Memento Mori Ink

MORSUS VITAE

Issue 5- April 2025

Editor: Pixie Bruner

Unquiet Sleepers Unearthed

Regrets for Disturbing the Deceased- Pixie Bruner

I Held Their Names In My Hands - Chris McAuley

Solitude - Brandon Lubertazzi

Gravedigger's Lament - C. Payne

Parasitic Love - Pete Kelly

A-C-C-I-D-E-N-T - Dane Erbach

Dog Eat Dog Whirl- Westley Penland

Exhibit – Amanda M. Blake

the tight wooden cage – Mark Macleod

Shall We Dance – Rick Powell

R.A.F. Nuclear Guinea Pigs Reunion – Sara Casteneda

Horrorku - Vampirlibido

Dark of the Moon - F. J. Bergmann

Love Transcendent - Lisa Vasquez

From Pixie-

Thank you for joining us at ***Morsus Vitae***. This is the Fifth ***Memento Mori Ink*** literary review. “Remember you must die, so create to live.” We have finite time together each month, final time in our existences, and the focus is always on poetry and Ink Blots of choice micro-fiction.

Submissions are always open. Literary merit is the only standard, and we always want it darker

This month was the seance. I, as the medium. Those gathered at this table are *Chris McAuley, Brayden Lubertazzi, C. Payne, pete kelly, Dane Erbach, Westley Penland, Amanda M. Blake, Mark Macleod, Rick Powell, Sara Casteneda, Vampirlibido, F.J. Bergmann,* and *Lisa Vasquez*. You do not want to know what happened. The angels are still weeping and I still bleeding. The room may never be cleaned from the bloodstains, the tears are ankle deep, and as the one left in this dark room, ectoplasm can be radioactive. So many ghosts, so many…even worse things. We have no regrets, however.

The Seance began with me reciting the title poem of my book- recently Elgin-award nominated and long-listed, so sometimes I may set the ambience, dim the lights, light the candles, call people to the table, ask them to clasp hands and we reveal the theme.

The Body As Haunted

Tonight I am in the haunted house.

Like Ginsberg, I say the Kaddish for my mother,

singing the Hebrew mourners prayer

in her same hoarse alto

with her brown eyes, with her hair and her complexion.

I light the Yahrzeit candle I bought in the

kosher section of the Winn-Dixie

that only stretches my arms width-

She died on an October Friday the 13th.

This is an October Friday the 13th.

Tonight I am a haunted house

I stayed with her corpse while the stepbastard got the paramedics.

Begging "Mommy don't leave me, I still need you, Don't leave me."

I hadn't called her mommy in years.

Suddenly I was younger when pop pop, daddy, and mom mom died.

I was suddenly a child, that loving daughter, that good little girl.

all rebelliousness gone, no more breaking free-

that disease of all 17 year olds

Tonight I am haunted.

I closed her eyes but they popped open and they were my eyes.

They wouldn't stay closed. I didn't have 2 coins to pay her fare.

I sat numb in the hospital while they tagged and wrote her up.

The sun rose. My cousin took me to Denny's.

"Don't leave me, I still need you, don't leave me".

I still say that. Tonight is her anniversary.

Aunt Nettie’s ghost, nor hers, has no rocking chair here.

My family always had ghosts and welcomed them.

Come haunt me.

Let them find me, I say.

This cheap little candle lights her way to torture me.

Candles light the way home of all my lost loved ones.

A parade of ghosts comes tonight and they do not scare me.

Daddy, we can play together with Greg’s matchbox car collection.

Mom Mom, I need your recipe for Jewish Apple Cake

Pop Pop, let’s paint a watercolor of my balcony view.

Aunt Nettie, I need your expertise on red lingerie.

24 hours of Remembrance.

34 years of a life after.

You’ve all haunted me all my life.

I am now older than both my parents ever were.

Mommy— no, Lois, I loved you but you were no god to whom my life should be a shrine.

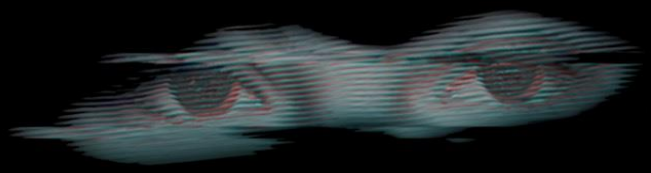
Though I have your voice,, intellect, gestures, and body.

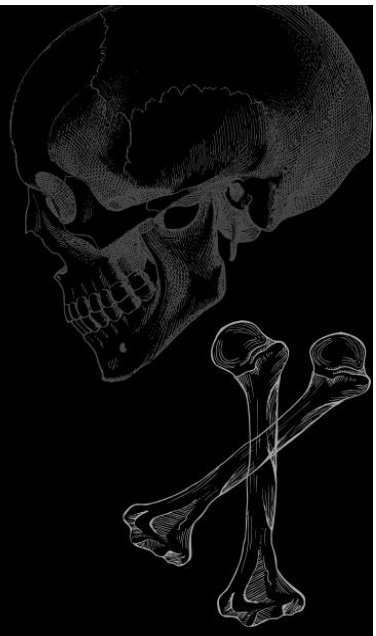
I am so much more than just your daughter, a Xerox of you.

Let this ink bleed and stain these fingers.

I have been released!

Drink up, my precious darklings!





I Held Their Names in my Hands

Chris McAuley

I don’t dream anymore.
Not the way I used to.
Now it's just flashes.
Fingernails in dirt.
A breath caught mid-scream.
Eyes that stop looking,
even when they stay open.

I keep their names in my mouth,
but I never speak them.
They taste like iron,
like pennies pressed between molars
until blood seeps down the throat.

You don’t get to grieve when you’re the reason.
Grief is for the left behind,
not the one who did the leaving.

My hands still twitch in sleep,
reaching for the air where they were.
Fingers curled, not to hold—
but to silence.

There was a moment—just one—
before the first.
A heartbeat where I could have walked away.
I hear that moment all the time.
It screams louder than the others.

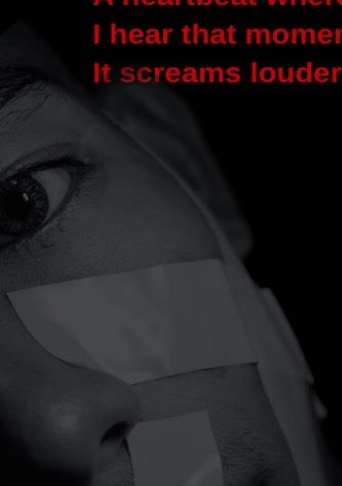
I scrub my skin until it splits.
But there's no soap for this kind of stain.
No priest for this kind of confession.
God stopped listening
the second I stopped hesitating.

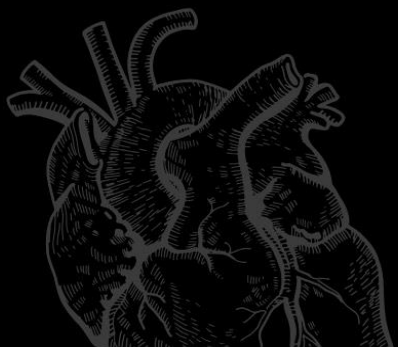
The worst part
is the silence that followed.
Not their silence—mine.
The way I looked down
and felt nothing.
Not guilt. Not rage.
Just emptiness.
Vast and endless as the grave.

But now I feel.
Every day.
I feel the weight of bones I buried,
stacked inside me like scaffolding.
I walk with them.
I eat with them.
I breathe with them lodged in my lungs.

They don't scream anymore.
They just stare.
Waiting for me
to join them.
But I won't.

Dying would be mercy.
And I don’t deserve that.





Solitude

Steadfast in my solitude,
My end is my beginning.
Leave the flesh for the promise of more,
Withering away like a holy whore

Slipping into a new noose,
parasites of the highest order.

Chained in the prison of mirrors,
staring at an ever-cracking reflection.
A shattered sense of self—
nerves stretched thin, a strained connection.
To what surrounds me,
is this real? Are you answering this cry for help?

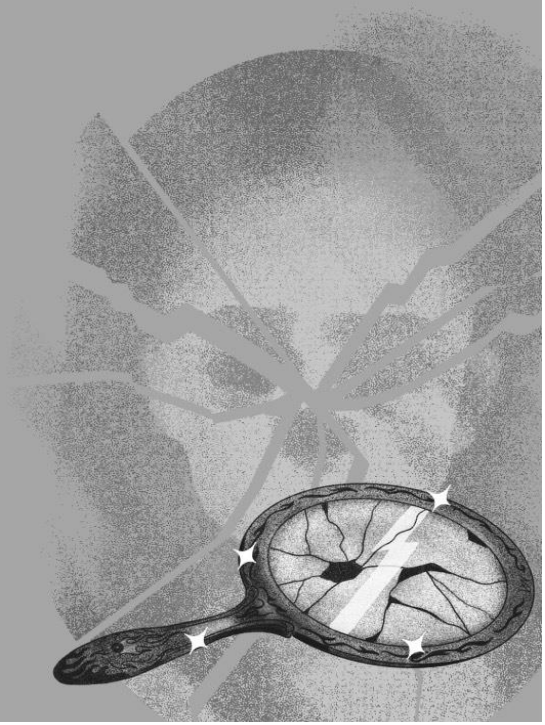
The maggots will consume any legacy I leave—
muddy memories of matricide.
I seize and convulse under the pale rider's squeeze.

Black fluids spill from the bastard's bullet hole,
as life fades into a bottomless grey.
My eyes consumed by an emotionless haze,
I stare until it stares back,
I dare until the hand reaches back.

Blanketed by grief, coveting relief,
I search for release at the bottom of the sea.
The artist's aneurysm of color fades
as quickly as it comes,
spasming, grasping as the hues seep from me.

My crown of mediocrity paints a morbid frown—
forever forced to wonder what could have been,
as I wander the waste,
searching for a sliver of serrated solitude.

-Brayden Lubertazzi



Gravedigger's Lament

C. Payne

It is my duty to dig the grave
shovel always breaking open eager earth,
never to be granted the rest I crave.

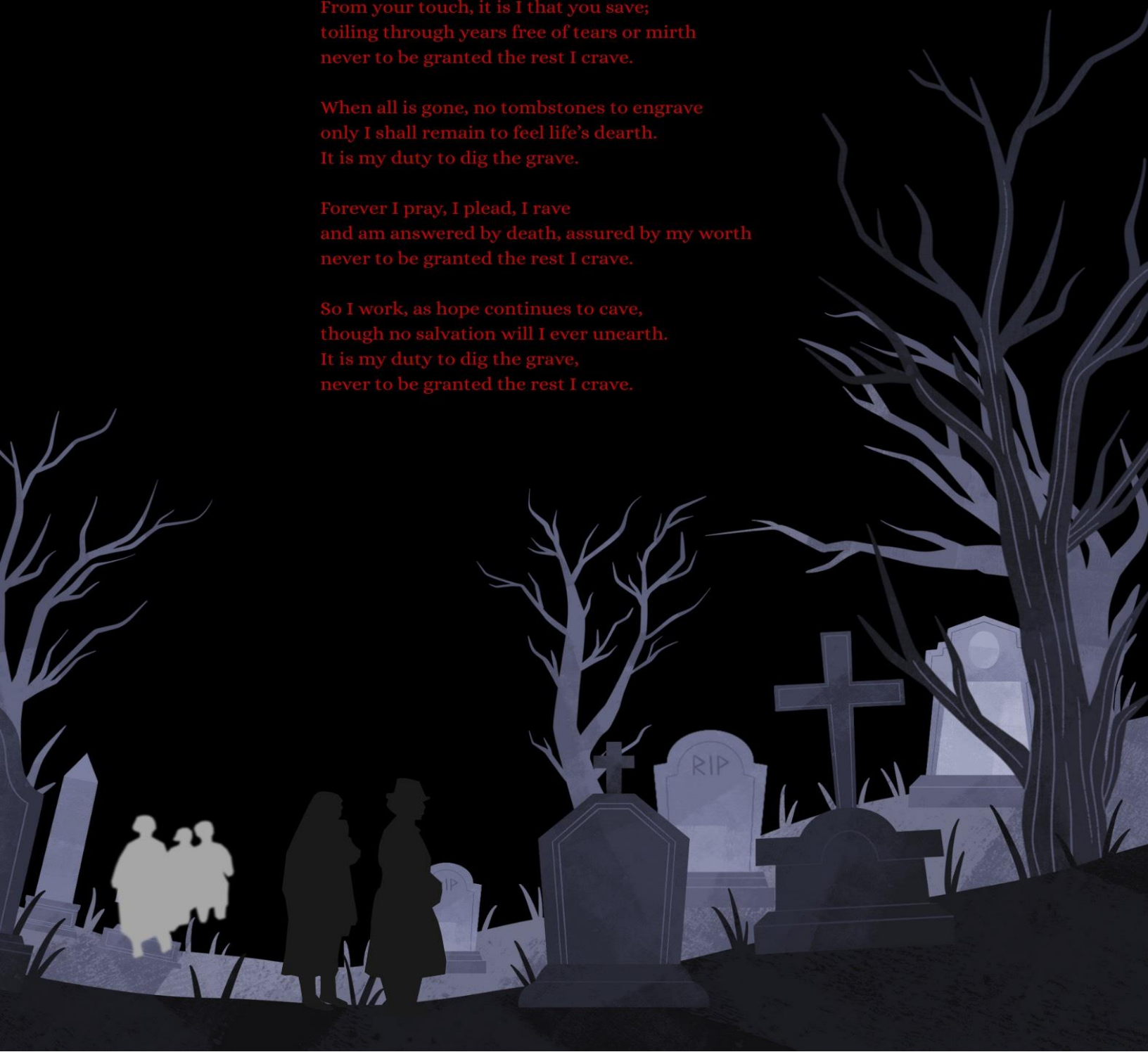
Dear Thanatos, I am thy humble slave
marked for this grim task since birth-
it is my duty to dig the grave.

From your touch, it is I that you save;
toiling through years free of tears or mirth
never to be granted the rest I crave.

When all is gone, no tombstones to engrave
only I shall remain to feel life's dearth.
It is my duty to dig the grave.

Forever I pray, I plead, I rave
and am answered by death, assured by my worth
never to be granted the rest I crave.

So I work, as hope continues to cave,
though no salvation will I ever unearth.
It is my duty to dig the grave,
never to be granted the rest I crave.



Parasitic Love

—pete kelly

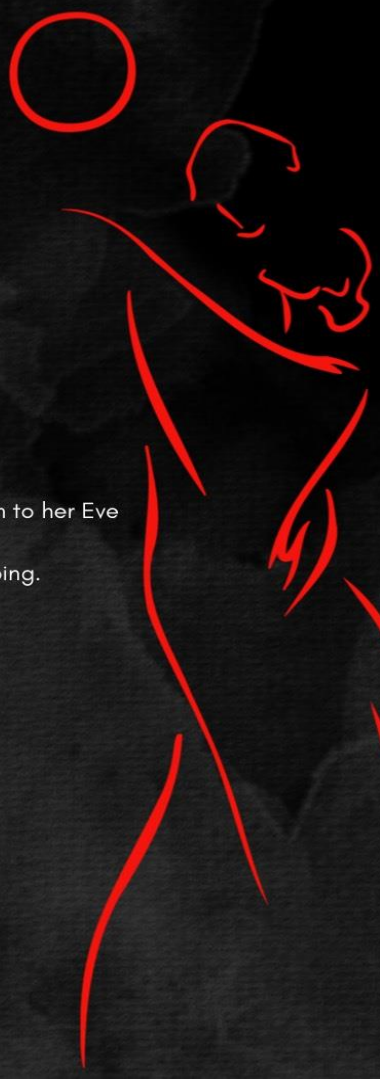
The cacophonous sound and epileptic light show
Disturbs not the thoughts of one deep in mind
All about creatures celebrate mutual hedonism
Cavorting amidst a horror to which they are blind.

A figure interrupts this sovereigns mindful solitude
Lord of an emotionless realm that exists within
Her body is a silhouette dancing suggestive and rude
Awakening a desire to furnish my empty dominion.

A prophesy of failure from my distant humanity
Though still I follow her,to her last willful act
We dance feeling with our bodies writhing together
Aroused creatures within begin to react.

An invitation is replied with a solemn gesture
A ride home consists of her nervous chatter
Her life so trivial, visions of death on a floor
In another life we could be lovers, now I hunger.

We enter a first and last time,for one to leave
Resuming our rhythmic writhing while disrobing
She pushes away to dance and seduce, I am Adam to her Eve
Her body her smell her groans my senses all absorbing.



Her eyes close, my skin ripples as a disturbed pool
Veins increasingly active ever excited to feed
Pain as skin is stretched from within my whole body
Conscience aches from warnings I did not heed.

My limbs outstretched as pulled by unseen bondage
Finally synchronous eruptions bring a sweet relief
I need not see as before have I witnessed this image
Tearful memory from blind eyes show a human grief.

Blind tendrils taste the air sensing prey is near
A stifled scream a knowing dull thud to the floor
Her mind chose not to comprehend but close in fear
From within a solace comes regret that will endure.

Serpents gently tap as they glide over her limp form
They pause then as one movement plunge beneath skin
Her eyes open she screams till the coming dawn
Pulsating veins feed a struggling heart within.

Feeding brings exquisite yet tainted pleasure
Shown by a confused smile upon my lips
I long to feel a satisfaction so pure
Though I know this need will never loosen it's grip.

My sight returns as do my tendril horde
Exhausted I fall to my knees as they return inside
I cry as a child requiring a mothers comfort
As I belong to no one I merely flee and hide.

So for each day passing for love I care less
Retreating further within my familiar domain
Finding the comfort sought in the darkness
I have removed the eyes to see a caring hand.

A-C-C-I-D-E-N-T

"We'll just start without Lill," Mayze said, sliding the board out of a battered box. "She won't mind."

Mayze and Ruby had never seen a Ouija board before. On the colony, little was made of paper—fragile things rarely survived on planets like IFC-12.

"Okay," Mayze said, her fingertips on the plastic pointer. "Is there anyone here?"

The pointer slid immediately to YES, then swung between letters.

"A-C-C-I-D-E-N-T," Ruby read, her hands trembling. "Did something happen to you?"

Mayze frowned. "Who are you?"

Mayze and Ruby realized before she finished spelling her name that Lill had been there all along.

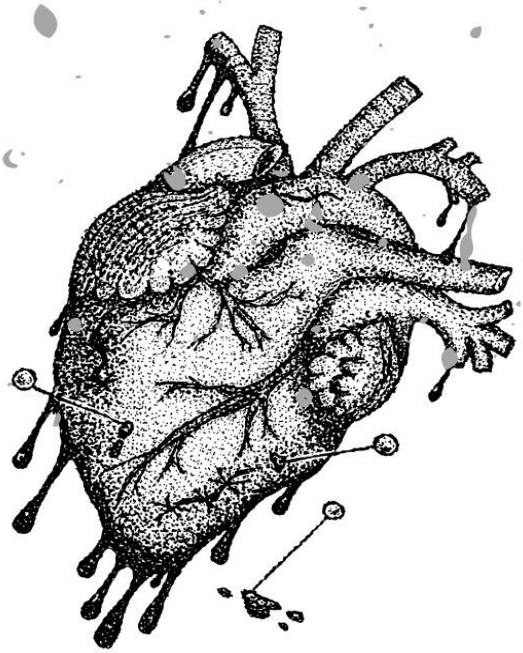
—Dane Erbach

Dog Eat Dog Whirl

Westley Penland

I fear that I am
unloveable,
like they all told me so.
But not in the sense
that I will be unloved
but in the sense that
love will not stick to this teflon body.
I have been coated in oil
much too slick to form bonds
with anything else,
other than the salt
I've been seasoned with.
but every bit of every season erodes
my non stick coating
And each flaked chip
exposes my true danger,
that I will poison this.
Even if you deglaze me
with my own tears
the sediment of sentiment
will ruin the whole meal.
Bitter bites of resentment,
The much too sweet nibbles
of spite.
Salty grit of negligence.
The sour taste of blood in my mouth
as the tip of my tongue is sacrificed again
for peace.
Masticating masochism
for a chance of eating
something that
brings me pleasure.
Plate me in my finest position
love me
to satiate your appetite
but pain me
with hunger pangs.
Composite me with all
your compostable parts
so that you don't waste your time
and so that in turn
I can grow into something new.

It takes seven years to replace yourself
and when my heart became anew
It revealed,
I'm now stainless steel.
No more chips
No hate.
I see myself
A roborant sight.
I serve this lucullan sample
of new skin, up
unsure of new beginnings.
I close my eyes
and brace for a cautionary lick.
To my wonderment,
Umami envelopes the tip of my tongue,
Ravenous for nourishment,
I sink my teeth in,
Love has never tasted so good.






<u>EXHIBIT</u>
Amanda M. Blake

such an exquisite exhibition
shadowbox man in a bell jar
pinned and exposed
evisceration like an
opened envelope
abdomen full of ink

you licked every letter
quilled to me with
twisted tongue
from coffee cup stains
to saltwatercolors

anatomy lessons every morning
in evening the flex
of muscle and distended tendon
beads of cold sweat river
through furrowed brow
stitched embroidery fibers
pincushion needles
to hold spread

ribcage a craft basket
never had time for women's hobbies
empty for someone else's things
gaping bones hard
and something soft
dormant and leaning left

embalmed airless for preservation
a learning opportunity
cautionary tale

although heartless
slice a vein and
bleed honey for me

That tight wooden cage

It started
when clawed steps
in the roof raced across
my dreams like a mad cat,
then the frantic scratching
inside the kitchen walls –
maybe a bird, but how
did it get down into that
tight wooden cage? I
listened for singing. I
asked my brother
to let the bird out.
'That's no bird,' he said.
'And if I did open the wall
to set it free, I would have
to kill it. The fleas.' Just at night
the scrambling left off.
Then at dawn it started
again, not with the light,
which only we could see,
but our banging
and ticking and warmth,
this side of its prison
boards. I tried to avoid
the kitchen, I tried
singing hymns.
All we could do was wait
as the tumbling and
clawing inside the walls
grew slower every day
and then stopped.
We were released
into the silence of death.
Then blindly waddling
their way to the sun
like the knots of sausage skins
or a row of freshwater pearls
strung end to end in the dark
behind the breadboard.
After three weeks the maggots
stopped coming, and then
the slow lazy flies.

Mark Macleod

Shall We Dance

Shall we dance, My Love,
When the moon is full,
Shining bright,
Breath on your brow,
Fitting,
Like a hand inside a glove.

Shall we sway, My Love,
Two leaves in the breeze,
In Autumn, at play,
As they tumble,
Uncaring,
From the dead trees up above.

Shall we glide, My Love,
Like a raft from shore,
In a tender wave,
Rocking, rolling,
Untenanted,
Pushed from a unknown shove.

Shall we dive, My Love,
Quick, like a bird of prey,
From clouded skies,
Undeterred, silent,
Hungry,
At an unsuspecting dove.

So, we will dance, My Love,
As your dead feet drag,
Not a sound,
Do you speak,
Eyes, dead white,
Like the color of my glove,
Like the silent stars up above.

Rick Powell

RAF NUCLEAR GUINEA PIGS REUNION

Sara Castaneda

While most people know about the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, fewer are aware that an additional 2,000 atomic bombs were detonated after World War II and tested on hundreds of thousands of young soldiers to prepare them for nuclear war. They were not allowed to speak about their experiences during this time under threat of treason until recently. This is some of what they had to say.

They told us:

Bury your eyes in
the crook of your arms or in
the sand.

"It was sheer brilliant light."

"To say it was frightening,
was an understatement."

"Indescribable…
shocked us all into silence."

"When the flash hit -
you could see the x rays of your hands,
of your bones,
through your clothes."

"Then the heat hit.

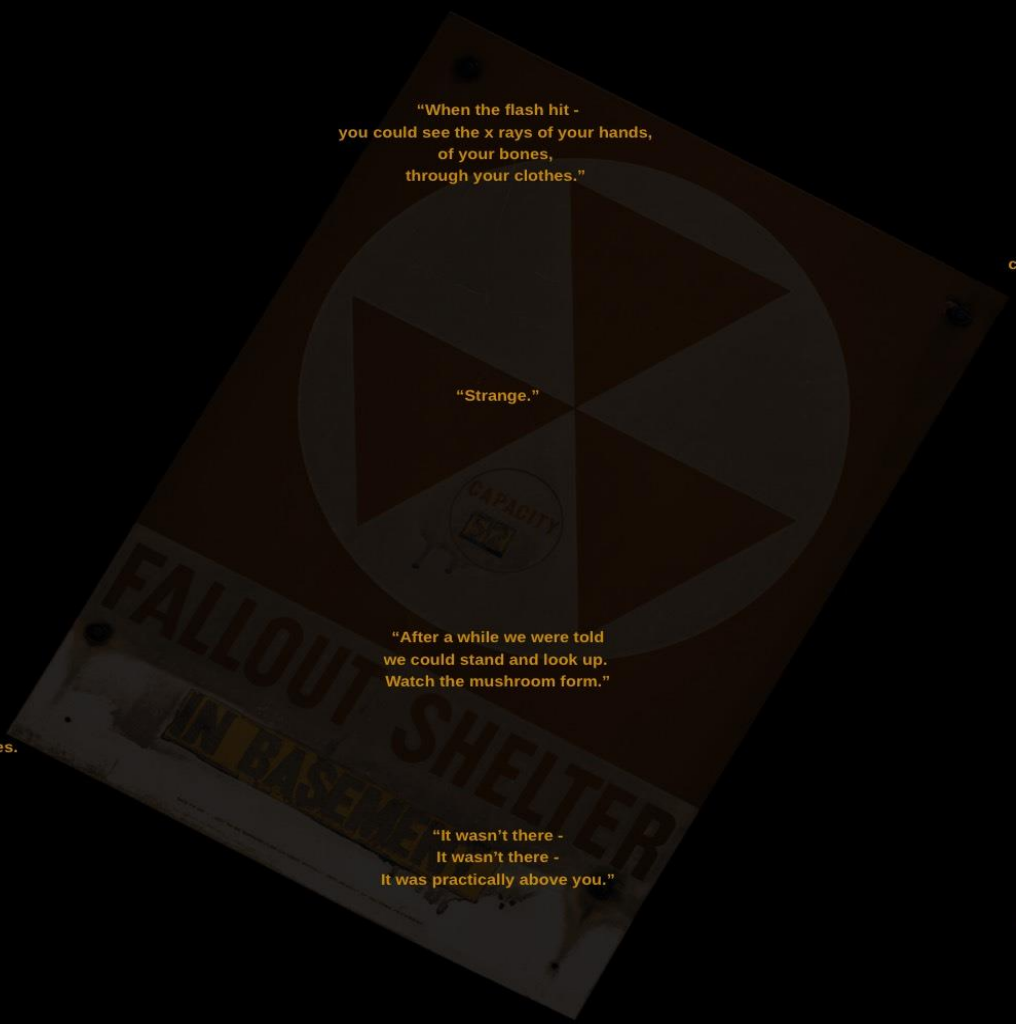
That was as if someone,
my size,
caught fire and walked through me."

"Absolutely…Unearthly."

"Strange."

"Some lads would stand up
thirty seconds later…
limbs broken and bruised."

We could not believe
the blast would not subside."



"After a while we were told
we could stand and look up.
Watch the mushroom form."

"You caught sight of it at ninety degrees.
It was huge."

"It wasn't there -
It wasn't there -
It was practically above you."

"All we saw was this rising fireball.
A colossal fireball.

"Going up.
And thunder, lightning.
You name it."

"I noticed the clouds moving away.
Like that, you know…
round and round and round."

"It was too much for some.
E Some were crying.
Asking for their mum….

"Awful."

"There was no comprehension that
anything like that could even exist."

"It was immense.
It was a sight to see.
And I never want to see it again."

after conjuring her
and wanking,
an unearthly lust
assaults him

summer rain. . .
the witch sucking blood
from a baby's neck

***

choking him
with frenzy jaws
a female werewolf

witching hour a bite on the nape wakes you

"Get out of here
or I'll kill you!"
the EVP said

under the sheets
after the bite
a groin bleeds

licking
her sleeping sole
an invisible tongue

After the blow
splattering hairy tits
severed carotids
blood moon

just before sleep
a cold mist
on your face!

"Is that you, little girl?"
she said, holding
the planchette

After biting him
she sips his life
beat by beat

.

As he came
inside her,
a lover dissipates
and the widower expires

"Where are you, Mommy?"
the medium said,
with girlish voice

Dark of the Moon

—F.J. Bergmann

He never replaced the ornate front-door brass lock, acanthus-embossed, authentically Victorian, and permanently unopenable. He had haunted antique and thrift shops, hoping to one day find a key that fit. His convivial friends joked about being relegated to entering by the back door for his frequent parties. But once, coming home very late from entertainments elsewhere on a night with no moon, he had seen a shadowy figure in a long, dark dress desperately twisting and pulling on the knob, hammering soundlessly with black-gloved fists on the solid oak panels, and he decided not to look for a key anymore.

LOVE TRANSCENDENT

Adieu, my love.
Beyond this life, across the veil
I'm stretched across your grave, forever
Listening for the absence of your heart
Sink into the earth in search of you
Blades of grass, clumps of shale
Calling through dreams, still you depart
Through every breath, I seek to endeavor
To sate the longing for divine rendezvous

The salt of your flesh on the altar of lust
The dagger of faith, the piercing of trust
Blinded by clouds of dopamine rush
Pin-prick sensation of serotonin flush

Six underground, looking up from the dark
Gravedigger sings from above like a lark
The gods have all slipped into torpor tonight

Adieu, my love.
A kiss then embark
The river we sail
The map that we chart
The road to wherever

When I long,
I long only for you

—Lisa Vasquez, 3/10/2025