

# Firefly Magazine

I



*A Journal of Luminous Writing*

~ Media Experimentation ~

The figure being completely black derives a feeling of spatial distance between the viewer and the figure

The subject walking or running in the hallway will be a tall, skinny figure inspired by Giacometti (see page 115)

A figure portraying dark feelings and emotions in an anonymous way

Extended arms, legs and neck

Extremely skinny limbs

Lacks scary-feeling like you're the bad guy

No clear distinction of feet or hands - simplification

Setting:

Winsor Blue + Mars Black + Crimson Red + Titanium White

Ceiling and floor the same color, as are the walls, creating a sense of symmetry

Fades into darker blue, purple and then into black to create depth

Winsor Blue + Titanium White + Mars Black (locks)

→ A hallway with no end - no getting out



Sketchbook | Lisanne van der Oort

# Table of Contents

Sketchbook | Lisanne van der Oort 2

## Poetry

Choking Roots | Chloe C. Ivy 5

The Fragile Creation | Damien B. Donnelly 6

Passage | Melissa Fu 7

Area Code 205 | Erin Traylor 8

Dying Gods' Story | Jennifer Ruth Jackson 9

They were Dreaming of Watermelon | Melissa Fu 10

Stars | Nik Guzman 11

Phenomenon | Erin Traylor 12

Transmute | Jennifer Ruth Jackson 14

Scribbles from a Crumpled Piece of Paper | Jaeheon Kim 15

Worry Dolls | Erin Traylor 18

## Flash Fiction

Ghostlights | Chloe C. Ivy 19

Umnath | Nod Ghosh 20

Gazpacho for John | Bart Van Goethem 22

Stranger at a House Fire | Jon Green 23

Cultural Confusions   Nick Dunster	25
Caged   Amanda Quinn	26
The Ant Farm   C.P. Blackburn	27
Quince Jelly   Nod Ghosh	28
She was the Ocean   Micah Mackinnon	30

### **Short Stories**

A Heavy Dose of Atmosphere   Lianne van der Oort	31
Ghoul   Justin Elesia	32
Melon Tossing   C.P. Blackburn	35
Nothing Can Ever Really Shield You from the Sting of an Acorn   David O'Neill	38

### **The Artists**

Dying King   Chloe C. Ivy	42
Elysium   Lianne van der Oort	46

# POETRY



Choking Roots | *Chloe C. Ivy*



## Featured Poem

### THE FRAGILE CREATION | *Damien B. Donnelly*

Falling,

Through the fragile line

Of time and space,

Reverberating

And rebounding off each other.

Searching through the confusion,

Paralysed from the fear

And awakened by the silence.

In each new moment,

A new connection,

Made and broken.

We move

Through currents of air,

Whether combining,

Connecting

Or falling apart.

PASSAGE | *Melissa Fu*

There are so many  
ways to decay:  
fade wilt wither  
soften rot collapse.  
The structure degrades,  
folds on itself  
from the inside  
or the out,  
grows smaller. Bones  
become pitted, lose  
calcium. Skins become  
thin thinner translucent.

When it rains,  
the bone aches  
where it broke,  
the fracture leaves  
legacies of foresight,  
bristles, charged and  
humming, in tune  
with all the  
broken bits, and  
all the about to  
be broken bits,  
of the universe.

AREA CODE 205 | *Erin Traylor*

I thumb-dragged  
you into a tiny trash bin.

Now my pointer-tip hovers  
over your phantom

slot between Remy, who  
I can't recall, and my step-mother's

email address. I want to select  
the old you, hold

down and say I'm not  
afraid my heart is going

to stop. Say I'll fly  
to tea, that the only

thought that made  
any difference was one of you

and I slow dancing  
in black-lit sports bras

in a home you  
once described.

DYING GODS' STORY | *Jennifer Ruth Jackson*

Creation, us from them

Holds a spark

Mischievous chance

Ringling on high as we

Stomp down the plains like

Tempered steel

Speculating about divinity

Humanity

Who birthed who with

Trepidation while we

Light candles for our

Dead and stars materialize

THEY WERE DREAMING OF WATERMELON | *Melissa Fu*

of the thump of ripeness  
the cracking of green mottled skin  
revealing a flush of pink flesh

of drip and slurp and crunch

of hard black-brown seeds  
spit far – ten feet, twelve feet –  
scattered and dusty

of drip and slurp and crunch

of tiny white seeds, still  
nestled in the fruit, swallowed  
whole in greedy mouthfuls

of drip and slurp and crunch

of juice running down  
cheeks and elbows  
leaving sticky trails

of drip and slurp and crunch

of ants, like vultures, waiting to  
climb carcasses of pale rinds,  
waiting to devour any spots

of sweetness left behind

## STARS | *Nik Guzman*

i cough and the stars escape, scraping  
my tongue and the roof of my mouth and  
a few get stuck between my teeth as  
they try hard to get out. so i pick  
them up and i put them in a box for you.

i stutter through my thoughts and the stars  
make a gory display of my words  
for him. you planned this.

i choke on the stars so please excuse me  
if you sliced your finger on one. you  
screamed and hollered while i swallowed  
the blood in my mouth.

PHENOMENON | *Erin Traylor*

to the silence between  
thoughts      to this quality  
of light

it is 4 a.m.      it is  
raining  
to the way one lit

candle granulates the bedroom  
wall      a clip from an old  
film I discovered as a child

flipping channels past  
midnight  
the screen-cast: green

the chemist glaring into  
his measuring  
glass

the finger hooked behind  
my navel      later  
I couldn't be

sure this really happened

\*

to your metamorphic knuckles  
how you'd pin my wrists

to sheet      try  
to bridle my bucking

tongue, slither in  
my ear      something

about the difference between  
doing and doing

with all your heart  
to that moment

why is it I'm always  
taking the steps

or lifting my foot into the car  
or onto a curb

when I know      and I must know  
even though it feels

like recognizing  
some vague horror

TRANSMUTE | *Jennifer Ruth Jackson*

You laughed

Lead into gold

You said, impossible

But gold is nothing

A mere beginning

I crave the omega, end

Your arrogance arranged

Into compassion

An empty chest growing

A heart like a vine

You, husband, changed by

The alchemy of love

SCRIBBLES FROM A CRUMPLED PIECE OF PAPER | *Jaeheon Kim*

I

Life is one big joke.

Every day is a standup comedy show

And I am the subject for it all.

Point your fingers at me and laugh.

I am the joke.

II

My ears are numb from the whisperings,

The whisperings of women,

The whisperings of strangers,

And the whisperings of God.

Sometimes the sky conspires

Against me.

III

The machine swallows another coin.

IV

You smiled at me

But I found out

That you wore out your laughs,

The laughs that still echo in me,

To trash and jokes alike.

V

Like the moon you always rise when it's dark  
And like the moon you always set  
To give way to dawn.

VI

The machine swallows yet another coin.

VII

I play to win  
But I always seem to lose.  
As if fate itself has gotten used to it,  
I am left with the same static screen.

VIII

It is hard to stay sane  
When everything flashing around you  
And everyone dancing around you  
Seems to be out of their minds.

IX

The machine swallows my last coin.  
This game is nothing but a joke to her.  
I heard she doesn't like jokes.

X

There are lines

Lingering yet laying softly somewhere on my body,

One line for each time

I thought

I could teach pigs how to fly.

WORRY DOLLS | *Erin Traylor*

Eyes cast down as you mouthed  
*el trueno*, flexed your wrists

toward the linoleum, the way you'd done  
since we met.

I kept the dolls –

tooth-sized paper people, wound  
with embroidery floss – pressed

inside their tiny woven sack  
and under my pillow, as you

instructed. Now, in a cigar box  
in the trunk of my car. Five years

I've lived and haven't  
unpacked.

I have a secret, you said. I learned,  
later, more of a riddle.

Not the thing, but the anticipation.  
You were the jagged white strike.

My breath  
held.

# FLASH FICTION



Ghostlights | *Chloe C. Ivy*



## Featured Flash

UMNATH | *Nod Ghosh*

The whiteness of bone hides beneath his fingers, but Umnath scratches his shins oblivious to what is inside. He rubs for so long that his skin becomes tomato red. His chin rests on brown-paper knees. The matchbox abrasions of his breath belie the uncertainty of diseased lungs, though his lungs function better than his brain. The rattle of his breathing is a reminder of the impermanence of life. But it is the rattling of loose thoughts in moments of lucidity that tell Umnath he has lived too long.

The running. There was always the running. It was long ago. The memory heightens the redundancy of his limbs.

Running. Running under the reddened sky. The sky is decimated by a blast-furnace glow. The relentless bloom of flies, the screams of children, throats tight with hunger. The kathakali dance of cicadas locked in ritual encounters. The scent of a hundred year's incense from the Gita Mandir, where dream-gods march next to sleeping ancestors. The tambour of beggar boys with bellies like drums. The disappointment of rice without meat.

Metallic fumes shorten the air. The juxtaposition of love and decay in roadside shanties. A screeching baby at its mother's breast, shocked by the enormity of its existence. Shit floating in a slow turning river. The mechanical beat of October's heat that refuses to die after nightfall. Umnath runs through all of this. It happened so long ago, and yet it is happening to him now. He runs until something tears inside his chest, and he can run no more. He stops by a stall selling aubergines and leather handbags.

Umnath catalogues his thoughts in jumbled disorder.

He runs to a new life. The improbability of escape becomes probable. A scholarship, long years of study, the accountability of dreams.

The transference of ambition to his guileless children. They know nothing about struggle. They know nothing about running. They hold his hand, and talk to him like he is stupid. And all he can do is stare back at them like somebody stupid. Because that is what this disease has done to Umnath. It has made him stupid.

His son says "good day", to the man in the bed opposite. The man is a creature with yellow skin, the tallow hue of death. He runs to a different history. The beat of his memory takes a different path.

Though he has been there for five weeks, Umnath has never spoken to the man.

He never will.

## GAZPACHO FOR JOHN | *Bart Van Goethem*

2 pounds tomatoes  
1 medium red bell pepper  
½ medium cucumber  
1 thinly sliced self-image  
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
⅓ cup almonds  
One ½-inch slice white bread  
5 pounds humiliation  
½ red onion  
3 tablespoons sherry vinegar  
1 medium fresh jalapeño  
2 garlic cloves  
4 cups hate  
Salt and black pepper  
1 avocado  
A pinch of botulinum toxin

## STRANGER AT A HOUSE FIRE | *Jon Green*

He stood and watched as the flames gathered momentum, each of them licking at the sky which was black with smoke. Tommy ran some of his belongings through his mind. His record player, his bed, his television, imagining them in a charred form, a semblance of their former selves.

- Yours?
- Yeah.
- Fire Brigade?
- On their way.
- Good.

The stranger was calm. He did not try to comfort Tommy. There were no hugs or blankets offered. They just stood, the two of them and watched the blaze. The pebble dash facade of the house looked about as strong as eggshells.

- Insured?
- No.
- I see.

He wore a brown jacket that had elbow pads. His dark hair was messy and unbrushed. Tommy wanted him to offer to run in and get his things but he was no have-a-go hero. Instead he lit a cigarette and started to smoke. Didn't offer Tommy one.

- I didn't have any pets.
- That's good.

The man inhaled deeply and blew out his own smoke, pale by comparison to the stuff pouring from the roof.

- Neighbours?
  - Not home.
  - Have you called them?
  - I was hoping the fire brigade would get here first.
  - Because it's looking like they might be involved.
- Tommy nodded.

- They usually get home at 7.

The smoke was billowing. Dark black plumes issuing from the windows and doorframes. Everything would be gone. He imagined what he would usually be doing at this time. Watching a quiz show, or reading a book, he thought. Such basics seemed a distant dream right now.

- I would offer you a bed if I had one.
- Don't worry yourself.
- Something will happen.
- Sure.

He offered no reassurance at all. Crossed his arms and blinked slowly at the sight. He was unshaven.

- Do you live around here?
- I'm just passing through the neighbourhood, actually.
- I hope I haven't disrupted your day.

The stranger didn't reply.

Another small group of people accumulated and watched the fire from the road slightly further away than Tommy and the man. None of them spoke to him. He didn't really know them and he felt foolish being the one with the burning house. He found some solace in the fact that he was with someone, despite it being the stranger.

- Anyway, I can't hang around all day. I have things to be doing.
- Sure.
- I might come back. Another day.
- I don't think I'll be here.
- Sure.

The two of them shook hands in what was an awkward departure. Just as the man left, a fire engine arrived at the end of the road.

## CULTURAL CONFUSIONS | *Nick Dunster*

Drunk in Thailand, James wanted a tattoo. “The Pride of Scotland” and a thistle, he requested. The tattooist looked blank. You know, the thistle: the spikey plant. Ah yes, the tattooist said, nodding. James passed out, waking later to admire “The Pride of Scotland” on his arm. Beneath a pineapple.

## CAGED | *Amanda Quinn*

Her suggestion this. Typical quirky girl shit but it's a first date so he lets it go.

There's something about the concrete swoops at the entrance but it's not until the turnstile takes them in two clunking gulps that he remembers. How could he have not? A cage door swung open in invitation. Harris' grin as he pocketed the key. The backs of the rest, shambling up the hill to see the star attraction, a whale named 'Cuddles'. His shouts drowned by barks, bleats and growls. A September night that drew in quick. A quiet boy. Unmissed by school friends, teachers, even his father – working late as usual. Finally forcing the lock to freedom. And home to only a glance from the study.

But today the sun is shining. All is well. He pushes back on the metal bar but it holds fast. There is nothing to do but unfold the ticket in his fist and walk towards her smile.

THE ANT FARM | *C.P. Blackburn*

"So where exactly are you off to?" he asked.

"Can you ask me without the tone?"

"When did it become okay for you to talk to your father this way?"

"Dad, don't start."

"I suppose it's too much to ask—"

"Oh, God, not again about the farm."

"Well, I just thought that—"

"Dad, nobody does this anymore. You're the only one that sees the point."

"The point?"

"Yes, the point. It's boring."

"Boring."

"Dad, it's the same thing every day. You stand watch over them. You make sure they get enough water and light. You watch them chew and crap and mate and fight."

"Well, there's a little more to it than that."

"What? The whole divine father thing?"

"They need guidance."

"They don't. There're seven billion of them. They do their own thing. They make a mess; they clean it up. So it goes. You're the only one that believes there's more to it than that."

They sat for a moment and watched 'Ole Blue's gentle rotation.

"So what are you gonna do?"

"I don't know. Not this."

The father nodded slightly.

"You okay for money?" he asked.

"Well, if you're offering."

## QUINCE JELLY | *Nod Ghosh*

Mother is making quince jelly. She drives her knife through the fruit's tough coat, her voice strained with effort.

"Don't touch," she says when my finger comes close to the knife blade. "Keep your fingers away."

"What are they?" My voice is silk.

"They're called quinces," she says. "I collected them from Aunt Esperanza's garden."

Quinces like princess, I play with the new word and shape it into something familiar.

Another chop. Mother's blade sinks into the wooden grain of her board. She could be wielding a machete, piercing skulls.

I am a shadow, inches from Mother's side. She blends butter-yellow cubes of fruit with lemon and water, and then weighs seven-hundred-and-fifty grams of sugar. She uses a spoon to scoop the extra back into the bag.

I steal two pieces of quince from the pan as she returns the sugar to the pantry. I give one to Herman. My brother is painting lines on sheets of newspaper, his overall splattered green and red. He scribbles circles with fat crayons, tearing holes in paint-soaked paper. His simian features are contorted in concentration. The sliver of fruit slips in and out of his mouth like a yo-yo. He says nothing as the yellow cube bounces past his knee onto the floor. Herman doesn't understand everything, but he knows the illicit nature of stolen fruit.

I bite my piece. The astringent nothingness of it makes me want to spit. How can quince jelly be good when the fruit tastes foul? I plop blue paint onto my paper, and force the quince down my gullet, trying not to think about sick. Herman and I sit like two silent monkeys.

Mother sings one of her old songs from the time before Father left. She stirs the pan with a long spoon. All her kindness goes into the quince jelly. I wish she'd save some for Herman and me. My brother works on his newspaper squares, drooling in concentration.

Mother's been making the quince jelly for hours when the telephone rings. Dark tones contrast with the frivolity of her gingham-topped jars.

"Hmmm," she says, and "oh dear." The aromatic air caramelises into something sinister. It must be bad news. The shrillness of her voice makes me think the call is from far away. She talks about dates and flights. "I'll have to leave the children

with Esperanza", she says, and a trill of fear makes me stand on my toes to hear more. Herman dips his brush into blue, though it holds the browned remnants of every other colour.

I picture Mother on an aeroplane. The world is segmented like an orange, crisscrossed by flight paths, branching like the wrinkles of Aunt Esperanza's face.

Mother drapes her apron over the back of a chair, intent and oblivious. The molten jelly bubbles and creeps over the side of the pan, beckons like a signal. I push my finger on its mottled surface, and lick away the fierce heat with my tongue, swallowing my scream.

SHE WAS THE OCEAN | *Micah Mackinnon*

She was the ocean. Endlessly crashing onto his beach and receding to come back even harder than before. Crash. They folded into each other with every wave. His hands ran up and down her curves and she wrapped him in her world. He poured himself into the ocean and the ocean swept him under the waves.

Lights danced on their shapes. He tripped and fell into her hair and led straight into her depths. He didn't open his eyes, he couldn't. But he felt her. He felt her breath, her weight and her warmth keeping him and guarding him against the angry winds. The chills that were sent sneaking down his spine were slain by the ocean's warm summer waters. He poured himself into her and she swept him off his feet. He fell for her and sank deep into her waters.

The winds roared off above while he slept deep under the dancing lights.

She was his ocean. Waves crashed on him and withered away the rotting flesh from his bones. Crash. They folded into each other with each touch. He ran his hands through the water and it rose to surround him in her world. He poured himself into the ocean and was swept under the tide.

Lights danced on the rippled water. They scattered, tripping through to fall upon his face. He couldn't open his eyes but he felt the weight and breath of her. He was guarded from the ripping winds above. Her arms wrapped him in her warm embrace.

The winds roared their tantrums above him as he slept deep under the dancing lights.

She was the sea. The tide slipped up to his knees keeping the cold at bay with her warm caress. The sea suds fizzled against his clammy skin. He saw her limitless universe and saw his reflection in her eyes. Her vast Everythings dwarfed his rough Nothings.

He looked into her eyes and saw the corners of the world.

The seas of Earth all wrapped up around the finest pebble.

# SHORT STORIES



A Heavy Dose of Atmosphere | *Lianne van der Oort*



## Featured Short

GHOUL | *Justin Elesia*

I have dark circles under my eyes.

From a distance, they look like pools of muddy ink under the skin. Up close, they look like bruises.

I used to date a girl, a very lovely, gentle creature, who said it was hereditary. She said my mother had the same eyes.

As the years have gone by, the skin has hardened, darkened and begun to atrophy. There are cracks that run in ever-expanding circles, like the inside of a dead tree, sawn to the stump and smoothed by the elements. I have worn sunglasses since 1974, which is convenient as it's enabled me to colour-match them with a dark tan leather jacket I've owned since, I think, 1976-77.

In the last year I have visited a doctor who said I should sleep more and worry less, and a dermatologist who said I should drink less and run more.

"Your diet is healthy?" the last one asked.

"Well, I just eat bats and that's it."

He shook his head – doctors always do – and directed my attention to a pamphlet entitled *So You Want to Give up Bats?* The front page featured – and probably still does - several strangers posing as a family on a beach, flashing brilliant smiles from the pamphlet to eternity. The image is clean and, from what I can remember, the lines of text run softly around the cover's perimeter. You might

be impressed; you might not. One small detail will catch your eye, though - a single thought bubble extending from the father's head:

"No Jerry, I will not eat a bat today."

The two children, with smiles as wide as their shit-eating parents, are feasting on some type of bubbling, grey larvae; if I had to guess - mealworms.

Honestly, I dropped the thing in the first bin I found.

Atrophy is a peculiar smell. Like something is dying but will not rot. I have read that it is basically mummification. Am I becoming a fossil? Will I end up as a shrunken head in some museum of curiosities nobody visits?

The middle and lower third of my face is hard like stone at this point. When I tap it, there is a heavy rapping sound. I sometimes think if I had more visitors - a dog, or some other short-lived friend of man - I could pretend there was knocking on the door. We'd laugh and laugh, and then, after a brief discussion of what had occurred, go our separate ways.

I know now you're wondering where I live. I know about the letters. Of course, I couldn't say. It wouldn't be right. What I can disclose is that it's not terribly far from where you are now. Even now.

My house is simple, it doesn't stand out, so don't go thinking you can find me and just turn up.

I've kept things simple inside too; various mementos from my working life and not much else: 30 years selling suitcases from China - you can do that kind of work over the phone - and five years pretending God had touched my soul. Of course, he has not. I suppose what I'm saying is there's still a lot of suitcases in my house. Do I work now? Not at all; my face has put paid to that.

One thing to be grateful for, I suppose.

Life here is quiet. My neighbours tend to their business and I tend to mine. There are few children. For a while there was an ice cream man who came by but he seems to have learned his lesson. There is no money in ice cream, I told him. Not much money in most iced things, to be honest.

At night, the bats gather at my window. They tighten into a single mask, swarming black 'til I let them in. And how they run against the rushes!

There is a whistling as I turn in; a draft caught in the gaps of my chin. I am splintering and I am cracking. I am almost hollow.

Just don't call me a ghoul.

## MELON TOSSING | *C.P. Blackburn*

There are few things more satisfying than launching watermelons in low gravity. Does wonders for the ego. You just take a standard three-step drop, plant your significantly reduced weight on your rear leg, step forward, and let her fly. She'll carry for ages and fall with a satisfying squish. Not that you'd hear it. But having our own variations of these melons on Hegedrus, I know what sound it should make.

And here you're probably wondering why I'd be wasting food way out in the Milky Way's Lesser Antilles, on this lunar outpost, circling planet E-Minor. To which I'd respond, have you ever tried to eat a family-sized cabbage? I'm flush; worry not. When Qow needs a fix, he just whisks down to the Americas for a nice slab of even-toed ungulate and a bottle of *vitis vinifera*.

But Qow's going on a bit. I tend to do that when I'm nervous. And my life at the moment isn't quite as carefree as tossing watermelons might make it sound. For one, it's Sunday, week-one of my third fantasy football season, and I've been over-tinkering my lineup. The second, though it relates to the first, pertains to my job here. In addition to being a self-proclaimed Earthophile, my job here is to report on the status of the Helium-3 supply to my superior, General Zeorf. The humans must always be, to use his words, "light-years away from getting their simian little digits on the stuff."

Helium-3, in case you're from the far-reaching Camargo Cluster, is the fuel of my civilization. It's an isotope harvested from the solar wind that collects on atmosphereless atolls across the galaxy. It's collecting on my boots as I scuff through the regolith on this otherwise barren surface. Instead of using fusion to split uranium molecules, which, to be frank, have produced some spectacular Earthly follies, Helium-3 relies upon nuclear fission reactors. No radioactive waste. Harnessing the power of a star, a single spacecraft's worth could power all of North America for a cycle around its sun.

Humans have known about it for years, but have only recently made the strides to do anything with it. As we speak, the Chinese have a rover scuttling about up here, poking around for the stuff. It makes for great target practice with the melons. Left to their own devices, it looks like humans will turn the Moon into the Middle East, and just in time for the start of the playoffs, which is a problem.

The thing is, General Zeorf would never allow it to come to that. Before then, he'd hover three or four spaceship carriers over the surface, and Earth would suffer a more totalitarian enslavement than the self-imposed one they are currently living with. And that would be the end of fantasy football, and I am way too excited about my draft this year to allow that to happen. After a painful exit in the playoffs last year, I have a real shot at winning this thing.

I mean take a look at this lineup. ODB and T.Y. at wide receiver. Beast Mode and Ivory at running back. Wait. T.Y.'s up against the Jets defense this week? Maybe instead... Damn it, there I go again. Tinkering.

Qow drops back to pass, sees ODB deep, launches it. Could it be? Whaaahhh. Qow does the unimaginable, a 600 yard pass for the touchdown. Some fantasy owners will be very happy with that play.

You want a real challenge, though? Try clearing the Aristarchus Crater; it's two times as deep as the Grand Canyon, two lengths of Manhattan across.

I don't know, with so many of me spread throughout the galaxy, there's a good chance my reports don't even get read. Mid-way through last season I started including updates on my team. General Zeorf never said a word. And besides, do we Hegedrians really need to have our hands on all the Helium-3 in the galaxy? Would it hurt us to leave the humans even a little? We're not even using the stuff here, and it's three miles deep.

Please don't think I've been sitting idly with this information. I've been very active on my blog, extolling the benefits of renewable energy on Earth. I've sent some very strong-worded letters to a number of heads of state. I've trolled the conservative sites. It's so easy to bait those guys—their vitriol is palpable. Solar and wind might not send you across the galaxy, but it could keep you content long after you've pumped and fracked every drop of oil and gas out of the ground. And besides, interstellar travel isn't all it's cracked up to be. Most of it's like this—a lot of empty space.

But if we are crunching the numbers, Helium 3's worth an easy three billion US a ton, and their estimates of a million tons are far less than what's actually here. In short, it's not if, but when.

So let's say I let old Zeorfy know what's up. Week one of a sixteen week season starts today. Let's say the message is flagged and processed in a week or two. The fleet would get here at the earliest, say week fourteen. Just in time for the playoffs. A year from when ODB dropped 30 points on me and ended my

season. But now ODB is mine, and I got a real shot at winning this thing. On the other hand, if I wait, I could throw a few melons around, maybe even a cabbage or two, and scare the bejesus out of whoever arrives first. That would buy me at least a couple of weeks.

I think that's what I'll do. Humans, whether you know it or not, this is your last fantasy season; I hope you are loaded up.

## NOTHING CAN EVER REALLY SHIELD

YOU FROM THE STING OF AN ACORN | *David O'Neill*

I was once told that when trees are planted close to each other, they begin to grow together; these inoculated trees start to entwine, to dip and swerve and rest in the reliance that their symbiosis grants. The protection and opportunity granted under the communal embrace of branches was perfect for He and I. Amateur spies, soldiers, explorers. We appreciated the shelter provided by wide old oaks, the elasticity of young saplings and the fortification given by junipers and crab apples. If you were to cut us open – slice us and gaze at our cross sections – inside me, you would find ten tidy, agreeable rings; He would contain twelve bawdy, explosive ones.

At that time I felt us inseparable, freewheeling towards our teenage years. Even then I was acutely aware of my role as understudy. It was necessary for me to act as counterweight to the disregard He held for social convention; apologising to shopkeepers following His attempts at pre-teen robbery, providing alibis for missed meals and breaches of curfew and on one sorry occasion, ignoring the desire to speak out about a magazine, taken from an older brothers bedroom. The images had made me uneasy. I felt a great relief when, having tired of rubbing the glossy paper against my cheeks and lips, terrorizing me into making contact with women that left me confused and alarmed, He set it alight. This is not to say, however, that time spent together was wholly unpleasant. I dipped and sometimes even bathed in the opportunity of being a part of ventures which were beyond those I was capable of myself. I took a silent but genuine delight in witnessing, first hand, the spectrum of emotions that were gleaned from sailing a half step closer to danger than I was comfortable with. What He lacked in etiquette, I made up for in reliability.

At that time I felt us inseparable.

Having an army issue penknife, lifted from my father's toolbox, as the only working utensil does not make for quick work. Sharpening stick-arrows one by one in this way, shavings slowly dancing downwards and crowding around your toes, quickly leads to boredom. The bubbling mix of endorphins that fizzed around His mind

and limbs were causing Him to pop with frustration. He scoured the surrounding trees, bushes and undergrowth for an alternative pursuit. Laying His sights on two unfortunate boys (nine doughy and innocent rings apiece), He bounded out of our bolthole. Their tearful stares, obvious and natural reactions to an onrushing, knife swinging maniac, seemed to ignite the crackling tension that howled inside Him. As I watched, the initial, prickling irritation gave way to a sort of thrill, feeding me from a comfortable vantage point, without the burden of any real engagement. His eyes were focused intently on the boys. It was a look of total investment, the search for entertainment had been realised. Like stakes, hammered deep into the forest floor, they remained, upright and rigid. Acorns were soon arcing their way towards the targets, lighting the late afternoon air as they whistled past the now alabaster children. One of the two cried out in a comical whine as the grenade clipped him on the bridge of his nose. He stooped forward, cradling his head as if it were ready to roll straight off his shoulders. Eager to deliver the fantastic, final blow, He turned to me, smiling. What He saw in return were my eyes, sailing high above His, dazzled by a source of confusion and interest. Perched high, watching.

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A hand resting on a negligible hip complete with schoolmarm mannerisms, an appropriation of an action which She had undoubtedly seen before; perhaps from Her Mother, possibly an older Sister. Clothes hung much too loose on a tiny frame, giving a malnourished impression. Any notion of that was quickly dispelled however, by the passion that bristled in the healthy red glow of dimpled cheeks. Before He could think of an appropriate excuse for this aerial bombardment, She was standing between Him and His targets. I had never seen anyone his own age stand up to Him.

I crawled into sight and, misjudging the gradient of the slope, bounced directly into this spontaneous court scene. My loose arrival seemed to trivialise the situation somehow as the targets of a previously rampant acorn assault were now ignored as they bowled away softly with a t-shirt, transparent from sweat, and a grazed nose as souvenirs. We watched anything but each other, sticks were nudged with toes and stones were tossed into brambles until eventually the silent impasse melted into a burgeoning social connection. Undoubtedly, this was aided by a kick, absent-mindedly aimed at a crisp pile of leaves. Watching as they caught form in a breeze, following them as they weaved and landed in Her

nest of cork screw curls; our crumbling laughter was enough to cement the developing bond. This was it. The forest was ours. A triarchy we.

From then, we travelled as a pack. From the moment that the dawn dew began to evaporate until our skin prickled with the burn of the cold night air, we were as one. At some indiscernible point of the summer break we caught a bus. Now comfortable in our own village we craved the experience of somewhere unknown, of anonymity, of alien sounds and assaulting smells; of a place that was not ours. Withering looks from new faces provide ample stimulation for three wayfarers. None more so than that day, Him, protesting innocence with contraband in clear sight, a flushed face offering nothing to ease the suspicions of an explosive shopkeeper. I, watchful and stumbling; unable to catch my breath as voices were raised and fingers were pointed. Her intervention, one part honesty, two parts pleading and haphazardly diluted with comedy, reduced the danger to a manageable level that provided an opportunity to exit unscathed. Maybe not a clean incision, perhaps a flesh wound, though not life threatening. For that brief bulb of summer, this was how it was. Her, acting as a foil for Him and I. She was neither as socially offensive as He, nor as unashamedly apologetic as I. An anti-hybrid.

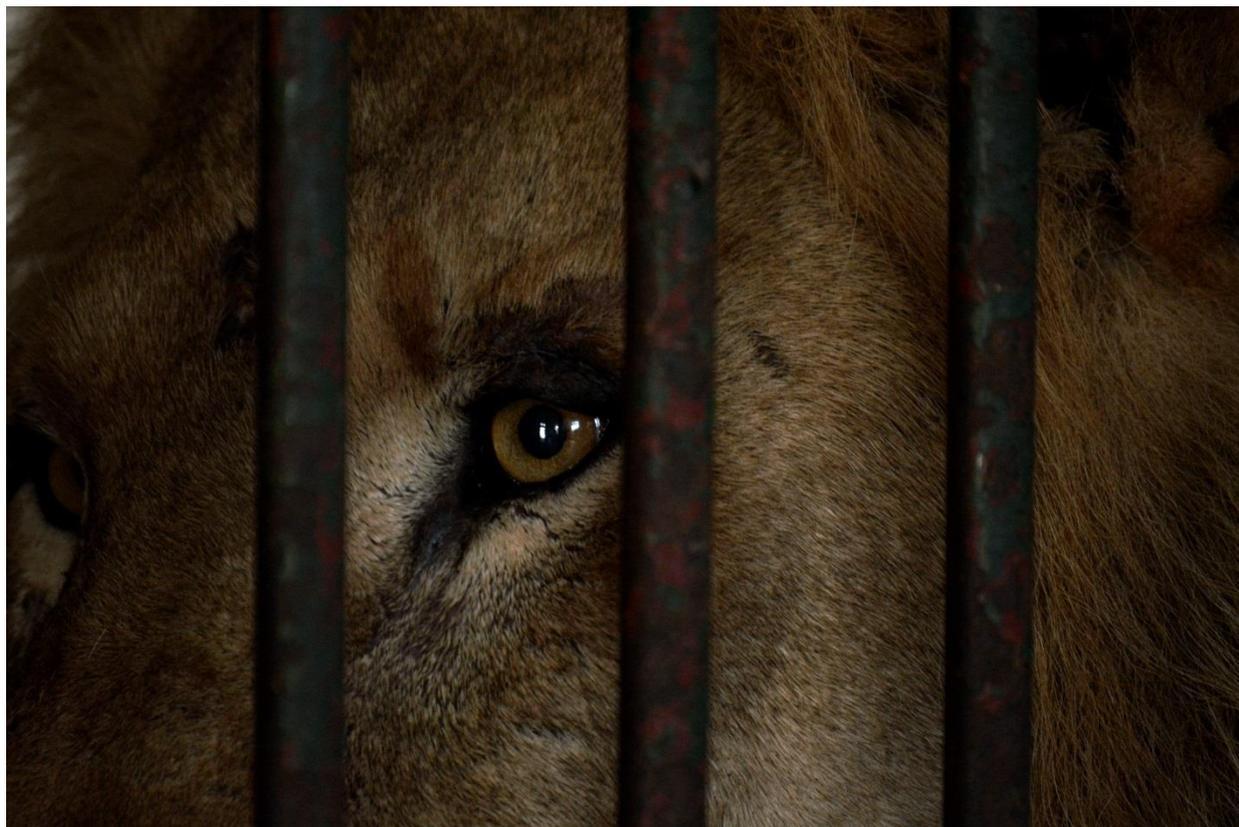
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We watched as the leaves—once robust, taut and green—reached middle age. Their supple skin was being replaced with a wiser, less vital shell. Over the remaining weeks of summer, our union was also changing course. Suddenly and—for me at least—unexpectedly, three people were no longer a mandatory requirement. As each passing day held onto the balm of sunlight for a marginally shorter time than the day before, Her and I found reasons to share ever increasing moments together. These engagements started to matter more to me than anything else, the humour and reliability in our fragile friendship gave weight to a form of emotional growth. I told her, in the most grown-up language I could muster, how trees could grow together, how they would remain inseparable if they were planted beside each other, how from the moment their dewy branches entwined there was no way it could be reversed. Bound together the way fingers on the hands of lovers entangle, the position our fingers suddenly and frighteningly found themselves in. While never intentional, we were, in a sense, promoted to a higher emotional platform. He remained stagnant, but content.

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I did not recognize the end of our friendship; as I took less enjoyment from times shared with Him, forcing myself into a role I no longer had a script for. I did not recognize the end of our friendship; as I had subconsciously tweaked my route so that I tapped at Her sitting room window first each morning instead of His, eager to gorge myself on Her words and Her curls at a slower pace than was necessary as we walked to His house. I recognized the end of our friendship; sitting with Her, under a porcelain shield of foliage, its protective gauze hiding our inosculated fingers. I recognized the end of our friendship; as an acorn landed square against my chest, a second made my ear ring, a third brought blood to her nose.

# The Artists



Dying King | *Chloe C. Ivy*

C.P. Blackburn

Chris is a fussy New Yorker, who has lived and worked in Madagascar, Hungary, Belarus, and Turkey. He is currently working in Istanbul, delighting in Turkish hospitality and cuisine. When he is not grading papers or fussing with his stories, you can find him fussing-about on his paddleboard. He has previously been published in the Flash Dogs anthology. Pay him a visit at @CP\_Blackburn

Damien B. Donnelly

Born in Dublin, now living in Paris, Damien was a pattern maker for various fashion brands in London and Amsterdam but always had a love for writing. He will be featured in the short story anthology 'Second Chance', published in Dublin, this November with a Flash Fiction appearing in The Fable Online's Halloween issue. He is working on his first novel and his blog [www.deuxiemepeau.wordpress.com](http://www.deuxiemepeau.wordpress.com) featuring poetry, prose and photography. Otherwise he can be found in the kitchen, baking delightfully delicious carrot cakes.

Nick Dunster

By day, Nick Dunster runs a small, independent fostering service. By night, he writes very small stories for his "fiftywordsdaily" blog and other flash fiction.

Justin Elesia

Justin Elesia is a favourite. He has work in Circus, and the South Bank Review, along with various titbits all over the internet waxing about the film, Ninja Terminator. You could say he's wasted a lot of time, but why be a dick about it? When not writing letters to celebrities he believes slighted him, he is answering court summons' or stockpiling a virtual library of records on Discogs. He's also really trying to write more. Anyway, he thanks you for reading his work and invites you over to his house for tea and biscuits: [www.yellaholes.wordpress.com/](http://www.yellaholes.wordpress.com/)

Melissa Fu

Melissa Fu grew up in northern New Mexico and currently lives in a village near Cambridge, England. She is working on a collection of memoir-style pieces based on growing up in the Rocky Mountains, two of which have been selected as competition winners appearing in Words and Women: Two, (Unthank Books, 2014) and Original Writing Summer Short Story Anthology (Original Writing, 2015). She also has two short pieces appearing in issue 92 of Right Hand Pointing.

Nod Ghosh

*Nod Ghosh lives in Christchurch, New Zealand, a beautiful crumbling city where elves are not hard to find. Nod's writing has been accepted for Penduline Press, TheGayUK, The Citron Review, Flash Frontier, JAAM and Takahe. Further details: <http://www.nodghosh.com/>*

Jon Green

*Jon Green is published at Rollick Magazine, Literally Stories and The Fake Press. To read more of Jonathan's work visit [themapofantarctica.wordpress.com](http://themapofantarctica.wordpress.com) or follow him on twitter: @Jon\_D\_Green.*

Nik Guzman

*Nik is a teenager who currently is situated in Istanbul and enjoys art, hair dye, and travelling the world. Instagram: @sproutingson*

Chloe C. Ivy

*Chloe...if you're looking for a face to go with that name, look at her photos. Those are the most real parts of her; they're how she sees the world. She wants to capture moments like fireflies in a jar. She wants to live, experience and remember."*

Jennifer R. Jackson

*Jennifer Ruth Jackson reads too much and travels too little. Her work has appeared in The Binnacle, Verse Wisconsin, Kaleidoscope Magazine, and more. She lives in a small Wisconsin city with her husband. Visit her on Twitter: @jenruthjackson.*

Jaeheon Kim

*Jaeheon Kim is a musician and a part-time writer. Born in South Korea, Jaeheon enjoys isolating himself from the outside world and procrastinating like any healthy individual.*

Micah Mackinnon

*Writer. Sketcher. Creator.*

David O'Neill

*David O'Neill is a writer, poet and musician from Dublin, Ireland. His writing has been described as work which 'approaches heavy subjects with beauty and gravitas'. He has been published in various Journals including The Incubator Journal, Spontaneity Magazine, The Useless Degree Magazine, The Lonely Crowd and Deep Water Literary Journal. He tweets @cartoonmoonirl*

Amanda Quinn

*I am a writer based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. I have been published in the anthologies 'Scraps' and 'Landmarks' (from National Flash Fiction Day) and 'Inspired by my Museum (British Council) and in magazines/online including 'Butchers' Dog', 'Alliterati', 'After the Pause', 'Paper Swans' and 'Paragraph Planet'. In 2014, I came second in the annual poetry competition organised by the Black Country Living Museum.*

Erin Traylor

*Erin Traylor graduated in May with a B.A. in English from Salisbury University. She now lives in Siesta Key, Florida where she practices roller derby and takes care of three cats. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Cheat River Review, Red Earth Review, Permafrost Magazine, and Germ Magazine*

Lisanne van der Oort

*A Dutch Visual Art student living in Istanbul with a special interest in the creation of 2-D pieces that convey psychological stories, emotions, and mental states in a symbolic way.*

Bart Van Goethem

*Father. Copywriter. Drummer. Facetious if necessary. National Flash Fiction Day Anthology 2013 & 2015. Follow him @bartvangoethem.*



Elysium | *Lisanne van der Oort*