

Paper Mill Press

a journal of creative arts/ 2022

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2022

Paper Mill Press 2022

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Secrets and the Night

By Mark Saunders

The night was cold and black. Winter comes fast and hard to Northern Newfoundland, holding it tight in its grip and not relenting until the firm hand of Spring forces it reluctantly away. When night comes, the cold descends mercilessly, freezing out the light. Darkwater succumbs to the night, almost willingly, hiding in the creeping dark that protects its secrets from the revealing light of day.

All along the winding road that cuts through the centre of town out to Dead Man's Cliffs, saltbox houses puffed out long whisps of smoke. The unreliability of the power lines during fierce winter storms meant that wood stoves were still the dominant form of central heating in most homes. Sometime during the night, the fires would choke and die, and when the people woke in the morning, their feet would freeze on the cold floor. For now, most of them slept peacefully in their warm beds.

Those still awake as the night of February 3rd drifted into the the morning of February 4th kept their secret pacts with the night.

2

In a round bedroom window sat the silhouette of a small boy. The Sandman hadn't yet come to him and so he sat in a chair by the window, watching the ice-pans bobbing in the black harbour. The door creaked open and he jumped. He half expected to hear his mother's voice from the doorway.

Jake! What are you doing up? It's half past one!

But there was nothing. He looked to the door and saw the dark grey form of the cat slipping in through the half-opened door.

"Hi Smoke," he whispered and the cat mewed back. He dropped one hand down and Smoke obligingly lifted his head up to it. With another low *meow*, the cat leapt into the boy's lap, where it curled up and began to purr softly. Jake idly stroked the cat's head as he continued to stare out the window. He let his mind drift away to world far beyond the purview of this tiny town.

He was a king, ruling over a kingdom of happy people. His subjects danced and sang in the streets, proclaiming him to be the wisest, fairest king who ever lived. He sat on his gilded throne and smiled at their songs. But there was something on the horizon, something dark and evil. A great dragon with eyes

burning red and breath of pure hellfire swept down upon the kingdom, reducing half of it to rubble and ashes. The singing turned to screaming as the people burned and died. The survivors ran to the castle, seeking the protection of their king. He turned to his bravest, strongest knight who, in these adolescent fantasies, was also played by Jake. Jake the Mighty rushed, unafraid, into the fray. He held aloft his mighty sword and...

The rest was lost in the wild, muddled dreams of a sleeping eight-year-old. He slept in the chair and the cat purred in his lap.

3

Jenny Collins tossed and turned in her sleep, disturbed but not awakened by the snapping of the deadbolt on her front door. In the crib next to her, the baby rolled over, dreaming of things he could not yet understand. The thief crept in easily and unnoticed, leaving behind snowy footprints that quickly melted into tiny puddles on the floor. His eyes darted greedily around the room. He slung the backpack off his shoulders and began to fill it with anything that looked valuable. The radio, the silver picture frame, the hand-carved tobacco pipe, all the cash from

the wallet and purse on the coffee table; all of it went into the bag.

There was a large coffee tin atop the fridge. He grabbed it and pried off the plastic lid. It was stuffed to about half capacity with five, ten, and twenty dollar bills; the result of about two years' scrimping and saving. He dumped it all into the bag and slipped quietly into the bedroom.

He saw the figure in the bed and tensed for a moment. But her chest kept its regular rising and falling, showing no signs of waking. He relaxed and turned to the bureau. There were three jewelry boxes, each of gold-trimmed black leather, arranged in front of a tall mirror. He opened each of the boxes in turn and stuffed the contents into the bag. From the crib next to him, he heard the baby murmuring, threatening to awaken. Feeling suddenly nervous, he zipped up the backpack and flung it back over his shoulders. He threw up the hood of his heavy winter jacket and slunk out of the house. Leaving the front door open, he melted into the shadows of the night. A cold winter wind blew through the aperture and woke the baby. He began to cry. Jenny Collins was awake instantly.

“Charlie?” She said softly to her husband. There was no answer.

Charlie was gone.

4

Loretta Abrams rocked slowly in her creaking chair, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. There was no fire in her sitting room, despite the chill, and the only light came from the small reading lamp on the coffee table. The cold of the winter, this was her sixty-third, had never bothered her much. There was something far colder in her heart, something even the deepest freeze couldn't touch. She scowled as she stared out the large picture window onto the town below. She knew full well what they thought of her down there. *The nosy old bitch who's always poking around in other people's business.*

That was just fine. She hated them and they hated her. The only one she ever spoke to with any regularity was that fat fool Milt Howard, proprietor of Darkwater's only general supplies store. Even that was begrudging. A few people had tried to chitchat with her while she was there, but she had sent them packing with a few well-chosen words.

Something had soured her, something long ago and long forgotten. It had curdled her mind and her spirit like milk left out for too long. No one, not even Loretta, could precisely say what had done it, but the effects were felt.

She caught a glimpse of something moving down in the darkness. Grabbing the binoculars from the windowsill, she peered down into the shrouded town below. A man was creeping out of the Collins's house. His hood was up and she couldn't see his face. Didn't matter anyway, she knew what he was up to.

That slut Jenny Collins has taken another man. Her husband's no better, of course. Between the two of them, they've probably shagged half the town. Sinners, the lot of them. They'll all burn in Hell, as sure as God made them!

She pursed her lips tight and put down the binoculars. They would all pay for their sins, the Good Lord would see to that, just as he would reward the faithful. She, of course, was one of the faithful. She absently reached out for her old and battered bible, the one she'd had since Sunday school. It was the one with the red pen marks crossing out all the sinful bits, the bits about sins of the flesh and begatting and the like, and especially anything with that *whore* Mary Magdalene.

She began to pray.

5

"Stay," Brandi Doyle said as Charlie dressed in the dark, "you never stay with me."

He said nothing, pulling up his ratty old work pants and slipping into the cambric shirt that smelled of grease and cigarettes. They'd had this conversation before and he had no intention of having it again. He had to get home and sneak quietly into bed before the baby woke Jenny up at 4.

Damn brat, he thought, regular as fucking clockwork.

He threw his heavy coat over his shoulders and started to leave.

"Go on!" Brandi screamed, her face flushed with sudden anger. "Go back to your whore of a wife and your shitty little kid and your stupid fucking house! You no-good piece of shit! I hate you!"

He whirled around, eyes blazing with hatred. He stood in the doorway, glaring at her with those dark eyes. His fists clenched and unclenched at his sides. He gritted his teeth and moved closer to her.

"I told you not to say that."

"Screw you."

Charlie was a violent man. It took all his willpower to hold himself back. He moved closer still, until he could feel the heat from her face on his own.

"Don't ever say that again. Got it?"

She nodded, tears beginning to well up in her eyes.

“Good.”

He slipped out without another word, leaving her naked and sobbing in her bed. The cold grabbed hold of him instantly, burying itself deep in his bones. Even the heavy coat that Jenny had got him for Christmas did little to keep it out. He hunched his shoulders and tucked his chin into the fur-lined collar as he headed off down Miller’s Lane. In the dark, he passed close to another man, heading the opposite way, but the night hid them from each other.

As he walked, he was so caught up in his own thoughts that he didn’t notice the front door hanging open or the wailing of the baby until he was standing on the stoop. He just stood there, slack-jawed in the cold darkness, staring at the melting footprints on his floor and listening to the baby crying.

6

Father Allan shifted in the high-backed leather chair and poured himself another glass of whiskey. He gulped it down in one go, his face wincing with the burn, and sat back in the chair.

Forgive me father, for I have sinned.

His dry, cracked lips spread into a thin smile. He allowed the glass to fall from his hand and tumble onto the carpet. He

wondered what his parishioners would think if they walked in at that moment. But, then again, he had very few parishioners. No one came to Sunday mass anymore, save for the old folks.

Loretta Abrams was in the front row every week, lips tightly pursed and hands clenched on the lap of her purple church dress. He could see her pinched face grimace whenever he said something that didn't gel with her puritanical view of the faith.

She's more pious than the bloody pope.

He laughed out loud, not caring if anyone heard because there was no one to hear. So what if there was, what did it matter anyway in this place? The fact that he was stuck in this godforsaken hole was a source of constant torment for him. It was a depressing place for a young priest on his first posting, especially one who had the gall to have *ideas*. How was he supposed to do any good here? The old ones that actually came to church were mostly at death's door and some were too deaf to hear him. The adults were too far gone, and the kids would never listen. None of them came to church and most of them got the hell out of town as soon as they could anyway.

They can get out, they have an escape route.

He took another drink, this one straight from the bottle and contemplated the futility of his existence. He was trapped

here, sinking further and further into the mire of his life while also retreating further into the bottle. And for what?

He had no answer to that. He had passed out, the brand-new bottle empty in his hand, and slumped over his desk. The half-finished notes for tomorrow's sermon served very nicely as a makeshift pillow.

7

The town slept peacefully in the still darkness. Behind the curtains of the night, a hundred silent melodramas played out, each one unknown to the other. When the curtains opened and the light came streaming in, the telephone lines would buzz and hiss with the news of the night's events.

Did you hear that Charlie and Jenny got robbed? Someone just...

Well, you know that Charlie's been screwin' that Brandi Doyle, and she's half his age...

That old bitch Loretta Abrams was down the store today and she...

Saw Father Allan at the liquor store yesterday, bought three bottles of Jameson. Such a shame. A nice young man going to ruin, and a priest at that. Course, I don't go in for...

But some things are never told. Some secrets are not meant to be known. Like how young Billy Winters had snuck through the back door of his house at 2:30 in the morning, slipping the stuffed backpack under his bed, pretending he'd never been out.

Or how Jenny had never told Charlie that the baby wasn't his, but belonged to Eddie Cartwright down the street. Or that Charlie had paid for Brandi's abortion, even getting her a ride to the city to have it done.

Or that Loretta Abrams kept dirty pamphlets inside her old bibles that she would gawk at from time to time, and then pray to Jesus for forgiveness.

Or the real reason that the Archdiocese dumped Father Allan here was because the Archbishop had heard a rumour that he was a homosexual. Which was perfectly true, but admitting that would get him run out of town—not to mention excommunicated—and so he buried it, a secret kept between himself and God. And, of course, the night.

Some secrets are not meant to be known. They hide under the cover of darkness, safe in the shadows. They belong to the night and the night keeps them well.

Sidewalk

By Teal Leacock

i

each footstep melted into nothing
on the concrete
like a snowflake hoping to stick
around for a little while longer
to linger on an eyelash and be loved

by the time the snow settled
the rain made a ruined blanket
for me to slip onto
I swung my arms and legs to make an angel
then just laid there

ii

snow smothered the sidewalk
I waited forever for the plough
for something big and sure of itself
to dig deep enough, to realise I was
waiting to walk again

I settled for sleep
burrowing under a wholly blanket
wondering if it felt just like this
on the final day, that final breath I could
witness for just a moment

A Rarity

By Grace Way

It's one of those nights.
Peaceful and blank,
engulfed in my still surroundings.
The dead air is all encompassing.
There's nothing particularly new to see,
or to touch,
or to hear,
however, my senses are heightened under this blanket of
oblivion.

A gust of wind rattling the house I am in
feels like the world is taking a breath with me.
The walls shake like my ribcage.
The utter silence after the exhale,
that pause of life is when I am hyper aware of
everything settling back into place,
only to come alive again on the next draw in.

If I stare into space for long enough
the chair beneath me disappears.
All sound dissipates and I am alone in the middle of noplac. As
I float, I let myself become undone;

the unravelling starts at my fingertips and toes.
Slowly I am lost to the absolute emptiness of it all, I let the
overwhelming nothingness take me.

On a night such as
tonight, I am far from
reality.

A whisper of a person
in the nonexistence,
reduced to a meaningless breeze in the midst of the nonbeing. I
am void of everything,
but somehow, in this moment,
I am more than I've ever
been.

It's one of those nights.

Lady of the Lake

By Stephanie A. Ernst

Lady of the lake
Girl of pond water, clawing her way to the surface
With bloody hands.

Mud beneath torn fingernails, vines twisted around
Bare ankles, dragging

Back to depths and darkness
She fights restlessly against fate

Lady of the lake
Clutches tight to scraps of sunlight
Like a man drowning

Clings to moss
Like silt clings to her skirts.

She scorns the skies,
Burrows back beneath
And bides her time
Waiting for her chance
To rise.

Lady of the lake
Emerges like a goddess scorned,
Pond water flows in rivets
Beneath her steps
A crown of water lilies rests
Upon her brow
Tears through underbrush, an army all her own

And in a small clearing, with scarred hands
Frees sword from stone
Lady of the lake no more.

Pomegranate

By Stephanie A. Ernst

Girl of flowers
Hellfire parts before you
You do not falter
The screams of the dead
Are your lullaby

Girl of sunshine
Promise you are not ruined by me
Even as I stand before you
With pomegranate juice on my lips

Girl of growth
Your absence burns, acid down my throat
Settles in my chest until the leaves fall
The frost spreads
You come back to me
I come back to life

Goddess of Spring
Queen of all that is unholy
Tell me this is what you want
This life with me, here

Where nothing grows
But my love for you

Wife of mine
Light to the shadow of my soul
Where once I was stone
You are my achilles' heel
For you alone,
I kneel.

Love Lost & Found: for Qi Hong

By Yuan Changming

1/ A Rambling Sentence for Love Lost

How I sometimes wonder
 Whether it is because you wear
 Your years so well or because the years
 Wear you so well that I fell in mad love with
 You after as long as 42 years of separation without
 Knowing each other's whereabouts, again at first sight
 With the whole Pacific Ocean between our shortening arms

2/ A Periodic Sentence for Love Found

At a fairyfly-like moment
 On a bushy corner of nature
 Preferably under a tall pine tree
 In Mayuehe, our mecca or the hilly village
 Adjacent closely to the bank of the Yangtze River
 With myriad tongues from my hungry innermost being
 Each eager to reach deep into your heart, where my soul's
 Fingers could caress every single synapse of your feminine feel
 Between the warmth & tenderness of love, across the Pacific & the Pandemic
 I'll join you

Thought in Levy Flight

By Yuan Changming

Where's Allen going? Pacific. Today is Wed. My old
Flame is sleeping, waiting to have her GGN removed
From her lungs to stamp out cancer. Poetry. Something
Good to pop up down the road? No luck is good luck
Choices Market where to work soon until 10:13 pm
A little dark cloud drifting beyond the horizon. Crows
Pandemic. Delta plus plus plus keeps chasing us all
China has closed its doors behind the bamboo curtain
Big paranoid. I cannot to go back to Jinzhou to see
Mom, let alone join Qi Hong & elope with her! Bid-
Den vs Trump in so many ways. The apolitical is way
More politics. Wife is cooking fish again, um, smells
Good. Blue & white & pink noises. Any dark ones?
Tinnitus makes me mad. Whistling. Ah, ppppanda!
Three trillion cells in my body, just as many stars
In the cosmos. Ants, rats, silverfish. Floaters darting
So evasive like hopes. Catch one. Paradise lost

Nesting Doll (Poem)

By Leah Osmond

why am I still in my childhood bed
things are so different
but they're still the same
I'm bleeding through the covers
of an old time machine
I don't want to go
but I don't want to stay
the one thing I didn't expect
was that the emotions
never really leave
I am 5
and I am 12
and I am 18
and I can only pray
that perhaps
by the time I hit 23
time will rewind

The Hart Grows Antlers

By Jeremy Wills

Strange

The hart

Grows antlers

Two heavy weights

Upon the head

Two dead trees

Growing from the brain

Make it hard

To run in the forest

Hairlines

By Jeremy Wills

Two curls on my head

A twin hairline

Hardening into horns

I sprinted like a man-goat

Over tundra

Fur-lined pools like many eyes

Plane of hair gave way

To a forest of antlers

Trees without roots

Forced to slow my pace

Afraid of being gored

I contemplated hart-bones

How many stags died there

Horns entangled hopelessly
Or flesh burned out in laboured flight

Among still forest shadows
I stroked the stiff tufts on my head
wondering

Open the Door

By Marianne King

I shouldn't have looked out the window.

My editor at the travel magazine thought this would be the perfect opportunity for me. A remote village in the mountains, peace and tranquility, a working vacation to help with the stress that I'd been under lately. The little one-room cabin I'd rented was just a short distance up the mountain from the village, in a small clearing hidden amongst the trees. It had the perfect look of a festive holiday card.

Arriving a few days ago, I had immediately started to gather information about the area from the villagers. Initially, the adults had been wary and the young had run away laughing, both groups reacting differently to my accent. But persistence had gotten them to trust me, and it hadn't been long before stories of the spirit surfaced – stories of travelers getting lost in the forest during a snowfall and falling prey to the spirit that hunted them in the snow, breathing in their energy. Their bodies would be found later, pale and frozen. My curiosity and lack of belief in what, to my mind, was a local superstition of simple folk made me careless. When the snow began to drift down, I walked to the window.

And there she was. Standing just inside the ring of trees that clustered around the small cabin, as if she'd known I would look, as if she'd been waiting.

The distance and the snow blurred her features. Her long dark hair and long white dress blew in the wind, giving her the appearance of a floating specter against the darkness of the trees. I caught glimpses of dark eyes and a pale face, visible briefly through her moving hair. She held her arms around her waist as if to indicate she was cold. Her utter and total stillness of body unnerved me.

An impulse to run to the door, to let her in, overwhelmed me. The icy chill of the doorknob against my palm brought me to my senses. All of the villager's warnings flashed through my mind. *'Don't look out the window during a snowstorm.'* *'Once you see her, you won't be able to resist.'* *'You'll want to save her, you won't be able to help yourself.'*

I knew what she was, had been told what she could do. Pulling out my phone, I faced the window again. With no cell reception in the area, taking pictures was pretty much the only thing it was good for. I slid up to the window again, turning on the camera as I peered outside.

Was she closer?

I couldn't be sure. There were no footprints in the drifts to show she had moved, but her features seemed a little clearer through the falling snow.

The *snik snik* of the camera as I quickly snapped some photos broke the silence in the cabin. Hands shaking, I let the curtain drop, blocking my view of her. I trembled as I tapped my phone screen, bringing up the pictures so I could see them. Disappointment coursed through me. All I had gotten was a blur of white against the dark trees. Nothing to prove she was out there.

The blue light glow from my laptop caught my eye, reminding me of the looming deadline for my article. I returned to my desk, shaking my head to get rid of the hazy feeling that the sight of her had brought me. I worked, losing track of time. My article started to come together, a weaving of the local traditions and folklore with the tourism of the area, but my thoughts kept drifting to the window and the eerie figure in the snow. The pull to look grew stronger and before I knew it, I found myself at the window again, my hand reaching out to pull back the curtain.

Definitely closer.

The snow had intensified, the drifts getting higher. At first I didn't see her, I'd been looking further back towards the trees. Then I noticed her standing to the side, in front of a large gray

stone that was halfway between the trees and the cabin. Her dark backdrop made me realize that she seemed to make certain she stood out in the snow. Her hair and dress were still moving with the wind, and her features were more distinct. Her lips and large unblinking eyes didn't move, that creepy stillness imitating the stone she stood in front of. Small hands, the same colour as her clothing, were still gripping her sides, as if to keep warm.

The cold window pane against my forehead broke my trance, making me realize that I had been leaning in, trying to get closer to her. The shock made me step back and drop the curtain, breaking my gaze. I backed away from the window, trying to think of anything but her.

Again my computer beckoned, so I sat down to continue my work. The rhythmic tapping of the keys calmed me. I closed my eyes and just let the words flow, typing nonstop. It was the realization that my hands were making the same motions over and over that caused me to open my eyes. I read over what I had written and as I reached the end of the article, I jumped back from my computer in fear, shock making me numb. The repetitive motion I had sensed had been me typing the same words continuously, in one steady stream.

*openthedooropenthedooropenthedooropenthedoorope
nthedooropenthedooropenthedooropenthedooropenthedooropenth
edooropenthedooropenthedooropenthedooropenthedooropenthedo
ropenthedooropenthe*

Sweat broke out on my forehead as I stared at the screen. *Why would I write that?* I backed away from my computer and began pacing, glancing at my laptop every now and then. The words spun in my head, running together as I heard them ... *openthedooropenthedooropenthedoor.*

It was the tapping that caused me to stop my frantic strides. I faced the window and listened. After a pause, I heard it again, a soft *tink tink tink* against the glass. My steps faltering and hesitant, I approached the curtains. Pulling them to the sides, I looked out.

She was right outside the window.

She gazed at me, her dark eyes now revealed to be a deep violet. Those violet eyes and crimson lips were the only colour found in her pale, expressionless face. Her obsidian hair and her clothing no longer moved, the cabin sheltering her from the wind and snow. A subtle pattern stood out on her thin dress – a dress that couldn't possibly protect her from the freezing temperatures. Her arms were no longer around her waist; instead she held her hands up to either side of the window, bracing herself against the frame. The sleeves of her dress had dropped to her elbows, exposing her white forearms to the cold. My eyes flicked to the unmarked snow behind, no indents to show she had walked on it.

Again the stillness, no movement at all as she looked at me.

Time seemed irrelevant as I stared at her. I could hear the words pounding in my head, getting louder and louder...*openthedooropenthedooropenthedoor*.

The icy doorknob didn't stop me this time. I numbly looked at my hand holding onto it, watching it turn. The door swung open as I stepped back, a gust of wind helping it on its way. She stood in the doorway and her lips curved into a small smile.

She reached out her hand, touching my cheek as she stepped inside.

Nightstand Chapstick

By Ashley Dingwell

When people die
do they take their scent with
them and is that scent gone
forever
Or does someone else, somewhere else
carry the same smell of your old soap
and laundry detergent
on their back
too

Tell You Tomorrow

By Ashley Dingwell

In my head

I am still there with you, by the dock

One foot in the water

Watching the ant who keeps coming back to eavesdrop
on our Tuesday gossip

I wish we had come here more often

We are here right now

It all feels too late, I know

But even if we had made it to forever

I still would have wanted

more time

Familiar Love

By Jesse LeGrow

I want a love like my parents have.

The warm and gentle kind,

the soft breeze that slowly turns the page of a book.

I want the chaos of thunderstorms that still carries the

heat of a summer's evening,

and the hard knock of its rain against my window.

I want the laughter at 3AM, hushed so we don't wake the kids,

but still full of the youth they inspire.

I want the desire that lasts a lifetime,

and the want that makes me never doubt it.

Sometimes it feels like I'll never have it the way my parents do,

that my heart only exists to feed others but to never be fed.

That maybe they created me to be the fuel of people's love,

but to never ignite that fire myself.

Yet when I think of the future,

my want to love and be loved surpasses any doubt in my mind,

that the heart my parents gave me is strong enough to find it.

The Cold

By Jesse LeGrow

It was snowing when my grandparents both died,
and the irony of it is almost humorous
since it was the winter that birthed me.
I do not like to think about how the cold can give a life
as much as it can take one,
that the sharp wind can put the breath into my lungs
while taking it from someone else,
that the snow I played in years after,
fell while my grandmother passed,
then fell again as my grandfather did too.
Now with every gust of wind that blows my hair,
every flake of snow my tongue tastes,
and every winter on my birthday,
I think of them and the cold
that stole them from me.

Lonely Commute

By Zoey Dwyer

I feel lonely. I wake up alone, commute alone, work alone, ride back home alone, and go to bed alone. No one pays me any mind.

It's dark when I board the train home. There's nobody in the observation car and I settle into the furthest seat back so I can watch as the railway tracks fly out from beneath the wheels of the train. The whistle sounds, the train rolls out of the station, and I expect the ticket inspector to do their rounds. But they don't come.

I'm staring at the train tracks when a figure steps out of the shadows and obstructs the window from outside the rear door on the platform. How I didn't notice her when I first arrived is beyond me. I usually notice other people.

I haul myself out of my seat and swing open the door. Wait, did I actually see someone?

Wind whipping around my cloak and standing on the cramped back platform of the train, there is someone here. Should I tell her to join me inside? Suddenly, the train hits a tunnel and I'm plunged into darkness. It swallows me whole.

After a second, I see two warm, glowing, brown eyes appear five feet in front of me. A smile stretches open in the darkness and I see pearly white teeth. "Join me," she says, voice melodic and inviting.

It's been so long since I've been with anybody and my heart aches for the comfort of another person. I climb over the safety railing, arms outstretched. I put one foot in front of the other, and I don't find any ground.

Are you lonely?

If You Could See Me Cry, Would it Change Anything?

By Kera Leights-Rose

When I look in a mirror, all I see is fat.

Am I really the person who is looking back at me?

When I walk the streets the number on the scale appears above my head.

People say, "at least you're nice." Why is nice never enough?

My family is the image of perfection, and I'm the odd one out.

Dad's friends remark, "that isn't what I imagined your daughter would look like."

I feel like an animal trapped in a glass cage at the zoo.

They glare like I stand on a podium.

Their remarks, their judgments, stick permanently like the stretch marks on my body.

The verdict forever imprisons me.

Just because I don't fit the body mass index, does that mean I'm less important?

I will never be a rose, so do I appear to most as just the dirt on the side of the road?

The voices in my head say I will never fit people's perception of perfection.

If I screamed would anyone hear, or would they not care, enough to

answer?

Do I believe that being skin and bone and set to society's standards is what I want?

So, I spend my life on the couch because I think eating away my life is what hurts them.

I could never maintain what they imagine a female body should resemble.

Tantramar Revisited

By Chris Veach

I could take the train to Truro

sun and cloud
dyke and wire
barbed inside out
heave of tide

I could take the train to Truro

red mud aches
as god loves

I could take the train to Truro

but the way here
is the way home
so I go
the way I came

Excerpt from Novel

Chapter 3: Nose Twitch

By Tam Jenkins

Chapter 3

“Hi, what can I get you?” A waitress in black dress pants done up with a belt. A white short sleeve dress shirt is tucked neatly into it with a tie collared around her neck. Her light brown hair drapes around it like a cloak. An artificial smile perched on her face. Her name tag reads “Anna”.

“Can I get a-a-an ho-home-e styled omelet, n-no tomatoes pl-please.”

“Of course, to drink?”

“Haa-hot coffee.” my stutter gets worse in social situations.

“You got it, and you sir?”

Jae smiles and speaks in a higher than usual voice. “It’s ma’am.”

“Oh, what can I get you ma’am?” Nervous laughter fills the room.

“Eggs, bacon, toast, ya know the uh, number three. Iced coffee to drink.”

The waitress nods. She turns away, Jae smirks at me with a devious smile. Oh my god, what is she about to do, she only does that when she's up to something. She bites her lip in my direction, and suddenly time stops for me. Her short black hair shines when the light from the sun bounces off the lake and reflects back on it. Her pearly white smile is blinding. Her amazing jawline. Her hair is always shaved on the sides, a neat bun on top, it's not even long. It's an undercut, the hair on top comes to about the apple of her cheek when she lets it down. She is the perfect example of butch.

"Hey Annabelle, point me towards the urinal!" Holy shit, she really- oh god. I kick her shin and laugh uncontrollably. The waitress runs off.

"Je-Jae!.... okay that was fa-fucking hill-hilarious" I can't hold back my laughter.

"Alright kid, you coming over tonight for a bit? Ash ain't coming home till late, so movie night?" Jae always has an expectant, glass-half-full type of expression when she asks me to do things with her. It makes me excited, how could I say no to her puppy-dog eyes? Not like I would want to say no anyway.

"You b-bet your a-ass."

Jae grins and her eyes shift, "lesbian at ten o'clock".

I see a woman sitting at a table about twenty feet from us. Short red hair, flannel, jeans, converse. "Ho-holy sh-shit that's g-ga-gay!"

Every time I go out with her, I feel the little butterflies that I use to get before my ballet performances. It feels like a date, my brain wants to tell me it's a date. Sometimes when I let myself believe it as soon as I hear Ashton's name I feel a lump in my throat, not from wanting to cry. From being repulsed. Is it bad that I wish she'd just break it off with them? Is it bad that I want to give her more than Ash ever had to offer? What makes them better than me?

"Hello? Tall girl with a weird ass nose twitch?"

The nose twitch again, ugh.

"A-ass-asshole!"

"Not my fault that your snot likes to dance."

"Ew gross." I laughed so much my ribs hurt.

We eventually left the restaurant after Jae poked more fun at the waitress. Before I knew it, Jae and I were back at their place, "their" as in her and Ash. She was right, they're still not home. She really likes horror movies, I pretend I like them. I spend most of the time staring at her when she doesn't notice, because she's too focused on the movie. But, hey, at least I have an excuse for having her arm around me.

"AH- w-why do they have to p-put, put, those je-je-jump sc-scares in?"

"It wouldn't be entertaining if you didn't jump."

"Haha, v-very fun-funny."

“What? Why do you think I always watch these when you’re around?”

“W-why?”

I notice her blue eyes sparkle with the tv light. They may be a little grey sometimes but they aren’t dim. Why is she getting closer? Why haven’t I noticed her chapstick before? She doesn’t have any acne. Unlike my rough skin, hers is soft and moisturized. Woah she’s not about to- is my breath okay?

“Is that a new freckle?”

What the fuck. “R-r-re- shit, really? Wa-where?”

“Under your eye. Let me see, I think it was just eyeliner. It’s gone now.”

What an asshole. That shit’s gonna hurt in the morning.

Once again I observe the grooves in my ceiling. Another restless night, why can’t I have a way to turn off my mind? 3:30AM and I’m still thinking. I put down my phone, I couldn’t stay on it any longer.

The clock strikes 5:50AM. I begin to shiver, I didn’t take my medication yesterday, shit. I have to take it now, I don’t know if it’ll help right now but it’s worth a try. I take my medication from my bed-side table and walk up the stairs. Scratching at my skin on my abdomen with one hand, with my other hand I feel the soft grooves in the wall. I choose against a

glass and reach for a cup. My eyebrow twitches with every move I make. My breathing slows.

Not again tonight, “B-Blake you- you’re, you’re so stupid”, I whisper it to myself.

I should’ve taken my medication yesterday. Every time the words leave my mouth I slap my arm. I need mom. I say it quietly at first and progressively sound louder, “m-mom, mom, ma-mom.”

I don’t know what to do, she’s sleeping, I start screaming, it’s the only thing I can do anymore. All I can hear now is thumping noises, my vision blurs, my skin is crawling.

“Blake! Sweetheart?” She wraps her arms around me. I’m still in the motion of slapping when she holds my hand. “Did you take your medication? Have you slept?!”

“N-n-nnn” I can’t get it out. I can’t say anything right now. Tears are streaming down my face, my breaths turn weak and shallow. My mom holds me by the hand and leads me to her room. She holds me for the rest of the morning, I sleep for hours next to her.

3 Poems

By: Averie Michel

see what they see

on the outside
everyone could see we were slowly destroying each other
we both evolved into totally different people
we were mutations
no one wanted to mention it to us
because we seemed so happy
on the outside
but we were a time bomb

- *if only we could've seen what they've seen*

see what i see

we are both amazing people
we were just toxic for each other
i still loved you all the same
and i hope you loved me too
but we weren't right for each other
i'm happy you found someone
someone who truly loves you the way you should be loved

- *i'm happy she sees what i see*

see what you see

you see me as a terrible person
someone who is unloveable
and toxic
and hateful
and manic
you see me as my greatest fear
you see me as i see myself

- *i see what you see*