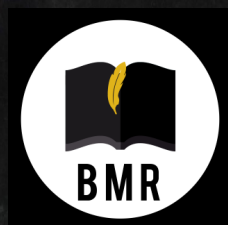


BLACK MARKET RE-VIEW

SPRING 2018



BLACK MARKET RE-VIEW



Online Literary Journal

Editors

Editor-in-Chief

Mostyn Jones

Fiction Editor

Isabella Casteneda

Poetry Editor

Joe Smither

Flash Fiction Editor

Danni Boneheyo

Events & Logistics Coordinator

Jen Murphy

Social Media Editor

Dylan Booth

Contents

Sunita Thind

<i>Dusky Daughters</i>	5
<i>A Punjabi Funeral / Sasakara</i>	7
<i>Dastar / Turban</i>	8

Michael Mau

<i>Platypus</i>	10
-----------------------	----

Brindley Hallam Dennis

<i>Disposals</i>	25
<i>The collector of secrets</i>	26

Stephen C Middleton

<i>Outsider Fragments</i>	27
<i>In the Ruins</i>	28

Black Market Interviews: Ilya Kaminsky

Natasha Leigh

<i>Billy's lane</i>	36
---------------------------	----

Niamh McMullan

<i>06:14:33</i>	40
-----------------------	----

Paul Beckman

<i>Sobs and Makeouts</i>	41
--------------------------------	----

Brendan Quinn

<i>Torments and Temptations</i>	43
---------------------------------------	----

John Rodzvilla

Five minutes with you45

Sally Barrett

Body Language53

Rebecca Metcalf

Cromer Pier55

Jamie Stewart

Notes on the death of a woman57

Mark Russell

*O^***62

O^^^63

*O^^^**64

Sandra Arnold

As Clear as Crystal.....65

Richard M Thompson

The Virtues 67

Done Days68

Ian C Smith

Automat..... 70

Happenstance71

Parsifal.....72

Mitchel Grabois

Thrill Spike.....73

Sunita Thind

Sunita is a poet from Derbyshire, she has worked as a model, a teacher, and a makeup artist. She is passionate about poetry and is now spending most of her time writing. Her work appears here for the first time.

Dusky Daughters

‘Sonni Gauri’ (fair and lovely in Punjabi).

Trampling on this so-called dusky rose.

‘Tusee karli!’ (You are so dark in Punjabi).

‘Selena bought sonni’ Selena is very fair.

‘Tu see Karli’ squawks my tawny, rotund uncle!

‘Stay out of the sun!’ his wife parrots in Punjabi.

Shall we join the illustrious ranks of the brightening and whitening brides.

Lets have a bonfire of this avalanche of skin whitening products.

Perhaps mercury induced and lethal...

These skin tones are considered grotesque if too tawny, too rusty brown or too onyx black.

This processed paleness of the sequinned skeletons on glam mags.

Is this dusky darkness devilish?

Are we itemized by the colour of our skin?

Family members met you with the obligatory scorn.

Wilting under an Indian red giant.

Scorched and blackening on a Malaysian beach.

I am the shade of fragrant tea that my Dadi-ma and Nani-ma slurp while nonchalantly remarking that skin colour dictates aesthetic appeal.

Why should I disown this swarthy skin?

Revolt against my own reflection?

My puha-ji proclaims my mixed heritage niece ‘Has these gray eyes, pale skin, light hair and looks positively European!’

She is a dazzling furore.
What about the dusky daughters?
With the cinnamon doe eyes and endless limbs.
Should I have slathered on the sun screen and appear joyfully porcelain.
Not a golden and caliginous exterior.
Internalized!
Indoctrinated!
Re-iterated!
To believe that a chocolate brown complexion is heinous, hideous and low
caste?!

Why not fifty shades of the diverse foundations?
Pearlised and pale....is not the only ideal.
Not the only beauteous ideology.
Mami-Ji would say lather yourself in saffron and haldi paste to make yourself
bride fair with smooth skin.
Spurned and spurred to this bleaching?
Until we are all bone white and shiny bones.
Caucasian, calcified clones.
Why this Westernism and colour-ism?
Assimilate out of this brownish burden- it is not inferiority.
Perhaps I am ingrained to with this bigotry.
This bleaching syndrome.
White progeny.
'Gori hai sundar' (white is beautiful-in Punjabi).
I was once forbade for going out in the sun.
You cannot camouflage who you are.
Lamenting female relations.
Validation for this blanched, tinged cadaverous form.
They want us to be milky and mute.
A spectral ghost.
Do men have an acute, sexual preference for it.
Misconstrued is this baking, bronze goddess.

A Punjabi Funeral / Sasakara

Bleached ghosts in pearl and white salwar kameez, korta and saris alike-no adornments or decorative patterns.

Witheringly white-colours and tones of the afterlife.

Enthralled in grieving, white shrouds.

Chunnis, turbans, handkerchief.

Weaponised cries.

Crumpled relatives- Dada Ji, Mama Ji-shrill they are.

Squirting are tears, glittered in remorse.

Unravelling are Dadi-ma and Nani-ma saddening hollers.

Underworld.

The corpse washed, bathed in ghosts. Immaculately clean and clothed with the 5 K's

The 'Mool Manthar' is recited-this fundamental Sikh prayer.

Gurdwara, occupied by starless eye sockets.

Exhume the body on display.

Sikh funeral rites-this is 'Hukam' (God's will) -we tell ourselves that.

Dressed in the garments of the holy.

Priest in fire orange turbans ordained by the holy.

The body the clothing of the soul that is cast off at death.

'Antam Sanskar'-final rite.

Scrapped of smiles, tears like wet petals.

Freedom from the cycle of birth is called Mukthi.

Mama-ji told me.

Langar is served. (free meal)

Stuffing my mouth with roti-to stifle my cries.

I gulp down the Parshad-it is gloopy and sickly sweet.

During the Shabads (Holy hymns.)

Cremated in a furore.

This loved carcass.

Reincarnated.

Congregation-of weeping wailer's.

Lamenting.

The 'Kirtan Sohaila' and the 'Ardas' recited.

A ten day reading of the 'Paath'.

No dazzling death monument is erected-over the remains of the dead.

It is the Sikh custom.

Dastar / Turban

Saintly soldiers soliloquy- a Sikh warriors guidance.

Some school kids might think that Sikhs are genies.

This hefty head gear.

Not all are just hell bent on commandeering public buses and occupying corner shops.

Brother took off his turban once before Mama made him wear it for school and kicked it around like a football. It resembled a decapitated head.

Sometimes school kids would bait him.

Sowing the seeds of doubt not to adorn his head with a turban.

Home coming is spiritual, he is not just in a minority.

How many styles of turban...Dastar....are there?

The rounded turban is seen as more holy, the more pointed is colonial and militaristic.

Door of the guru is the Gurdwara.

To stride into the Langar hall for a free vegetarian lunch of daal (lentil curry) and roti (chapattis).

It is mandatory this headdress for Sikh men in the prayer hall.

My brother once attended a turban tying class-this twisting of cloth in this perplexing fashion.

Hair remains uncut so that the body remains as the Sikh god intended.

I was forced to keep my onyx hair waist length till I was 17.

A curtain over oppression snaking down my back.

I did not wear a turban as a girl or lapsed Sikh with unplaited faith.

Hair must be clean and unblemished and entwined in cloth.

Grandmother said only the Indian elite were garnished in turbans.

Sikhs wore them in defiance, occasionally scalped by the obligatory Mughal ruler.

Caste system abolished-surnames Singh-Lion for a male.

Kaur-Princess for a female.

All indistinguishable- no untouchables residing here.

I do not possess this holy aptitude.

My cousin sister chose a Dastar.

She announced she was a feminist, honoured to wear a turban.

She didn't want to be a hairless, shiny woman.

Tying the turban with purpose,

They are not rag heads, it is not a hat.

It does not conceal anything.

They turban fortress, part of the Sikh army-the Sikh Marshall Order.

Decorated with glittering, circular throwing rings.

They were weaponised, hurled at enemies.

Sikh warrior- baring down on the opponent, two feet tall.

Stature is magnificent.

My Grandfather said he smelled the pride on himself.

That 80,000 of his Dastar compatriots were slaughtered in both World Wars.

For the British.

I feel British.

He said when he tidied the layers of material, there were neat edges, not rough.

My Na, Na (Grandfather in Punjabi) dignified with his luxuriant beard.

Am I strongly over the notion of god?

This idea of my brother's black blue braid remaining uncut, coiled in a saffron orange Dastar.

Part of the gang colours, this iconography of the noble Dastar.

My head will remain unadorned.

Michael Mau

Michael received his Masters degree from the Eastern Kentucky University Bluegrass Writer's studio. He is a writer, actor, runner, artist, and father. His work has appeared in numerous American creative writing journals and he has performed with The Woodford Theatre and the Bluegrass Opera.

Platypus

I had been stuck in a remedial biology class the summer after my freshman year of high school. My mother had wanted me to take an extra class over the summer, but she accidentally enrolled me in this one. When I complained, she told me she didn't know what the difference was.

Shannon showed up for class on the third day. I only knew her because my friend Arnie liked her, and because of her breasts, which were more pronounced than other girls' in our grade. When she walked into class that June, her face was popping with acne and she had splotchy skin on her legs. She glared at me, and I went back to reading from my work packet, 'Science U.S.A.'

We continued like this, two strangers brought together by typical circumstances, actively avoiding one another. Then one day something fell out of Shannon's pocket, and everything changed.

I had heard the clink, clink, clink of a hard object bouncing off the floor, and as I turned my head to see what it was, the shiny white ball about the size of a jawbreaker landed on the top of my shoe.

I reflexively picked it up but almost dropped it when I saw that it wasn't a ball but a glass eye.

Immediately Shannon was standing over me. 'Give it to me, faggot.'

I had been called that by a handful of boys, and I knew if I was hearing it, I was about to be tormented. Just as quickly as I had picked up the eye, I handed it up to Shannon.

I saw my friend Arnie that week and told him about Shannon's glass eye.

'So,' he said.

'But I thought you liked her,' I said.

Arnie told me that his older brother Paul said he'd heard Shannon was really a dude.

I told him that was dumb and that, besides, she was developed.

‘She stuffs,’ he said, ‘and nobody but grandmothers says ‘developed’.’

‘I think she’s cool,’ I told him.

He told me to get a hobby. I did.

My hobby became stalking Shannon: waiting for just the right moment when I could ask her about the eye. Stairwells, sidewalks, water fountains—I trailed her like a detective. One day as she was coming out of the bathroom, she pushed me against the wall and asked, ‘What the hell do you want?’

I was so stunned, I just said, ‘I want to see the eyeball.’

Her eyes softened, and she asked, ‘Why?’

I didn’t know why, and I told her that.

‘I don’t have it here,’ she said, eyeing me as if to glean my intentions. ‘I left it at home.’

I think sometimes about myself back then, how terrified I was of other people, of girls specifically. And Shannon wasn’t just a girl. She was tall, but not birdlike; she was tough, but not a bully; she had a voice like Kathleen Turner, and she was only fifteen. Maybe I saw how vulnerable she was—saw something in her that I had only seen in myself. ‘Can I come over to your house?’ I asked.

‘Maybe,’ she said.

I pictured her room: Motley Crüe posters and a corkboard with ticket stubs and photos of Johnny Depp and Keanu Reeves. She’d put the eye on her vanity next to the vanilla perfume she wore. There it would sit. Waiting for me.

When I went to my bike at the end of class, I found Shannon’s address written on a page torn from the biology textbook and taped to my handlebars. I rode straight there.

Shannon lived in one of only two houses on her street that hadn’t been bulldozed for this strip mall they started a construction for, but never finished.

As I sat on my bike on the sidewalk out front, Shannon walked up from behind me and thumped my ear hard. ‘Don’t get too jealous, faggot,’ she said and ran up the driveway.

Her room was plain. No posters, no ticket stubs, no Keanu. Just yellowing walls and a beige comforter. Shannon picked up the eye off her dresser and tossed it to me like it was an ordinary ball.

‘You really like it, don’t you?’ Shannon asked.

‘I don’t know,’ I said. I didn’t know if I liked it, but I knew I needed it just like I would grow to need Shannon even when I didn’t want her.

‘You want it?’ she asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Too bad.’

She took it from my hand, and when she did, her fingernails tickled my palm. I thought then about what Arnie’s older brother had said, the absurdity of his claim, and I was just angry enough with her for snatching the eye I blurted out, ‘Arnie said his brother said you’re a guy.’

‘Arnie sniffs his fingers,’ she replied. ‘Now piss off.’

I didn’t move, not sure how to translate her command.

‘Door. Driveway. Bike. Home,’ she said, pointing at the door like my mom did when she wanted the dog to go out to the bathroom.

Summer school ended, I got my second biology credit, and I spent July riding my bike around town with Arnie, finding excuses to drive by Shannon’s house.

I showed Arnie where Shannon lived, and he said he already knew that. I told him I had been in her bedroom all by myself. That’s when he dared me to go look in her window.

‘That’s dumb,’ I said.

‘Because you’re a pussy.’ He pursed his lips to do his ‘pussy call,’ which was just repeating the word quickly like calling a cat.

‘You do it then,’ I challenged and immediately regretted.

Arnie was off his bike and sprinting towards the house. When I tried to follow, my shoelace got caught in the chain of my bike and I was tasting blood and gravel in seconds.

I sat at the end of her driveway, not knowing whether to untangle my lace or wipe my face or spit. I checked my teeth with my tongue. Sore but seemingly not loose. As I gently brushed at my face, I heard Arnie yelling, ‘Go!’

When I looked up, he was standing over me. ‘Go. Get up. Go,’ he said.

‘I got—’ but Arnie picked up his bike and ran with it until he had enough momentum to jump up and pedal away.

I saw Shannon out of my peripheral vision. I looked to her for answers, but she just stared at me. She was wearing an oversized t-shirt with the name of some band I had never heard of. It came all the way down to her knees. Even from 100 or so feet away, I could see her spotty red skin.

‘What happened?’ I asked.

She held up her middle finger and then turned to go back inside.

I freed myself and went to find Arnie. His bike was parked outside the Circle K. He was sitting on the curb with a giant Icee.

‘I saw it,’ he said as I approached.

‘What?’

‘It,’ he emphasized. ‘Its thing.’

He told me he went window to window until he saw movement behind a sheer curtain. He peeked in and saw Shannon naked.

‘I told you,’ he said. ‘I told you.’

I couldn’t see this as anything more than a lie fueled by jealousy. ‘You didn’t see anything,’ I said and took his Icee.

When Arnie didn’t protest or trying to convince me further, I knew he was telling the truth. Or he thought he was.

The rest of the summer, I avoided Shannon’s street. I avoided Arnie, too. If I didn’t see either of them, I could create my own truth. Arnie saw what he wanted to see. Shannon was upset because we were peeping Toms.

When school started back, I was hoping that they had both just forgotten about what happened.

The whole school was packed into the auditorium for an opening day assembly about making school count. The speaker came in on a unicycle. He was dressed like Elvis. Sitting by myself in the front corner, I scanned the crowd. From across the auditorium, Shannon was staring at me.

I didn’t see her again all day, but when I went to my locker, I found a note inside.

Instead of going home, I followed the directions on the note: ‘Come to my house. Come alone. We need to talk.’

I played out different scenarios as I rode. She’d call Arnie a liar. She’d beat me up. She’d introduce me to her twin brother who has a defect and doesn’t go outside.

She met me at her door and led me back to her room. There was the glass eye, perched on a notebook on her dresser. As if it were watching over Shannon’s room.

With Shannon watching me, I went over to the eye and picked it up. She snatched it from me immediately and pushed me back so I sat on her bed.

‘Is it true?’ I asked as if we had been in the middle of a conversation and I had already told her what Arnie said.

‘It’s almost true,’ Shannon said coolly, staring into the eye.

I let her words fill the room, bounce off the posters, the corkboard, the broken mirror. I was expecting her to laugh along, to tell me she really did have a brother, to call Arnie a lying piece of shit. I picked the tiny white pills off her bedspread, rolling them into a ball in my palm.

Shannon asked me if I heard her.

When I looked up, her face had changed. Her jaw had a sharper angle; her nose was thicker, shoulders more broad. I told her I heard her, though I wished I hadn’t.

Then I asked her a question she had surely been asking herself for years. ‘What are you?’

‘What are *you*?’ she asked.

I remember being so insulted by her question as I told her, ‘I’m a boy.’

‘I’m not,’ Shannon said in a tone that mocked my defensiveness. It was true. Arnie’s brother had known it, and Arnie saw it. Maybe everyone else at school already knew, and I was the only one left out.

When I was five or six, my parents had gone on vacation alone and had left me with my aunt and uncle and my cousin Valerie. I don’t remember the specifics of the situation, but at some point I told her my penis hurt. She had responded quickly and excitedly, ‘Mine does, too.’

Valerie didn’t know what a penis was, didn’t know she was built differently than I, but Arnie had said Shannon had one, and she was telling me what he had said was true.

Whether to prove my knowledge of anatomy or to correct Shannon’s obvious misunderstanding, I said, ‘Girls don’t have penises.’

‘Some do,’ she said. ‘Besides, I’m not a girl either.’

Shannon held onto the eyeball tightly as if it was a talisman that gave her the courage she needed to confess.

‘I have to go,’ I said on an inhale, but I couldn’t move. I fixed my eyes on the giant eyeball in her hand in the same way I had to stare at a landmark to keep myself from getting seasick. My mother had taught me to count my breaths, so that’s what I did. I focused on the individual splotches of color in the iris and counted.

I was up to fifty-six when Shannon asked, ‘You ever seen a platypus?’

‘No,’ I said to her bedspread.

‘But you know what one is.’

I nodded.

‘What is a platypus?’ she asked.

The ridiculousness of her question gave me the strength to look at her. I still couldn't talk to her.

‘I mean, is it a bird?’ she asked. ‘Is it a beaver? When I was little, I thought they were beavers wearing duck costumes. Maybe I had seen it in a cartoon. You know, the beaver wants to fit in with the ducks so it puts on a bill and some webbed feet. It's not a costume, though. I have these wildlife cards—’

I smiled reflexively. I had had those cards, too. Just the sample set, but one of them was the platypus.

‘I'm a platypus,’ she said and handed me the eyeball back. ‘And if you tell anyone else, I'll cut your dick off. You can go now.’

I wasn't at all sure that she wasn't playing a prank on me, but I secured the eye into the tiny pocket on my jeans, and I left.

Once home, I dropped the eye into a velour bag that once held Dungeons and Dragons dice. I held it in my hand as I slept, caressing the soft skin of the bag around the eye. I would wake up several times a night and make sure the eye was still there. Sometimes I pulled it out, imagining as I looked into that black pupil, I was eye to eye with Shannon.

Shannon and I didn't even acknowledge one another during the day. I felt guilty, but when Shannon and I met up in the afternoon, she said, ‘I hope you don't mind if I ignore you at school.’

Despite my relief, I was hurt by the idea coming from her. I said, ‘Okay.’

‘You're the only one who knows,’ she said.

I told her Arnie knew.

‘Arnie doesn't know shit,’ she said.

‘He knows you're a guy,’ I told her. ‘Or his brother does.’

‘That's why I have to ignore you at school,’ she said.

‘Because you're a guy?’

‘Because you think I am.’

Despite Arnie's insistence Shannon was not what she seemed, his cruel 'rumor' never took hold—maybe if he had been popular. I forced myself to stop noticing her at school altogether. When her name came up, she was just that weird girl with the pizza face and the big boobs. As the eye lay hidden in plain sight on my nightstand, so too did Shannon disappear into the clutter.

At night though, both became my treasured jewels. I had worked up the courage to ask Shannon for her phone number, to which she replied, 'You like me. Gross.'

When I called her, we talked about school stuff for a few minutes, about movies we wanted to see. There were questions I wanted answered, but my lips tightened around my teeth and wouldn't let them out. Soon we were silent. I listened for her breathing to make sure she was there, and I nestled the phone into my pillow so I could lie down and still hear her.

Each night, we stayed on the phone until one of us finally passed out or my mom picked up. After my second lecture on tying up the phone line, I braved an even worse punishment by sneaking out. When I couldn't, Shannon did.

'I need to tell you something,' she said to me one night as we sat on my floor rolling the eye back and forth. 'And you're not going to believe me.'

I told her that was pretty much impossible, but to go ahead and try me.

'The eye,' she said, 'It's a communication device. My mom sent it to me. I'm not from Earth.'

'That's definitely true,' I said.

'You know why I told you?' Shannon asked. 'Because of this.' She held the eye in her hand like she was weighing it. The pupil and iris were staring off at a diorama of the solar system I had made a couple of years earlier. 'My mom said—' she trailed off.

'Your skin is clearing up,' I said. I was falling in love with her.

'You sound like my dad.'

Until that moment, I hadn't ever talked to Shannon about her dad. He was never around when I was there, and Shannon never said anything like, 'My dad will be home soon,' or 'My dad's bringing home pizza.' He was a non-entity.

Without my permission, my mouth shot out, 'Does your dad—'

'No,' she said, not wanting me to finish.

'How?'

She shrugged and said she had to go.

The next night, in the seclusion of her bedroom, Shannon explained she didn't even know her dad until she was ten. He didn't know she existed. One of those stories of the one-night-stand followed by the nine-month-stand.

'It's not that my mom didn't want a boy and forced me to dress like a girl. She told me I refused to be a boy. I screamed at my first haircut, ignored the trucks and trains she bought me, freaked out over princesses. All that stuff that's so stereotypical. When I could talk, I told my mom I was a girl. I was already named Shannon after my mom's great uncle.'

Shannon talked. I listened. I felt like an interviewer sitting down with a celebrity. Shannon's mom gave in, at first maybe to humor her she thought. When she enrolled Shannon in Kindergarten, she told the school the birth certificate was wrong; they didn't question the woman standing there with a five-year-old who was obviously a little girl.

'My mom had kept her life a secret from me,' Shannon said. 'I didn't know about the drugs or the other stuff. She must have known something was going to happen because she took me to meet my dad about a week before she left. You didn't live here yet, but her disappearance was kind of a big deal.'

Arnie had told me Shannon's mom had been shot, but I hadn't believed him. His gesticulating and melodramatic voice made the whole story seem like a movie. When Shannon moved in with her dad, he didn't know what she was. She said he was so terrified of having a little girl he treated her like she had a disease he didn't want to catch.

My mom was always barging into the bathroom when I was naked. I couldn't imagine keeping something like that from her. I asked Shannon what would happen if her dad found out.

'He won't,' she said.

Shannon played some Native American ceremony music she had gotten from the thrift store, and we lay back on her bed looking at nothing in particular.

Then we were looking at each other. I brought my hand to her face, her skin warming my cold and trembling hand. She did the same, and my tense jaw softened. I shifted, and the eye escaped from my pocket.

I moved my hand to grab it, but Shannon was faster. She was on her knees and holding the eye while I tried to get my balance on her bed.

'Sucker,' she said as if our moment had been a ruse to steal a precious stone.

That's when I kissed her. The force of me moving towards her knocked her back onto the bed, and I fell onto her. I could feel the eyeball pressing into the back of my head as she held me tightly. I dug my fingers between her back and mattress; if the universe would have allowed, I would have pulled her into me.

She said she had heard a noise, but whatever the reason, Shannon brought the eyeball down onto to the back of my skull with a *thwock*. Dazed, I rolled over. I don't know who started laughing first, but once we started we couldn't stop, the infectious giggles passing back and forth until I fell asleep.

I woke up that morning to Shannon's erection stretching her underwear to the ceiling. I didn't just want to touch her penis, I wanted to hold it, to take the piece of her that in my mind kept her from being a girl and wrap my fingers around it. I'd go back to sleep, and Shannon would think it all an accident.

In my mind I was reaching out, fingers inching closer, but in reality I lay as still as I could, captivated by the bulge.

'I'd tell you to take a picture, but—'

'No...'

We both sat up, Shannon more slowly than I, and she asked, 'You wanna see it?'

She locked her door and ordered me to stand at the foot of her bed. 'No touching,' she said, and she pulled her underwear down.

She was not like me. My penis had a rounded head and a collar like a turtle neck. Shannon's turtle neck had been unrolled and made her penis look like an echidna. Her blonde pubic hair looked lopsided as if she had started to cut it off but stopped.

My gaze was broken when Shannon dug into her clump of hair to scratch it. I swallowed, but my throat was so dry I coughed.

'Your turn,' she said.

My hands immediately went to my crotch to protect it.

We hadn't heard the car pull up or the front door shut, but we both heard the 'Hey' coming from down the hall. Shannon pushed me into a chair and grabbed the first piece of clothing she could before slipping on an oversized t-shirt and rushing to unlock the door.

At the very second the lock clicked, Shannon's dad pushed his way in.

‘Out,’ was all he had to say.

Shannon called later to tell me that her dad wasn’t *mad* mad but that I should stay away for a little while. Before she hung up, she added, ‘Is it embarrassing for you that your dick is smaller than a platypus’s?’

Despite her physical gender and despite her platypus rhetoric, I could only see Shannon as a girl. Even when she wore jeans, even when she spoke in her puberty-stricken voice. Even when I saw her naked.

‘Eddie Philpot has bigger boobs than you do,’ I said.

‘Yeah. He’s fat,’ she replied.

‘Why do you stuff your bra?’ I asked. I wanted her to see that even *she* thought of herself as a girl. ‘Do you shave your face?’

‘Look, just because you feel inadequate about yourself doesn’t mean you need to try to make me feel the same way.’

I knew she felt inadequate though. If she was proud of who she was, she would tell other people she was a platypus; she’d take the tissue out of her unnecessary bra; she’d let me love her.

Until I saw her standing at Shannon’s locker touching her fingers, Selena Kelleher had been invisible to me. Afterwards, I saw her everywhere: that skater boy haircut with a stringy rattail, her mismatched Converse, her jean jacket with a malformed skull bleached into the back.

‘We’re just friends,’ Shannon told me.

‘Since when?’

‘Since I don’t know. Quit being so precious.’

I didn’t know what she meant by that. She should have said jealous because that’s what I was. To the rest of the world, Shannon and I were strangers, linked only by a boy who didn’t even go to school with us anymore—Arnie’s parents had decided boarding school was the best fit.

Two girls touching fingers in a crowded hall, and I was the only witness to this catastrophe.

There they were in the cafeteria, sniffing each other’s milk and making faces. Selena saying something hilarious, and Shannon lighting up the way she was only supposed to with me. Selena showing Shannon the L and R she had Sharpied onto the rubber toes of her shoes, and Shannon acting like this was the cleverest idea anyone had come up with. Shannon tugging on

Selena's rattail, and Selena pulling Shannon's hair back to show her, *This is what you would look like if you were a lesbo like me.*

Every time I closed my eyes I could see them together, so one night well after one a.m.. I walked to Shannon's house and watched her sleep, picturing myself curled under her arm, and even the imagined sensation of her erection pressing into me excited me. I was, I'm sure, completely silent, a ghost, but the din of my rushing adrenaline must have woken her up. She didn't startle. Instead, she calmly walked over and opened the window.

'Hi,' she said.

'Does Selena know?' I asked.

When moved to kiss her, a compulsion driven by jealousy, she backed away.

'What do you want, Christopher?'

I couldn't remember her ever saying my name aloud, not once. Hearing her say Christopher was like I had never heard my own name spoken. Christopher: a word I didn't understand spoken by a foreign doppelgänger of someone I thought I knew.

'I want the eye back,' I said.

Shannon looked over to her dresser at the round object that seemed to emit its own light, then she looked back to me. 'It isn't yours,' she said. 'Go home.'

So many times during the day, I could have spoken to Shannon. Just said hello even. Waved at her. Cornered her under the stairs and felt her lips against mine. But I didn't. Even when I watched her hugging Selena. Even when she cut her hair short. Even when they walked down the hall holding hands. Even when someone wrote dyke on her locker.

Arnie could never convince people Shannon was a boy, but Selena had transformed her into a lesbian within two months. There were kids at our school whom everyone assumed were gay: boys who had lisps or flitted their hands, girls who played softball. People said things behind their backs, made seemingly innocuous jokes. As long as a kid didn't rub it in your face, as long as there was still a chance you were wrong.

Shannon had been mine. She had stayed hidden until I wanted to see her. She was my secret keeper, and I was hers. Now she was with Selena, and her secret was even more hidden than before.

Too many nights I lay in bed fully dressed, ready to sneak out to see Shannon. Too many nights I imagined her with Selena. Imagined that moment of revelation, the initial shock, the questions, and the inevitable conclusion that they fit together perfectly.

Shannon ignored the taunting at school, but Selena lashed out at her tormenters. She cursed and punched and threatened worse. In line in the cafeteria, this guy tried to show off by standing behind Shannon and ordering. In his best husky voice, he said, 'I'll have the pussy, please.'

Shannon said, 'You wish.'

Selena punched him in the ear.

One week when Selena was suspended, I worked up the courage to talk to Shannon at school. Our gym class was playing dodgeball, and we were among a crowd of weaklings and weirdoes watching from the bleachers.

We talked about Arnie away at school and about how we were halfway through high school. We talked about videos we had seen on MTV, about how the last season of Saturday Night Live was way better than this one.

'I miss you,' she whispered and touched my knee.

That night Shannon showed up at my house.

'I brought Hot Pockets,' she said as she breezed by me up to my room.

After her explanation of how the walking time from her house to mine was the exact amount of time needed to cool the core of a Hot Pocket, she went right into talking about Selena.

She was trying to be cute at first, showing me the marker tattoo she drew on her forearm, the double S that mimicked a Nazi emblem. When I showed her I wasn't impressed, she said, 'She understands me.'

'I understand you,' I said.

'Not like she does.'

'Why? Because she's a dyke?'

Her laugh came out like a coughing fit, like she was choking on a punch line I had fed her.

'Shut up,' I yelled.

She laughed harder.

'Shut up.'

And harder.

'Shut the fuck up.'

She let me cry for a bit before she put her hand on my back. 'I just couldn't believe you used that word,' she said. 'And then you got so mad. I brought you something.'

She handed me an envelope she had pulled out of her back pocket. Inside was a folded drawing of the eyeball.

‘You drew this?’ I asked, thinking I knew Shannon even less than I thought.

‘Selena did.’

I dropped the drawing. My tears were returning.

‘She understands what it means to be different, to feel like you’re trapped in a Halloween costume—and it’s one that’s way more boring than who you really are. And she’s not afraid to walk down the hall with me.’

Her comment was unfair. She was the one who had made that rule, and I told her as much.

‘I did it to protect you,’ she said.

I wanted to tell her I was ready to walk down the hall with her, that I didn't care what other people thought, that I loved her for who she was. What I said was, ‘Then why don’t you tell her you’re a boy and see what she says?’

‘To you, I’ll always be a boy,’ she said, ‘a boy pretending to be a girl.’

I once again asked her, ‘What are you?’

‘I told you,’ she said, ‘I’m a platypus.’

Selena’s first ever words to me were, ‘We need your help.’

She said ‘We’ but she meant Shannon, and I hated her.

On the way to Shannon’s house, Selena told me Shannon’s dad had walked in on them while they were having sex. He had seen what Shannon had been able to hide from him for years. He had shouted at the naked boy to get off his daughter, and then he saw the naked boy was his daughter.

‘He kept saying, ‘That bitch; that lying bitch,’ over and over as he hit her,’ Selena said. ‘He called her an abomination and told her to get out. Then he left.’

Shannon was in her room, a suitcase open on her bed. Her face was swollen but not as badly as I had imagined. She was folding all of her clothes neatly before packing them.

‘Shannon,’ said Selena.

A flattened stack of underwear.

‘Shannon,’ I echoed.

Her oversized sleep shirt.

‘Shannon.’

Those pants that showed too much if you knew what you were looking at.

She ignored us, and Selena had to say her name six or seven times before she looked up.

‘I told you not to tell him,’ Shannon said.

‘He can help.’

‘I can help,’ I echoed, although I didn’t know what I could do.

‘Go home, Christopher,’ she said.

Selena asked me if Shannon could stay with me until they figured out the next step, but Shannon protested, saying she could take care of herself.

Selena pulled me aside and asked me if I had any money.

‘So you two can run away together,’ I spat.

‘Yeah,’ said Selena as if I had asked the most obvious question.

We both looked to Shannon like two kids getting approval from their mother. She was standing over her suitcase with the eyeball in her hands. I had the most outrageous thought:

if she just rubbed the eye on her skin, her mother would send down some signal to make the bruising fade and the swelling subside.

‘I’ll stay with you tonight,’ said Shannon.

She was looking at me. I hoped Selena was disappointed.

The three of us walked to my house together holding hands. Shannon was in the middle, of course, and I made sure I was standing furthest from the traffic. When we got there, Shannon and Selena kissed while I stood by the front door pretending not to watch.

That night Shannon and I made plans—the kind of plans kids make that are more hopeful than realistic. She’d stay hidden away in my room, and she’d get a job so she could save money to get a place of her own. We’d graduate, and I’d go to college to study marine biology. I suggested we get married, but Shannon said her mom’s birth certificate trick probably wouldn’t work on a judge.

We talked into the night, legs and fingers intertwined, about how we met, about Selena’s terrible haircut, about her mom who had gone back to their home planet.

Shannon held up the glass eye. ‘She told me that she would use this to look after me, and one day, when I was ready, she’d use it to bring me home.’

‘Where is home?’ I asked.

‘As far away from here as you can get.’

Our words became distorted yawns, and I fell asleep with her breath on my face.

I didn't panic the next morning when I found myself lying in bed alone. I think I would have been more surprised if Shannon had stayed.

I held her parting gift, looking into the pupil, wondering if some day Shannon would use it to communicate with me.

I called Selena to ask if Shannon was with her, but I knew that was futile.

Wherever Shannon went, she didn't return. She and Selena had talked about Seattle, but I convinced myself that she had used the eye to return home and join her mother. It zapped her away to safety, to a place where a platypus didn't have to explain what she was.

Brindley is a writer of short and very short stories. His work has been published by Unbound, Thresholds, and Pewter Rose Press. Writing as Mike Smith, he has published poetry, plays and critical essays, many of which have been features on the International Short Story Forum website.

Disposals

A bomb arrived one morning at Jeremy's house. It was delivered by Parcel Force. It wasn't a traditional bomb with a curved metal casing and tail fins. It was in a very large padded bag. What convinced Jeremy that it was a bomb, and not, as the note inside claimed, an 'act of kindness', was that it had been addressed to 'Mr & Mrs.'

Brian, who was not technically Sarah's widower, had sent it. She had never agreed to marry him, not in all those years. The explosive filling was, of course, a bundle of letters.

Jeremy had long known he needed a bomb up his arse, for life was comfortable the way it was, though he was self-aware enough to realise that the pain anything decisive would have caused to his 'loved ones' would not, on its own, have deterred him.

So, his wife said, you wrote these?

There was always the possibility that it might be a dud, he thought.

You've read them? Of course she had. He could see it in her face.

She pushed the pile with her fingertips across the kitchen table towards him. They waited in silence. Any ticking that he heard was purely imaginary.

And though he knew that it was simply too late to make any difference, as far as Sarah and he were concerned, he gathered them all up, and carried them up the stairs and put them, first among everything, into the bag that he began to pack.

The Collector of Secrets

I slipped quietly out of bed and went to the window. The rain was coming straight down. I could hear it on the roof, but in the grey gloom of the pre-dawn I could not make it out by eye.

She was a collector of secrets. We were in that little coffee-shop just off the market square. I'd written it out on a page torn from my notebook. I'd folded it over and written 'this is my secret' on the front, and signed and dated it. I put the folded paper on the table and slid it towards her. She reached out, but I held it still beneath two fingers.

I'll sell it to you, I said.

Sell it?

For a kiss.

She laid her fingers on it too, and we sat there, looking at each other, with the folded paper under our fingers, like a playing card on a Ouija board.

It would have to be a good secret, she said.

It will have to be a good kiss, I told her.

She said, I can't pay you now.

I said, you don't have to. And I lifted my fingers off the paper. She took it up, and unfolded it, and read it, without making any comment, though she looked me in the eyes briefly. Then she refolded and tucked it away, before leaning forward and giving me a peck on the cheek.

That's on account, she said.

Stephen C. Middleton

Stephen is a writer who lives and works in London, he has published five books and been featured in a number of anthologies. He was an editor for The Tenormen Press; and Ostinato, a magazine of Jazz and Jazz inspired poetry. His current projects relate to jazz, blues, politics, outsider art, mountain environments, and long-term illness.

Outsider Fragments

These fragments
Were never the victim of
Maverick intention

As brick by brick
As any theory
Given credence
By our bloodstained
Self-righteous leaders

And however trip, skip, & slapstick
They seem

Fall prey
To doubt & painstaking
Retracing the process
Nonetheless

Shuffle & slide
Purpose elided
Perhaps
An outsider's precarious glide.

In The Ruins

Old reflux ulcers
& sell by dates

Cauterised at source

(That the scar would burst
From retching, on board ship)

No wound /
I never fought in the jazz wars

Or: cannula, where the infection started

Sore eyes

There is pebbled grit in the spray
As they shore up the scaffolding
(Support or siege)

The frighteners on

Doctors, diagnostic
Malign structures

What ifs rewrite encyclopaedias

&, hey,
All those books you stole
Are coming in really handy, today
All these years later

In the ruins
With the politics of fear.

Black Market Interviews

Ilya Kaminsky

Ilya Kaminsky is a poet born in the Ukrainian city of Odessa in 1977. Kaminsky is fluent in both Russian and English, having emigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen, and he has written poems in both languages. He was the co-editor of 'The Ecco Anthology of International Poetry' (2010) alongside Susan Harris. His collection 'Dancing in Odessa' (2004), won the Tupelo Press Dorset Prize, the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Metcalf Award, and ForeWord Magazine's Best Poetry Book of the Year award, and was translated into French and Romanian. He edited and translated 'Travelling Musicians,' (2007) a collection of English translations of his Russian-language work alongside Polina Barskova. The manuscript of Kaminsky's forthcoming collection, 'Deaf Republic' (2019) was awarded Poetry magazine's Levinson Prize and the Pushcart Prize. He was recently nominated for the Neusdadt International Literature Prize.

This interview was conducted by Creative Writing students as Edge Hill University and Black Market Re-View editors.

Interestingly, *Dancing in Odessa* is dedicated to your family but there are also poems about other writers (Akhmatova, Brodsky, Celan, Mandelstam, etc.). How difficult was it to combine these various sources of inspiration when writing the book?

I grew up in a country that was atheist, and the writers were held in a slightly higher regard than they are in the West. Writers like Akhmatova, with a story of her standing outside the prison gates, approached a level of national myth, as almost every family (including my own) had someone standing outside the prison gates. So, in many ways, these sources weren't various at all. They were unified by historical situation they all found themselves in. The relationship between history and privacy, between country and childhood, between literature and myth, between myth and chronicle

are usually also the relationships between phrases and/or characters in the book.

Memory and forgetting co-exist as important themes in the book. Have you found that your time in America has allowed you to access your Ukrainian childhood through memory alone? As your life in America progresses, how do you stay connected to Odessa and your Ukrainian upbringing?

I left when I was 16, by Ukrainian standards very much an adult. I had a job as a journalist at that time, and most of my friends already had children. Hard to imagine, by contemporary Western standards, but that is how it was in the Ukraine of 1990s.

But coming into a different language was a kind of second childhood, yes. That so-called Adamic task of the lyric poet, of naming each thing anew, is something every child does, and also something every recent immigrant is forced to do. Childhood, in the book, was also the way of being alive again, and if there is any freshness in that book, it is probably because of this; the language is seen for the first time, and so is the world it names.

As for my connection to Odessa and Ukraine today—I go back almost every year, these days. It is a country at war, and also the party city that parties around its literary history (Odessa is a city of literary tourism; the writer Isaak Babel is something of George Washington in those parts). So, the wild mix of drunken joy of tourists and high style literature is blended together with actual war refugees and stories of real-life bombardments and terrorists attacks. People are burned in buildings alive and in the next street there is a wedding. This is Odessa today.

But then, in the United States, boys are shot in the streets, crazy millionaire is the president, and every single politician of some note is sold out to this or that corporation. All poets of reknown also teach as college professors, and talk more or less in the same way.

Now, you tell me: what world is more surreal?
The truth is, the answer to that question matters little. What matters are the sounds, images, different ways of perception that

sometime, often against themselves, light our way to what might be—perhaps—a semblance of truth, of recognition.

We listened to you reading ‘Musica Humana’ and I was wondering if you rehearse your readings and, if so how? How much of any reading involves aspects of character and improvisation?

I don’t rehearse readings. I really don’t believe in public readings, and/or performances of literature. I find attending most such events almost physically painful. Perhaps this is because I can’t hear what those speakers say? Or because most speakers read as if they really don’t give a shit about the words they impose on us? Either way, I find myself struggling with how all of this is in line with capitalism, with read-to-sell-more-books structure in the Western world.

On some fundamental level, perhaps because of that situation from my childhood I described above, wherein writers were considered to be a bit more than mere scribblers, literature is still a holy activity for me. Perhaps because I am a foolish man. Or for the lack of anything else holy that is at least somewhat believable and not marred by scandal of some sort (e.g. I am not one to follow a religion, since I see most contemporary religions as mere corporations). There is something in literature that still moves me, on fundamental level, that still changes my life, who I am as a man in these streets, among these trees.

And if writing and reading changes you so, then reading poems isn’t merely reading poems, it is something else. Or, at least, should be so.

Improvisation, a word from your question, is an interesting word. If you mean it in terms of theatre improv, I could care less. But if you mean this as a way of probing the possibility of language with one’s throat, that is more interesting to me. The poem is already written, it is on the page. Yet, no poem, in its finality, is ever written, is ever, absolute. (God is absolute). So, one tries, with one’s voice, to go elsewhere, to probe further. So, in my readings, the syntax would often change, the lines would get longer or shorter, the possibility of engagement a bit further, a bit longer, a

bit deeper, is something that makes the readings of poems aloud more interesting for me, more bearable.

You arrived in America and learnt the language in order to write there. Did this develop new themes for your work?

I didn't learn a language in order to write. I learned a language in order to ask: how do I go to the bathroom? Where can I buy water? How much is this apple? Who is next in line? Will you forgive me? Will you fall in love with me? Will you not hurt me? And, by the way, where is the trolley stop #4?

I began to write poetry in English for a very personal reason, which I do not need to go in here other than to say someone I love died and I couldn't write about that person's passing in Russian, my native language. That would feel like a betrayal. English gave a chance of make-believe world, a chance of a world—if only in my imagination—without death. A world that has joy of new sounds, a joy of naming words anew for each thing one sees around one's body in this world.

In a single sentence, can you define your poetics or writing process?

It has to be alive on the page; words, Emerson said, are animals.

You are a lyric poet and also a nomadic poet who transcends the singularity of experience. How do these things work together (or apart) in your writing? Are you aware of a single, fixed self in your poetics?

I don't quite believe that a lyric poet = singularity of experience. A notion of nomadic poet (I assume you mean Pierre Joris definition from his book on the subject) is still something very vague; sounds pretty, but isn't convincing. Who is to say that Emily Dickinson wasn't nomadic in her travels from one gravestone to another, in that cemetery, fifty four steps from her living room. Who is to say

that each of us doesn't undertake a nomadic journey from our mother's body to some hole in the earth?

As for a lyric poet: I think this is someone who is a very private person, whose language is beautiful enough, strange enough, spellbinding enough, that it can speak privately to many people at the same time. If that definition is correct, then a lyric poet very naturally transcends the singularity of experience just by a virtue of being a lyric poet.

St Petersburg, Odessa, the US. This book travels through multiple places and landscapes. How far does place displace us? How does this affect aspects of voice (or voicings) in your work?

Place is (or can be) a myth, like anything else that you allow to hold a magnetic pull over your chestbox. And, yet, place is physical, it is visible, you can touch it, bite it, spit at it. It is a myth—e.g. imagination—standing right in front of us, around us, above and below us. Yes, it can displace us. That is why most writers of place are exiles. They re-write the place so that it can't re-write them.

Did you publish poems in Russian? How are they different to your poems in English?

I used to. But I come from a very specific tradition in Russian poetry (Odessa school, or Southern Russian school of literature, as described by Shklovsky once) which is very much based on the senses. Spanish poet Lorka said something elsewhere that might as well describe Odessa school: poet is a professor of five senses.

Which, for me, means, the ability of going to a market and trying tomatoes and overhearing a new word, spoken by someone who visits in that market. And then getting in a fist-fight in a bar and hearing new slurs and shouts and curses that were made up, just now, in that fist-fight, in that bar, for the first time every. Language is alive, words are animals.

But if you live away from the place where that language is spoken, the thing soon becomes artificial. I am not interested in museums' neat expositions. I am interested in bar-fights. Which is why writing in a language I don't live in the midst of doesn't quite work for me.

Which is not to say it can't be done. Nabokov and Co are glorious examples of the above being untrue for others. But everyone has to find their own truth. This is mine.

You famously once declared to Carolyn Forché in a workshop: 'my name is Ilya Kaminsky and I write for god'. How much do you worry about a reader's perception of your work? Where does the idea of an audience arrive for you in the composition of a poem?

I don't give a shit about audience. I would like to find out why I am alive, what is the purpose of being here, how and why (and why not) do we fall in love, kill each other, help each other, destroy the world around us, buy each other flowers. I assume others are already interested in these questions so they will be interested in the work. But if not, who cares? Language for me is a way to salvation, whatever that might mean. I am not interested in being a low-level entertainer or academic who presents to a dozen other academics. Life is too short for that. Language is too beautiful for that. There is too much joy to waste on things like worrying about audience. I am much more interested in astonishment, in bewilderment, in tragedy, in empathy—and how all of them can be slightly heightened, surprised, probed or disturbed, in our minds, and in our mouths, by sounds, images, turns of phrase. What these turns of phrase reveal to us about the nature of our kind.

In *Dancing In Odessa*, the poems seem to come from a very personal place. Do you ever feel that your poems are more about emotional catharsis than about the work itself? Would you ever choose not to publish a poem because it is *too* personal?

Excuse me, but if writers were worried about things like this, we would never had Greek drama wherein mothers slay their children, we would never had the Old Testament wherein brothers kill brothers, we would never have Gilgamesh—the very first epic story a human kind possesses—that begins with a prostitute and proceeds with a moving recounting of the love of two gay men. What the fuck is personal? Are the bones in our bodies too personal? Are lungs? Get a life.

Well, of course, this is an over-the-top response to a very lovely question. But what I am trying to say is: nothing is too personal or too impersonal. The real question is: how do we frame it? What does it tell us about ourselves, as a kind, as a species? Any sound, image, story, any turn of phrase has a chance to aim at metaphysics, to go deeper. There are no forbidden sounds or stories or themes. Whoever tells you otherwise is constipated and needs to take a pill.

What you want to ask, instead, how do we take these things-- often very uncomfortable things that humans do to other humans-- and try to find some kind of truth from the shock of life we live, from the stunning of our acts, our intimacies, or expectations. Google what Dickinson says about her take on reading poetry (e.g. the top of her head going off) what Kafka says (eg the axe for the frozen in all of us) and ask yourself what is it that literature does to wake you up. An interviewer once asked a great Polish poet, Zbigniew Herbert: what is the purpose of poetry? And, the man responded: To wake up.

Of course, it would be all too presumptuous for me to say that I have *done* that—in Dancing in Odessa, or elsewhere. That's for others to decide. But I can tell you what I wanted to do, what I *still* want to do, why literature isn't a mere pleasantry for me, isn't just work (what the fuck is "work"?) but but an ecstatic activity. I am more interested in literature as a way to the unknowable, literature as Job might define it, as Isaiah might define it, as Dickinson or Celan or Césaire or Tsvetaeva might. Everything else is for academics. And, life is too short for that.

Questions by Abigail Cox, Alicia Caples, Amy Connolly, Eve Lewis, Daniel Smith, Mostyn Jones, Madison Corthell, Dylan Booth, Jessica Hughes, Sonyun Shin and James Byrne

Natasha Leigh

Natasha is a graduate of the Manchester School of Writing's Masters course. As well as writing fiction she works for a Manchester-based company that create innovative art-based advertising products

Billy's Lane

I'm two streets down, walking towards his house before I remember he won't be there, but I keep going; smoking and walking, just more slowly. Taking the way he'd go, across the unlit allotments and over the stream. High water covers the pallets, so I peck out my joint and jump; slipping in the mud as I land and the ice water fills my trainers. The bracken is rotten and won't hold my weight as I pull myself up the embankment. In summer, this was a mini beach; a strip of red sand only a meter thick, a car tyre to sit on and chill out on, a low branched willow tree blocking the view, and stray comments wafting over from the jealous old green-fingers in the veg patches. No wet feet or freezing fingers. We'd turn the tape player down low enough to hear nosey dog walkers. We'd never bring anyone else here, just us three.

Grit crunches as I dodge rain-filled pot holes along the park lane in my wet shoes and dirty jeans, he'd say I was schlepping. He'd say I was schlepping. It had always been worth the schlep for the free-weed and bad company at the twenty-four-hour house.

No party sounds from the house tonight. A hippy on the porch on tiptoes, the length of a ladder with his hair in a bun, swears to himself as he twists a coloured lantern shade. Fillip-flop we called him, or manky toes. I stay back and watch him trying to screw in a light bulb one-handed while tilting the fitting with the other hand. The light comes on. Fillip holds two fingers to his lips and touches the bulb as if giving it a kiss, or checking if it is hot. I stay back in the dark, not close enough to be seen but close enough for the smell from the house to reach me. I wasn't expecting that. The smell hits me in the brain and chest at the same time: in the bedroom dissing his vinyl, or in the kitchen flirting with his stoner mum. The hippy takes something from his back pocket, could be a spliff, and tucks it into the

bottom of the lamp, step back inside the house and closes the front door. The fresh cold air loses its spiced smoke and fades back to damp grass again. He'd know a shit poem about that or some Bob Dylan song. I don't.

Nearer to the house the new bulb makes shadows on the driveway as it swings slowly; the old camper van, parked and useless, much help that was. A rotted hammock hangs from a tree and it's hard to tell where the park ends and the garden starts. It feels weird now, like I'm a stalker. I've never known this house quiet and I listen hard: no guitar, no singing, no crying. I walk quicker, away from the silence and towards the street lights at the other end of the lane. I've not noticed how creepy it is here before: no other homes, no passers-by. Overgrown bushes are shitting me up like they never did before. A car pulls off the main road and onto the lane, dipping its head lamps and killing the engine. I run the last bit but we pass at the widest part of the track and the driver doesn't see me. It's Tommo. He coasts by like I'm invisible but I'm out of breath and I can't get words out in time. The car stops before the drive and the red break lights make the bushes uglier. He must have his foot on the pedal keeping the break on. His window winds down but he doesn't get out. He's here like me; just checking. I walk back down the path to see him.

'Hey, mate?' I say.

'What the fucking-fuck!'

'It's only me.'

'Shit!'

'You ok?'

He doesn't answer, rubbing his hand over his face.

'You been crying?' I can't take the words back; they're out.

'And you've not?'

‘Sorry. Didn’t get much chance to speak the other day. After the you know, and all that.’

‘Yeah. Had to get off.’

‘Work?’

‘Just couldn’t hang around. S’too much.’

‘You here to see her now then?’

‘No. Are you?’

‘No. You want to though?’

‘Hell no.’

He wipes his eyes again, sniffing deeply on his sleeve.

‘Should I go? Leave you to it?’

‘If you like.’

‘I can wait? At the end. For a while.’

‘Don’t be mad. It’s feckin’ freezin’. And why you all covered in mud?’

I look down at my jeans and jacket, turning my hands over in the red light.

‘Been at the beach.’

‘Get in you loon.’

Warm air in the car is blowing from every fan and he closes his window before restarting the engine.

‘She sent Stretch around with a box of bits for the girls.’

‘Stretch. That’s it. Fillip-flop man.’

‘I didn’t go down to see him. Left a load of National Geographics, a nightlight, art stuff and that. Could hear him crying from my bedroom, but thought I’d leave that one to my old fella.’

‘Can’t imagine that going well. How is he, the old racist?’

‘Better, you know. A lot better. Not one joke. You know since...’

‘She posted mine to me. No stuff. Just the ticket. And a book mark with a recipe on it for a Moroccan lamb tagine. S’got three camels on the back.’

‘So, what we supposed to do with them now, anyway? Frame ‘em?’

‘Our kid says you can cash it in if it’s paid up in cash. Or swap it for somewhere else. But not really in the mood for a holiday.’

‘You gonna do that then?’

‘Nah. You?’

‘You know what we should do though, right?’

Niamh McMullan

Niamh is a spoken-word performer and writer of short stories and flash fiction. She works as a teacher and is a frequent contributor to Black Market Re-View. She is based in Merseyside and recently spent time working in Seoul, South Korea. Niamh writes YA experiences with a supernatural twist. She is excessive in everything she does, except her writing, which is quite succinct.

06:14:33

I was leaving the train station when it happened. It was a sleepy morning and I had just managed to get myself together to get the first train to my dad's house.

I can still feel the cold hilt of his blade, sunk deep and kissing my rib cage - caged, my heart and lungs stuck in the tender grip of 06:14:33-06:14:36 before the breath came back to me, and pain sliced my brain in two.

I desperately thought, *dad will be here any minute.*

My eyes frantically glanced around at the sky, the sun was starting to rise. A cold sweat gathered between my shoulders when he hissed, 'This is the end,' to the hollow of my throat, a hand splayed on my back keeping me up.

The sun was kissing the sky by the time he had left. I wanted to reach out for it.

I don't remember him leaving, but I know when my knees hit the concrete, the steady thump-thump-thump following my blinking eyes. I don't know if anyone had seen, I opened my mouth to shout but my throat closed around itself.

Of course, I thought of her, I had put on her hoodie that morning, closing my eyes to lose myself in pine trees and quiet rain.

I saw dad recognise me, sprinting and dropping his phone, shouting at the operator, voice higher than I had ever heard.

I thought of her high ponytail, the smirk on her lips as she pulled back from me, the hoops in her ears brushing her cheek.

I couldn't keep my head from lolling to my chest, when I was hoisted up, clutching onto the jacket of a woman that didn't smell like her.

But the cold was in my bones now, and I threw up down my front, dad was whispering smoke-stained words of comfort as he wiped my chin.

The harsh lights of the hospital yanked me back to the pain, the cold blood on my stomach, and I cried out when they cut through the material, glanced back at the piercing lights, tried to feel pine trees and rain but - nothing.

Paul Beckman

Paul Beckman has two story collections, "Peek" and "Come! Meet My Family and other stories". He has had over 350 of his stories published in print and online in places such as, the Connecticut Review, Playboy, and Matter Press, He runs the monthly FBomb NY flash fiction reading series at KGB, and his new collection, "Kiss Kiss", from Truth Serum Press, will be out in March 2018.

Sobs and Make Outs

She was sobbing loudly. I heard her two minutes into the park. A man was comforting her, his face hidden. I walked down my usual path and heard loud wailing. The woman on the bench was inconsolable; the man next to her facing her way and arms outstretched, pleading. Every bench a crying woman and a man trying to console her. No one spoke; the women sobbed, the men held and stroked. There were no squirrels or dogs running in the park today.

After fifteen minutes I exited the park onto a street filled with double decker houses and some triple deckers. People sat on their stoops silent, tears running down the faces. No one attempted to console these men and women and this lasted for several blocks until the park ended and normal life went about its business.

I passed by a house, the window open, the radio on and this soothing male voice saying crying is good and cathartic. It will wash away bad feelings, sins, disappointments and more. The people invited me into their house and they

were happy. The kids were playing a board game, the husband and wife were washing and drying the dishes and everyone was smiling.

‘What’s going on?’ I asked.

‘Life is wonderful,’ wife said.

Husband added, ‘Our crying was last week and this week we couldn’t be happier.’

‘Who’s doing this?’ I asked.

‘Does it matter?’ wife asked. ‘It works.’

I walked out with a handful of home baked chocolate chip cookies.

I headed back to my apartment hoping my wife had cooled off and was no longer angry with me. Walking my usual path through the park I saw no one was crying anymore and all couples were now making out.

I walked into my house, looked for my wife and found her with the plumber making out on our couch. They ignored me and I sat on the loveseat and broke into tears. They didn’t try to comfort me.

Brendan Quinn

Brendan is a poet and insomniac, he recently completed a Masters in Creative Writing at Edge Hill University. Brendan was part of the Edge Hill Press production team on the publication of 'Atlantic Drift – an Anthology of Poetry & Poetics'.

His recent poetic work has featured in The Wolf and formed part of the 'And The Word Was' exhibit celebrating the creative influence in writing and art. Brendan has performed collaborative pieces at The University Camarade and North By North West Poetry Tour, both curated by The Enemies Project.

'Torments & Temptations' is part of a larger ekphrastic sequence responding to the 'In Focus' exhibit of the work of William Blake and Tracy Emin at the Liverpool Tate Gallery.

Torments and Temptations

reach as though
the moon
is your headboard
the son of all suns
inevitable tumble
blames descent
on snake wrapped legs



Elohim Creating Adam – William Blake

hooked by the sinews
of your being
your physicality
is a joke
amongst immortals
you build fires for warmth
they breathe fire for



Ciampolo the Barrator Tormented by the Devils

William Blake

blue blood holds a higher value
in the market of the Gods
hang their heads in pride
bang a drum for shame
each take their own position
some search for divine
endorsement
to look directly into the light
only makes your vision
less clear
outstretched arms make easier
targets
enough said about those
who keep their eyes closed
deliberately



The House of Death – William Blake

aren't we all unfortunate lunatics
or do artists not speak for themselves enough?

John Rodzvilla

John teaches in the publishing and writing programs at Emerson College, Boston. His work has appeared in The Harvard Review, McSweeney's, gorse, DecomP, Verbatim, and Bad Robot Poetry.

FIVE MINUTES WITH YOU

"I was flying on the back of a bird. It was a nightingale, or maybe a crow, possibly even a dove. I can't remember exactly, but it was bigger than one of those tiny brown birds that are always hopping around the sidewalk. I felt warm sunlight on my skin and every time we flew through a cloud these little wisps of cool mist spritzed me. There was this sense that everything was weightless and free. Then I was beyond the bird, beyond the clouds. I wasn't there." This is what Tracy tells me in the medical station. I had asked Tracy if she remembers passing out right after the little girl on stage screamed. She looks at me from the hospital cot for a few seconds and then continues to describe how her bird kept getting smaller and smaller as she got heavier and heavier until she couldn't stand.

"I can't believe I'm a POF," she adds and leans back to look up at the ceiling.

The online forums often talk about the young women who get a little carried away at a Raza show and try to rush the stage to be with him. Like Tracy, they usually pass out before they get anywhere near the front of the venue. The forums even have a name for those fans, a "passed out fan" or POF, and my roommate Tracy is now one. I'm sure by the time we check tomorrow people will have posted several different accounts of her fall. Thank god that the theatre doesn't allow phones or cameras, otherwise she would be immortalised on Youtube.

Because of the POFs, Raza's management has been setting up a space for emergency medical services since Raza was still playing small clubs. During his first few shows, back when they still allowed the audience to film, the fainting spread from person to person. It wasn't uncommon in

the early shows to see entire rows pass out and fall over one another. This one time in Cleveland a teenager in the balcony started to cry and twirl and stomp her feet. Within minutes everyone around her started to twirl and stomp as well. The fan footage from that show captures an entire balcony shaking. Rumour has it that one girl even twirled off the balcony, but no one has ever been able to confirm it. There's also a comment on the video that the theatre management filed an insurance claim for structural damage, but you can't always trust the comments you read on Youtube, not even those posted on videos related to Raza. Raza's road crew now includes two former security guards who deal with out-of-control fans quickly before the crazy can spread. They were able to grab Tracy within a second of her hitting the ground. I was also pulled out of the show, just in case. They said it was to make sure someone was there for Tracy when she woke, but I spent over an hour sitting around on a metal folding chair without my phone. Not that I would have stayed to watch the show with my roommate passed out on a cot. Okay, maybe I would have stayed. I mean, it was Raza.

#

Tracy and I first heard about Raza when everyone was sharing reaction videos to his "Five Minutes for You" video. The reaction videos are just webcam footage of people watching a screen and then flipping out. When I first heard about them I thought they were some kind of marketing gimmick for a new movie, like that thing they did for Paranormal Activity.

I remember the first one I watched. Some girl just starts bawling, passes out, and slides off her chair. I watched it seven times in a row. After that I just kept clicking on one reaction video after another until Youtube started to suggest things I had already seen. It was all Tracy and I talked about in our dorm room for a week. I couldn't believe that a video would really make people react that way. Then late one Saturday night Tracy and I found the original "Five Minutes With You" on a bit torrent site and dared each other to watch it all the way through. I was still expecting something really lame. Tracy had bought in to the hype, but she also loved to watch those housewife shows for the drama. She had decided to sit on the floor instead on the bunk bed, just in case.

We watched it. Nothing happened to either one of us. We watched it a few more times and after nothing happened on any subsequent viewing, we decided to go to sleep. I remember lying there feeling really good and started thinking about the video and how it felt like it was the first real thing I ever watched online. Not real like the camera phone footage of the revolutions in the Middle East that we watch in class. Or footage of the riots that happen elsewhere and to other people, but real like it happened to me. It felt personal, but then again, I had been refilling my Diet Coke with nips of vanilla vodka and was drunk to the point of being philosophical about a lot of things.

The video had over 3.5 billion views when Youtube took it down the first time. Too many of the reaction videos worried parents and they started to circulate an online petition. Youtube acquiesced. They always acquiesce. Of course it just moved to torrent sites and shared Dropbox accounts. What we saw that night (and dozens of times afterwards) is a shaky five minutes of amateur footage where Raza leans against a wall and falls into a trance. The light is so low that any landmark is obscured by pixilated shadows. At the two-minute mark a look of pure bliss appears on Raza's face. Around that time the clatter and clang in the background disappears until there is only silence, the kind of silence that can only be found far away from cities and cell phone towers. Tracy swears it even has a dampening effect on her laptop's fan, which always turns on when she watches videos. The trance continues for another 3 minutes until Raza suddenly shakes his head and gives the camera a smile. The video ends with him saying, "That was for you," as he walks out of frame.

#

We got tickets to the show because everyone online said that seeing him live is a totally unique experience. In the beginning it's really boring because you are just waiting, but then you see people start to cry around you and then you start crying for no real reason. And then, as long as your friend doesn't flip out, forty minutes pass in a second and the lights come up to break the trance. It literally feels like forever for the first four minutes of the show, but afterwards it feels like the whole thing lasted for a brief moment. Time can be funny at these shows.

Raza's wavy jet-black hair reminds you of the Grecian islands. If you are close enough to the stage or have stared long enough at pictures of him online you can see the sparkling eyes and aquiline nose. His eyes are the eyes of hypnotists and mystics. He's more Bronte's Heathcliff than Justin Timberlake—a dreamer in military pants and a slim-fit sweater. Watching Raza feels like flying through some fog in a small prop plane only to be greeted by the northern lights when you finally break through the clouds.

When Raza walks on stage, a single spot follows him. It's an intimate moment: a man surrounded by silence. Raza starts his show with an exaggerated wink after he looks out at the audience and shakes his head in disbelief. His welcome is short; he only asks that the audience "take the cotton from the mind's ear." Then, in a manner reminiscent of Mr. Rogers, he takes off his shoes and coat and places them next to the standing bed that's on stage. In the bed Raza will lie back and stare into the blackness just behind the rafters. This is what the audience paid to see: a skinny guy lying in a bed in black jeans, a designer t-shirt, and socks. And it is the most glorious tableau that has ever existed.

Other than a brief intermission where he pulls an audience member up on stage, nothing else is uttered during those one hundred minutes. At least no one in the audience can remember hearing another word from him. There's no banter, no playing to the crowd. There's no need. The audience loves the silence.

I know it sounds strange, but after he untied his shoes, time really did slow down. I could focus on the little things, like how he folds his sweatshirt or the three steps he takes to the stool. It became clear that he is very deliberate in his actions and they speak more than any words. He makes you feel like it's just you in the seats and he's right next to you to make you feel safe. I know I sat there is a state of bliss even after he did some stretching that signals the intermission. I checked my watch and forty minutes had passed. One minute he's untying his shoes, almost an hour later he is waking us up from a trance. I hadn't moved the entire time. It was the longest I have been that still for years.

Right after he wakes, a spotlight from high above the stage begins to search the crowd. It lands on a little girl a few rows in front of us. When the spotlight picks her, she shields her eyes to see tonight's chosen one. She thinks she's only caught the light meant for someone else. When her

seat number is called and a security escort arrives at her row, she looks over to a young woman sitting next to her and then at the stage and then back to the escorts.

When she gets on stage, the lights accentuate her awkwardness. Her glasses catch the floodlights above and flash for a second. Even though the stage is sparsely decorated, the girl still fades into the background. She appears to shrink as she approaches Raza. Unlike the POFs, the chosen ones never pass out. There's even a rumour that they glow a little bit during the last part of the show when Raza is once again alone on the stage for a final hypnotising nap. He reaches out, takes her hand, and asks her name.

"Abigail, but people call me Abby. My sister calls me Abs." She says in a whisper that is barely picked up by the mike on stage.

"Okay Abigail, I'm going to hold your hand and lean back. When I do, I want you to close your eyes and imagine the best thing in the world. Do you think you can do that for me?"

"I think so," she responds and I feel my soul collapse.

#

Raza gives Abby a wink and gets into position on his standing bed. Abby stands there like an awkward magician's assistant in jeans. Once he's in position, staring up at the ceiling, he asks "Okay Abigail, are you ready?" and reaches out for her hand. The girl grabs it and she does what a forgotten girl does when she becomes the focus of attention; she adjusts her glasses, clears her throat, and closes her eyes.

When they touch the silence is deafening. With a sold-out audience you think you should hear something: a cough or hiccup, something. But it feels like someone placed their hands over your ears and pressed hard so sounds aren't just muted, they're gone. You can only hear your shallow breathing and the occasional swallow. On stage two people are perfectly still, holding hands, eyes closed. The young woman on the left is smiling. The man leaning back on the mattress is expressionless. He looks like he's fast asleep, or something much worse.

A small twitch appears on Abby's cheek. Her smile fades and her head twitches to the left. She starts to moan very softly. The silence of the theatre somehow amplifies it. Abby's cry breaks the collective trance. The audience starts to shift in their seats and murmur. The stagehands standing at the edges of the stage are unsure what to do. Abby bends over and

starts to rock back and forth. Her moan is louder now and she is visibly shaking, but she is still holding Raza's hand.

Raza is now reacting as well. The serene countenance is gone. His body is tense and his lips narrow into a straight line. Audience members in the first row claim they saw tendrils of dark smoke curling off of him.

A stagehand finally reaches for Abby and she breaks contact. A stark scream of "No!" echoes in the theatre. Everything freezes in place. Stagehands stop moving; the murmuring audience falls silent; even the motes in the light become still. And then Tracy breaks the spell when she goes to run down the aisle.

#

After I accompanied the security guards who carried Tracy into the recovery area, I went and sat on one of the folding chairs they have over by the door to the box office. I wanted to stay out of the way of the people in white coats who were examining Tracy. Shortly after I took my seat they wheeled Abigail in. Leslie, the woman Abigail looked at in the theater who it turns out is her older sister, followed them in and, unsure what else to do, took the seat next to me as the medical staff did what they do.

"I didn't think something like this could happen," Leslie starts telling me after a few minutes. "She wasn't supposed to be here. I was supposed to go with friends, but they canceled at the last minute. I only took Abigail because I already had the ticket and I missed her birthday last week because I had a date. I blew off my sister's party for a date. I was feeling guilty. I thought maybe it would make up for it, you know?"

"Yeah. Hey, it's not your fault." It's all I can think to say.

Leslie and I continue to talk quietly as we wait for the medical staff to give us an update. It was more like Leslie kept talking and I just sat there listening to her while trying to think of something to say that would be mildly comforting. After about twenty minutes the medical intern tells us that both Abigail and Tracy are fine and that they would wake soon. He also tells us it is helpful for the POF if they see someone they know first thing. It helps with their confusion. I went over to Tracy who did wake with a start but calmed down once she saw me.

Five minutes later, in the small collapsible cot on the other side of the room, Abigail starts to slowly wake up. Leslie is holding her hand, softly calling her name. Tracy and I watch as the little girl in the cot twists and moans. When she opens her eyes the moaning stops and Abigail says something to her sister in a hushed tone.

After some back and forth between the two, Leslie asks a medical student if they could get a Sprite since there are only pitchers of water near the cots. The intern picks up a phone on the wall and calls someone. Two minutes later a stage manager rushes in. The medical student asks for a soda. The stage manager tells him that's not part of her job. He tells the stage manager, who is standing right in front of me, that it's for the family of the little girl from the stage. He gives her the coldest stare I've ever seen and the stage manager wilts. She runs off and returns with a can of Coke two minutes later just as Abigail is starting to sit up.

"How are you feeling?" Leslie asks.

"Better," Abby responds. She rubs her eyes. "I was back at my birthday last week. There was a cake on the table, but no one was there to light the candles. There were paper plates and hats and cards. I guess I was supposed to light the candles myself, but it felt like they were my only guests and I didn't want to set them on fire."

"What do you mean, Abs?"

"When you called me on my birthday and I said I couldn't talk because it was my party—I lied. There was no party. Mom was out showing a home and didn't get back until late. Dad didn't even send a card. I was angry and I didn't want to talk to anyone because I was in the middle of watching an episode of Supernatural. But then you took me to see Raza and it was the best thing ever, but then when I closed my eyes on stage I was back at my party, but there wasn't a party, except for the candles. They were having a party on my birthday, but I wasn't invited."

"Abs, you're not making any sense."

"Can I see Raza? Is he okay?"

"I don't think that's a good idea. You got over-excited and passed out. Raza was..."

"I just got light-headed after he showed up at the party with the blackbird. The blackbird was to blame. I just wanted to thank him for showing up at my party."

"Abs, you're still not making any sense."

“When he first held my hand, I was back at my birthday party, I saw birds just like they describe online. I heard the music he hears. Everything was good and then the blackbird sat on my shoulder and that’s when the cake disappeared. Raza came to protect me from the bird, but it was so dark because I couldn’t find the candles.”

“Oh, Abs, the show’s been over for some time, he’s probably back at his hotel room by now. Or on his tour bus.”

“No he’s here, I can feel him in the hall and he’s...”

There’s a knock on the doorjamb, we all turn to see Raza holding an unopened can of Sprite.

Sally Barrett

Sally lives and writes in Manchester. She has previously been published in Black Market Re-view, redceilings blog, Picaroon and Hypnopomp online magazines and 3AM Magazine in collaboration. She has read at Peter Barlows Cigarette and has performed at Reverb as part of the Camarade.

Body Language

Victorian lemonade, Coffee, Hellmans' mayonnaise
menu 'HOME is where', empty glass, full red wine,
pushchairs, children, rucksacks, 'White Stuff' anorak,
bobble hat, dating, mooching, meeting, Crisps, cake,
Vans trainers, Granite floor, wooden stairs

Noisy cafe, headphones on

She sits, grey chair, Feet on the floor
Inappropriate 'Dr Dre', that children can't hear

She sits, writing, leaning slightly forward, knees softly apart
She sits, red pen, purple notebook, right handed, she's crossing out

and then stops

mouth shut / tongue behind teeth / looks up north easterly
eyes wide / forehead raised - not looking at anything
and then head down, writing, writing in the notebook

*

I know what that look meant
She looked up to search
She looked up to think
to await the thought to come
with music playing
and she listened to 'Dr Dre'
fighting the thoughts
and the thoughts comprised
analysis of
BODY LANGUAGE
and describing what is happening
and then I wrote
looks up north easterly
eyes wide
forehead raised
And now I yawn

Rebecca Metcalf

Rebecca is a writer and student from Essex. She studied at the University of Chester and is currently studying for an MA in Victorian Literature at the University of Liverpool, where she writes for a student magazine. Her work has been published in Pandora's Box, Flash: The International Short Story Magazine, Electric Reads Young Writers' Anthology and Foxglove Journal.

Cromer Pier

My numb fingers hold the lump of fish under the hand dryer in attempt to defrost it into more manageable chunks. The smell wafts out from the toilet but it's warmer in here than it is out there so I don't mind. I take the opportunity to defrost my fingers under the dryer as well. After a few minutes, my arms start to ache from holding up the fish, so I go back out onto the pier and walk along to the end to re-join my dad. There's no one else here at this time of the morning. Even the sea is empty of boats.

I put the fish down, a bulging eye staring back up at me as I plonk it down across the wooden boards. I dig my nails into its body and claw off a chunk, before handing it to my dad. He attaches it to the hook and lowers the line back into the sea. We stare out across the thin stretch of beaches currently shrinking under the incoming tide, the pale sky spread out overhead and the narrow horizon wedged in-between. Both of us shuffle from side to side to stay warm.

When a crab bites, we haul it up and drop it into the plastic bucket we have prepared. I kneel down to have a closer look at it as it shifts around at the bottom of the bucket. Its legs look surprisingly fragile for a creature with a body like a rock, and its eyes are tiny. Other crabs soon join this one. They become brief trophies in our plastic bucket before we have to toss them back into the cold grey sea.

Jamie Stewart

Jamie is a writer living and working in Manchester. His work has featured in in FOCI, Black Market Review, and Humanity Hallows. He has a BA in English and Creative Writing and has completed his MA in Creative Writing from Manchester Writing School. When he is not reading or writing, he enjoys binge-watching RuPaul's Drag Race.

Notes on the death of a woman i-vi

i.

Marie wakes suddenly. As though being prodded on the side. She jerks forward. It is dark. Night. Her hand searches for David but the bed is empty. The other half of the bed is still made up and cool to the touch.

No David.

He has been sleeping in the other room, that's right. No David. Mary Queen of Scots. She steals one of the pillows from his side of the bed and props herself up. The window blinds sway in the breeze. She lies with her eyes open, staring at the ceiling, until they begin to ache and fall shut. remember. Mary Queen of Scots Mary Queen of Scots Queen of Scots of Scots.

She breathes louder than usual. sucks in as much air as she can. Nose mouth. Queen of Scots Mary. She empties her lungs. She feels a slow trickle of blood leaking from her nose. Again. She reaches for a tissue, rolls it into a long sausage and plugs her left nostril with it. The nosebleeds have stopped worrying her now. At first she would bleed and

nostril with it. The nosebleeds have stopped worrying her now. At first she would bleed and bleed and bleed and bleed and bleed. And she would wake, always at night, and panic.

Mary Shelley Queen of Scots. Remember.

She would be too scared to make a noise in case she woke David. But now he sleeps in another room. The nosebleeds have become less frequent, less severe. Now she knows to keep a box of tissues next to her bed, just in case. Not a heavy bleed, though she feels lightheaded, unwell, irritable.

Her bladder aches dully.

She reaches out for David and remembers.

No David.

ii.

She counts famous Marys, Maries and Marias to get to sleep. Sometimes she counts Mariahs and Marilyns, too. It depends on her mood and whether she has been able to count all of the Marys, Maries and Marias. She has been thinking about their deaths, some of which she cannot remember. She has been thinking of her own death, which she feels is near and still so far away. A long road to the sea. Being pulled in by the moon. Why is it only women who are drawn to the moon?

Mary, Mother of Christ. Can't remember. Shelley, Shelley, Shelley. Mary Magdelene. Can't remember. Mary Shelley. Suspected brain tumour, that's right. Curie. Aplastic anaemia. Mary Queen of Scots. Marie Carole Welling. The room illuminates slowly from a passing car before falling back into darkness. The car door opens and closes. A plane flies overhead. Then silence.

Beheaded.

Marie Carole Welling.

Beloved.

iii.

She wakes again. It is early morning. The room is lighter. There is a clock on the wall opposite her. She struggles to see the lines, the hands. She watches them tick. It is similar to the one she had as a child, with a different bird for each number. She'd had to get David to take out the batteries. The noise was too much.

She listens to the street outside. No cars kids people going to work. must be a Sunday. Or holidays. Her legs are warm, itchy. She wet herself again in the night. Her legs stick to the sheets. She thinks she can almost remember doing it. She thinks she remembers the feeling of her bladder aching contracting, then slowly relaxing, followed by warmth and quiet. She thinks she can remember the vapours from the piss rising like a steamed treacle pudding into the night air.

 a bloody tissue on her bedside cabinet. She the drawer and hides the tissue with the others. The room feels empty and still. the emptiness of a place in which there are no living or breathing things except for herself. No plants. Nothing breathing. It is too still. Too silent.

Has she asked for plants? She asked for plants. She had asked David for plants a few days ago a week ago. She remembers it clearly, well, as clearly as she .

?

She had asked for something simple, something bright, something that would grow fast in the sun. Nancy had bought them a cactus each, from the makers' market. A small, furry thing with a fake flower on the top. Marie had thrown hers and David's died not long after.

She wishes there was a plant in the room. A plant or two. She pictures it by the window, its branches hanging over the window sill, extending out in to the rest of the room.

 breathing life into this dead room. She opens her eyes and the room is still empty. Just metal and wood and plastic and the soft silk of the duvet cover that hurts her skin and, outside, the sound of her neighbours starting their days.

She closes her eyes and thinks this is it, the end – the final time her eyes will close, the last time she will inhale a fistful of breath, the last time she will have an un-scratchable itch.

iv.

If the brain as a map. Think different countries parts of the brain. What interested in when comes stroke, how these countries connect . Blood vessels, rivers, When river too full, burst banks, flood country neighbours. ? So to do, is to river a easier to control. ?

Marie?

?

v.

She wonders if things would have been different, if her mam had come home after leaving, or hadn't left in the first place. What if she had never known her own mam? It could have been easier then, if she'd never known.

If she had moved to Cyprus and started eating a Mediterranean diet, would things be different then? Fresh oil and cheese. Tomatoes. Garlic. Anti-sceptic. Herbs. Lemons. Fresh tomatoes. Fresh tomatoes. Fish. Seeds. Tomatoes.

Q. Would things be different?

A. Perhaps. Sometimes. Always.

She thinks about what they'll say about her when she dies, or at the funeral, or weeks and months and years later. How she was still so young. How she, in her final hours,

recited the death of every single Mary, Marie and Maria in existence. How much she loved that Sonny and Cher song. How she'd gone off her food. How she found peace, , in staying in one place. How she reached for her chest, clutched her nightie and wailed into the night. How she felt like a kite, dancing in the wind, being reeled in, let go. How it was over quickly. How she longed to see her mam again. How we should all thank higher powers for quick and deft mercies. How the last thing she heard was the low creak of death whispering into her left ear.

vi.

But there is no sudden movement. No sudden shift in thought. Her jaw, joined to her skull by the finest film, rattles in the breeze; her tongue a swollen cluster of black cells.

She lies far from the emptiness of the room, miles from the stuttering of her heart valve. The clock is silent, still, although she is aware of the faint echo of birdsong. She feels far from the loose kneecap on her left leg, from the bleed on her brain, and the stale piss down her thighs.

They'll empty her. To be sure she's really gone. David will sign the request form. Nancy's lips will curl into a smile at the corners and she, that inquisitive mind, full of medical knowledge, will ask questions, and lace her arm around her dad's shoulders, and whisper: *there, there, there, it's for the best.*

Then David and Nancy will watch her being emptied.

They do it with all the women these days. They wear gloves and masks. They make an incision in the fleshiest part of the groin. They screw in a rusty spigot and tape up the hole. Then they twist the tap and let everything leak out. They turn the body on its side, on its front and upside down. They bend the body in half, draining out the hidden wells. They massage the fingers and toes and palms of the hands and feet to squeeze out the final few drops. They collect it in a bucket. They do it to measure – in pints, litres and gallons – what a woman was worth. They make a record of it, and compare it against other women of a similar age, size, ethnicity, etc. They handle the data responsibly. They film it and make a documentary. Then they take all of the fluid from the woman and drop it into the sea.

Mark Russell

Mark's full collections are Shopping For Punks (Hesterglock), and Spearmint & Rescue (Pindrop). He has published two chapbooks with Red Ceilings Press, 1 (the book of seals), and Saturday Morning Pictures, and a further chapbook, x (the book of moose) with Kattywompus Press.

o^**

The grandmothers listen. During the recitation, they cross their hands over their laps. One or two fall asleep. When the fathers stop, the grandmothers allow the silence to linger.

◇

The men from the town want to know how to pass the test:

- *tell us you see virtue in this*
- *don't tell us to come back later*
- *tell us something*
- *tell us anything*

◇

The children from the town are more demanding. Certainly the boy children:

- *wealth (they think)*
- *some morsel of merit*
- *the drag and draw of plenty*
- *show us the ridiculous consequences*
- *show us a pound of fresh flesh*
- *show us our fathers' test results*



The women are calm
they have conducted many services
like you
sometimes they fail
but their bones are full of courage
they have seen cause
they have touched regret
they answer
you may have nothing
but the ridiculous consequences

The grandmothers are satisfied.

o^^^

if you can carry a single thought
like a river carries a leaf to the sea
you may have a full life

you are not the river
you are the leaf

allow yourself this small contentment
to be the leaf

if you cannot be content to be the leaf
you may never reach the sea
where all the leaves live together

o^ ^ ^ ^ *

a man who drives his grandmother
in a car made of coins
is not virtuous
unless his driving
is to his grandmother's advantage

only she knows the truth of it

this is one of the reasons
for the grandmother's long-life
her wide and welcoming hips
and the pleasures she finds
in rivers and mountains

Sandra Arnold

sandra is an award-winning writer who lives in New Zealand. Her work has featured in Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine and New Flash Fiction Review and the anthologies, Sleep is a Beautiful Colour (National Flash Fiction Day, UK, 2017), Fresh Ink (Cloud Ink Press, NZ, 2017) and is forthcoming in Bonsai: The Big Book of Small Stories (Canterbury University Press, NZ, 2018). Her work has been nominated for the 2018 Pushcart Prize and 2018 Best Small Fictions.

As clear as crystal

“Mum, you know that old muslin dress of yours with the embroidered sleeves?” said Crystal. “Can I wear it for Robbie’s 21st party? It’s a 70s theme.”

Liz lifted the dress from its box at the back of her wardrobe. A photograph fell out. She slipped it into her pocket without looking at it.

Nathan arrived in a huge black afro, pink velvet flares and a white muslin shirt.

“Oh, you look *wicked*, Nath!” Crystal shrieked.

“You look *outrageous*!” Nathan grinned.

And you’ve both just stepped out of my photograph, Liz thought, trying to breathe.

“You’ll freeze!” were the words that came out.

“We’ll be fine.”

“Drive slowly! There’s ice on the roads.”

She watched them roar away in Nathan's old bomb.

Heart thumping in her throat, she rang Sally. "It was like watching Alex and me speeding into the future we thought we'd have."

Sally asked how long it had taken her to stop looking back. Sally didn't think she'd ever reach that point because she still wanted to kill Jeff and the slut.

"Come and drink wine with me instead," said Liz. "Bring things to burn."

They tossed clothes, photographs and CDs on the fire in the garden. They toasted each item in red wine. A plane flying in loops beneath the frozen clouds spelt *HAPPY 21ST BIRTHDAY ROBBIE* in blue smoke.

"The future," said Sally, raising her glass to the pink and gold sky.

Liz took the photograph from her pocket and consigned it to the flames. She watched it curl and burn. Sparks flickered in the wind like fireflies. Ash settled on the trees like snow.

Richard M Thompson

Richard is a poet, director, actor, novelist, and writer. As well as featuring in previous issues of Black Market Re-View, his work includes the award winning film 'The Young,' and the poetry collections 'The invented cages,' and 'black & blue.'

The Virtues

We stumbled upon the Carmelite Chapel,
first stone laid in 1622.

Starting from the door, the virtues -

on the western side:

Vigilance comes in the form of balconies,

Work is tweeting at God awful hours

Obedience is to the body

Purity is in our frank discussions

Penitence is when I don't perform

Hope that the liver can take it

Faith in the hand on my spine

Charity the sewing machine that nicked the
thread;

on the eastern side:

Prudence in the questions

Zeal when we're gallerying

Poverty at 3am

Submission to the blade

The science of the saints a science of a camera

Humility in the panting

Silence when the prayers grow loud

Contemplation over a scrap of paper
in the Dada Bar.

Done Days

National identity grew
beneath you
in some remembrance of soil -
 hot throated, you now cup a hand with it
and chalk your mind
 with the done days,

feel Ashwin Street cloister round you
 in the shower
the old smells from antiques
curl from your hair
and age perches
at the crest of your tongue
where stories are unbuttoned
and you wonder what you made of it all

you ask yourself:
what England did we sweat out
 last night?
What of the acid that drips
from statues' mouths, old idols
injured by the rain,
what of the brows that lift
like bridges snapping and
ascending and

each tabloid that bleaches
us blind with warnings?
 “beware invaders”

we've wooled our way from sheep
whined our way from grapes
cooked ourselves from coal
lace ourselves from leaves

the leaves
 are
browning

your necklace
feels cold in your fingers
and alleviates the pain
in a moment of unfastening
as the water
gurgles down the plughole

Ian C. Smith

Ian's work has appeared in , Antipodes, Australian Book Review, Australian Poetry Journal, Critical Survey, Poetry Salzburg Review, The Stony Thursday Book, & Two-Thirds North. His seventh book is wonder sadness madness joy, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He lives in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria,

Automat

I fled dismal Des Moines, eager, writing,
inspired by her Pulitzer, sonnets loved.
Staring at coffee I recall sighting
the red-haired poet, our sibyl, my gloved
hand stilled, held cup cooled, picturing her, slim
like her house, at the Rehn, that painter's show,
his work, creepy houses, crushed hope, stark hymns,
moments when he watched us, still as a crow.

Lights reflect, late now, tattered dreams, love's wrongs,
my book-shelved room, bed, a ghetto of one
looming, those glimpsed vignettes echo like songs
of refusal to give in, things not done.
I should kick up my heels to *Dinah*, dance,
avoid ending back in Des Moines. Fat chance!

Happenstance

Haphazard, we borrow time, no planning ahead.
Teeth touch, birdsong bittersweet under a wan sun.
Distant city towers shimmer towards a future,
our cars coupled at the end of another rutted track.
Mishaps could frighten her off, my dread.

We swoon, sequestered in a grassy glade
before the trail bike in trees beyond this bower.
Then a bang. Silence detonated.
A machine-gunner taken out by a mortar.
Her alarm shakes me but I must offer aid.

A slim boy immobilised by shock, a broken wrist.
I show how to support it, walk him home
to his happy family secluded close by, unlike us.
Her emergence, blouse buttoned, surprises him
as I haul his bent bike past our interrupted tryst.

If he lives that boy is middle-aged, not so slim.
Does his wrist ache, catching his heart off-guard,
remind him of us, faceless now, ghostlike,
consequences of risk it takes years to understand,
the rush he felt, energy pulsating under him?

Parsifal

Fortified by photographs we flock for tickets
like a theatre crowd, Mad King Ludwig's castles'
ethereality whirring our Tinker Bell wings,
our childish fantasy of spires sky reaching.

Fifty million have ogled this gilded fairytale,
the grandeur in stone of Verlaine's 'only true king'.
Pious, overrun by the Prussians, our puppet king
loved dress-ups. Television would have loved him.

Nocturnal Ludwig rode noisy Wagner's bandwagon,
and an elaborate sleigh, enrobed as a chieftain
of the Middle Ages, part of the architectural mix,
his other favourite the House of Bourbon.

My thrill on first seeing the photographs overturned
boyish disbelief that fabulous could be real.
Though I grew to resent egotistic eccentricity,
here I am, sheepish in Bavaria, eulogising dreams

Mitchell Grabois

Mitchell is a poet and author whose works appears in literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad. He was awarded the 2017 Booranga Writers Centre Prize (Australia) for Fiction. His novel, Two-Headed Dog, based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital, is available in printed online. He currently resides in Denver.

Thrill-Spike

I once lived in a rudely converted horse barn. I was paper, my hands were paper, my Underwood-Olivetti was centered on my desk.

Now I live in an apartment in the city. There are no horses outside my window, no manure, no dirt; I'm a digital man. I live in a thoroughly clean environment. Feelings slide off my laptop screen and fly directly down the rubbish chute. The rubbish shoot has no smell. No cooking smells flavor our hallways.

I remember the beat poets. I remember stoned evenings on the bluffs. Now there's only Ones and Zeroes, and I don't even use paper coffee filters anymore.

I'm so citified, I even let my new friends convince me to join dating websites. I met a woman, but our failure was all my fault. My immaturity got the better of me and I found myself less interested in finding a solution to our problems that in hearing her say *You'll not make an arse of me again* or *I'm no one's twat-waffle* in her rich British voice.

Each time she said it was a little thrill-spike to my rat brain. Our relationship was doomed, due to nothing more than my admiration for colorful language.

She was easily angered. I was superficial. I didn't care to develop a long-term committed relationship and said as much on the various dating websites I'd joined. I'd even joined Christian Mingle because I'd been hooked by the poignancy of one of their commercials, the one in which the dewy-eyed woman says: *He's my second chance.*

Thank you for reading
Black Market Re-View will return
Autumn/Winter 2018



Black Market Re -View Is an online literary journal based in the UK.

We only accept electronic submissions.

Please visit our website for further information.

Copyright ©2015
by Black Market Re-View Literary Journal

Cover Art by Bill Bulloch ©2018

Published in the UK.

ISSN Number:
1759 - 0760.



BLACK MARKET RE-VIEW