

decades review

Issue Four



July 2012

poetry

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CONFLAGRATION

It's difficult.
To be a voice.
Without reason.
Such treason.
Is desperate.
And not allowed.
So I cower.
In the corner
of shadows.
Tying my fingers
into knots.
To stop my tongue.

-A.J. Huffman

TO KEROUAC

No phone calls today
only more leaves
fell

-Kanchan Chatterjee

TO HER BEAUTY

Making reservations at an elegant restaurant, we sat
staring at each other. Her beauty caught every eye
in the room. Her eyes glistened and sparkled in the
candlelight Her skin was smooth against her vermilion
dress. Her smile was subtle; Mona Lisa like.
Her lips were full, as she drank the red wine.

Her auburn hair caressed her cheek.
The beauty of her face radiated through the room.
She touched my cheek and pulled me close.
Her warm breath filled my ear. She softly whispered,
"Please pass the garlic bread."

-Mike Berger





"Two Photos" by Anastasia Tucker

TONIGHT A NEW TOWN

the bag is packed,
the clothes folded neatly inside
the dew on the grass and gray
sky scream morning
never coming back

so listen for the express
thundering overhead
and shake with fear at
rattling walls

tonight a new town

-D.S Jones

RITUAL

I do not glide. I crackle.

I wrap myself up
then open and shut all
in one fluid movement.

Burn is not the right word for this.

Smolder comes close, and yet
it still can't touch what I am trying
to say to you.

What I am trying to do to you.

Count me among fever.
It's warm and dangerous
here inside my den.

-Alexandra Smyth

NEVER TELL A HERO TO SHUT UP

Never tell a hero to shut up
Women just don't like that
They respect dignity
Or something like that

-G David Schwartz

"Two Photos" by Pat St. Pierre



SCENES FROM CALIFORNIA

I Elk In Fog

To think that diaphanous fog
could obscure
so massive a creature
silhouetted against the horizon
as if far away,
while the ocean, veiled in mists,
roared against the cliffs.

II Trapped Cow

Somehow it slipped
down the muddy gulley
and couldn't climb out.
A man out hiking
heard the bellowing
and summoned the farmer
who shot the animal
out of mercy.
Surprisingly preserved,
its body leans
against the incline
like a black shadow,
its unseen feet resting
in shallow water.

III Life/Land Forms

The slopes of the headlands
slide smoothly to the sea
of cold waters and roiling tides.
Under a wet shock of brown grass,
the narrow skeleton of a fox,
where weeds blow back yellow and russet,
and coots align in even rows

across the rippling surface of a pond.

Past mossy trees tangled in vines
and lichen-covered fences of an old farm,
lies a ribbon of brown sand
without beginning or end.

-Anne Whitehouse





"Two Photos" by Steve Sachs

RESTLESS NATURE

She gave to me her tall and thin physique,
Her manic depression,
Her sad bad eyes and her love for words;
She also gave to me her restless nature,
And like a hummingbird's hunger,
My need for experience is all encompassing.

Yet

An hourglass filled with the sands of my happiness
Lies entwined in the strands of my DNA.

I have reached within with the rough hands of my heart
and pulled it forcefully from me;
I have taken the scalpel of my thoughts
And cut it out with more precision than a computerized surgeon,
But all to no avail;
The hourglass grows back like a salamander's amputated limb,
And when the last grain drops,
It becomes mathematical:
I have to leave.

Oh we can use Freudian techniques,
Dream therapy,
Hypnotic suggestion,
Placebo substitution,
Past life regression,
100 bucks an hour session
And even ancient superstition to alter the psychological
We can even use genetic engineering to alter the biological
But in this universe
2 plus 2 is always 4
and I will always more
Even if it means hurting my loved ones;
Even if it means hurting me

She gave to me her tall and thin physique,
Her manic depression,

Her sad bad eyes and her love for words;
She also gave to me her restless nature,
And I love/hate her/me for it.

-Efe Okogu



"One Photo" by David R Morgan

VOLVELLE

You said I'll miss the light
when I leave here
this place
where we'd begun
always lit by the sun
as if the gods were still children
who invited us to play
in their daylight.

You know this because you returned
to the light you missed,
rolled the blinds
as though they are yours
and we'd frolic in bliss.

I relished in the movement,
the way the room unfolded
to the world and let us in
again, through the seasons
we'd spin
as if there could be no end.

But the gods have put their toys away
pop-up books and all
and you no longer return
to raise the blinds.

Though I am still here
in the creases
you were right
it is the light that I miss.

-Loukia M. Janavaras

WANDERER

I lay as in a dream:
envisioning tangible
heights of sharp
and wild winds,
to be muscled
by our slender arms;
intoxicated by fairy places,
floating within islands of blood,
covered with grey ashes
and the rumor of the waves,
shaped like thoughts,
growing like e-mails
in the book of life,
becoming letters;
many a time unwritten;
not sent; stuck
in wandering reflections.

-Francesca Castaño

AND THEY ALWAYS LEAVE THE GATE OPEN

They tore down the tired old building off the square,
the one that was vacant for decades,
and what was left of the floor plan's skeleton,
they transformed into a garden.

I don't know who they are,
but they put down cobblestone paths,
planted red roses along the back wall,
installed water fountains that resemble
a conglomeration of slick pebbles.

My girls like to press both hands
against those fountain towers,
feel the soft mosses growing on the bricks,

collect shed petals in a slippery, fragrant stack.

Whoever they are, they erected a handsome iron gate
flanked with pots of perennials
that seem to say, Welcome, please come, stay
as long as you like. We are careful to pick nothing,
and leave our echoes on every leaf.

-Dayna Patterson



"One Photo" by Annamarie Ritcher

SECRETS

My family is careful with secrets,
hiding the breakdowns
and a body or two lost
in hunting accidents
while under the influence,

very quiet with pride
over trophies earned and honors
and good at burying rage
at early desertion.

Beneath the perfect penmanship
and inside the trunks of photos
snapped at reunions,
darkness coiled in the DNA
of an infant held close
to her mother's breast.

Tender photo of the woman
with wavy hair and soft dark eyes
and the infant with a serious face,

looking backward into the pool
of early deaths,
unsure of what comes next.

-Carolyn Gregory

WHO AM I TOO, SEI?

for my mentor, poet, and friend Claire Kageyama-Ramakrishnan

who were they,
men and women
lost today, turned
up?

fish of the Minamata Bay
the new generation,
labels: five minute ichiban,
corporate endowed sensation umami.
K and Y for the tongue and gums

Jomon, Yayoi, Kofun, Nara, and words
made firm by kana, characters, ink bones
forgotten after places like Arkansas, Oregon,
Washington, Wyoming, Colorado and Arizona.

surnames flushed out like the Italians and Germans
who came before the first sei? white washed
and assimilated into fixtures to glow,
moon color bulbs in pictures
faceted and accepted into industry - real lamps

we're both in a boat to Manzanar:
anglos, whites, haoles - all purged of ancestry,
tongues of language, stories, and identity washed
since a bar of soap called BIBLE

my friends and I eat around a bowl
sheets; thinly-sliced lamb, tong-ho leaves
spinach, watercress, and daikon
taro, lotus root stewing, bleeding history

chopsticks touching, taboo, meant for

collecting bones from ashes of those light bulbs
grandfathers, grandmothers, all sei
enoki, shitake, & 36 spices. and now ohashi

all I can do is wonder who I am too, sei
tell me, children, all generations of black and white
photographs with barren wood buildings-backdrops,
children who might sing with pride and instill hand clap
games on school yard playgrounds “Issei, Nisei, Sansei,
Yonsei, Gosei!”

did your forefathers stand at five foot seven?
did your people come from the kageyamas, shadow
mountains? were your grandfathers and their fathers
strong like Kintaro sparring with bears?
movement of graceful sounds, limbs, ink bones
kana drawing your family lineage?
will you wonder how others weighed the same
as persimmons after war?

at midnight hours I look up, awake
a turned up fish from the Minamata Bay
faceted to a lamp calling to the ceiling:
“who am I too, sei?”

and then an answer falls, heavy
persimmon after war.
we're the same
old & foreign & lost
hollow lines like kana
stilled black & white names

-Colin Sturdevant



"One Photo" by Kursty Loathesome

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LORD'S PLAYER

Often times, I am stuck sitting
For hours and hours on end
In between meetings
On which the day's success depends.

Some odd spot, no amenities.
Maybe a coffee
In a parking lot
Descending to serenity.

This ridiculous pilgrimage
Not to temples dark.
More like an amusement park where
Madcap harlequins pillage plots.

She asks, "How did it go today?"
"Oh, fine... bad... okay."
The best part, I can't really say,
Was spent in the Lord's field- at play.

-Phillip Larrea

prose



BEFORE WE KNEW FOR CERTAIN

Sam was too much into his PlayStation 3. I knew this was true when he told me he was an angel hunter.

The destroyer of angels, he liked to say if you see a woman with dilated pupils, a woman who smells like mildew, a woman with fingernails that are stained yellow and teeth that are uneven and broken, if you see that woman—run. Run! Because that woman is an angel... but an angel of death. Run before her wings unfold.

I tried to get him to keep busy in other ways, reconnect him to reality, but he only complained.

I don't wanna write no letters to no God, he said. If I can't go to school, can't even get a real job, then I ain't doing shit for nobody. No fucking faith gets me.

He suffered from insomnia. Late at night when he thought everyone was asleep, he'd tune in to the local news station and follow each and every report about civilian violence.

Static flooded the flat like a flurry of wings.

One time when I went to the market, I found out that he had been beaten less than a street away from our flat. He'd been collecting empty cans and bottles when he came across a gang. And what did they beat him for?

They're just mad at the world. But everyone's mad.

Sam didn't know that I couldn't sleep either, that I hadn't slept since our neighborhood had been bombed and selected ones disappeared.

One night, just a little past midnight, I heard Sam leave the flat. I hurried to the window and watched as he went out onto the street, a heavy coat over his pyjamas.

Above him the moon hung full-faced but empty, like a ten pence piece with Liz permitted her leave. Sam held an object in his left hand; in the moonlight,

I caught the gleam of a knife, its tip hidden within his coat sleeve. He turned around once, looking back at the building.

I ducked and counted to five before popping my head back up again.

Even after he disappeared from my view, I kept watching.

He returned a few hours later, before the sun rose, walking with a limp, his coat hanging off one shoulder. Seeing him hurt, I couldn't pretend anymore, and I waited for him in the living room.

When he walked through the door, he didn't look surprised to see me. The front of his pyjamas was stained with blood. Stray white feathers fluttered free.

He was missing a shoe.

I got one, he whispered, his eyes shadowed but triumphant.

I took the knife from his hand and rinsed it in the bathroom sink. The blood swirled sweetly pink as it vanished down the drain.

Take off your pj's and put them in a bin bag, I said.

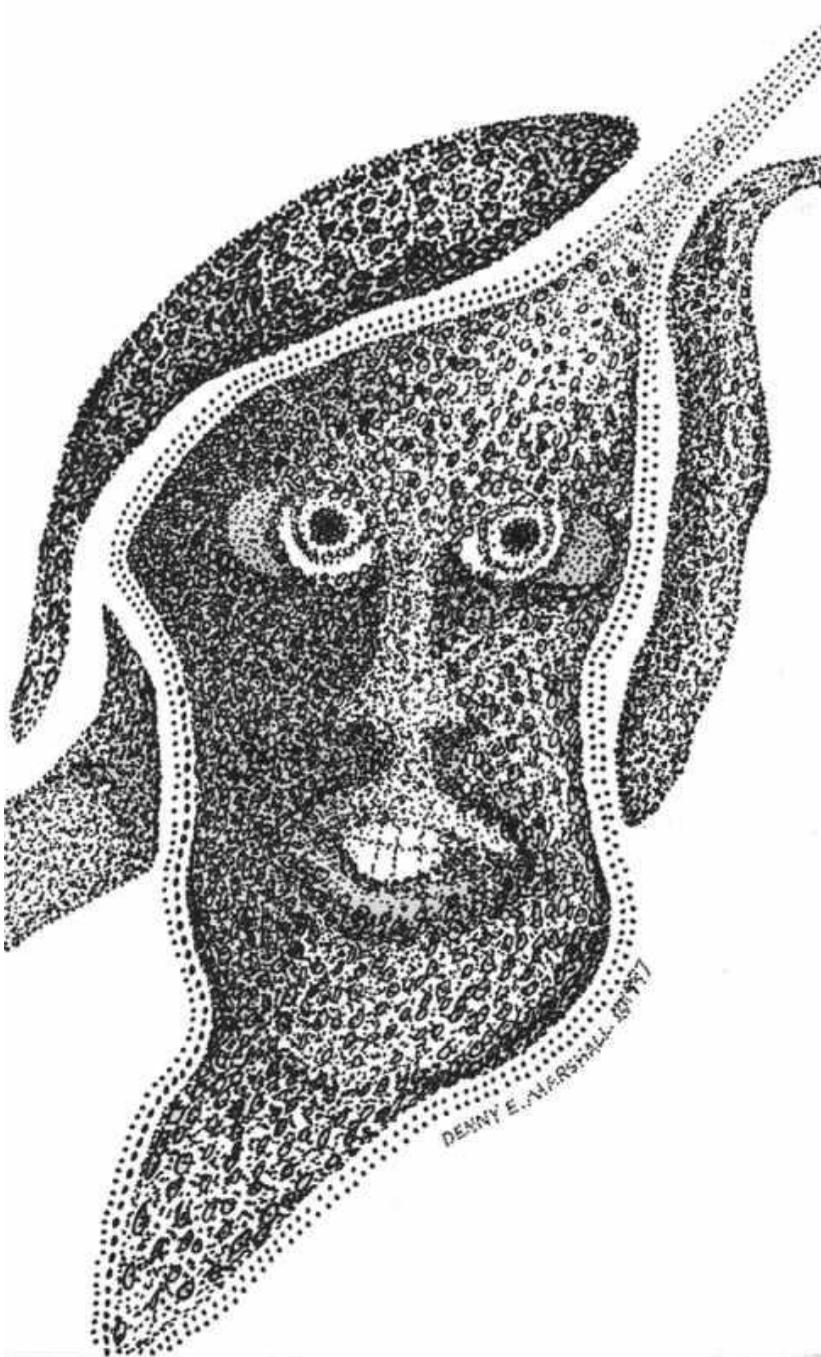
Ain't no one gonna find me, he said. Ain't no one gonna care I got 'em. But he slipped out of his clothes anyway and bagged them up. I crept out of the flat, making sure the hallway was clear before dropping the bag down the rubbish chute. I helped him get to bed then, tucking him in like he was my own little boy, staying with him until he fell asleep.

As the sun rose he held me tightly, both of us acting like everything was okay.

-David R Morgan

visual artwork

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"Two Pieces" by Denny Marshall



"One Piece" by Flo Haynes

END