

The Writer's Block Literary Magazine

Volume 4 Syzygy

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Syzygy: The Writer's Block Literary Magazine, Spring 2019

The Writer's Block

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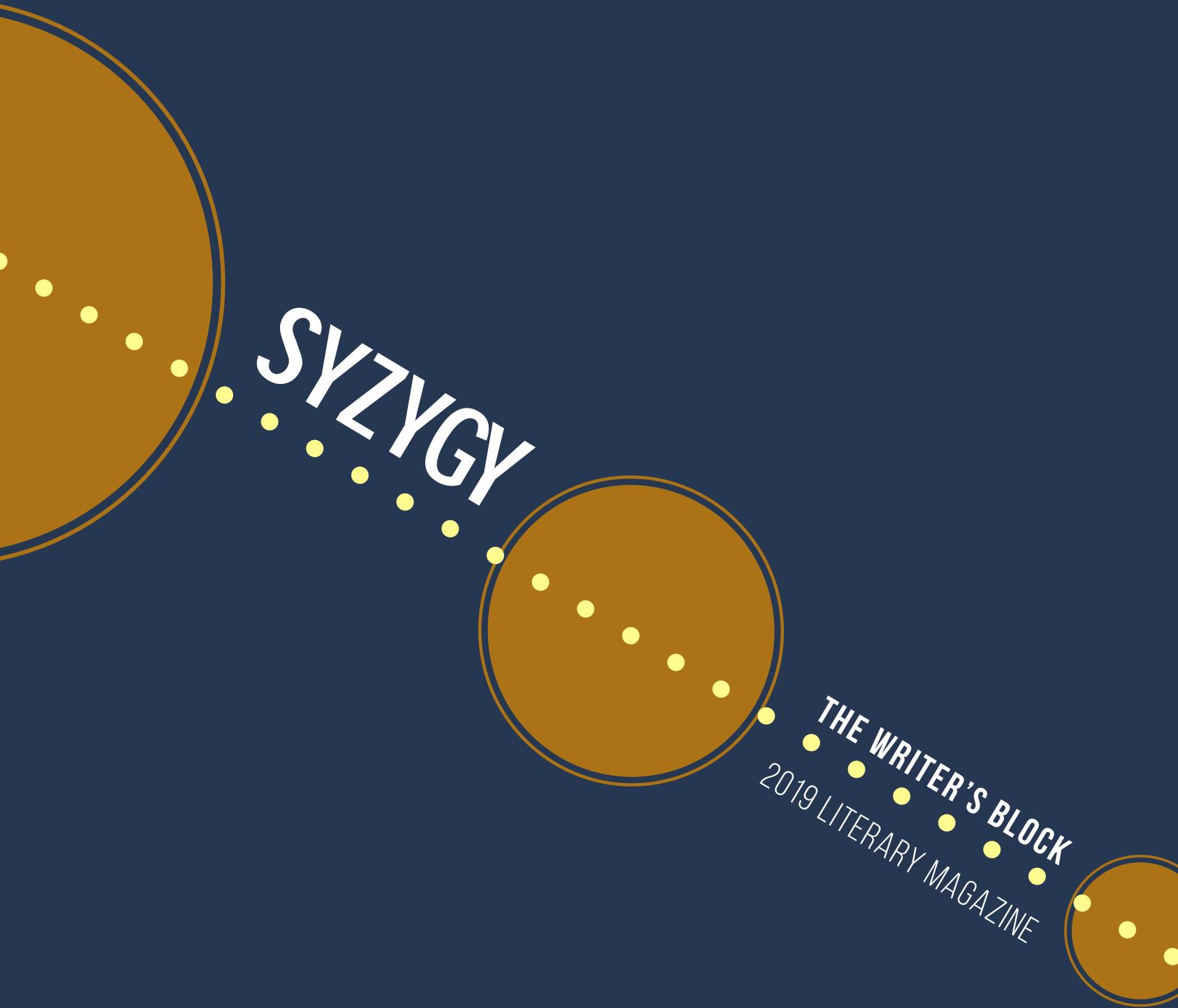
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THE WRITER'S BLOCK

LITERARY MAGAZINE

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE
SPRING 2019

FOUNDED IN 2013, the Writer's Block has rapidly grown to become the University of Alabama in Huntsville's premiere writing organization. Creative students of all majors are welcome to attend our meetings to improve their creative skills, share and gain feedback on their written works, and (most importantly) have lots of fun. The Writer's Block publishes an issue of its literary magazine every school year featuring creative works of the students and community of University of Alabama in Huntsville.

THE WRITER'S BLOCK

LITERARY MAGAZINE

SPRING 2019

SPECIAL THANKS TO
OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS



LOVE AND THANKS TO
OUR ADVISOR,
DR. SUSAN FRIEDMAN



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A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT:

Dear Reader,

As you flip through the many pages of this magazine, I want it to be known that it was built by those who believed in the power that art & creative writing have to bring people together. Beginning with Jessica Lockett and her team in 2015, this magazine burst into life and poured itself out over campus. The creative passion from this magazine inspired other artists and authors to come forward, regardless of their career related field, and continue on in the pursuit of creative excellence.

We stand to say that no matter who you are, what color your skin is, what sexual orientation you are, what religion you follow, where you grew up, what your first language is, or what major you study in, you are always welcome here at The Writer's Block. Let your experiences push your passions forward, and never let anyone hold you back from being the person you know you can be.

The members of The Writer's Block organization want to highlight the wonderful people who make this magazine possible. From the students who sent their submissions in, to the jury members that took their time to find the best pieces, to the editing team that scoured the lines of passages, to our graphic designer who put it all together, to our wonderful faculty advisor Dr. Susan Friedman, to our officers and club members, and also to you, our readers, who enjoy and believe in this magazine, we thank you. Without you, none of this would be possible.

We are proud to present to you, Syzygy, the fifth annual Writer's Block Literary Magazine.

Sincerely,

Mary Grace Byram

President of The Writer's Block (2017-2019)

APOTHEOSIS

IKE FORRESTER

In essence, you are the stars above the horizon
Formulated from free floating phantoms of wonder
Bound to be chased by poets and dreamers
Desperate to hold the heavens 'twixt greedy fingers
Shadow-box figures of still life surrealism
Brought to reality through your gentle glow.



WELCOME TO THE SHOW

TRINA



Home was never some pretty brick building,
But waves lapping against my feet instead.
The gulls' cries echoing through the air.
Sand like silk beneath my toes.
A salty breeze playing with my hair.
The beauty of it all bringing me peace.

The sea has a song only some can hear.
A lullaby for those who wish to listen.
I am lucky enough to be amongst them.
I am lucky enough to hear the sea's voice.
It's a voice that calls for me to come home.
To dance and walk and live amongst the waves.

It shall be a love that lasts through the ages,
Me and the sea and the sun and the shore.
There is only one thing I wish for in this life:
That I may wake each day to the ocean's roar.
Perhaps I shall spend my life intoxicated;
Drunk on the sea and its endless horizon.

HOME

JOSIE SMITH



FLOAT

TRINA

TINMAN

AUTUMN SCHREINER



.....

A devil once walked the earth,
and from him, humanity came,
and we struck him down.
He choked on his laughter,
because he knew.
The devil is dead.
There is only us now.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

OFFSPRING

KATRIELLE WULFF

1888

KERRI BALLANCE

I was born of blood and death. I didn't know my mother, but I did know her pimp. He was a disgusting little man, his grubby mitts fumbling with everything he saw. Said after I came out, she just kept bleeding, said they couldn't stop it, so they chunked her weighted corpse into the Thames. He told me that, as she lay there dying, she named me Carin (pronounced Ca-ren, for you educated dandies who NEVER pronounce my name right). I made him tell me that story, over and over again. He said I scared him, said it wasn't natural that I should enjoy hearing it. But I did. He kept threatening to have me carted off to Bedlam, formally called Bethlem Royal Hospital, famous for its...care of the...patients. I knew he wouldn't send me off; I was too useful. As an innocent child, I could convince the younger Detective Inspectors, no matter what they had seen the girls doing, that nothing was going on that was against the law. I could weave the sweetest, most moving, sob stories about how the girls had given up their life of crime to care for me after my poor, dearly departed mother perished at my birth. The more senior Inspectors didn't care; they were helping to keep the girls employed. But the newer Inspectors actually believed my stories, gullible fools. I left all that, years ago. I taught myself how to dress and talk like a boy so that I could actually earn an "honest living." There's no honesty in what I do...but no one cares. I...procure bodies for the doctors to cut up and study. I don't know what they think they're going to learn. But what do I care? It pays the bills and I so enjoy my work. At first, I'd prowl around the

alleyways, looking for fools who'd overdosed on opium, or over indulged in drink; they were easy enough to find. But the doctors got tired of overdoses; they wanted bodies that had died of more... creative ways. I have no idea how they could tell an overdose from any other problem, but somehow, they could. So I had to get more creative, by any means necessary. I started practicing with live drunks no one would miss; the lazy, prostitute-beating ones were the simplest marks. My first kill was so easy; he didn't even budge when I slipped the knife into his chest--just gushed some blood, so much blood. I was drenched from head to toe in a matter of moments. The blood gave my shirt a nice crimson pattern that I'm rather fond of. After him, I got more bold. I'd attack almost anyone in an alleyway. And the more that I killed, the more I enjoyed slicing the throat, giving people the smile in death that they never had in life. There's something about the skin on the throat that makes the loveliest sound when I slice it. And, of course, there's always the challenge to see how deep I can get my blade to rake across; I've found that the deeper I cut, the tougher it is to pull through, but I've always enjoyed a challenge. I know, I should have been more careful and selective with my victims, but I didn't care. The blood felt so good on my skin, especially in winter. Of all the months to hunt, December is my favorite. The way the warm, steaming blood drops on my chilled skin...there's nothing like it. But, sadly, most doctors require bodies, fresh bodies, in the spring; winter hunting was a rare opportunity. But it was a good system: the doctors paid me for the fresh meat, and the Detective Inspectors were none the wiser about the killer on their streets. Until Friday 31 August 1888, when London awoke and realized they had a monster in their midst. Just for the record, I didn't kill those women. I had never even met them; they lived in a different part of Whitechapel than me. Oh wait. You're likely American; you have no

idea what I'm talking about. I'm talking about 1888, the year that Jack the Ripper arrived in London. He had a habit of slicing up broads in the messiest way possible, he slit their throats then cut out some of their organs. And, I gotta admit, even though I didn't agree with his choice of prey, I admired his style. The way that he would slice open their throats, perfection; he was an artist unlike any other. Removing their organs was kinda dumb; it cuts down on the sale value to the doctors but hey! Who am I to judge? He went through five broads in a matter of three months. Even I don't usually go through that many bodies that fast. But I loved those three months. Stalking the night, wondering if I was going to be next, knowing I was not alone in my monstrosity... And then there were the letters. OH. Even now, all these months later, I can still barely contain my glee when I think of them...

I happened by my old haunt a few days ago. Saw Mum's pimp, still as wormy and disgusting as ever, but he looked nervous and torn, like he was debating something, and that made me curious. I shoved him against a wall, knife to his throat, and growled,

"Talk." He squeaked like the rat he is and stammered, his teeth chattering. "I know something that you might be interested in."

"Oh? Do tell," I said, my eyes narrowing.

"I heard th-th-that you had an interest in The Ripper," he stammered.

I smiled, put my knife away, smoothed his collar and purred, "Says who?"

His eyes about popped out of his head as he backtracked, "N-nn-no one. I-ii-I just thought"-- I sneered, "We both know thinking's never been your strong suit."

He blurted, "Your daddy's Jack the Ripper." I glared at him. "What makes you say that?"

"I heard some of the girls talking about your mum's best client--"

"So...what you're telling me...is that...you've wasted my valuable time. Because, if the girls

really thought I was related to Jack, they'd be heading for America as fast as they could. Which means, you're lying to me." I stared him in the eye, daring him to say something. Then, I walked away. Annoying as he was, he was a fixture whose absence would be noticed. I wandered along, thinking. What if Jack were my father? Even I had to admit to the similarities between our kills, between our victims... most people wouldn't miss them. Would it be so crazy if we were related? It would explain a lot about me. But, do I want that explained? That thing that sets me apart from the masses? I love that thing; since I yielded myself up, gave myself over to it, I've been making a living off it. But you already knew that. And you don't really care. So I'll skip to the part that you might care about. I've accepted and thrill in the idea of Jack as my father.

Sadly, since Jack brought so much attention to Whitechapel, I've decided to move to America, to be with family. The girls recently showed me Mother's letters to her brother, a doctor by the name of Herman Webster Mudgett. I must admit I'm sad to be leaving my hunting ground, but I can't hunt if I'm in prison. Signed,

Carin

Daughter of Jack the Ripper

Hi there. You should know that it's...been a few years. I would like to inform you that my uncle is an absolutely charming fellow, with a nasty penchant for lying. His wives are nice women, his children are lovely, and OH right! He also kills people! Surprising, isn't it?

His most famous alias was H. H. Holmes. He admitted to killing twenty-seven people! Except...the police, as you call them, could only verify nine kills, though they believe he killed more, possibly as many as 200! And several of the people he claimed to have killed were still very much alive. Who knows?

While it probably is dreadful to be related to his victims, I certainly feel better. As a child, I used to wonder why I enjoyed killing, but eventually I stopped caring. But now I know; I couldn't help but enjoy it. I got a killer's instinct from both sides of my family, and they, unlike me, enjoy the public eye.

After my uncle was arrested, I decided to find a less on-edge hunting ground. I've heard of cities on the east coast so large even the locals get lost. A perfect place to reestablish myself. We shall simply have to wait and see whether you hear more from me.

But remember, reader dear: I still enjoy my winter hunts....

DROOLING

DOKUSA



LEFTOVER SPACES

EMMA KIRKLAND

I live in leftover spaces
like birds in a nest of
last year's feathers
crusted over and forgotten
like the stagnation of
a parent's dreams and
desperate clinging to new life.

They call me useless material
mismatched like straw and silk,
torn fabric from an old sweater
like old memories refurbished-
no longer useless.

I live in leftover spaces
in a world clogged up
by faces whose worth
is measured up against
the constant dripping of time
onto the cave floor of life:

They act as if it matters where you land.

I live in leftover space
because I like the way emptiness
is so easily redeemable:
 there's no renovation to be
 done in something so bare.
Just room for more
useless material
to congregate and be made new.



It's said, "Democracy dies in the darkness", as if Her light does gently fade

However, it is not at night Dictators parade

No, Democracy dies in the light of day, for all to see.

She dies as her citizens crowd the colosseum in glee.

Breathing Her last as the Guillotine's blade raises higher.

Choking as books burn on Her funeral pyre.

Her Founder's words all forgotten.

A tomb ready for Her and Her Freedoms to rot in.

Democracy dies as the people reach with outstretched hands.

The Autocrat all too willing to meet Her citizen's demands',

Democracy dies in grand speeches made in the light.

Not to the coups set into motion at night.

For here is the Truth we all dread

Democracy dies over loaves of bread.

IN THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE

ALEXANDER WILLIAMS



WE GET IT, YOU VAPE + ICON + CHANGES

RAY GATSBY



SOUL SCRAPBOOK

KATRIELLE WULFF

Breathing
Feeling the air move through your
lungs
and with every gulp
a little of your soul escapes
and you breath in.
With that inhale,
you take in
a bit of others' souls.
"You two are so alike."
they say
"You practically radiate of them."
they tell you
"You remind me of your father."
they told you.

And you didn't think it fair
that you had to carry
your dad's soul.
You did not understand why
you had to care for it anymore.
But you had it.

There was no separating it from you
for now it was part of you.
So you continued breathing
giving yourself to others
while
you began to know
of what glowed inside you.

WHILE READING THE ROMANTICS

JAMES PAUL ROGERS

While reading the Romantics, I wonder if I have the potential to produce anything transcending the commercial. Perhaps it is a product of my self-flagellating nature, but I cannot help but observe how much greater they were at my age than I am. Keats died at twenty-six, but by the time of his passing had already produced an incredible body of work. He, a man not far older than myself, is lauded with honors by all, and is featured in my Anthology of British Literature. I wonder, could I ever create anything worthy of such remembrance? Have I already? By my own estimation, I have not. But did Keats on his deathbed know that he had left a legacy in the world? I suspect he thought not; his requested epitaph reads "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." It appears he thought himself transient and forgettable. I cannot help but feel a kinship with that sentiment.

One thing for sure he has over me: in his life he was published, though not well received. Still, the world at large had access to his work. Obviously, then, if I desire to be remembered, I must be published. But is that true in this present age? The Internet has changed the world, and is engaged constantly in changing it. I wager that more people have seen one of Logan Paul's YouTube Videos than have read "When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be", and Paul is the height of consumerist. What, then? Should I strive to serve a piping hot stew of controversy and digestibility to the masses, in the name of notoriety? I think not. As the consensus of the poets exclaims, to do so is to betray the very spirit that moves to create. Such is a living death, torture for the soul. I have no wish to relive the torments of the artists of the past, fruitlessly.

But, perhaps, all is not so dire.

There are those who value quality
and meaning.

Just as there are those who are con-
tent with hollow pandering,
and excellence tends to outlast
mediocracy.

Perhaps, if I can capture some
meaning and distill it into my words,
I can tap into the same hunger felt
by others today.

The difficulty is in said capturing.
How am I to match the old, dead
masters of

Yesterday, who exalted in sensation,
nature, and love? Their passions
transcended

Time itself, and in death, they be-
came immortals.

Shall I presume I possess the
Same marvelous gifts as they?
Who am I to strive for their heights?
What have I sacrificed in the name
of art? Shelley and Byron lived out
the tragedies they adored; must I
similarly destroy myself? Must I fall
in love with the creations of my own
mind, as was Milton's fallen angel's
ruin, and the ruin of so many excep-
tional men?

I hope I can be spared the sad fate
of the Romantics, who burned so
brightly and were consumed in the
heat of their passions. I suppose I
must press on, and see where the
road will take me.

One thing is certain: a coward is
always forgotten.

ONLY

IKE FORRESTER



In the end, we're only human.
Dancing 'neath starlight in our bare feet.
Laughing at the sunrise wrapped in another's arms.
How mortal we are, together in disharmony.
Casting thoughts into realities.
Dreams become tangible with naught but effort and time.
Singular souls in an infinite cosmos.
Making penknife marks in the bark of eternity.
Desperate to be heard, to be alone, to be loved.
Ill-at-ease among self constructed reality.-
Unafraid of change, unsatisfied with the unorthodox.
Carefully crafted arrangements of stardust-
Only everything the Universe could conceive.



TORSADE

DOKUSA

SYZYGY • PAGE 25

DISRUPTION

SHAYENNE AREHART

She could feel his breath brushing her skin, the delicate flesh at the curve of her neck sparsely covered with fine hairs warmed. In this land between dreams and reality, nothing was forbidden, and she could relish in the feeling of his otherworldly presence. His presence was overpowering; it took control of every fiber, every nerve ending from the nail beds of her toes to the rounded tips of her fingers until all she felt was electricity.

She remembered him, of course; he never let a day go by where the feeling of him didn't course through her veins. As if yanked by a hand out of the limbo, she opened her eyes to see the yellow light of the just waking sun peer through her windows as if to say "You're here, not there." But she wished she were still there.

The mundane routine of her work-day passed by without unusual intervention: scrub the skin harboring her body with a pink loofah until it screamed an angry red; drive the thirty-minute commute to the dilapidated office building where she worked as an accountant, the numbers swimming in her vision until she couldn't take it; driving home, listening to the furious honking of the other commuters and blankly watching them as they glared and held up a finger to each other. She kept her eyes on the road, fixed on an invisible image that called to her a place of shelter, of safety. After arriving back at her apartment, she fixed herself a sandwich: slightly stale rye bread with a slathering of room temperature mayonnaise, two thin tomato slices so as not to soak the break with their juices, a frail piece of lettuce, and exactly three slices of ham placed atop each other. She took the sandwich to her armchair and ate slowly as she watched the television.

Images of dark-haired sisters driving around cities in Land Rovers with paparazzi mapping their every move would surely follow her into her dreams, and not him. With an empty plate covered in a sprinkling of bread crumbs, she washed her single dish with scalding water from the tap and turned off the light in the studio apartment. With the lights off, she could enjoy the view of the national forest in the distance. The tops of the trees shrouded the forest like a green blanket from her vantage point. She knew, in some part of her wandering mind, that in that forest there were deer leaping across moss encrusted boulders, trees looming over them and shielding the forest inhabitants from humans like a battalion. She could be one of them, one of the forest creatures with freedom entering her blood like a drug, with the scent of clean air and crisp river water sticking to her clothes like a second skin. When people saw her and smelled the forest on her skin and in her hair, they would know what she couldn't say in words. They would say "She doesn't belong with us."

The bed was a warm creature beckoning her to escape from a confusing world, and she pulled the thick cotton sheets over herself. She felt protected, cocooned within her plush pajamas and encased within the bed covers. But, as she was drifting into sleep, he came. He always came like this: the arms wrapped around her from behind and pulled her to the surface of the raucous water, the waterfall thundering overhead. The water was all she could see, dark blue and thick. Her breath came in gasps as she coughed and coughed, her lungs screaming for air, not water. Her arms flailed, unable to grab hold of something solid and only coming into contact with the viscous water. She couldn't see who was holding her above the water, but whoever it was smelled of the earth, of rolling grass fields, the summer sun and the sharp winter sun.

in the branches of thick oaks.

The smell filled her nostrils and entered her body like a sedative; her arms stopped flailing and her mind stopped screaming. She felt a sigh come from deep within the person's chest, and she decided, yes, it must be a man. His arms protectively tightened around her waist as he effortlessly pulled her onto the bank of the lake into which the waterfall emptied, his hold restraining her from turning to look at his face. Her skin brushed against prickly grass as she attempted to catch her breath, her chest still heaving. Her hands clawed at grainy dirt and grass as she slowly reoriented herself. The arms retreated, and with her head free to move, she looked down and saw sun darkened hands, the veins strong and standing up against the skin. As she wrenched her body around completely, she caught a glance of eyes the color of glass and trees, so sharp that she felt it like a cut upon the skin of her face. That glance was all she had before she was left alone in the forest with the birds crying above her

This was the last memory that she had experienced every morning upon waking for the past three months. It had become an obsession for her, a memory that dug its claws into the coating of her mind and scratched night upon night.

Endless nights of research had become her routine, countless Internet searches and visits to the local library seeking the answer to a question she couldn't even form.

But tonight was different. She spent the night sitting on the red brick stoop of her apartment building and watched children dressed in costumes go from door to door trick-or-treating.

Children with disheveled hair and clumsily applied face makeup were dressed as angels, devils, witches, and animals. As she watched them hop from house to house, she thought about how she could never return to the peaceful state of mind that they were experiencing. She could never again go back to that state of innocence, of unknowing, because a door had opened in her life that she couldn't close.



OPHELIA MY DARLING

SABRINA HARBIN



BLUE WANDERERS

TRINA

There is a yearning in my soul
For so many far-off things.
There is an ache in my heart
For a sky filled with stars.
Each day I stand and wait
For when my wings will come.
And I love having dirty feet
From walking dusty roads.
The maps seem so small
While the world is so big.
There are a thousand things to see,
But not enough time to see them all.

WANDERLUS

JOSIE SMITH

Miles and miles I've traveled
Yet I always long for more,
The lovely, wide-reaching horizon.
I hope that I will never reach it.
I hope the journey will never be done.
I hope to always be on the run.
To those who are always moving,
There will never be anything better
Than aching feet and bright eyes.

Once I had tasted flight,
There was no going back.
Wander and roam and rove.
There is no escape.
There is no cure.
There is no greater joy.
There is no better affliction.
Those who settle think me crazy,
And I am glad to be so.
I don't know how it began.
Only that my love started when
Traveling along an open road
Began to feel like home.

THE GRUMPY OLD MAN

CAMILLE HERBERT

Deep in a secluded forest, where the trees grow tall and stark against the ever-grey sky, there wanders a creature known only as the Grumpy Man. Little is known of his origins, or why he came to wander this particular region, and there are many who say he doesn't even exist. But a select few insist that he is there, walking through the forest, muttering his complaints until someone is unlucky enough to come along to hear them. I have seen him.

I was exploring the woods not far from my house, passing time until dinner, when suddenly a chill ran through me, and my surroundings seemed to morph into another place entirely. The trees seemed to grow taller and thinner, and I could no longer tell the direction from which I came. The air thinned and grew hazy with mist, and I thought I heard the faint trickle of water – though there weren't any streams or ponds nearby that I knew of. As the gloom set in around me, I noticed another sound: far off,

but coming closer, was the sound of something crunching through the underbrush. Unnerved, I stepped behind a large tree in an attempt to conceal myself until I knew what was approaching. As the noise came nearer, I also began to hear what sounded like a man grumbling under his breath, though I couldn't quite catch the words he said. Peeking around the tree, I could begin to see who was coming.

The sight that met me was not what I was expecting to see, and I drew back in shock. I saw what looked like an old man dressed in ragged grey robes which dragged along the ground. His face was pale white, with hollow cheeks and thin lips. But the eyes! Where a normal person would have eyes, he had voids of pitch black, which seemed to draw in the light from around him, dimming the air around his face. And behind his head trailed a strange veil, hovering impossibly behind his head like the tail of a snake. In a similar way, his garment seemed to stretch out behind him, creating a weird blur effect as he moved.

He appeared to be walking, but he moved much faster than his steps seemed to drive him, as if he was being pushed by a current in the direction that he walked. Aimlessly he meandered through the trees, weaving among them with no apparent pattern. All the while, his shriveled lips were moving as he grumbled about something, still too quiet for me to hear.

I watched carefully as he passed me, shrinking back to avoid being seen. When he seemed to be far enough away, I stepped out and began moving in the opposite direction – whatever he was, I didn't want to be anywhere near him. Suddenly, I heard a piercing scream. Startled, I turned to see that this creature – the Grumpy Man – was staring straight at me. As my eyes met the abysses where his should have been, his words suddenly became clear to me, though I cannot describe them now. Still screaming, he rushed straight towards me, his obscenities and complaints echoing through my mind as if they were all that had ever been there. As he drew closer, I saw his mouth open impossibly wide, as if to swallow me whole. I tried to run but instead felt my legs buckle beneath

me as everything went black.

When I came to, I had collapsed in a heap on the edge of the woods near my house. The sun was just beginning to touch the horizon – by my reckoning, about an hour had passed since I had first set out. Checking myself, I was relieved to find that I was in one piece, with just a few scrapes from when I fell. As I got up to go home, I looked back into the trees one last time, and I thought I could make out a slight movement, but it could have just been my imagination.

I've shared my story online, and I've connected with a few people who have had similar experiences, but I still have very little information about the Grumpy Man. All I know is that sometimes when I'm out for a walk and I pass another person, I get a strange feeling of annoyance, like I want to yell at them for walking too close, or talking too loudly, or even just being there at all. And there are times when I can still hear his complaints in my head, pushing my thoughts to the side and bringing back the memory of those black voids staring straight at me.

THE PRINCE

ERIC RICE

The Prince knew what was to come;
He dreaded it all the same.
The King would hasten his downfall
But the Queen would be to blame.

So, striking out all on his own
He left the gates behind
For a place where nothing would live, nothing would perish
He knew there'd be nothing to find.

He found a stone among the abyss
So cold, so very alone
Lighting a torch, he warmed it up
So it could become a home.

There would dwell pain,
He knew it well, but made it just the same
For it would not be alone,
But with hope and joy would reign.

Out of his flask, he poured a flood
Building rivers and lakes that drowned
From his hair he made great trees
And stuck them in the ground.

His knife carved steep valleys
And wedged mountains up to great heights
To the stone, he added a spin,
Giving it days and nights.

His clothes were next, ripped and torn
Fashioned into great roaming beasts.
But the world was still far too bare,
A full banquet with no one to feast.

He knew what he still must give
And unsheathed his knife again
So they were made to resemble him
And born of his flesh were men.

With his last and fading breath
He watched them on the stone
As they lived and breathed and built,
He knew he'd made a Home.



A BEAUTIFUL RIVALRY

ABI BADGER

“Well!” she exclaimed, hands clasped at her chin and head cocked fetchingly. “If it isn’t his worshipfulness, Duke Apollo of the house of Athranes. Do tell me, does the king ever reward his favorite watchdog for such committed service?” She cooed like a dove, batting her lashes and widening her sky-blue eyes.

The Duke, barely older than Ash herself, narrowed his face into a scowl and signaled to his men to surround the young lady and her band with a flick of his wrist. “Ash Black is it not? Princess of pirates, daughter of the Red Pirate Queen?” he queried, one dark eyebrow raised. She openly appraised him, appreciating his powerful physique and the strong planes of his face.

“That’s what they call me,” she grinned, flashing her perfect white teeth and dimples. He allowed a hard smile to light up his face in return.

“Then, pirate, you are under arrest for thievery, larceny, and crimes against the crown,” he stated in a proud and thunderous voice.

Ash laughed uproariously, at least her intention was to laugh brashly and uproariously. But, with her fae gifted gracefulness, her laugh would be better described as a tinkling giggle or a melodious chuckle. Right at that moment, the powder kegs at the back of the warehouse exploded with a colossal bang. The Duke’s men started and turned at the sound, giving Ash’s band the opening they needed to scamper up the sides of the crates and wares around them. When the soldiers turned again to where the pirates should be, Ash was standing alone. She cocked her hip and remained silent, benign and generally nonchalant. “After them!” Duke Apollo thundered. He watched his men begin to navigate their way through the disordered warehouse, wildly following the thudding steps of the fleeing pirates.

The young duke quickly pulled his weapon, a hand and a half broadsword with an elegant hilt. Ash whipped out her own rapier about as long as the Duke's but much thinner, with less heft and much easier to break.

Their weapon differences combined with his broad shoulders and the experienced way he crouched in a sword stance told her there was no way she could beat him in a fair fight. But she had no intention of fighting fair. Quick and lithe as a cat, she mounted the line of crates immediately to his right, gained a running start, and jumped down on him from the superior height. His eyes widened at her unexpected attack and he raised his sword to block her descent. But he misjudged her fall. She curled up slightly and cleared his head entirely, landing and rolling in a pile of fishing nets behind him. He whipped around, but she had already recovered and threw a great mass of nets in his face. Stupidly, he swung at them and managed to tangle both his arms and sword. He freed one hand and swiftly pulled a knife from his belt, trying to cut his sword arm loose.

Ash was having none of that, however, and threw another pile of netting over his head.

He snarled, struggling and further miring himself in the great heap of knotted ropes. Whipping her head around, Ash noticed the crates behind her were precariously supported by a small barrel at the bottom of the stack. She wickedly grinned at the duke and cleanly kicked the barrel. The whole stack, about fifteen feet high, started to sway. The crates groaned and fell directly towards the duke's standing but struggling form. He shouted and dived to the side, just missing being crushed, when they hit the ground with a deafening crunch.

Delighted amongst the chaos and more than a little smug, Ash strolled over to the man on the ground, tangled helplessly in fishing nets and covered with dust and wood chips. He managed to roll onto his back and was tenaciously attempting to saw himself free with his belt knife. Ash let out a chuckle and crouched, resting her sword at his throat. He stared at her wide eyed, torn between confusion, dismay, and fury.

“The next time you set a trap for me, do tell your men to bathe first. I could smell them from a street away.” She reached into the mass of nets and plucked the knife from his hand.

“Black! We need to go,” Hurley yelped as he came around a corner, hotly pursued by the sound of stomping feet. Ash gave the Duke one last roguish smile.

“Have an excellent night your grace,” she said in a singsong voice before bolting for the exit, Hurley in front of her and the remainder of her men behind. They had dealt with the Duke’s soldiers masterfully, leading them on a merry chase amongst the rafters and cramped spaces of the warehouse. The barrels of gunpowder Hurley had ignited had caught a good portion of the building on fire, which was swiftly extinguished by the pouring rain. Ash Black and her comrades disappeared into the stormy night, leaving the Duke to be rescued, cursing and grumbling, by his men.



PAST

AUTUMN SCHREINER



CALIFORNIA SUN

TRINA

TRAVELLER WITHOUT A COMPASS

OMEY M. BHOSALE

I am a leaf apart from tree
small, alone, but free.
I flow where the winds blow
where the lights glow....
where the mightiest shake,
and the strongest break.
Where the bravest fear,
and boldest don't dare...
ready to give any cost,
to find something precious I lost.
A pearl, a diamond, or was it gold?
or was it the feeling to never become old...
I am a glider, aiming for Sun,
may I have to fly or I have to run,
the things I dear most in this world
are endless freedom and nonstop fun...
I may seem a little crazy from far,
wanting the peace but ready for war.
don't even know the meaning of all,
as the world is big and I am small...
but the spirit I have inside,
that's the light that'd spread wide.
I don't need the means or mass,
I'm just a traveller without compass...

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

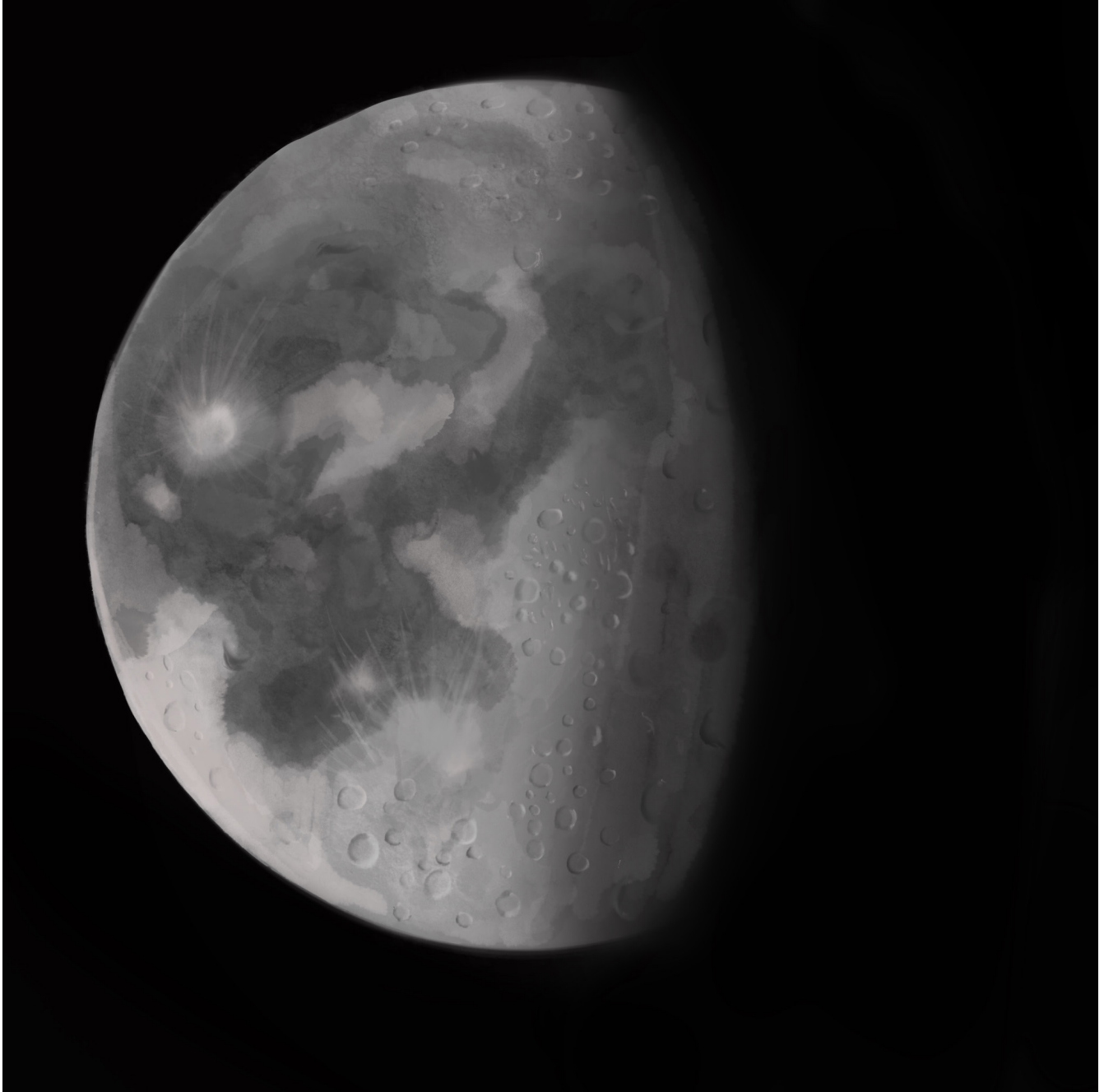
ANNMARIE GARCIA

They always say dogs are a man's best friend,
But dogs' abilities are limited.
They can make you feel loved until the end,
But their love is often primitive.
Books can take you to a whole other world;
They can change anyone's reality.
Through time and space they have traveled and whirled
From *Twilight* to *The Old Man and the Sea*.
They provide an escape from normal life,
A way to prevent the unhappiness.
You can explore life as a meek housewife
Or conquer a planet full of madness.
Dogs can be helpful, and stick with you 'till the end,
But books, without a doubt, are a man's best friend.



TO THE MOON AND BACK

RACHAEL STEWART





LETTING GO

SARAHJOY DUNLAP

THE TALE OF ASH BLACK

ABI BADGER

“Well, mates! We seem to have bagged ourselves a princess,” the pirate in the center shouted, eyes twinkling in victory.

Snow, with a sudden flash of violence, snagged a knife from the belt of the nearest pirate and slashed him across the face. She kicked him in the knees and forced him to roll away from her. She held the knife in front of her, the blade shivering slightly with her unsteady hand.

Her face screwed up with determination, angelic features etched with despair and fury.

“I’m no princess, not anymore,” she growled in a low voice, jumping when the pirate who spoke moved towards her. With a start she saw sharp and delicate, almost elf-in features underneath the broad brimmed hat atop the pirate’s rusty red hair. This was either the most gentle faced man she had ever seen, or a woman.

The dainty pirate captain flashed Snow a roguish grin. “Now,” she drawled, “there’s a reward out for a little lost princess named Snow.” her bright eyes bored into the little girl

in front of her, her features thrown in and out of shadow by the lamp hanging over their heads, swaying with the motion of the ship.

“That wouldn’t be you, would it?” she asked, almost mockingly. Snow refused to answer but instead crouched further into her best approximation of a fighting stance, ready to go down swinging if need be. The pirate captain continued to stare at her with a calculating look. “Now, you don’t look much like a Snow, frankly, you look more like an Ash.” She turned to the pirate on her left, “What do you think Sandrat? Doesn’t she look like her name is Ash?” The pirate, evidently named Sandrat, gulped under her intense gaze and growled, “Whatever you say Captain, but is you sure she ain’t named Snow? ‘Cause there’s an awful lot of gold we can get for her if it is.” The Captain returned her eyes to the young princess and asked, “Yes, but seems to me the knaves offering that reward are the worst cutthroats to grace the nine seas. And I can’t

have a knife in my back just so they can claim they've killed the whole royal family." She continued to size Snow up, "You don't look too strong little Ash, can you mend a sail, swab a deck, and gut a fish?" She quirked her eyebrows up with the challenge. Snow swallowed and licked her cold lips. She returned the pirate's gaze and stated as steadily as possible, "Can't say I ever have, but I'm a quick study at just about everything. What's more, I recently gained a great deal of free time and have frankly no idea what to do with it." The Pirate Captain crowed a laugh "Well, little Ash Black, I've been needing a cabin boy, but I'll take a cabin girl in a pinch." She turned back to the pirates who had invaded the hold, "Whataya say mates? Three ayes for Ash Black!" The brigands responded with a rousing cheer, mostly. A few eyed Snow with greedy looks and their captain with distrustful ones. Snow realized that directly on the heels of losing her family and kingdom, she may have just been adopted by a band of bloodthirsty pirates. What could go wrong?

Snow, or Ash Black as she had been known for several years now, leaned back in her chair and eyed the wretched soul in front of her. She had learned the posture from her mentor and captain, Renault the pirate queen and scourge of the nine seas. Together, they had driven most of their competition into the briny depths, or generously allowed the ships and crews of every pirate galleon to sail under the red and black banner of The Pirate Queen. Once she had fully come into her own and learned all there was to know from her captain and friend, Ash Black had decided to run the land smuggling operations that were so vital to the Queen's shipping empire. Previously, they had had to rely on small bands of smugglers and knaves to get the contraband goods for them to ship across the ocean. Now, Ash was slowly taking territory and building a land based smuggling empire to rival the Pirate Queen's own. She stared at the trembling thief crouched before her desk. Her enormous sky blue eyes and raven wing eyebrows making her haughty look into a thing of awe and terror. She tapped her nails (which never seemed to chip or get dirty) on

the scarred surface of the desk and flicked her silky black hair (which remained perfectly curled and soft no matter how many times she was dunked in ocean water) over her shoulder.

"I've heard that you've been dipping into your profits, Sigmund," she cooed nonchalantly. The scrawny outlaw jerked his gaze to hers and said, "You don't know it was me! You can't prove nuthin!"

"Don't insult me maggot," she stated, her silky voice shifting into a growl. "I know that you've been taking coins, jewels, whatever's small whenever you're sent on a run.

You've been carrying away my profits in those disgusting pockets of yours." Her face shifted into an angelic and empty smile.

"How did you find out!" he gasped. Her smile widened. She held out her delicate hand and a small sparrow perched on one of her fingers. It twittered into her ear when she held it close and then flew away.

"A little birdie told me," she said, her voice shifting back to its usual light and velvety tone.

