



Bitterzoet Magazine

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Note from the Editors:

This is a special issue for us. We just celebrated our two year anniversary of our magazine being an actual thing. But the really special news is that this is the first product of our third year. We celebrate our second year anniversary with a strong start into our third through this all-writing issue. While we only have one piece of fiction, the overwhelming array of talent in this issue makes it one of our best yet. We know that the road has been long and challenging, and we have a long way to go yet, but this issue is our way of saying, "you know, we're actually doing pretty well." Here's to our third year. To more magazines, bonbons, and other ways of sharing words. We love you guys.

Sweetly,
Pattie and Wes

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Dream Face
Tom Pescatore

You take the little pieces
of me that rot and fall away,
and kiss them good night.

there is a room
that leads to another
room of the same size
that leads to another
room of the same size
that leads to still another
room of the same size
and so on.

the door cuts the back of each room.
a standing rectangle,
a single flight of stairs
leads up.

there's a drug to share our thoughts,
there's bodies sleeping on the floor,

you I we me step around them,
over them,

the windows are slits cut into the walls,
light barely fights its way through,

I look in the mirror.
I see myself.

I am surprised.

Bumbler
Megan Fahey

I was first alerted to the arrival of the mail by scratch of the plastic cat's toy as it moved across the slate floor of the entryway. It was nearing noon, and I'd been napping. In all the time I'd lived in the house at 337 I'd never received any mail: not one bill or package, no surveys from the census, no summons for jury duty, no junk ads, no love letters. I was a postal ghost—a stamped-out phantasm in an abandoned shack.

My knees popped in their sockets when I stood, pressing my face to the cool glass pane of the big front window and peering down the street for clues about who put the postman up to this. But he was long gone, off to retrace his tracks in another neighborhood.

"Hmm," I said to the cat.

Putrice was a purrer, and I liked to imagine each time I said, "Hmm," she was saying it back. I looked her square in the jaw.

"Did you do this?" I asked, "This thing? With the mail?"

"Hmm," she said, and I agreed. I'd have to go out and see for myself. I slid a sleep-pressed hand down the cat's back and gave her tail a little squeeze. Her tail had a clump of goop gobbled in it, so I said "hmm," again and didn't even notice the foot of the coffee table, which was on course for collision with my little toe. I wailed and cursed—as I did often. What waited in the mailbox was a petition, maybe, from one or all the neighbors, sent to beg my keeping it down. Wouldn't that be something?

§

The first thing I'd done upon moving into 337 was have installed an electronic security system—a failsafe device designed for keeping out. The technician who'd installed it tasked me with inventing a five-digit pin—one I'd remember, he implored.



"That's easy," I'd said, "12345."

"But no," he said, "That's the first thing a thief will guess. And not your birthday either."

At the door, on the day the mail arrived, I spent some time wondering why a man should have to recall so many numbers in his lifetime. The number I next remembered was the number thirty: thirty seconds--the maximum time allowed for the front door to remain open, without code access, before the house would light up like a grid of neon blueprints, and the police would be alerted. Thirty seconds to get the mail.

My stride was wrong--too fast across the lawn. If a detective asked, the neighbors would testify something had been 'up.' I slowed down, but my slowness was cool--criminally cool, too cool for a man who'd not long ago been perfectly napping, forced from his house to rush to his mailbox and find inside, one bee.

I didn't remember the bee's having been there before, but I also didn't not remember it, and so decided it must have been delivered today.

"Hmm," I said.

It buzzed a reply with the tiny voice of its wings.

"Hey," I said, "Come out of there." I coaxed and shooed and smiled like honey to lure the bee into the open. I picked a white, weedy flower from the un-mowed grass and wiggled it seductively about the mouth of the mailbox, but the bee would not be moved.

"Must be the wrong address," I said.

I closed the door, raised the flag, and waited for the next delivery.

THE HANDSOME DOCTOR

Juanita Rey

The nerve in my shoulder
is tingling, pulsing, throbbing.
The doctor presses his fingers deep.
He's coming from a healthy place.
My sinews are glad to receive him.

His wedding band glints
from the overhead light.
My breasts sleep in the
cups of my bra.

So he must be happy.
So I'm a young woman
with a very specific pain.

So why do his particulars drain me?
Why do mine give me
all the cover I need?



HOT TIME

Juanita Rey

The oatmeal is hot
and outside is going on a hundred
and the tiny lawn
out back of this apartment house
is scorched brown.

The water boiling
sends clouds of searing steam
out of the spout.
So when I finally pour it
on the grains of Instant,
the coffee is hotter than hot.

The email says,
the weather back home is hot too
but there are always the sea-breezes
to temper the humidity.

And my brother writes
that his baseball team is hot
though that's a whole other kind.
He's a pitcher.
He likes to brag how he "brings the heat."

Some guy at work last night
said I was hot.
I ignored him as I always do
when the complements have
what I call dirt on their hands.

When I'm in the fast-food kitchen
shoving chicken after chicken
into the broiler,

I don't feel that good kind of hot anyhow.
Just sweaty.

Strangely enough,
hot coffee on a hot morning relaxes me,
cools me off in a strange way.
My roommate tells me
that's just crazy.
and that the heat is getting to me.
But if it's as hot as this,
what choice does it have.



ISLAND WOMAN

Juanita Rey

My mother's photograph
sits on the mantle
between a flag of my country
and a ceramic dolphin.

She does not smile.
The word is Spanish
is la sonrisa
and my friend says it reminds him
of the English word 'sunrise.'
But she is more dusk,
with lips clenched,
eyes peering down.
Even her clothes are dark,
like their sun's already set.

She hates to have her picture taken.
But I pleaded for this one,
which is why I have this pose
given so unwillingly
like a wealthy man
tossing a coin into a beggar's cup.

But, though leaving the island,
I must have something of it.
It's a small flag
and the dolphin was
manufactured in Taiwan.

But, even grim,
she is not small.
Even dour, she was born,
not made.

CANID

Chelsea Eckert

in youth I sat in desks wonder-eyed: the rivers of bodies
desperate fish on the dock that is love and lust (I howl
this story at you because my hands they are small made
of ungendered earth) everything we have done feels like a
print clear in the sand the gold pillar on a hunched back

wondrous fox-confusion in the city the red wolf of me: you

what part of our rumbling must we sing about? and for them?
the writers who speak of our birth defects? documentaries?

(you have put away your wood-voice you are not here to save)

TO THE WOMAN WHO PICKS THROUGH THE ASHRAYS
FOR CIGARETTE BUTTS

Chelsea Eckert

smoke buds, flexes, conceals her body,
her hands especially, with the two middle
fingers the same length, the fingers her
brother said made her a werewolf

she imagines re-creation at the beckoning
of the eye of god, the moon the floodlight
to disappearing breasts, dog hips, the
pipe-legs of a beast (women are never beasts)

and she asks herself did you light up
today, are you bright and monstrous and
acid, or are you a phantom inside girlish
bones?

ON DISSECTING AN OWL PELLET AT THE AGE OF
TWELVE

Chelsea Eckert

death's length is fingers-to-tweezers, the florescent illumination of a child's
breath, and the skull of a mole, broken at the brow: was it a necessity that
curled out from you as the moon cycled at the wing-tips? paleontology
wrung from the sweat glands of dryads? when I lean towards the first
option, I move the remaining bones into a gallant exhibition of anatomy
– oh goodness

my little hands hold the wheat at the end of every life

Dragon
Anastacia Renee Tolbert

one of *them*
anisozygoptera never use your six legs
never run when you should
never hop anisozygoptera never jump ship
let yourself be all forward, backward
 & side to side time you use more dragon
 & less fly
who needs legs anyway when the predators
aim straight for the knees
cut you down when you are begging to be raised
tell you your bony legs aint shit/aren't worthy/not even defecation
amisozygoptera that whether you got one, two, three four, five or six years
experience/legs/lifetimes/dead babies
that you are only as valuable
as the next ones pointed resurrection

zonbi'
Anastacia Renee Tolbert

the zombies do not wish for love or passion or gradients of friendship no
pining for love letters or was she looking at me because i thought she was
looking at me the zombies are not into people pleasing or name dropping—
no false pretenses about job possibilities or big investments in small words.
the zombies are not afraid of the dark, rather—prefer the night. let a
night come over the day like a crush on sunday. let it fall humid like
unexplained dampness between two stars. zombies do not need approval
from anyone thing. don't need a head nod about shoes or a co-sign about
job choices. zombies are not actually dressed in white—this is a human
misnomer about what we view as sacred or impure. is a thing wrapped in
white with supposedly no soul, left or right? & there are days when you
wish you were a zombie, tie your wanting up messy & pretend you don't
see no thing. set fire to yourself while sleeping burn your dreams, your
arms out stretched for a woman on fire.

This is How You Lose Me
Jordan Castle

If I was still sixteen
I would blast angry punk music

and egg your car
maybe even your bedroom window

if I had enough eggs.

But since I'm older now

older but still a few years younger than you

I want to blast Adele
and not ironically but actually

want to press my face into my mattress
and sob to her first and second albums

with the door shut so no one can hear but me.

What I want to know is

how a person does
what a person does

to weigh another person down.

Maybe it's us holding hands above a shark tank
me always threatening to put your arm in

whispering *This is only a test* *this is only a test.*

You never took me out to a \$4 dinner at Denny's
like I wanted

never
made me waffles
one-handed like you promised

too difficult

because of your dislocated shoulder.

You were the one who said you would do it.

I never asked.



We watched movies
where Liam Neeson kills people
where Bruce Willis kills people
where Mark Wahlberg shoots Derek Jeter.

You let me choose every time.

I grew up on an island near Manhattan.

Too near to it
so near

that I had to leave.

You're from California
blond and tall
a jaw like Luke Wilson

before he put on weight

and after when he took it off.

You lived with a woman for a year

before you decided that the apartment was too small
for such little love

and so many fights.

This was the summer before

the winter you met me.

I was wearing a gold bandeau

the bar was crowded and loud and damp.

Your arm was in a sling your smile was a Colgate ad.

I asked

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

No.

multigrain cheerios.

"Does your girlfriend have a cat?"

No girlfriend no cat.

Midnight: your birthday.

"Do you like *Beverly Hills Cop*?"

You were asleep. I was watching the clock.

Which one?

I didn't want to wake you up.

In the cab I thought you might be a murderer
because I think all strange men are murderers

The day before
I had met your twin
had met your friends.

so I asked:

Do you collect skulls?
Do you like fire?
Have you ever

killed anyone?

This one night
you wanted me to stay over again but I needed the sleep.

You still gave me a pair of shorts and a t-shirt
and my own side of the bed.

You looked at me with cow eyes a color I don't remember
(can't now couldn't then)

And in the morning

and said

But it's my birthday.

I went home

but I wish I had stayed
so I could have stayed again and again.

Days later we watched *The Grey* together on your couch.

The plot: wolves kill men
and Liam Neeson kills wolves.

I watched my head on your good shoulder.

Liam stood to face the alpha at the end and... that was it.

Credits.

You turned off the light. I couldn't sleep.

I asked "But what happens?"

You said *It's just a movie*

and rolled away.

And then you went missing
and gave me responses reactions
instead of conversation.

And I was ready for that comfort

but it had gone bad
sour

like I'd forgotten to check the date.

The night I told you my dad had been in prison for four years

was the night you told me about your life with her.

Your head was resting on my chest.

You said
Was that too much?
Your heart sped up.

I shook my head. You laughed
said

I can feel if you're lying.

But it was just that you were too heavy to hold.

And when you disappeared days later
you resurfaced as a text message:

Maybe the timing isn't right.

I had weeks but she had years your ghost girl

and her dad was sick
or dying.

When I was in your bed talking about prison and plans and staying in San Francisco

I asked about her enough to know but not to pry.

You said you didn't know if you should reach out to her

I wonder if she still hates me you whispered.

When you disappeared
when you resurfaced
you wrote that you were having
ex-girlfriend issues

I don't know what that means

I wrote back on the outside reaching in
just a phone call away

a phone call you didn't make.

I needed to hear you say it's not me not my fault.

But mostly that you want tonight and the next night every night
with me.

Instead you write that you'll call me when you get home

and you don't.

I cave and call you
and it rings

instead of talking back.

You showed up in my laundry today:

a gray t-shirt with STUD printed above a stenciled muffin

a gift you got as a joke

and gave to me.

Instead of giving it back

I want to call Domino's on a weeknight (an exercise in grief)

and give them your address

tell them it's a party a pity party

and we need ten pizzas
with anchovies

delivered at 11pm
no sooner.

We will not be prepaying

I'll say

the man of the house has cash.

He's not asleep

just keep ringing.

Don't give up.

Dog Days
Cait Cole

You grew with the corn stalks on a flat field in Iowa---
your hair just like the kernels, yellow
long locks grazed your ribcage by age three.
Swinging high heels at sixteen you painted your lips
mulberry wine, your teeth round and pearly
just like your mama's, but she never flashed them
the way you did, the way you always did, the way
you'd forget after twenty-two.

Lately you've been praying for green grass
and the daisies that tickled the backs of your
thighs when you used to lay out in the warm sun,
so incredibly scintillating it is, the inside of
your eyelids make you see blood red as they absorb
the heat. Now when you think of the dog days
it means something different.

That is what you have become, a dog that
obeys. A master is what you now call love, but you
never knew love. Your eyes are no longer wide
filled to the brim with curiosity, any questions
you had stirring were beaten lifeless,
dead.

A sweet lamb consumed by lions, digested
and suffocated by acid, you no longer grow with
the corn stalks, no, you stood gravely still before
you hardened like winter wheat, burrowed deep
in the ground, you lie dormant and still and bear
the bitter season, only to never blossom
in the spring.

Composite
Cait Cole

I found myself in my childhood home
strung out and beat down and left out
I wanted to kick you into the dust
and shot myself three thousand miles
into the west when you said 'no'

I found myself in a twin-sized bed in
a yellow house on Martin Luther King
I made pizzas and I sold old clothes on
Broadway and I drank beer and I smoked
cigarettes on a porch on Malden

I found myself stumbling down Pike
a long night at Linda's had me seeing
red and black and Cobain's ghost
I never imagined that I could care
so little and so much at the same time

I found myself in a place that you
couldn't tear me away from
I felt disintegrated in the rain
but I wouldn't have cared so long
as my body bled into the asphalt

so long as there I would always stay

Author Biographies

Jordan Castle is a New Yorker transplanted in San Francisco. During the day she writes blog posts and ebooks for money. At night, she eats pizza (unfortunately, not (yet) for money). She has been published elsewhere on the internet and in print, and gets intimate at nomoreundead.tumblr.com.

Cait Cole is a poet, fiction writer, and essayist living in Seattle, WA. She is a student and is currently working on a manuscript of new poems. When not writing, she enjoys the company of her cats, husband, and collection of books.

Chelsea Eckert will be attending UNC Greensboro for her MFA in creative writing in the fall of 2015. Her fiction and poetry, both literary and genre, have appeared or will appear in over twenty print and online venues. Stalk her like a hungry catamount at <http://chelseaeckert.me>.

Megan Fahey is a first-year MFA student at West Virginia University where she works as the Fiction Editor for the *Cheat River Review*. In addition to having some short plays produced, her fiction has appeared in *Blinders Journal*, *Cease Cows*, and *Allegory E-Zine* among others.

Anastacia Renee Tolbert is a queer super-shero of color moonlighting as a writer, performance artist and creative writing workshop facilitator. She has received awards and fellowships from Cave Canem, Hedgebrook, VONA, Jacks Straw, Ragdale and Artist Trust. She was recently selected as the 2015-16 poet-in-residence at Hugo House, a place for writers in Seattle.

Tom Pescatore grew up outside Philadelphia dreaming of the endless road ahead, carrying the idea of the fabled West in his heart. He maintains a poetry blog: amagicalmistake.blogspot.com. His work has been published in literary magazines both nationally and internationally but he'd rather have them carved on the Walt Whitman bridge or on the sidewalks of Philadelphia's old Skid Row.

Juanita Rey is a Dominican poet who has been in this country five years. She has worked many jobs while studying to improve her English. She has been writing for a number of years but only recently have begun to take it seriously. She enjoys reading. Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Toni Morrison are particular favorites.