



Neon 22

A Literary Magazine

Issue #22

www.neonmagazine.co.uk

neonmagazine (at) ymail (dot) com

This compilation copyright © Neon Magazine (2010).
Do not copy or redistribute without permission.

All content copyright © respective authors.

Authors may be contacted through the publisher.

Cover image by Matthew Basham.

ISSN 1758-1427

Edited by Krishan Coupland.

Published Quarterly.

Contents

Two Poems

Howie Good

Three Poems

Paul McDonald

Two Stories

Ladee Hubbard

Two Stories

Dave Migman

Manual Soul Transmigration

Adam Moorad

Three Stories

Joseph A. W. Quintela

For Ill Mothers

Jessica Hollander

Three Poems

Emily Darrell

Two Stories

Bryce Alister Doersam

Two Poems

Howie Good



Image by Katinka Kober

The Last Fire Engine From Hell

1

Fire splashed up at us. What looked like snow or ashes were scraps of paper on which good deeds had been recorded. The fireman remembered it as a turquoise building, with its pants around its ankles. Someone had covered the holes in the screen with electrical tape, but night still got in. We held each other. The fireman raised his axe. No amount of coaxing could get the canary lying on the bottom of the cage to sing.

2

As soon as I enter you, monarchies and condors, music for pieces of wood. There's only one law, you say, the law of unintended consequences, but say it so softly I only imagine I hear it. And then we untangle, and the migrants on the hill, who had paused to watch a cloud shaped like Asia Minor, return to gathering windfall apples under blind, embittered branches.

The Reference Librarian Of Arcane Griefs

Who knows when
she went down
to the evening dimness
of the stacks,
but now she stands
with her flabby back to us,
slowly turning the pages
of a long treatise
on melancholy
and quietly weeping.
Anyone would think
it was she herself
who misshelved
the books we needed.
What about the burning curtains?
I want to ask her. And what
about the parking lot filled
with abandoned babies?
She doesn't look up,
but if she did,
she might see planes
like silver crucifixes
and a few tiny, gray clouds
scattered like the debris
of some distant confusion.

[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)

Three Poems

Paul McDonald

An Hour, Maybe Two

It's coming,
hurting things along the way.
It throttled Mrs Lanford's self-esteem,
and left her lodger, Nigel, with tortured thoughts.
Mr Kumar's dreams suddenly turned sour
and he closed his shop.
Rumour is he's torched it but I'm too afraid to look.
My next door neighbour, Sharon, killed her cat;
my own stays out of reach.

They warned us, but who'd have guessed at this?
Now the Helpline is no longer manned; the radio's white noise.
I wait, though waiting hurts.



Image by Marijn Van Braak

Over Here

Where have you been?

I've been over there.

You've been over there?

Yes, I've been over there.

Have you come over here, now?

No.

Then why are you here?

I'm here to tell you I'm there.

So you're staying?

Yes.

Charlie's Art

Charlie in elephant trunk trousers
swapping his left eye for a light bulb.

Charlie filming a cat's shadow.

Charlie drinking ink, crying shapes onto a blotter.

Charlie with a see-through skull and mashed potato brain,
the Mona Lisa's smile where his sulk should be.

Charlie has a surfboard tongue!

Pastoral Chas is green in a suit made of chlorophyll.

Is that Charlie in a burka?

Charlie buys an image in the mirror.

Charlie calls it: *Charlie Calling it Charlie*.

[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)

Two Stories

Ladee Hubbard



Image by Jascha Hoste

Flowers

When my mother took me home from the hospital I sat inside my bedroom pulled my chair up to the window pressed my face against the glass. I could feel the cold air rush in push my cheeks like bones and I was leaning I was looking I was trying to find the stars. You don't remember the old stories or how I said them how I said them. And that was when I met you you didn't know I sat and stared. When you called I put on make-up my cheeks wore rouge like painted bones and I would smile at you for hours when we went out you drove me home. You did not know you said you said you did not know. What I was like to be with or what I was like to live with or what I really wanted when I want to be alone. And I loved you for it. You gave me

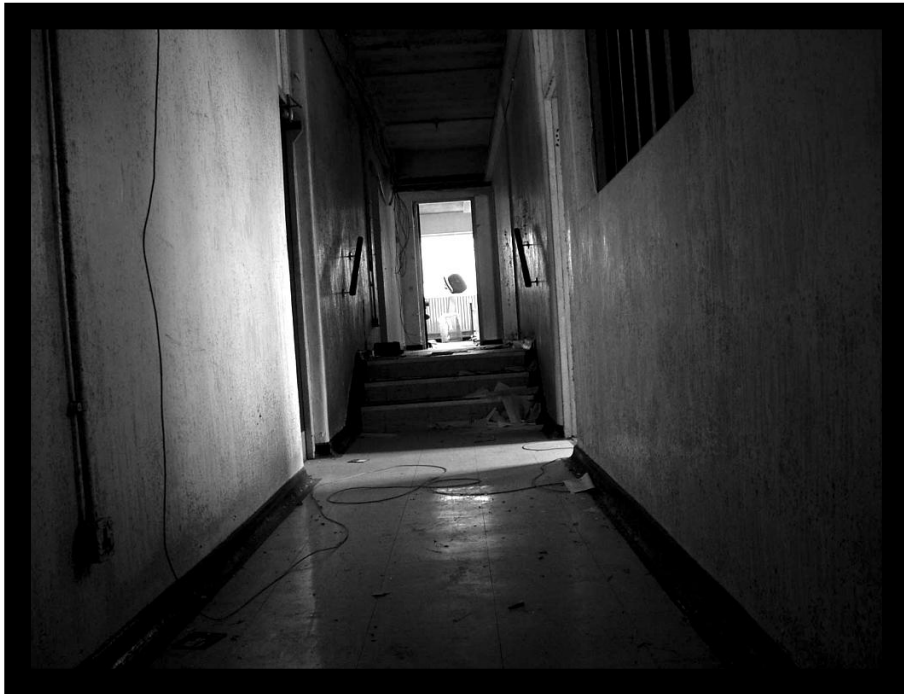
flowers on my dress like corsages and pressed against my wrist like the ties that bind. And the world sighed still I was ready to start and you didn't know I could not love you this way. But I am trying to smile/ it is disjointed unity in connected union where everything seems to fit. Even my body when I run out to greet you it is small enough it barely breathes it will love you forever it will cry for a long time in the bedroom before the mirror or at the window where I feel myself and I feel bones. I remember your flowers yes I remember your flowers yes I remember your flowers

and how they made me feel.

To Jenn

My roommate was pale and claimed she was the ghost of Edie Sedwick and at nineteen I couldn't sleep because I was afraid of the sound of angry flies coming from her closet. They were hiding in there--behind the shoe rack and hanging clothes, the eye shadow and razor blades, the toe nail clippers and bottles of hair dye, the newspaper cut outs and cardboard box filled with shivering, orphan rice. I didn't mind her scars or the sound of her retching with one hand holding open a garbage bag and two fingers of the other stuffed down her throat. I didn't mind her repeated invitation to join her for fifteen minutes, to strip off my clothes and cross the floor in strapped on go-go boots otherwise naked but for feigned expressions of despair. And when she went home for the weekend, I didn't mind the garbage she left behind for me to deal with. It was the gathering of flies that kept me up at night.

[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)



Two Stories

Dave Migman

Spume Law

Whole street's screaming drunk for the duration of the weekend. Taking it in turns to vomit outside the pub. Kids smash empties on the road.

There is an air of abandon here.

Across the tracks the trash spills like lava down the embankment. The train rumbles by and hardly anyone glances out the carriage. They can't beat it past their own reflections. God you look so fucking good. Hot.

All the boarded up houses are burning. They no longer send out demolition crews, the youth'll do it for free. To keep warm. Kicked out the house along with the dogs. They don't give a fuck what you do, where you go.

Across the rooftops, echoing along the avenues rival foot ball songs ingrained into baptised flesh. Gets the blood up, sours a mood. Bottles will break tonight. Blades with flash tonight.

They'll be pavement blooms all across this town tomorrow. God, you look so good.

Last night a storm moved around the city

We turned out the lights

Watched it strike out against us

With brilliant jolts, power hungry

Flashing and rumbling

Like a living thing that you feel in your veins.



Image by David Ritter

FugAZi

the heat clamps slippery vice flushing neck, swollen belly watching you watching telly
a curtain cloud draws across the growing shadow and the sun slips somewhere else
tomorrow and the ribbons of flashing flickering lights draw tighter around the city,
squeezing--inserting more pressure, constricting the choking hacking cough of a
society in catharsis, a city stuttering with the brevity of an epileptic.

Such a night as this would be cooler in the graveyard listening to the raucous
holler of jaykeys hidden in bushes or crawling through the rusting bars to fall into
whiskey dreams above the mouldering bones of long gone aristocratic merchants,
fitful slumbering with rats and demons clinging to the extremities of the subconscious
ripped up mind. Sleep man, sleep.

Old ghosts.

The graveyard, I can picture it; solid straight-backed shadow slabs, silent not a
sound, not even a breeze, grey grass beneath the feet and the swell of the city ocean
all around that bone filled hump of death, the graveyard hill in the sea of life.

In the cave we shivered all summer, our windows chipped and broken. We look
across the deserted school yard at the lights of other stoic tenements soft golden wide
rooms nineteenth century before the ghettos, and now, apparently, after.

Every day we follow roads that sparkle with fractured diamonds.

[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)

Manual Soul Transmigration

Adam Moorad



Image by Cathy Bell

Take your face by the bridge of your nose and make a crease from your chin to your eyes so your skin touches skin it has never touched before. Use the back of your hands. Try to pull. You will feel chapped and tongue-touched. The ceiling will move like the riptide. You will feel it.

Peel back your nostrils and leave them coiled in small piles of dough. Let them rest on your forehead. They will feel tanned and treated like a pelt or hide of an animal. This is when you can see creatures or something like a hairbrush in shadows.

Lather your sides until you're soft and flexible. Shave yourself until you see your ghost. Use a razor--or a rake. This will hurt. It will feel good.

You will be hungry. You might suffer. You will think that you might die from the prolonged lack of food--that you have anorexia and have lost your appetite and the ability to eat. This is natural. It's all in your head.

Stick your fingers down your throat. You won't feel anything because you're not even there--like the air, the sky, and space. Move your fingers in wide revolutions. Pretend your hand is an umbrella then give yourself a chance to swallow. Cough and spit phlegm. Lick your knuckles, smell them, and wipe the saliva against your ribs. Picture a xylophone. Taste yourself and feel inspired.

Wrap your arms around yourself and feel how much you've shrunk. You can wince. You should.

Then find a spike and slam your skull. Train tracks usually work well. Brush the rust against the ridges of your brain so your toe bones pop. It's just like pressing a button. This will happen faster if you arch your back as you hack your head. Let your jaw chatter like a dolphin's. Try to think about butterflies.

A window will open and you will see clouds. You will want to start counting them and the heart-shaped seeds sprouting inside them. Move from one body to another body to a new one. Try on other eyeballs for size. Their shapes and flavours will remind you of Virginia pears. It will be dark when your lids open. It is always hard waking up.

Leave yourself nice and hooked, hanging. Let your pants hang open and kick off your shoes.

If you feel like moving, pretend you're cement. Listen to the sound of sipping through a straw. Touch your neck. Grope your mouth. Fill your lungs and yawn.

Today, you can watch television.

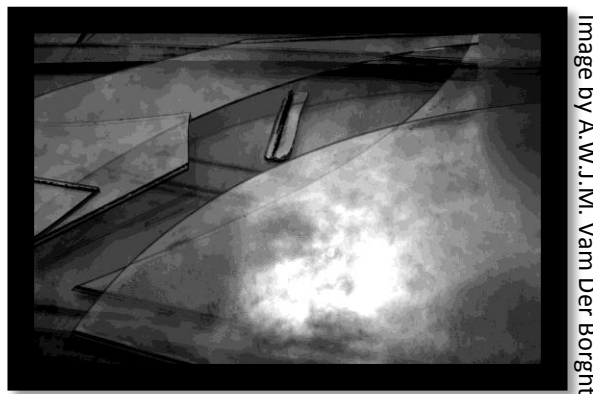
[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)

Three Stories

Joseph A. W. Quintela

Ike Takes A Holiday

Anger cloaked him. Draped in folds. You could see it. Smell it. Hear air quivering. Like hornets. Like cymbals. Terrifying. Sensual. On the day the world ended Ike Steel scoffed from his penthouse. Glaring down. Like God. As chaos consumed streets. He was still. But for the ever-trembling rage. Scotch in hand. Despising it all. Then came the wave. Majestic. Roaring. For a moment Love gripped him. A lifetime too late.



Untitled (3 December 2009 - 3:35pm)

Get the water hot. Searing hot. So it cooks dry skin to bonito flakes. Caught in the drain. 1 part yours, 2 part mine, 3 parts the commingled slough of our frenetic prayer. Steam rising in a flock. Me hiding in wings. You hiding on TV. The anchor prattles. Sexting. Climate change. A tremble morphed into a half moon laugh. I know the laugh. It smirks. Says *despising the world makes me love you more*. But it doesn't.

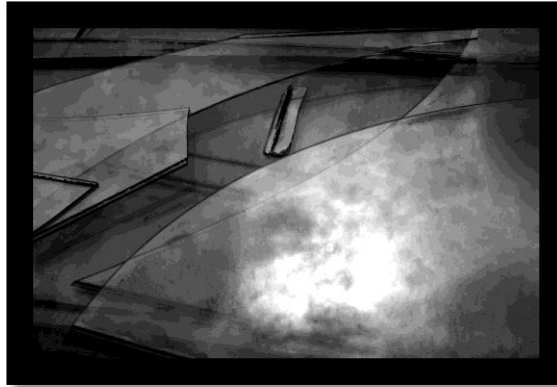


Image by A.W.J.M. Vann Der Borch

War (Mistakenly Titled Kitchen Scene)

Call it bird watching. That's what Jimmy calls it. Same idea. The lucky glimpse something rare. Haunting. With a voice like a glitter-dipped sledgehammer. Or call it surgery. That's what Joe calls it. Fingers don't tremble. Plies flesh from bone as if wielding a scalpel. So call it pissing steel. That's Tony. Odd. But one hell of a mothafucka. Yeah. Call it anything really. Anything but that. That might spoil dinner.

[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)

For Ill Mothers

Jessica Hollander

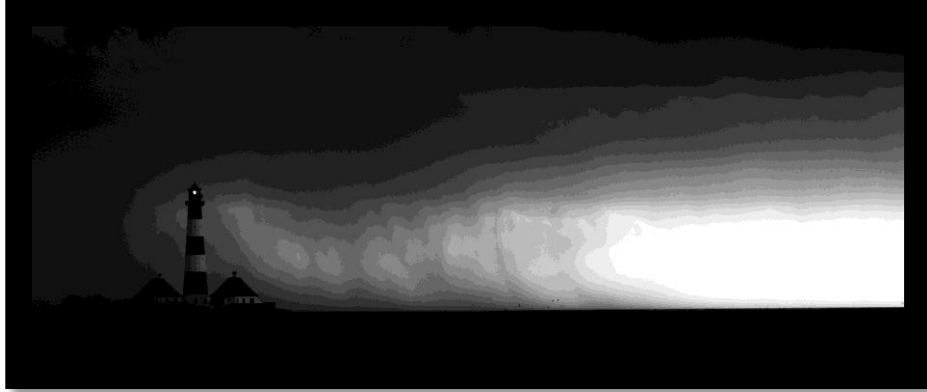


Image by Katrin Blumenschien

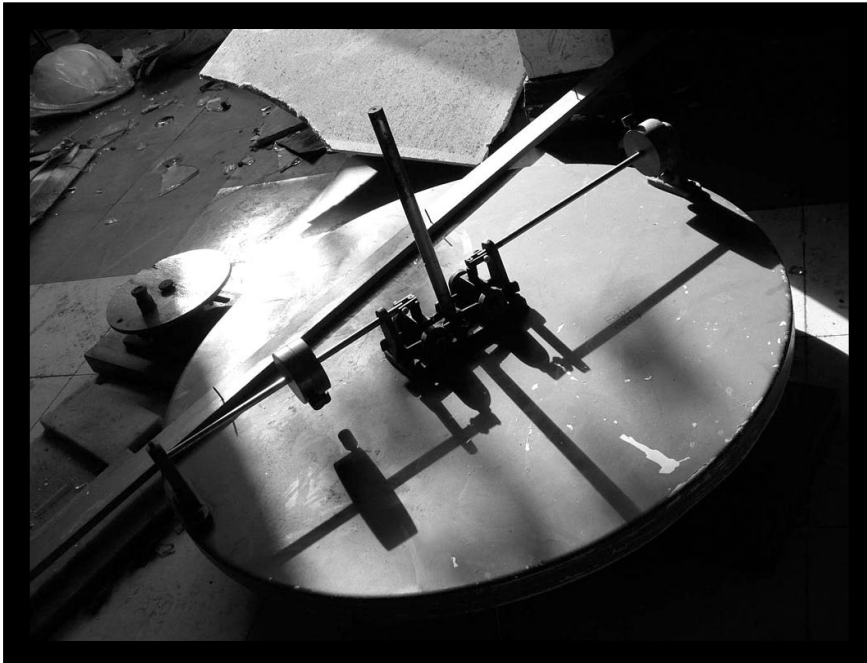
Tea can be made in the evenings for ill mothers, but steep too long and the water turns grainy and bitter and unwanted by ill mothers. Between sips she knits a scarf and I wrap it around her, a beautiful scarf makes a beautiful mummy. We talk and sip tea, green tea with lemon, tea for the daughter too, a bit stronger but weakening.

The leaves are falling, but she's seen the news. She wants to go to the ocean, doesn't care that the water's salty, grainy and bitter, steeped with seaweed. She would not like the ocean, there's no time for the ocean, but she insists: she wants to hold it in her mouth, feel the dry-wetness, the cave of her cheeks. We face each other on one couch, drinking our tea. My husband brings stacks of old newspapers from the garage when the conversation falters. He's very kind and perceptive but will not look at my mother, will not drink our tea. We skim the newspapers, cold, damp, and mouse-eaten; she mentions the water words, counts them: 32 she finds in fifteen minutes. *Coffee and waves, high-tide and swimming, rain, storm clouds, and high condensation.* She stalls at the weather, looking at the map. I turn the page when she asks so she won't stop her knitting. The room is warm; we steam from the tea. So what about the ocean?

The ocean is unlikely as she is already ill and shrivelled and soaked long enough. You do not trust the salt, she accuses, and I admit I do not trust the salt.

The scarf grows longer and longer, covers her feet, her ankles, her legs, her thighs. Her loose naked breasts are buried in goose-bumps, but she insists: you start with the feet so the corpse-to-be-mummied can't run away. My husband brings me my dinner, but I wave it away. He does not look at my mother. My mother will be here until. He knows this, he is perceptive, and he won't drink our tea.

[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)



Three Poems

Emily Darrell

I Knew By The Shapes Of The Trees

I knew by the shapes of the trees

we were almost home.

I wasn't sleeping.

We had reached the spot

where the trees changed and I heard them say

I was sleeping.

Flying and falling were my only dreams then

and they just repeated

but in different ways.

One day it would all make sense.

I stayed quiet and waited.

Sometimes I lied.

I kept watching those trees.

We were back on our street again. For awhile

at least, I would keep on pretending;

I would let myself

be carried inside.

A Pack Of Awkward Wolves

The forest is cool and green
with springtime, but I can't
enjoy it. A pack of awkward wolves
is chasing me. They want to eat
me, I am certain, but are
nervous. Other forest creatures
are watching. What if I
should get away? Their name
would be mud in this forest.

Mud. It is not for wolves to be
humiliated by squirrels, mocked
by rabbits, belittled
by sparrows. These are *wolves*.
Are their teeth less sharp
than they once were? Their
howls less far-reaching?

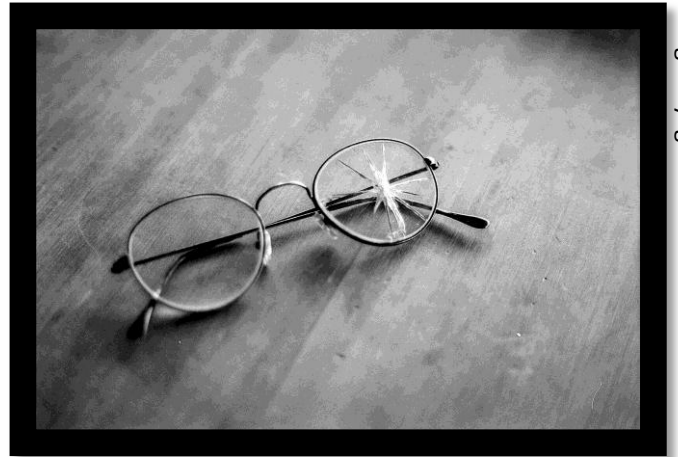
Self-awareness has ruined them.

Still, they are *wolves*.

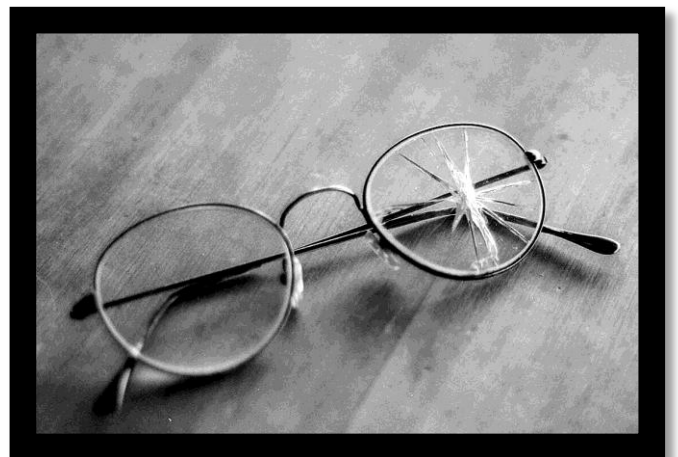
If they could only assert themselves

I'd be finished

in no time.



Images by Ignacio Leonardo



Night Of The Objects

The house is dark
and my objects are shouting
at me. I wake in the night
and they're shouting
at me! The toaster:
"You put bread in me!"
The forks:
"We spear your food!"
The television:
"You watch me!"
I wander from
room to room until
the shouting stops.
Eying an umbrella,
green and silent,
I could not tell you
what it is for.

[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)

Two Stories

Bryce Alister Doersam



Image by Fran Gambin

An Escape Plan

1.

Looking in the rear-view mirror of his rusted-out white Ford truck, out past the vague dirt road behind with the undefined borders which gradually fade into the surrounding greenery, he watches the house recede in the distance until it looks like a doll's, like a child's toy, which is as he prefers to imagine it and is the memory which will most likely stick clearest in his mind, and he wonders how long it will take her to notice he's gone and what she will think when she does, but the question is gradually forced further back as another feeling bubbles to the surface: a feeling somewhere between panic and elation upon being, suddenly, in the middle of nowhere and without direction, and free from the cramped space of the dollhouse behind him.

2.

The hotel room, he thinks to himself, seems smaller, he's sure, than the day before, as it was as well the day before that, although, at this point, he thinks, there isn't much he can do and he's paid for the week in advance and he is, to be fair, at least alleviated, if not from the sense of claustrophobia engendered by the tight confines of his truck (a sense of claustrophobia which has followed him into the hotel room), then at least from the equally panic-inducing need for constant movement which he feels while on the road, as if the highway in front of him attracted him through sheer gravity, which would, he supposed, mean he has actually been *falling* rather than "driving", which implies some sort of presence-of-mind or will exercised on and through the machinery rather than the disinterested playing out of natural forces upon an inert object.

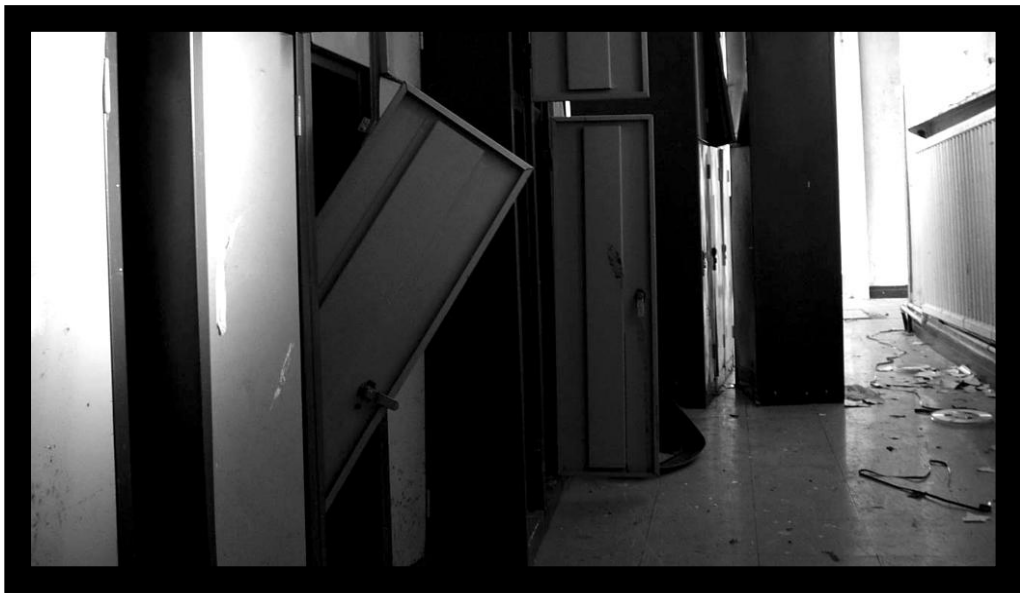
3.

When he met her, and as they got to know each other, and as he grew to, so he said, love her, he stopped seeing choice as a sort of stricture placed upon him, or an infinitely-branching series of equally narrow passages, which is how he used to, and in large part stopped thinking about it altogether, because, he told her one night while sitting on the deck of his apartment with the city spread out below and before them, he loved her, and there wasn't really much choice in that, and the city looked so small and so laughably insignificant anyways, from this distance looking like nothing more than dollhouses--children's toys--but there was an entire world between the two of them, up here, above it, so why leave, where would you go?

Etiology Of A Modern Multiple Murderer

As a child, Charles ("Charlie") Fairweather, Caucasian, now in his late twenties, when asked to explain himself, told his parents (Jon and Lucille Fairweather) that he "didn't know where it came from," when he, as a child, was caught, in a far corner of the family's forested property, "playing" with a deceased raccoon (killed by a large puncture to its left lung, though afflicted, as well, with various post-mortem mutilations), which they (Jon and Lucille) assumed had been killed and left behind by some larger, more ferocious animal, as often happened, and was, in a sense, true in this case as well, and they made him wash his hands thoroughly. After washing, his "mother" (Lucille) saw him in the hallway, and after chastising him, inspected his hands, which were, to Lucille, not satisfactorily clean, and he ("Charlie") was, in a way, glad he had not washed them more thoroughly, as he enjoyed her (i.e. Lucille's, who was in fact "Charlie's" stepmother, and not, in fact, his biological mother, and had married his father (Jon) only a year and a half before this particular incident) touch, rough yet feminine, even as she chastised him. He got the feeling, though, over the years, as he kept his feelings towards her (Lucille, whom he never called "mother" or "mom," but which his father often pressured him to do) secret, that she, in fact, detested him, and he even once overheard her (Lucille) say that she had come quite close to not marrying his father (who he referred to as "Dad") because of him (Charles) and the burden she felt him to be. Overhearing this candid confession, made all the more stinging by the matter-of-fact, flippant tone in which she (Lucille) said it (to his father, no less), he ("Charlie," i.e. Charles Fairweather) was unsure of who was the proper target of his anger: Lucille, for unfairly withholding her love, and not in the slightest way reciprocating his feelings for her (feelings which grew from a special affection and attachment as a child, to a taboo erotic longing as an adolescent), or his father, for not coming to his defence as this woman (Lucille or "Lucy" as his father called her) said such terrible, terrible things about him.

[Contents](#) / [Author](#) / [Comment](#)



Contributors

Howie Good, a journalism professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz, is the author of 10 poetry chapbooks, including *Visiting the Dead* (2009) from Flutter Press. His first full-length collection of poetry, *Lovesick*, has just been published by Press Americana. For more information, visit: americanpopularculture.com.

Paul McDonald is Course Leader for Creative and Professional Writing at the University of Wolverhampton. His latest novel is, *Do I Love You?* (2008) and his latest collection of poetry is, *Catch a Falling Tortoise* (2007). tindalstreet.co.uk.

Ladee Hubbard is a writer currently living in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Her writing has been published in *Sleeping Fish*, *GUD*, *Rhino* and *Prick of the Spindle*. She also won the 2008 Pirate's Alley Faulkner-Wisdom Short Story Award.

Dave Migman is a UK writer and artist whose work has appeared in various poetry 'zines including *Pulsar*, *Inclement*, *Rialto* and *Polluto*. He maintains a small presence online. A book entitled *The Wolf Stepped Out* is scheduled for release in the distant future (Doghorn Publishing). For more information, see: davemigman.daportfolio.com or crackedslab.blogspot.com.

Adam Moorad's writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *3 A.M. Magazine*, *H_ngm_n*, *Johnny America*, *PANK*, *Storyglossia*, and *Underground Voices*. He is the author of an ebook, *The Nurse and The Patient* (Pangur Ban Party, 2009). He lives in Brooklyn and works in publishing. Visit him at: adamadamadamadamadam.blogspot.com

Joseph A. W. Quintela writes. Poems. Stories. On Post-it-notes. Walls. Envelopes. Cocktail napkins. Anything he gets his hands on, really. He writes poetry on Twitter. Some people think that's cool. But, whatever. His work will (has) appear(ed) in *Right Hand Pointing*, *ABJECTIVE*, *Blink-Ink*, *Writer's Bloc* (Rutgers), *Niteblade*, *Ghostlight*, *Breadcrumb Scabs*, *Rose & Thorn*, and *lines written with a razor*. Actually, he wrote those lines with a battle axe. But, whatever. He got bored. So he started editing Short, Fast, and Deadly. Which is funny. Because he's none of these things.

Jessica Hollander is currently pursuing her MFA at the University of Alabama. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Quarterly West*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Hobart*, *Opium*, and *Barrelhouse*, among others. You can visit her at jessicahollanderwriter.com.

Emily Darrell just received her Master's in journalism from the University of Montana and recently spent a year in Romania teaching journalism at The University of Bucharest.

Bryce Alister Doersam was raised in western Canada and currently resides across the Atlantic somewhere in the vicinity of London. He writes whenever possible.