilton

Sleeping With The Dead

Claire did not understand why Mother was afraid of the attic.
No one but Father climbed the creaky stairs.
Until two days ago, Father still at the office, Mother shopping, hoping
to buy a cheap Christmas turkey that was not too scrawny.

The knife clenched in her fist trembled when the attic door swung open,
but nothing danced among the stacks of boxes except dust.
Mother's wedding dress, letters Father sent to her when they were in love.
Grandfather's will, his money left to a cousin she'd never met.

Claire took one thing from there besides disappointment: a yellowed photo.
The two little girls held hands.
They wore matching smiles and lace dresses.
Mother never said she had a twin sister.

Father said the turkey was tough, Mother yelled
they would have had better if he wasn't such a lazy sot.
After the bedsprings on the other side of the wall quit creaking,
Claire stared at the photo she'd hidden in her diary.

She woke in the dark, thinking she was dreaming except
the little girl said, "May I lay beside you? I have been so lonely."
Her dead aunt's breath smelled like cinnamon,
but her lace dress, her hair, and her skin were cold and wet.

My Son Breathes Fire

Do you believe in magic?
Not the hallucinations you see
from eating magic mushrooms or LSD.
That's bullshit.
I've seen the real thing.
Had it bite me.

My first child is a dragon.
An orange-eyed, black-tongued,
claw-footed, winged beast.
Hatched from an egg.
I squirted ground fish meal,
juice and yogurt down his throat
before he got strong enough to hunt.
Got some flung on my holster.
You've got to wear a gun
when you're raising a dragon.

Honk, honk, honk, he begged for flesh
like a baby goose.
Taught the beast to fly, too.
Flapped my arms until he took off.
I loved him even after I bled,
still have scars where his claws scratched.

When he was four months old, he said hello.
Eight months later, the feathers on the back of his neck
turned from green to yellow.

Did you know dragons like dirty jokes and cop shows?
Now he's learning opera.
Speaks in a baritone, sings like a tenor.
Wants to grow up to be Rolando Villazón.
Fan his tail, spread his wings,
strut across the stage.



Four Poems

Dan Grace

A Pound Of Protein

everyone I know is pretty fucked up
we thought, we hoped, you know
after the upload, it'd all be fine
meat gone, problems gone
the heart is just a pound of protein, we said
muscle pumping blood, that's all

All The Things I Miss Since Civilisation Collapsed

coffee
thick brown mud in my veins
and the things I had that went with it
my job my home you

The Solution To All Our Ills

running and fucking
help clear the head
if only I could
fuck and run forever

Blackbird

the blackbird builds its nest in me
song of flint cuts the heart of me
stutter rhythm floors me sets me
out of step lifts me shakes me
stomach lungs every part of me
the blackbird's built its nest in me
never lets me lose its song



Two Poems

Sophia Holtz

What We Could Not Save

A chick had fallen out of a branch
onto the pavement: wrinkled, purple
body no longer than the palm of my hand.

It had stubby knobs instead of wings,
a blue film over the eyes, no feathers
to speak of. I didn't know birds were born

naked as we are. A group of us kids
gathered around, and someone touched it,
I think, with a stick, or maybe his own

fingers. I am not sure how he thought
he would feel. The blind beak kept opening
and closing, and if there was a sound

I can't remember it.

Operation Teapot, Shot Apple-2, 1955

I peer at a series of film stills, and watch
a house swallowed up by the desert--the rafters
scattered across the sand like reaching hands.

The army is testing the structural effects of the bomb
on a town they've built to destroy in the middle of the desert,
complete with cars, dirt roads, even a fake power plant.

I can come up with reasons why the army would study the effects
of the bomb on a house, an automobile, but inside each building,
an officer placed families of mannequins--fully dressed,

with department store smiles--by the cameras
installed inside the houses. Placed a line of mannequins
facing the detonation site. As if they had been out in the garden,

saw the hatch of a B-52 open, watched. I do not understand
the scientific method here. I wonder about the soldier in the film
lifting the hem of a mannequin mother's dress to show how

heat burned the pattern of the fabric into her slip, about the soldiers
sent out to gather samples from the rubble, the pieces of a house: a home
for nobody. It is a kind of future conjured--these magician scientists--

closer with every test.



Contributors

Cassandra de Alba lives in Somerville, MA with two roommates and a cat named Roger Mindfucker. She's read poetry on stage in at least twelve different states, wishes on every shooting star for another season of *Rock Of Love*, and once sold a scone to Kevin Bacon.

Gregory Heath is widely published as a poet and short story writer. His literary novel *The Entire Animal*, published by The Waywiser Press, is available through all the usual channels and his collection of poetry *The Boy And His Animals* is available via his website at www.gregoryheath.co.uk.

Jones Jones was born in Wales but now lives a long way away. He is working on his first book of short stories and a novella called *Ysgol*. He blogs at jonesjones.moonfruit.com.

Alexandra Smyth lives in Brooklyn, NY where she is a receptionist by day and a MFA in Creative Writing candidate at the City College of New York by night. She was a featured reader at the *Earshot* reading series in Brooklyn, and the CCNY MFA Series in New York. Her work has previously appeared in the *Marymount Manhattan Review*.

Liz Bowen is an editor, poet, and Brooklyn transplant by way of backwoods Maryland. She has an honours degree in English and American studies from Fordham University, and her other poems have been published in *Anderbo*, *decomp*, *Euphony* and *JMWW*. Her favourite pieces of the world include brunch, book-buying binges, and every pet she's ever had.

Chloe N Clark is a writer currently at work on a novel. Her poetry and fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in such publications as: *Prick Of The Spindle*, *Fogged Clarity*, *Utter*, *Zouch*, *Weird Tales*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and *Fractured West*. More of her work can be read at her blog **Pints And Cupcakes**.

Alicia Hilton is a poet, essayist, creative nonfiction and fiction writer, and a law professor. She received an MA in Humanities with a focus on Creative Writing from the University of Chicago, a JD from the University of Chicago, and a BA in Sociology from the University of California at Berkeley. Her website is **www.aliciahilton.com**.

Dan Grace lives and works in Sheffield. He has work published or forthcoming in the *Dark Mountain Journal*, *Earthlines*, *Modern Haiku*, *Symmetry Pebbles* and *The Heron's Nest*, amongst other places. You can read more about his writing at **insurgentmumblings.tumblr.com**.

Sophia Holtz grew up in New York and lives in Somerville, MA. She graduated from Hampshire College in 2011, where she first became interested in performing poetry, and has featured throughout the north-eastern United States. She is currently working on a collection of poems on nuclear weapons testing, radioactivity, and atomic kitsch.

Eleanor Leonne Bennett is a 16-year-old internationally-award-winning photographer and artist who has won first places with *National Geographic*, The World Photography Organisation, *Nature's Best Photography*, Papworth Trust, Mencap, The Woodland Trust and Postal Heritage. Her photography has been published in *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, the BBC News Website and on the cover of books and magazines in the USA and Canada. Her website is: **eleanorleonnebennett.zenfolio.com**.