

Issue #30

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Two Stories

Michelle Reale

Paradise

Here is the trick: cruelty is not an invention. It has been perfected over the years. It can unfold in a sequence that begins to look like something else. There are often occasions that precede it, help it along. Become sequestered with him on a cruise liner, the super package deal you could not pass by. Or how about being landlocked in a country where only one of you speaks the language (the odds are it will not be you). Let me get a thing or two off my heaving chest: cruelty can be so sly. It can have unintended consequences that will be a bonus to him later. One carefully-aimed athletic thrust of the fist can lose you more than your dignity. How about the cupid's bow on your upper lip which, from impact on--your lack of a smile betrays you--shows a neutrality you do not feel? Guess which emotion is missing. Give him the space to stand back and adjust his Ray-Bans. His "sorry" will have a musicality that is beautiful in its banality. Forget that it is a song you have heard before. This drama will unfold in the artifice of a now-malignant paradise. But it is paradise, after all. Hand me the sun block. Pass the beer nuts. Chill me to my cross-hacked bones.

Magma

Wet wool and a velvet sky at four PM. The spider drunk on Cynar may or may not have been a dream. There are days it is difficult to tell the difference. The man you call your husband says he does not like the way you dance at weddings. It is the way he says it, while adjusting the patterned scarf around his neck that he refuses to remove. The restaurant in the strip mall is run by an ancient people who are perpetually sleep walking. It is crowded for the Tuesday early bird special. The one thing you still have in common is knowing the importance of deviating from the norm. He tells you that he only stepped out for a short time. A man who buys cat food is not necessarily headline news. You are willing to consider this. Glasses of ice-cold house wine are raised. You assault each other with grim smiles. He pretends not to notice the age spots populating your hands like tiny pennies whose value is long lost. You pretend that he is not somewhere else in that over-sized head of his, thinking of those red stilettos, two bottles of Moet. Now the earth is scorched and singed. You feel sure that you will be able to smell it for a long time and from anywhere you might happen to find yourself.



Two Poems

Rich Boucher

Scalpel, Sponge, Forceps

Help me hold this angel down;
you will notice that his wings are beating
back very rapidly against the operating bench,
almost as though he is aware that
he will not live through this procedure.
One almost regrets that this is necessary.

Pay close attention to his lips and eyes
as we work together; watch for dilation
and rapid movement. We will start
with an injection of a strong anaesthetic,
something to put this angel to sleep.

The first thing I am going to need
is the bone rasp. Hand that to me.
Next, let me have the cartilage crusher.
Quickly, now. I'll need a sponge here, please.
Removing the angel's ability to fly
is, of course, our first priority.

Night Of Thirst

do you have any gum?

that's what she asked me
when she let me pull her to me
in the barn that was in the dream
the dream that came to an end
almost by accident and pretty much
right after we began to kiss

I didn't have any gum

but she had a mint in her mouth
and we shared it with a kiss
and the alarm beside my bed
did not ring loud enough
for me to understand
she was not real

I drank a lot of water

when I woke up
because it felt like
my throat was closing up
from a night of thirst



Three Poems

Michael Spring

Open Heart Surgery, 1968

when I was five
I climbed the winding steps
of blue light

into that room behind the clock
the surgeons watched

I knew my body was behind me--
a child supine
on the operating table

*

my heart sat in its cavern
exposed to light

*

before I was buried
in the haze of anaesthesia

I imagined the doctor
lifting my heart
and working it

like some sort of pull-apart
puzzle

*

I remember my parents

promised starfish
and white sands and the surf

and they handed me a wentletrap shell
as large as my heart

*

I remember looking through the backside
of the surgery room's clock
and through the walls

to the steps of blue light

*

the clock before me

had no springs and sprockets
but rather it was made of sea shells

I reached in and pulled out
the wentletrap shell

*

I clutched the shell
and held it to my ear--

it was suddenly everything
I wanted--

absorbed in the sound
of the ocean

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The Circus Train

and here's another field
harbouring the railroad track
stitched like a scar
between the city and the desert

*

tonight we'll vanish once again
and the field will turn back
into coyote and jack rabbit
flashing in the headlights
of dusty teenaged cars

bonfires will blaze
giving birth
to a new generation of jugglers
and fortune tellers

*

the clacking sound of the train
is inside of me

I can hear it in the cicadas in the juniper
and in the tumbleweed
and the tumbling paper cups

*

home is an invisible rope
stretched tight
from one field to another

Knife Thrower

the woman's lips pursed
and her body shuddered
as if she was stung
by electricity

maybe the knife thrower
meant to cut her--
reveal how dangerous
his craft was--simply
nick her wrist
as the blade he threw
stole the ribbon from her grasp--
driving the heart of it
like a root
into the wooden target

maybe he lost his concentration--
perhaps a whisper
or cry was caught
somewhere in his head

the audience gasped
but hushed quickly
when he picked up another knife
and pointed to the rose
nestled in her hair

her face once again
flushed with innocence--
she smiled drowsily
and when she gazed

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across the stage
she was suddenly
the town's fair daughter

another drum roll began
when the knife thrower turned
his back to her and tied
a scarf over his eyes

the audience's fear swelled
and the knife thrower held on
to that moment

until he could hear rocky sea-walls
rumble

everyone was trapped
in the soul of the woman--

their mouths stitched closed
their hands and feet manacled
to the ferruginous wood

their fingers contorted
as they failed to will the woman
to struggle free

yet no needles were needed
to pin their eyes open

seduced and grave
they were helpless and heavy
as a bag of blood

they'd waited their entire lives
to wade like this



Two Poems

Alicia Hilton

Insomnia, My Ugly Twin

She has six cuts on her abdomen
and pelvis.

It was smooth before
the pod people came
with their one-eyed snake.

Snip snip snip snip snip
SNIP.

Nasty beast always
hungry.

Sucked out the life seeds.
Left behind the sad gas.
Full and empty.

Insomnia, my ugly twin,
every night enters my bedroom.

If I lock the door
she tap dances on the roof.

Grabs me by the hand
hot not sexy hot.

Skin like the Sahara.
Molten to the core fry
eggs on it.

But her smile
makes me shiver.

Come
dance with me.
Her shadow beckons
diaphanous.
Flickering on and off
my consciousness.
Climb
to the roof.
Howl
and scream.

Teachings

Cumulonimbus.
Stratus.
Stratocumulus.
Staring at the sky.
Feeling his fingers
trace a path
down her thigh.
She thought about
what Mother said.
The names
of clouds,
wildflowers,
bacteria,
and viruses
you catch
from sex.



Two Poems

Sophie Mackintosh

Lunar Caustic

january

the damp is atypical
my ribs swell soft and loose in the rains

february

i swim to the buoy in the harbour, hold it in my hands like a face
i run past the railway station i run to where the canal curves east

march

puppeteering your arms, i throw you rope and threats
but no reaction

april

two seasons ago the waning resumed with the tides
a thimble of rock-salt to mark the anniversary

may

sometimes i ripen and stay put
you kiss the wide flesh of my cheeks in good months

june

or portion out with fingers my shrunken-wire veins in bad

july

bloom-rot, haze the old water in the harbour

Neon

august

the buds harden inside their shells like yolks
sometimes i cannot run at all

september

i leave a headful of hair at the bottom of the field
your hand cannot close on my arm

october

i leave everything else
the axis halts a crescent slip against the sky

november

you check my breath every night, the terse brittle of my teeth

december

and sometimes i am still here
and sometimes i am not

We Are Waiting For The Wolves

What will you do when they drag me away? You say we will go together to the park and dig a shallow grave and atone for everything we ever did by breathing soil deep into our lungs, and the wolves will leave. But they were weeping as I walked past the park earlier, so it is no longer safe. You take my hands and tell me instead we will go to the highest floor of the car-park behind the train station and they will throw themselves right over us and I tell you *no, you have to understand, they will take us with them*, all the while thinking of their bunched wool-collar-itch hair and how the skin underneath is such a surprise to the touch and how you have not yet fixed the lightbulb, how it stammers in its socket as you speak.

Eventually you look to the ground, tell me instead we will go into the garden and offer ourselves up in our Sunday best, last week's rains coming up through the grass, and we will wait. And the wolves will take pity on our knee-stains and our palms split where we washed them too many times in the raw winter water, and they will smell the blood and soap of us and they will no longer be angry as they see us kneeling there, waiting for their judgement.



Seek

JR Fenn

1. I am a cold bitch but I'm hot as all get out. I shave everything and that means everything: no landing strip. You didn't believe me and that was your loss. You unlock the car doors with a click and wait for me to rid you of my presence. On the way home you didn't say anything and you reminded me of the weirdo in the movie that ends up alone in a baseball cap so the brim will hide his sad little eyes. That's all right, I got my Garth Brooks and lollisicles in the freezer. Don't touch me.

2. I am an international financier with an interest in wines and exclusive hotel lounges, preferably with a waiter who bends over attentively. There are a few things I can't tell you. I'm fifty and I live with my mother. When I talk about that my nose itches terribly and I have to scratch it. If I like you I will call your telephone repeatedly. If you tell me it's not going to work out I will continue to call you repeatedly and when you don't answer I will email you, text you and voicemail you, warning you of how foolish your decision will appear to you in the future. You are young now.

3. When your heart gets gunked up I'm the guy who gets it going again. The hands that hold this fork and knife to stab this goat's cheese tart callipered a beating ventricle and kept an artery from spurting out before I came to meet you, just two hours ago. That's very nice, what you do, if it makes you happy. A heart doctor's life is hard. I would like to tell you something. I've been thinking and I would like to see you again. I hope to build a home with someone. Soon.



Three Poems

Jeffrey H MacLachlan

The Damage Group

Dandruff floats like white lotus
fragments in cold sink water
as the girls prepare for another evening.
They touch silver pewter grim
reaper pendants fluttering
between underdeveloped breasts.
Soon they will slip into roles
of the foreign niece, the unruly student.
The snapping of buckles across
brown knees and tearing of Mexican flag
earrings from tender grommets.
The house is filled with limps and scars.
Floors drone with broken jars and metal chains.
Bolted to nightstands, the girls drink hot vase
water that slithers behind tongues
and melts black snakes down thorny lashes.

Cihuateteo

Aztec woman who dies in childbirth and haunts roads.

She wished for this noble
death--escaping Tijuana's
Zona Rosa from the birth

of her half-gringo dragon.
She now seeks her john
who will cross again

before Lent.
Her single hazel
eye presses against

his rental car window.
She is the orange sun
crawling over his lips

and red velvet seats itch
like a thousand ladybugs.
He pulls over to stretch

and clear his head.
A young girl offers
roses for a single dollar

and inside the roses
are amaranth curtains
swirling around a fizzy

neon sign that dizzies
him. She waits for him there
on a generous mattress

and touches herself
as he vomits peach
fluid. The dragon

appears. The dragon
hisses like a hot match
underneath the tongue.

The dragon swallows
him whole and he tumbles
down a burgundy hole

hearing nothing
but egg timer clicks
and small moans of water.

Paediatric Intensive Care Unit

Hallway wall ceramic animals glare at the bare feet of new patients. Each room contains hard cribs and relatives studying every inch of the door. At night, doors open to dead meadows chequered with smoke trees and silent lightning strobes. Termites carve translucent pupils into stumps while an elf owl chuckles. Nurses in stone scrubs lay face down in circles. Infants walk freely atop wire tentacles feeding on chubby termite queens. A plush-toy nest is constructed by shambling family members and the elf owl chuckles. The hunters have come. The hunters wear bright coats and stethoscopes and come to poach newborn toes. Relatives scramble to find a way back but doors flap in smoke trees. The elf owl chuckles.



Two Poems

Megan Kellerman

Saturday Night After Work

Well wait just a minute, you told me.
I didn't come all this way for nothing, you know.
It was Saturday night after work.
You had crawled out from between the cushions
in the backseat of my car.

I know, I'm sorry for your trouble.
I have to get home.

My hand shook over the key.
Your head extended out from your neck,
the shaft of which wrapped around my headrest,
your face meeting my cheek on the window side,
to kiss the cold glass and transfer
the chill to my face,
worn rubber on the slab--like
every corpse ever under the knife.

Your tongue was a ticking I
could never take.
My friends were all liars,
terrible though you were.
They said I could handle myself,
but here you were.
Handle me.

Neon

I didn't say anything out loud.
Just waited for you to recede,
to shrink back into the cushions
into the car frame
into the ground,
following every move
like a shadow
glued there.
Hello, guilty conscience,
your name is a song my throat
forever sings.

Cramped

I want to crawl into air vents
and shimmy through the pipes
of an apartment building.
To infect the air of every room
with my breath, connect
them all with my carbon dioxide,
and shake every surface
with the vibrations of my groping paws.
To be the unknowable link
in a kinked-up chain of cause and effect
between neighbours and guards and doormen.
I want my cramped body
to generate enough heat
to make the metal expand
and the wood smoke.
I want to swallow the hidden rats whole,
and let the spiders lay eggs
in my hair. I will keep them
and their building alive
while the tenants are too busy tending
their own hearts. I will trap
their minds with TV sets
and their bodies with childproof locks
and suck all the moisture
from the air, make them all as brittle
as I am, all of us dying
in my crumbling carapace
until the wrecking ball comes
and goes
and comes
and goes.



Two Poems

Howie Good

Contingency

I wake up feeling no better--considerably worse, in fact. The news advertises the apocalypse while I'm still half-asleep. Every day is somewhere we haven't been before. I might be the mumbling man on the Times Square shuttle if I weren't me. I can either afflict pain, they tell me at work, or be the afflicted, or both. These are the people who base their lives on a popular series of dreams. Decide, they say. Up and down the hall, snow blowers howl like Siberian wolves. None of this could really happen, of course, until it does.

Heartless Bastards

The sign outside the office said, You Are Requested to Close Your Eyes. In those far-off days, informers and false witnesses were everywhere, and illnesses had other names. How quickly the heart of the city filled up with corpses! I always thought the same thing: You bastards, there are innocent people down here. Everyone I knew who had a job hated it. When the patients screamed in pain, all the nurses covered their ears.



Two Stories

MC

The Place Where They Swim

This is the place where dead goldfish swim. Its deepness is fantastic. Every goldfish is damned to this place, and so goldfish become infinity inside of the palace of water. Light bleeds its loveliness into the space. Its temperature is divine and everything is always crystal. The perfection of the environment tortures everyone. It makes them realize that they are gone, because, of course, it's the consistent perfection of heaven. Of death.

The goldfish cry seven times a day. They cry upon waking, and after each incredibly proportioned meal. They cry when they think they might feel warm.

In eternity, goldfish are suspended in dark suicide massive thoughts. But goldfish can't commit suicide in heaven because they are already dead and because they are goldfish.

So they weep for themselves. They weep for the others. They grieve over all the humans that they have loved and have not them. They grieve over all the missed affection, because they of course are in water. When hands cup them, and lift them to their faces the goldfish can flick their bodies against the flesh for only an instant of touch. Their delicacy forever has isolated them. They grieve over their delicacy. They grieve over humans.

The goldfish pang to be dogs.

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The afterlife of a goldfish is earned through very un-heinous, un-malicious deeds.

They find themselves there generally because of certain human fouls they've committed. Easy, timid sins.

Thoughtless, careless habits, vaguely done.

Overlooking small tragedies and wreckages in people. Neglecting warmth. In some ancient time and space/future, it was decided that the fate of the ignorant lover would be to feel his perpetual (slight) ignorance eternally. Weird Hell

They now pleasantly hang in overcrowded blue magic town. The goldfish think of the last time their bodies touched another's. It was the lifetime before the last. They think about their slick metallic cages and pray to the god they hate for just a hand to reach down into goldfish heaven's bath water. For only a short while so they could each ram their bodies into it, touch it.

a handshake a passing of change at a counter a blow job a head on the shoulder a welcome-home,-I-missed-you-every-minute-you-weren't-with-me cheek peck

a bus jolted instant bump together

touch

touch

touch touch

An Accident

A golden wreath circles Susan's slender finger. The glow of Susan's cheeks and pinkness of Susan's life make Susan feel holy and perfect. Everything is round. Everything is like a wave. Twenty-two, Susan decides that Susan and God are both ready, and Susan marries Jack. Jack's pinkness matches Susan's in hue, and so they fuck and have beautiful children. Slowly, the ripeness of Susan's life turns into salt, falls, and it is overwhelming. Susan's boys are wretched to Susan and Susan scratches at her arms. She wants to be in her insides. Susan realizes Susan accidentally got married. Susan realizes that Susan loves the alternate route Susan did not take, and that Susan accidentally hates all the things of her life. Susan realizes that reality exists in this alternate, not in this accident. Susan is careless and unforgiving towards the ugly falsity. In the wide-open expanse of Susan's fantastic mind, Susan hides. Susan can hide and wait long enough and see the I. Maybe at a river. Susan can see Susan's actual self, the uncorrupt bird of a self that only exists here. The I does not speak to Susan much since Susan married Jack; Susan has to creep around her subconscious to glimpse the nymphet. Susan gets turned on when their eyes meet.

Susan remembers boys she dated and her red hair in college and what it felt like to throw up after uncareful drinking. Susan sees Jack and wants to crush Jack's face in, and blend Jack's hands in the blender by the sink. She longs to poison her dog. Her dog longs to poison her.



Contributors

Michelle Reale is an academic librarian at Arcadia University in Philadelphia. She is the author of four fiction and prose poem chapbooks and her work has been included in a number of anthologies. She has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She maintains a blog at www.sempresicilia.com.

Rich Boucher has published four chapbooks and has performed all over Duke City. He is a regular contributor/editor at **Local Poets Guild**. His poems have appeared in *Adobe Walls*, *Fickle Muses*, *The Rag*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *HyperText*, *Borderline* and *The Legendary*. Hear some of his poems at richboucher.bandcamp.com.

Michael Spring is the author of three poetry collections: *blue crow*, *Mudsong*, and *Root of Lightning*. His poems have appeared in *The Atlanta Review*, *DMQ Review*, *The Dublin Quarterly*, *Gavea-Brown*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *NEO*, and *The Oregonian*. He is currently poetry editor for *The Pedestal Magazine*.

Alicia Hilton is a poet, essayist, creative nonfiction writer, and 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.

Sophie Mackintosh is a 23-year-old editor based in Glasgow, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Spilt Milk*, *Specter*, and *Notes from the Underground*, amongst others. She is currently finishing her first novel and likes writing about omnichords, islands, and elsewhere.

JR Fenn writes to the screams of seagulls in southwest England and teaches English and Creative Writing at Plymouth University. JR's flash fiction has appeared or will soon appear in *The Other Room*, *Short, Fast, and Deadly*, and *PANK*.

Jeffrey H MacLachlan also has recent or forthcoming work in *Poet's Market 2013*, *Southern California Review*, *Stone Canoe* and others. He wonders what an Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All poetry collective would look like. He hails from Skaneateles, NY and can be followed on Twitter [@jeffmack](#).

Megan Kellerman is a graduate of Fairleigh Dickinson's Creative Writing program. Her work has appeared in *Catfish Creek*, and is forthcoming in *Emerge* and *Symmetry Pebbles*. She received the Andonis Decavalles Poetry Scholarship twice, as well as an MFA Award for Excellence in her major at FDU.

Howie Good, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of the poetry collection *Dreaming in Red*. All proceeds from the book go to a **crisis centre**. He is also the author of numerous chapbooks, including *The Devil's Fuzzy Slippers* and *Personal Myths*. Another chapbook, *Fog Area*, is forthcoming.

MC is originally from a small town in Connecticut, and is living and working in Providence, Rhode Island. She is 21, and a painter.

Matthew Basham is a photographer based in Stoke-on-Trent who uses photography as a way of understanding the world. Among the noise and clutter of the everyday, Matthew relishes those times when he can simply pick up his camera and take a walk. His website is: [mattbashamphoto.4ormat.com](#).