

# ISSUE # 3 4

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*Image by Leandro Ercole*

S A M F R A N K L

**FIGUREHEAD**

Kiss me on the mouth,  
'til it comes off,  
or enough to get goin'.  
Or enough to take the soft  
and suck it  
'til the bends come out.

Then  
rest my hands  
across my chest,  
with a little pressure,  
so they can't move,  
and can't shake,  
when you shake me.

Then peel back,  
like wet wood  
from cement flooring,  
with my pelvis  
stuck to yours,  
like mastic  
from a wet gun.

That view,  
looking up,  
you lift  
like a ship's  
figurehead,  
bent back.  
Breasts down,  
neck craned,  
head  
raised up,  
staring at  
the cracks  
in the

base paint coat  
I've botched  
behind  
my bed.

You're good that way.  
If I could paint,  
I'd paint you.

But I can't paint,  
so I fuck you.

## **PIN**

So I run a thick  
thumb over some  
paper-thin crease  
between your hips  
and where your ribs bend in.  
Then breathe some  
heavy breaths,  
down your nose,  
and onto your mouth,  
where they sit,  
on your lips,  
which purse,  
waiting for some  
perfect kiss,  
that I don't think I have in me.

My arms catch,  
like clumsy wings  
that can't seem to wrap you right,  
and fold like scarlet tissue paper,  
crinkling and bunching up  
around dark, moist patches.

And the weight of each  
false pretence  
I lured you in with  
sits on my chest  
with a wet weight.  
And all I can do is pluck at you  
with fingers too fat for their bones.  
And watch the promise of passion,  
which I sowed,  
seep tired and silly  
from weeping wounds  
on your butter body.

That you have yet to say  
a single thing.

That sometimes silence echoes  
with such force that neighbours spring  
from their beds and call the cops.

That you can walk.

That you can move at all.

That you can peel your flank  
from my hollow chest.

That in the darkness  
you can fumble  
and find your way.

All these things mock me,  
and pin me, translucent,  
to the window.

But,

that while I hang there,

light pouring

through my pinned,

paper wings

you can leave,

without me stopping you,

that, is the worst of all.



*Image by "MG\_FX"*



**TEN TRUTHS**

1. Every day I try to mimic the fragility of beginnings – every word measured, every detail attached with meaning, our names offered to each other like a bird, dying and precious.
2. I can feel your name between my teeth, a leftover bone.
3. I love watching children who take the train for the first time, all smiles and big eyes. All around them passengers hang on the railing like withered vines, dying their undying death.
4. I remember: sitting on a stone step after a rainshower, the water seeping into my back pockets. I remember: long walks, soft breeze, every cell of every walking body humming *what could be. What could be. What could be.*
5. I believe trains and buses mourn their paths, having seen it all before.
6. I have brought joy. I can prove it. There are pictures.
7. I am agitated by the simplest things: mud on my shoe, a pile of unfolded laundry.
8. I believe that as you grow older what you fear diminishes to the specific, but doesn't grow smaller. From death to the lack of space for new china bowls in the kitchen cupboards. Both fears leave a feeling of helplessness, which shouldn't be belittled.
9. I miss snow the way the mayfly misses dying alone.
10. I want us to begin again, fragile and hesitant: here is your name on the palm of my hand. Here is my hand knocking on your body.

## **SOMEBODY TELL THE RIVER**

### **I.**

*It is just like water to surround me and still refuse to know me intimately.*

### **II.**

Somebody tell the river  
that I do not want it in our living room,  
that it can take back the fish  
it has left at our door.

Somebody tell the ocean  
that it is not welcome here,  
that I have not forgiven it  
for drowning me in '94.

Somebody tell the sea  
that I can write it in a story,  
and say, simply, *He saw the sea*,  
stripping it of its colour,  
its breathtaking glory.

This is how I avenge myself.  
Somebody tell the water  
to be careful. It is not the only thing  
that can kill without bruising.

### **III.**

At the age of six, my greatest joy was in the familiar. The sacks of rice and sugar, the small ticks on paper, the folded tables, the lunch boxes emptied of leftovers for the cat to feed on. One step following another, every day for many days, the tides coming in and leaving at their precise hours. This is where faith lies, with what is constant. It was raining

when you said you no longer know what to do with your life, when it came to my attention that we are sad. Where is the water when you need it, the swell that can rinse and heal, the waves that can buoy you up? Outside, singing against glass walls and tin roofs. Making a body lose its balance.

### **IV.**

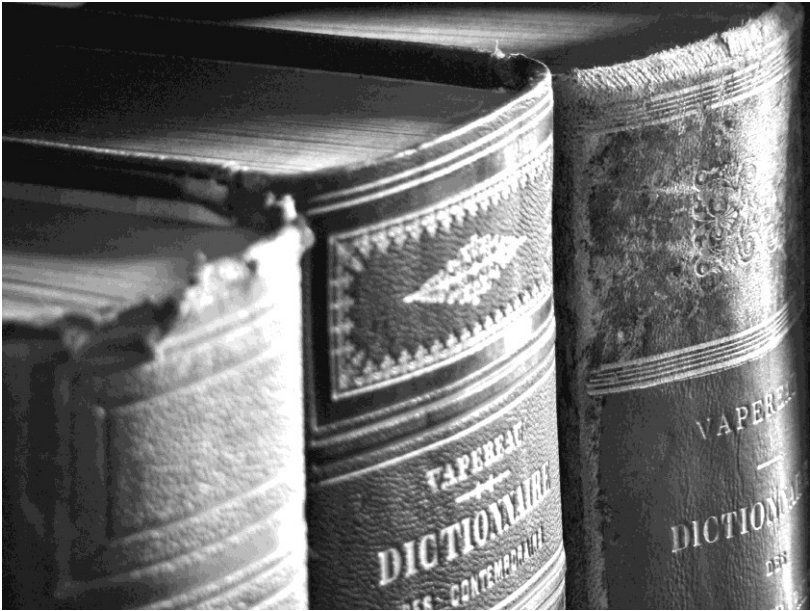
Q: Define an uncaring deity.

A:  
Omnipresent  
Endless  
Never dies  
Never answers

Q: Define water.

### ELEGY FOR THE LOST MINUTES

The woman with the wheelchair-bound husband is losing kindness in front of the elevators. We are standing in the car she has been waiting for for what seems like hours. We are thinking of inconsequential things – *sandwich, cookies, coffee, weekend* – clutching our wallets close to our chests, while the woman holds what's left of her kindness on the palm of her hand and lets it go. I thought patients are priority here, she screams the moment the doors open, and the elevator attendant offers her apologies, a kindness the size of a thimble. We are only capable of a little kindness: breakfast served promptly at seven in the morning, a window seat offered during the bus ride home. A touch of the hand, to signify commiseration. The woman looks at us with contempt. All of you people can walk, she says. Our hands are empty. *Here are our legs*, we wanted to say. But we are not kind enough.



*Image by Ivan Vicencio*

L Y N N   H O F F M A N

**AFTERLIVES – ALEXANDER PORTNOY**

I still get letters and I read each one  
tilting the pages in the bright Judean light.  
These days they say "thank you" or "you told  
the truth" or even "we are beyond that now, *alevai!*"

On the sunny terrace I conjure visions of my father.  
In my dream, he is loosed, unbound.  
Naked, slick, wintergreenish on the sweathouse bench.  
No suffocating shawl hides the cheerful vulgarity  
of this earnest, simple, careful, conventional man.

We talk, in these dreams, we sometimes cry  
for the sad frightened woman who pinched our lives  
while she choked her own. Her grandchildren may  
not understand the twisted grin with which their daddy said  
"Make yourself happy, but first make your self."

## **AFTERLIVES – BOND, JAMES BOND**

No longer with Her Majesty,  
I live handsomely none the less, on royalties,  
the movies, books, the occasional children's toy,  
they furnish a comfortable cottage in Cornwall.

John and I are a quiet couple.  
We've changed our names, our faces, our minds  
about the things that matter and the matter of things.  
I added a bulb and twist to my nose,  
time has puffed out the jaw, I surrendered my taste for gin.

John fixed his eyes, he paints, I knit.  
There are cats and a garden,  
for warmth there is Ibiza, for fun –  
Philadelphia and St Lo and when we leave  
the house, we have our secrets.

## **AFTERLIVES – DELORES HAZE (LOLITA)**

It was Lo in the morning? No.  
It was high in the morning, higher  
still in the afternoon, chasing butterflies'  
reflections, the higher hire of his lowing.

His ass in jail, he put a spin, spun a tail  
that followed him right up his end.  
His story makes me pukelaugh.  
He stole my this, he killed my that  
What bull! That stupid, stuffy cow.

Of all my men, he was the leastest  
blindest, thickest, soaring-boringest,  
my *On The Road* toad.  
He didn't take much time to kill  
mom, the man and him then us.



*Image by "Craitza"*



## CAR LIFE

He gets into the car. Waits for his wife. He always waits for her like this. He prefers to wait in the car. In the driver's seat. At the controls. Ready for the getaway. It's what he's used to. What he always did, back when he had things to do. For Them.

He slots the key in the ignition, turns it half way. Lights blink. A voice speaks from the dash: Kerry's dad has called to say there's stationary traffic on the A3 where it joins the M1 outside Lisburn...

He drives to work. Low sun blinds him. Winks off a stone chip like a disco ball. He counts the numbers down: 12... 11... 10... 9...

He drives home from work. Dark country roads punctuated by dual white spears of light.

Bastards! Get your high beams off.

The lay-by drops away from the road to the left. The lay-by where They'd meet him. Brief him. Give him what he needed: orders, tools, a hood, a gun. No one uses it now. 'Cept him. He swings the wheel, pulls the car up in the shelter of trees dark and stiff like petrified corpses. Drops the seat back down. Unzips his fly.

He parks in his garage. Old habits. Safe habits. Redundant now; no more reprisals. Not since They signed the deal. He cuts the engine. Listens with a bleeding heart to the rumbles that fall and die. Opens the door and gets out. Smells the heat. Sweat pricks in his crotch.

He drives the babysitter home at eleven. Keeps his hand on the gear lever. Only inches from her bare knee. She chats away. He feels his belt cinched tight, his gut spilling over it. She giggles. He imagines turning left not right. Taking her to Their lay-by, now his. Getting her in the back. Dragging her panties down over her thighs, over her cowboy boots. Turns right. Drops her at home safe and sound.

He drives to work. Rain pelts the windscreen, battering the glass. Making him blink. He counts the numbers down: 12... 11... 10... 9...

He drives home from work. A bruised sky hovers above. His knuckles, tight on the steering wheel, not bruised. Pulls into his lay-by. Climbs into the back. Stretches out. Recalls the babysitter. Her mini-skirt. Her cowboy boots. The lace panties he hopes she wears. Unzips his fly.

He waits to gun the engine. Here she comes. His wife. She gets in beside him.

Put your seatbelt on.

He does it for a quiet life.

Sure, don't drive so fast.

He slows. Drives according to the posted limits. He doesn't drive it like he stole it. Because he hasn't. Doesn't. Anymore.

He takes her to the supermarket. Waits in the car. Retunes the radio. Takes her to her mother's when she's shopped. Waits in the car. Reads the paper. "Girl's body found wrapped in bin-bag in grandmother's attic". New news, not like the old news. Only one dead. Good old fashioned murder. That's all now.

He takes his wife home when she's visited.

Leave the car out, I'll need it for bingo.

He has to park in the drive. He locks the doors. It'll be alright. They've all put up Their bombs and Their guns and gone home for tea.

He sits in the traffic. Red lights flash off/on-off/on out of sync. He puts the car in neutral. The engine idles. He idles. Reaches over to the glove box. Flips the handle. Fumbles inside. Finds the packet. Depresses the cigarette lighter. Forgets that it's knackered. Puts the packet back. Sighs.

He collects the mother-in-law from church. Brings her home for dinner. Wonders how she tastes. Too tough. Lets her out on the drive. Parks in the garage. Old habits. Good habits. Just in case. He cuts the engine. Listens with a bleeding heart to the rumbles that fall and die. Opens the door and gets out. Smells the heat. Tugs at his crotch. Goes in for dinner.

He collects the babysitter. She gets in the back, lolls out on the seat. Her boyfriend gets in the front. Next to him. A sharp lad. Crew cut. Heavy boots. Harp inked on his neck. Helps himself to the radio. Finds a rock station. Cocky young lad. Just Their type back when...

What's this so, 1.6? Fuel injection, so? Sure, good for a getaway, eh?

He brings them home. Waits in the car. For his wife. For their night out, her on the gin, him on the shandy.

Driving, so I am.

He drives to work. Wind bundles the car about. He tightens his grip. Knuckles clean, white scars like snail trails over them. He rides out the storm. Doesn't bother to count the numbers: 12... 11... 10... 9...

He doesn't drive home after work. He drives down town. Finds her on a corner. Asks her price. Asks her to sit in the back. Asks if her panties are lace.

He sees the road block. A van. Two cars. A motorbike. Blues and twos.

His heart races. Tell them nowt.

Just an overturned caravan. Nothing to worry about, sir. If you could just turn around there, sir.

They don't want to pat him down. Shoot questions at him. He doesn't even have to get out of the car. Some things are better. Easier.

He passes the lay-by. Doesn't turn in. Sweat's cold on his back, under his arms. Sticky. He remembers the old days. Drives slowly. With greedy pleasure.

He parks in the garage. Cuts the engine. Listens with a bleeding heart to the rumbles that fall and die. Opens the door and gets out. Smells the heat. Looks hungrily at the back seat. Presses himself up against the door. Grinds into it. Wonders if his wife is out.

He rubs it down with a soft rag. Caressees the curves, trails his fingers over the rises and falls of the body. Strokes softly. Breathes heavily. Is glad he has to drive to work tomorrow.

He drives to work. There's no interesting weather feature that day. He doesn't use the motorway. There are no numbers to count on B roads.

He drives home from work. On the way he stops at a services. Buys a dirty magazine. Has to double back to his lay-by. Crawls into the back seat, mag in one hand, torch in the other. Batteries are flat. He buries the magazine under the front seat. Recalls the babysitter. Unzips his fly.

He sits in the car. Waits for his wife. Chants the mantra: your hair looks nice. Thumbs the paper. Ogles the third-page titties. Reads new news. Remembers old news.

He drives his wife home. Her hair doesn't look nice. It looks expensive. A hairspray fog masks the tang of petrol, even with the window down. She makes him put it up.

The wind'll ruin my do.

He lets her out on the drive. She dashes for the house. He lets the engine idle.

He passes a crash. Vectra and Focus, nose to tail. Crumpled. Coppers. Paramedics. Fire crew. Ambulance parked up skew-whiff not for nothing. He wants to see what it hides. Slows to a crawl. Cop waves him through.

He hits a cat. It runs out in front of him. Bloody wee shite. Jolts the car. He keeps going. Heads for the carwash. Rollers crush over him. He doesn't have the stomach for cleaning up blood these days.

There's light at the end of the tunnel but it's only the same old day. Just enough distance left. He unzips his fly.

He takes the babysitter home. She doesn't chat tonight.

Are you alright, love?

She cries.

How's about a drink, love?

He drives to a pub. Not his local. Gets her a double. Gets himself a single. Just enough to take the edge off. Gets her another. Gets himself cheese and onion crisps. Gets two more doubles. Tips one inside the other. Gives her the glass. Lights his first cigarette in three months.

He helps her into the car. Into the back. Drives to his lay-by. Cuts the engine. Tree corpses crowd round him. Ghosts. Memories. Rose-coloured. Withered.

He gets in the back with her. Lifts her skirt. Tugs down her panties. Pink. Stretchy. No lace. Buries them under the front seat. Drives her home. Leaves her at the corner. Drives himself home. Parks in the garage. Old habits. Looks hungrily at the back seat. Presses himself against the door. Grinds into it. Sighs. Goes inside.

He drives to work.

He drives to work.

He drives to work.

He drives to work.

He drives to work.

He forgets about the magazine. He forgets about the panties. He doesn't forget about the babysitter. But he only remembers what he wants to remember. Always he only remembers what he wants to remember.

It's dark. He wipes himself off on a soft cloth he finds under the front seat.

He piles the cases into the boot.

Taking a trip?

His wife watches from the bedroom window.

Aye, but business, like, you know.

He gets into the car. Slots the key in the ignition. Gets away from home.  
He stops at the motel. Has to park out in the open. Takes one case from  
the boot. Leaves the other. Checks in. Goes to the bar. Orders a large one.

Ya alright, pal?

Bloody wife, bloody threw me out. Bitch.

Playing away, were ya, so?

He bites his tongue. Drowns his sorrows. Doesn't clock the harp inked  
on the barman's neck, the stomp of his heavy boots.

Barman takes his keys.

Don't want you doing owt daft, do we? ABS's fuck all use if you're  
pissed as a rat.

He doesn't remember anything.

He checks out. Gets his car keys from reception. Remembers the barman.  
Sharp lad. Cocky. Type They were always on the look-out for. Type he was  
once. Nothing for his sort now. 'Cept maybe the Dissidents and they're a  
fucking bad joke.

He goes to his car. It's been parked out all night. Poor baby. He  
hesitates. Wonders. But the carpark's full of comings and goings. And nobody  
checks underneath anymore.

He gets in. Slots the key in the ignition. Thinks about his drive to work.  
The numbers he'll have to count down: 12... 11... 10... 9... Turns the key.  
Hurtles skyward in a thousand bloody fragments.

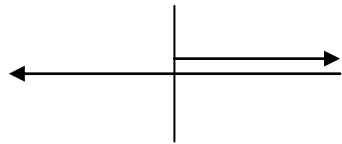


*Image by Maurizio Carta*

POINT ↔ NULL

I tried to kill my reflection, tried to kill the bastard, by counting the paces from the mirror to the middle of the street, walking back twice that distance and waiting for a car to pass. I think the driver was listening to something by Vampire Weekend, but that's not really what's at stake here. I heard the thud of the vehicle passing over the body. Ran back to find him dead in the middle of the street. Dragged his body to the mirror. Dammit, there were three reflections now. The mirror breeds an ill symmetry. Thus, he refuses to die, even when I let slip his lifeless body to the tiled floor with another thud. The third reflection does likewise, lets the second body fall out of view. Gone.

Reflection 1: A reflection (deceased)  
 Reflection 2: A reflection of a reflection (stillborn)  
 Reflection 3: A reflection (?)



And when I die, there will always be at least one remaining. Because when I die, my final reflection will close his eyes, half-homage half-mockery, with me. But even when I'm buried in the darkness, he will live on, even if he leaves the mirror forever. Because, though he closes his eyes, and though he may be lowered into the ground symmetrically, he will only be napping, or pretending to nap. And if he leaves the mirror, he could leave the coffin. And if he can manoeuvre between two mirrors, to create a million more reflections, he can find life in infinite regression, spiralling into a point beyond null, beyond the weight of gravity and the necessity of space, no longer the lone reflection bearing the weight of a cigarette scar.

Only one time did I in a worse state his back to me, counter, smoking a noticed me, he pale as myself, (in my exact the clove that sat counter, not mine. I my face; he had a face. I reached out counter where the opened my palm, the cold tile. His burning cigarette.

The reflection of a reflection is just another reflection

catch my reflection than myself. He'd sitting on the clove. When he stood up looking following my gaze manner, no less) to burning on his had a sick grin on sick grin on his for the spot on my clove would be, and planted it on landed on the He has one more scar than I.

**ITS**

**TAIL IN FRIGHT**

At 22 I forgot what it  
meant  
                  to be sober  
without a drink in hand

At 20 I forgot how to hate  
my father       never  
knew I did

At 23 I forgot the lizard  
                  sheds its tail  
                  in fright  
only to  
regrow  
it





*Image by "nahuel1992"*

## WHERE THERE'S SMOKE

You're eighteen and have just finished your first semester at an expensive liberal arts college in Vermont. You're back in Minnesota for Christmas. Your parents are sixty miles away at the outlet mall, buying discounted Gap hoodies for your many cousins. You refused to go, claiming a sore throat. It's twelve fifteen. You have just put a pan of cookies in the oven.

You'll soon be in the worst pain you've ever experienced, several orders of magnitude above your occasional menstrual cramps, headaches triggered by perfume, and the time you broke your wrist at Disneyland. The pain will carve out a new space inside you, one you can crawl into when you need a rest.

You lie on the overstuffed, striped love seat with a view of the driveway, waiting for the oven timer to sound. To your right is a piano that hasn't been tuned in twenty years. You keep a finger on one of the white keys, a high, shrill note, because that's what you can reach. Every thirty seconds, you push it down and wait for the sound to fade. You are interested in those last moments of sound before silence, the exact boundary between the two things.

You would have unfurled the curtains but you like the warmth of the sunlight through the glass. It bakes your face and forearms, making you sleepy and slightly nauseous. Outside, it's ten degrees. You saw a family of deer earlier. Their eyes were blank orbs; their nostrils spilled steam. They poked their noses under the snow and then ran off, startled by something you couldn't see. This is a snow-blanketed land of farmhouses and spindly trees. You are contained in a snow globe, waiting to be shook.

A UPS van circles, once, twice. Then it backs into your parents' driveway.

Last night at a gas station, you stood in the beer cooler with a man who wouldn't stop staring at you. Late twenties, topaz eyes, orange hunting jacket. He asked where you lived, what your parents did. His stance was stiff, and he spoke carefully, slowly enough to unnerve you. You gave him your phone number because he reminded you of someone from your dorm whom you find attractive. By the transitive property of lust, you found this man attractive, too.

When the UPS truck comes, you wait just long enough that you can no longer run upstairs and hide; he has seen you. He gets out of the truck. He is wearing a black parka, jeans, work boots. You are embarrassed to be wearing

no makeup, but at least you are fully dressed, in jeans and an oversized wool sweater.

You and the man look at each other through one of the small, square windows in the door. He's about your height. Blue eyes. You pause with your hand on the brass door handle. When you were in first grade, a tall fireman dressed in full fireman gear came to your class and taught you about fire safety. Feel the doorknob, he said, and if it's hot, don't open the door.

The handle is cold. You open the door.

The man kicks it in and it knocks you backward. Your head hits the wall behind you. You try to stand up, and he punches you in the mouth, then blindfolds you and ties your hands behind your back.

He doesn't bother with a gag. You couldn't scream loud enough for anyone to hear you. Even the deer are far away now, over the ridge.

Footsteps pitter-patter around you. Men's voices. The smell of cigarettes. They are boxing things up, putting them on the truck. They put you on the truck last. You flail and kick, and are shoved against the side of the truck.

Your arm has been pulled out of its socket. The pain tunnels through you. You can think of nothing else. You're composed wholly of tortured sinew.

Someone runs his hands over you, inspecting. He pops your shoulder back into its socket. You are grateful.

You bump along in the truck, which smells comfortingly of cardboard. You roll around, cultivating bruises, before managing to wedge yourself in a corner. Every few hours, the truck stops. Someone pets your hair and coos.

The shoulder was one thing; it persists as a nagging ache, like when you've left something at home but can't remember what. The worst pain is yet to come, in childbirth.

You live with the five men in the gymnasium of a burned-down school in Ontario. The windows are all broken. Birds nest in the eaves. The men always say they're going to shoot the birds, but so far they haven't.

You've been with them almost a year. You know from the changing of seasons; it's getting cold again. You hunker down at night in a sleeping bag with the topaz-eyed man, whose child you carry. He claims his name is Phoenix, but you heard the other men call him Brad.

During the day, they go hunting with your father's guns. You are left alone in the gym with the fluttering birds.

They bring in a midwife who only speaks French. You suspect she does know English, but refuses to speak it with you. She gives you commands

accompanied by broad hand gestures. She is always knitting, and seems annoyed when she has to stop and tend to you.

Through the distorting haze of pain, like a wall of gas fumes, you suddenly remember the cookies you were baking the day they took you. You wonder how long the cookies stayed in the oven. Did they burst into flame? Could the curling fingernails of fire have crept from the oven and strangled the house?

Here's what happened that day. Your parents returned with bags of hoodies along with presents for you, which they hid in the garage behind bags of salt for the water conditioner. On entering the house, they smelled the smoke and heard the chirp of the oven timer. Because all things must happen in order, your parents first turned the oven off. What were once cookies were now shrivelled black discs that collapsed, when touched, into powder. Were they oatmeal chocolate chip, or regular chocolate chip? Did they contain nuts? No one could tell, because you put the ingredients away.

The ash coated everything in the kitchen. The tops of the fan blades wore black fur. The walls and the wood of the cabinets bore an acrid smell, a faint sheen of ash, long after your parents moved to escape the memory of you.



*Image by Petr Kovar*

H E I D I J A M E S

## **THE POINTS OF THE KITE**

The points of the kite tilt to the ground  
Turn and turn, air supports and then  
Neglects  
Allows a collapse before collecting  
Up the wings and fragile framework, again.  
Tethered, it must land, it must return  
We watch, a small crowd  
Smoking cadged fags, mouths full of cheap cider  
Swigged back, heads tipped up,  
Eyes narrowed, watching a sky the colour of washing up water  
The clouds like dirty suds  
He took her hand  
Not mine, with bitten nails  
and said, "Want a go?"  
She put on the leather glove  
He whistled a high-pitched command  
Flicking the limp body of a chick, greasy yellow with death  
Not Easter fluffy  
Over her fist. Overhead  
The kite circles as if considering  
Whether or not to make a run for it  
I would if I had wings  
I wouldn't hang around here, watching  
Him nuzzle her neck  
Giggle giggle giggle as the huge bird  
Bolts in wings folding claws extended landing on her gloved fist with a  
Shove  
The sound of feathers rustling like a newspaper shook out to be read

He puts it back  
On a perch in a box in his van. Its eyes covered with a fancy hood  
She sits up front with him, his hand on her pale leg  
The rest of us  
Cram in  
Around the boxed bird  
For the drive back home

"I know someone with a gun,"  
I say  
No one answers, but close their eyes and doze over  
The bumps in the road  
"He's old enough to be my dad," she said earlier  
When I asked if she fancied him.  
"Yes," I said, "I s'pose so."

## STANDING

Standing,  
looking out over the gardens and flat, tar paper roof of the council office  
her chest pressed against the rail  
her coffee cup a warm curve in her palm  
the high whine of the spin dryer  
drowning out  
the love songs of pigeons  
and the school kids mustering  
in the playground  
she hopes this time it will work out.  
She steps off the balcony  
into the lounge  
the sun pooling on the leather sofa  
a small patch  
fading faster, nothing lasts, is undone  
a process of dilapidation.  
Time gathers and culminates  
around the objects  
in the room  
as quick as knives, quick as mirth.  
In the bedroom, he sleeps flat as  
a blank page  
mouth open sucking air in  
huffing out  
a surprise of teeth – white – a full set  
brown eyes  
like an animal, thin light hair rises from flesh  
I'm done with all the trouble  
he said  
All of it, she asked  
All of it, all of it  
How long for this time?  
For good  
Can I come home now?  
And she let him in  
because he looked clean



and it'd been a while  
and because she missed  
him  
despite it all.  
Last chance, she said,  
And I mean it this time.

## **LIVING HERE**

Next door smokes too much,  
he coughs and coughs all night  
hacking up phlegm and spewing in the morning  
Downstairs likes reggae  
Upstairs, he gets pissed and handy with the missus on a Saturday night  
and two floors up  
They like a drink and a party, but not that often  
They're alright  
usually  
And the old bird with the spotty dog who sometimes says hello and sometimes  
sniffs and whispers "Slag"  
just depends  
and the bloke  
That pisses in the lift  
And the good boys that smile and hold the doors open  
When you've got loads of shopping  
that sell skunk on the fourth floor  
and nice quiet family from Africa somewhere  
You see 'em going to church on Sunday in bright cotton clothes  
And the alkie fat woman that knocks her kids around  
in public  
and calls 'em cunts  
And the girl who threw herself off the 7th floor  
They never mended that cracked paving slab  
where she landed  
And the junkie who died on our stairs  
we stepped over to get to work  
because, who would know the difference between sleeping and dying,  
just from looking?



*Image by Colin Brough*

**REM**

*"REM" first appeared in Inklings.*

I am forever making an entrance,  
bumping into empty spaces:  
vacant lodge, the room with one bed,  
the darkened waterpark, and the house  
where I killed.  
my heart beats sideways, paper doll, paper thin,  
as I suction myself across  
the creamy landscape, reading locations.  
inside the room – a bed,  
suspended mid-air,  
a spiral staircase springs up to meet it,  
and the little girl  
is sometimes there,  
tries to remember my name,  
sees me slithering across the board.  
on my way out.  
in between the rafters of waking,  
I split myself into a pair of eyes,  
bulging, waiting.

## **MAGDALENE**

I have often heard about phantom limbs  
how they ache upon you  
like some lost relative,  
begging to have their cups washed,  
another piece of toast.

the body remembers  
when running was simple:  
the minutia of each muscle contracting  
against cold light, the art of forgetfulness.  
no looking over one's shoulder, like Lot's wife,  
to see the flames licking souls dry.

when I rammed my unholy frame  
right into your feet, tears split down my eyes  
and I felt the breaking, cracked glass, stained light,  
blessed the new hollowed place  
where you would be buried.

wounds eventually draw themselves in;  
I keep your memory swept up  
the back of my neck, piled behind the mind.  
only when I walk forward  
can I detect the slight limp  
the unwanted halt, the forever leaning  
against your shadow.

## **DROUGHT**

there is comfort in winter, snow-peaked  
crescent moons, the cold bitten skin  
on hands; an icing over of bad summers.  
we expect a certain consistency regarding seasons,  
a dying when the time is right, the pleasant aspect  
of going numb, sleet and madness.

but this winter is different, warmer.  
no freezing rain pelts my face or forces  
my head down in submission,  
no wind to drive the body  
back under heavy quilt where  
I shed all my scales, smooth myself  
back into the shell.

instead, a strange sun bullies  
across the sky, blinds me with its insolence.  
I hurl sweaters aside, leaving  
their comforted bulk and thick weave  
for a flimsy shirt, arms bare and the elbows  
dark and patched. I am misplaced,  
standing under the wrong day,  
and the night is far worse, a nocturnal desert  
which sweats me out by three AM.  
my dreams, though, are spiked with icicles,  
dirty-white and hanging like daggers above the bed.  
each morning I wake,  
my eyes pierced with water.



*Image by Evgeniy Lukyanov*

## C O N T R I B U T O R S

**Sam Frankl** is twenty-two years old and works on a construction site off the Walworth Road. He writes for *London Word* periodically in their "Speaker's Corner" section, and regularly contributes to *Le Cool's* weekly listings. Last week he completed the first draft of a novel he has been working on since the end of the summer.

**Eliza Victoria** is the author of *Lower Myths* (Flipside Publishing, 2012), *The Viewless Dark* (Flipside Publishing, 2012), and the short story collection *A Bottle of Storm Clouds* (Visprint, 2012). Her fiction and poetry have appeared in several online and print publications in the Philippines and elsewhere. For more information, visit [elizavictoria.com](http://elizavictoria.com).

**Lynn Hoffman** is from Brooklyn and lives in Philadelphia. He is the author of *The Short Course In Beer*. He leads wine and beer tastings, but most of the time he just loafes and fishes.

**Tracey Icton** is an English teacher and creative writing tutor. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Newcastle University, was winner of the Writers Block NE "Home Tomorrow" short story competition and a shortlisted finalist for the 2012 Bristol Short Story Prize with her piece "Apple Shot". Her publication credits include; *Litro*, *Tears In The Fence*, *Ride Magazine*, *The Yellow Room* and the *Brisbane Courier Mail*. She is currently working on her third novel – part two of a trilogy on the Troubles in Ireland – while working on publishing part one, *Green Dawn At St Enda's*, in time for Easter 2016. She can be contacted through the Society Of Authors.

**Michael Frazer** is currently a PhD candidate at Auburn University. Mostly working in postmodern fiction centred on the Southern Californian landscape and the Orange County locale, he also explores and experiments with other genres in writing and electronic music production. Because Postmodernism is play. Some of his forthcoming work will appear in *Used Gravitrons* and *Kudzu Review*.

**Kate Folk** is from Iowa and now lives in San Francisco. She has an MFA in fiction from the University of San Francisco. Her work has been published in *PANK* and *Bartleby Snopes*, among other magazines. Visit her at [www.katefolk.com](http://www.katefolk.com).

**Heidi James's** novel *Wounding* will be published by Bluemoose Books in 2014. Her novella *The Mesmerist's Daughter* (published by Apis Books) was launched in July 2007. Her novel *Carbon*, was published by Blatt in October 2009. *Carbon* is currently being made into a film by British film company, Institute For Eyes. Her essays and short stories have appeared in various publications and anthologies including *Dazed And Confused*, *Next Level*, *Flux*, *Brand*, *The Independent*, *Undercurrent*, *3:AM London*, *New York*, *Paris*, *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, *Full Moon Empty Sports Bag*, and *Pulp.net*. She has an MA in Creative Writing and a PhD in English Literature.

**Nancy Hightower** has had poems published in *The New York Quarterly*, *storySouth*, *Big Muddy*, *The Cresset*, *Strange Horizons*, and *Liquid Imagination*, among others. She has also had fiction published in *Word Riot*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Bourbon Penn*, *Prime Number Magazine*, and work forthcoming in *Gargoyle*.

**Andrew Shoemaker** is an American photographer based in Southern California. Originally from Lincoln, NE, he specializes in Landscape, Waterscape and Nature photography in the American Southwest. His website is [www.andrewshoemakerphotography.com](http://www.andrewshoemakerphotography.com).