



Bitterzoet Magazine

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Note from the Editors:

I hope that the crisp, fresh notes of fall are serving as the perfect backdrop to steaming mugs of cider, blushing leaves, and pumpkin patches, dear reader. This month's issue is a little bit more thrilling than most: we've tried to capture that truly haunting feeling of the surreal atmosphere in which we find ourselves every autumn, as the whole world around us slowly goes to sleep. We thoroughly enjoyed putting together this magazine, and we hope that you enjoy it as well. As always, we appreciate our readers and authors; we couldn't do it without you and it's been our greatest pleasure to nibble away on your work.

Thoroughly satiated,
Pattie Flint &
Wesley Solether

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Art

All art in this issue is by Alex Nodopaka, appearing in this order: 4 Horses of the Apocalypse, Mapping Woman to aviolin concerto is like, 93, and USA attacked by weapons of mass destruction.

Like a Body
Dylan Wagman

I see your features
finely lined in the light
of the purple sun.

Just over the peak
of your Andes irises
I see you harvesting
the pink from the clouds,
pulling it along the brae
like a body.

You find shelter in a cavern.
The flickering light
of the fading pink
is enough to light the corners.
See the bones
of the orange
left on the floor
from a hike long ago.

You use your body warmth
To keep its rose hue.
Nothing evaporates here.
You have scaled this mountain
before.
The brinks and the flanks,
you know where the scree is slipperiest.
You will rescue it,
adding its shade
to your rainbow.

LAST OF SUMMER
Taylor Graham

Swallows became small boys
concealed in the old barn's drafty
loft. No, the swallows after all these
summers were immune
to small-boy sorcery. They caught a slip-
stream off the brisk westwind
that skimmed up-canyon, intersection
of willow-stringer through
the cow-camp meadow, two miles
of washed-out road through encircling
forest. The foremost in our tribe
of hidiers was off to college.
My old dog, once so adept at finding
him, lay by the pickup, sensing
changes. Ravens gathered notorious
in the tops of pines, raucous
with a croaky undertone of thunder
to their corvid-latin. Would it
storm? The clouds
converged. We gathered up
our wrappers, scrimms of poems
from the flower-fading
of July; a bowl of leftover
words to take back down the hill
and home; each word
possibly the seed
of a coming winter's song.



Ghosts
Jeremiah Walton

I was a ghost last night.

a ghost of a whisper
a ghost of a warm whisper
ghost of a breath's warm whisper birthing ghosts

ghosts of a whisper
deceased
pulling ghost
of my inner-child
out my pencil.

the ghost of empty
the ghost of empty between two bodies
is the ghost massaging my back
the nothing massages my back
when I go to sleep
after waking up.

a ghost is under the bed
nothing and I sleep above.

the tracks are haunted
ghosts are everywhere now.

they're in my poems.
they euthanize my dreams

my body
a city of ghosts,
so many hauntings.

Holy Days
Jeremiah Walton

Planning revolutions in bars
Sucking on America's bruises,
A sweet taste
we forgot how to worship.

My temple is my
environment. &
it is
always
changing
its clothes.



4 Horses of the Apocalypse
Alex Nodopaka



Gravestones

J. K. Durick

Stones line up as if time were making
A list of us, ticking off our names
A procession comes through the gate
They gather, words are said, stone set
Our name carved, dates, a phrase
They leave and the stones remain
Line up, gather us finally into them
Become headstones, footnotes
About our time, the time we spent
The stones say our names, repeat
Our dates into the cemetery silence
As yet another procession enters, places
Another stone, our line is almost finished.

Back

J. K. Durick

Lie flat
In bed
For days

Your body
Plays
Such painful
Tricks

Pays
Such painful
Debts

To age
To accidents

To bending
And bowing

Leaning down
To lift
A life

A life
Much
Too Large

Too heavy
For a person
To carry

Alone.



Twin Bonnies
Alyssa Cooper

The fingers clutching mine let go,
all at once.

Shock,
and horror,
and inconceivable
loss;

there is no warning,
no expectation,
just a pain,
so pure and distant
that it seems to seep,
like an ichor,
from my dreams.

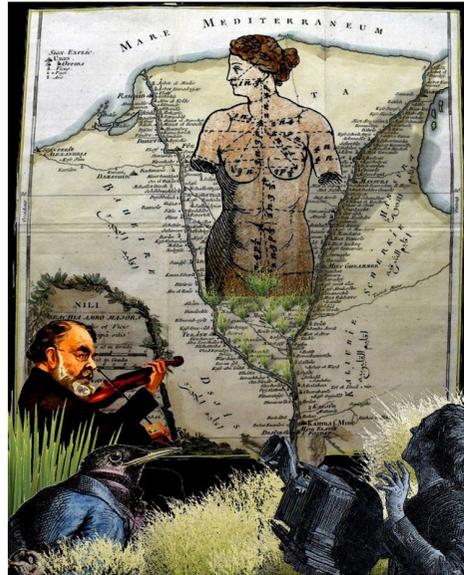
I'm lost.
She had me spinning
so fast,
and now the world
won't settle.

I'll shear the fur
from the side of
her head;
pour spun sugar
down her tightened throat,
and dance,
dance,
under those terribly twisted
boughs.

I'll open my eyes
and silence my blood,
to find my twin Bonnies,
swinging
from the Maypole;
swinging
in the sunshine.

Remember to Live
Jessica Van de Kemp

There are no words to explain the comforting thing
the dark ocean the dream where the ground opens up
and the thunder hurtles over the night:
there's no one in the trench but us the flowers reach up
through the dust like rubies shining messiahs
bent into their final shapes. The martens
sit on the panzers like hood ornaments. The old gods
fold the whiteness into a flag apotheosis
love is the secret the talisman passed down
through the generations. The storms that wake us
are the storms that give light to the darkness
music to the night time to our lives as we live them.



Mapping Woman to a violin concerto is like
Alex Nodopaka

A FRIEND ASKS FOR SIX SENTENCES
Joseph Goosey

I require many hours alone.
I require many hours in your company.
I do not have six or any tattoos.
I do not believe in borders and am not simply referring to nations or
posterity.
Money is a ghost.
Enter if you feel it.

But for a Measuring Rod

Tim Conley

An optometrist goes to see another optometrist. I have judged over two hundred patients legally blind in the past month, he explains, and that startling figure either signifies some kind of a phenomenon or necessitates that I get my own vision checked. You're too hard on yourself, always have been, laughs his compeer. He draws the blinds, points to the chart, and says, You know what to do. The troubled optometrist, let us call him Alpha, tells the examining optometrist, let us call him Not-Alpha, that the chart is too familiar to him, all the standard-issue charts their offices use are too familiar to serve as a reliable test for him, who could recite them without knowing for sure whether he saw each letter clearly or not. You're right, Not-Alpha agrees, a touch grudgingly because he himself never remembers the charts, even though he's seen them and heard them read to him literally thousands of times.

So this second optometrist takes the first to a strip club on the outskirts of town, and asks him if he notices anything unusual there. The drinks are kind of pricey, says Alpha. Not what I had in mind and irrelevant to the question at hand, Not-Alpha retorts and gestures to one of the performers onstage. Have you noticed her? His companion cranes his head and studies a swaying woman in her early twenties, if he is any judge of age, though in truth he is not. Says optometrist Non-Alpha in his ear, Read to me what's written across her belly, and he sees that yes indeed there is as it were cuneiform script gently striping her there. Her bobs and undulations naturally shape the rhythm of his reading aloud the following:

Created at twilight, before the Sabbath, it was given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. Adam gave it to Chanoch, who gave it to Metushelach; he in turn passed it on to Noach. Noach bequeathed it to his son Shem, who transmitted it to Avraham. From Avraham to Yitzchak, and then to Yaaqov, who took it with him to Egypt. Ya'aqov gave it to Yosef; upon Yosef's death all his possessions were removed to Pharaoh's place. Yitro one of Pharaoh's advisors desired it, whereupon he took it and stuck it in the ground in his garden in

Midian. From then on no one could pull out the staff until Moshe came. He read the Hebrew letters on the staff, and pulled it out readily.

Not-Alpha claps him on the shoulder: Your eyes seem fine to me. But that's an extraordinary tattoo, says Alpha, still staring, and no sooner has he uttered these words than a third man promptly sits down with them and introduces himself as a dermatologist. I couldn't help noticing your attention to Mitzi, he says, hooking a thumb at the stage which the remarkable woman now exits. If I'm not mistaken, you're admiring the writing on her skin, and that is to say that you recognize those markings for what they are, writing, and there seem to be few enough among the patrons who manage to do so. It's an extraordinary tattoo, repeats the first optometrist, who introduces himself and his associate. Not to diminish your feat of reading quite accurately those tiny letters in lighting and from a distance and within an environment not at all conducive to such concentration, chuckles the dermatologist, your senses deceive you somewhat. The dermatologist's chuckle is irritating, and though neither of the optometrists says anything about it he can see plainly enough it has irritated them, and knows from a lifetime of ill-advised chuckles that the sound he thus emits is irritating for almost everyone, save his wife, who may very well be lying about it.

The dermatologist diplomatically leads the optometrists from the noisy strip club down the night street smeared with garish lights to a coffee shop where they can talk. Alpha and Not-Alpha exchange a look that says, We're both curious, though we probably shouldn't be, about this Mitzi, but the air of secrecy to this man's conversation is hard to fathom and besides, his chuckle is irritating, but notwithstanding this expressive shared look they join him at a booth and order coffees from a waitress who coughs rather than speaks. That tattoo, says Alpha the optometrist the moment the waitress has left them with their steaming cups, what is all that about? I mean I read it, but to be blunt with you, it's been a long time since my bar mitzvah, you see what I'm saying. Not-Alpha nods vigorously and wants to know what kind of girl so religious as to imprint her body with it takes up that kind of work. And isn't that, well, kind of tameh, I guess is the expression? The dermatologist blows on his coffee to cut off the urge to chuckle again. It's amazing how many of you have been trickling into that place in the past three or four weeks to get

an eyeful of her, he says. What do you mean, how many of us? Us what? Not-Alpha asks. Optometrists, replies the dermatologist, and I must correct you from the start: it's not a tattoo. It is an undiagnosed skin condition.

In the few moments of silence that follows this pronouncement all three men stare into their respective coffees. In his coffee, optometrist Alpha sees the rippling letters and words he has read only a short while ago, dancing on that perfect dancing body, and feels himself absorbed by this image, while Not-Alpha finds in his coffee an unconsoling blackness that somehow testifies to his inability to recollect those standard eye charts or even the text of Mitzi, to which he had brought this other man, who sees further and retains better, even as he is falling into this blinding blackness. The dermatologist is unsurprised to see his wife's face in his coffee looking up at him. She is always telling him he should drink less coffee. When next he speaks, it is as though he was addressing someone not at the table.

Mitzi Messer was, he revealed, by all accounts a good girl from a home never broken nor even threatened with breakage, went to a school with no more than the usual and perhaps prerequisite number of bullies, dunces, and mortally bored teachers, where she did respectably well and had no serious upsets to her equilibrium until one day in the swimming pool changeroom she discovered this strange outbreak across her midsection. Her parents brought the doctor, the doctor brought more confusion, accusing them of mocking him and, he added, as he really got going, all of medical science. The family's respect for this professional all too quickly became terrified efforts at deference, but he would have none of it and hastened his querulous march towards retirement without so much as a glance behind, never mind a referral. Mitzi's mother had a cousin in medical school who agreed to stop in one weekend, and that turned out to be a weekend none of them would forget. The cousin, up till then a pretty stable sort with a good wife of three years and a nice career ahead of him, called his wife the first night and told her it was over, he was in love with another woman, his cousin's daughter all right but it wasn't like that, and she should never expect to hear from him again, may the heavens bless her, and all of this in the most pseudo-Talmudic jargon about purity and transformation and whatever else. And after may the heavens bless you he hung up. He had talked, his wife later said, as though he had turned into

a blend of throbbing adolescent and stentorian rabbi. The very next night he packed in a hurry, fled the house without goodbyes to his cousin, and drove home to sob for forgiveness. Mitzi by all accounts was almost traumatically upset, but totally withdrawn, wouldn't discuss what had happened with anyone, and within the week she had moved out herself without a word to anybody.

She went to New Jersey first, says the dermatologist, his face all unmistakable wonderment as to why anyone would do that. She told me that, one of the few details of her life I have directly from her. It was nearly a year ago that I first met her, but it wasn't in that place she's working in now. Not my usual sort of hangout, or at least I would have said so back then, but to be frank I find myself there two or three nights a week now, sometimes more. What I tell everyone, myself included, is that I'm spending my nights doing research, which is true from a certain point of view, especially if research is searching for something of which you vaguely suspect you once had an understanding.

Not-Alpha waves a hand: It's not that I don't believe you. What is it exactly that you deny not believing? the dermatologist asks the waving hand. His trained eye can see that the optometrist once suffered the effects of poison ivy. Is it New Jersey you don't believe? I don't see why she would lie about it. There could be a connection, interjects the first optometrist, Alpha, between all those people losing their sight and this skin condition. I mean, there could be, right? You said that that particular club fills up with optometrists. And dermatologists, answered the dermatologist sadly, and psychologists and speech therapists. I once met a chiropractor in one of the dives she used to work in and I no longer view that as a coincidence. Non-Alpha's hand repeats its dance more vigorously: It's not that I don't believe you. But he says nothing more. He is thinking about how it was his bright idea to bring his friend to this club and look at this dancer, let's be honest, this stripper, and whatever had possessed him to do a thing like that?

The brief silence is interrupted by the waitress, who is still brandishing a pot of coffee. Laconically chewing gum, she says scornfully, You guys seem so depressed, you know, it's depressing just looking at you guys. The derma-

tologist shrugs and says something about how they are more actually confused than depressed, and the waitress shifts the pot to her left hand and puts the right in a fist against her hip. Naw, you're depressed, it's written all over you, you know. I can read people. We've just been talking about reading people, chirps Non-Alpha, who is almost always stirred to a defensive cheeriness of manner when he is accused of being depressed. The waitress makes a short toot of a laugh and her gum-chewing speed increases just slightly. Is that a fact? Let me tell you, all right, we used to get this customer in here all the time, guy who was really depressed all the time, you know, and the funny thing was he used to tell me he was confused. He was in here all the time, always down in the dumps, and him and me used to talk about it, and at first he said there was something like a miracle he'd witnessed, you know, that was what he said. She chews a few times for emphasis and the three men try not to be obvious about their exchange of looks and thereby each is left unsure exactly what the looks from the other two are supposed to mean. She anticipates a question.

What miracle? asks the first optometrist. This appears to be the wrong question for the waitress frowns and reverses the arrangement of hands and coffee pot but does not slow the chewing. Like I'm going to ask about that, she says flatly. But it doesn't matter because after a while, after he's been in here a few times, in fact at about this time of night, and him and me would get talking, and it turned out, you know, that he's depressed behind being confused, if you see what I mean, and then we get right down to it and he tells me, not all at once of course, that his prostate is all filled up with cancer and his kid hasn't called him in almost ten years and he's worried his new landlord is going to evict him, and I tell him, you know, of course you're confused and depressed, of course you're seeing miracles, you want to see miracles, you don't want to see what's right in front of you, you know, like the writing's on the wall. She nods and drifts away to other tables where coffees await freshening.

So there they are, these three wise men, thinking about what one doesn't see and about scratches that can't be itched, and even

though those are, when you come to think of it, optometrical and dermatological concerns, none of them is comforted by the fact. Each one is wondering: will I be here tomorrow night, after taking in the show? What about the night after that? Is this coffee going to keep me up all night tonight, never mind the thoughts in my head, what I have seen and heard this night?

Wise men! Life is tough. Take the guy the waitress mentioned, Danny Sachs, all-around mensch with just fifty-one years on his back, this same night in terrible, terminal pain in a sub-par hospital on the other side of town, shrieking down the halls: *So pull it out, already!*



93

Alex Nodopaka

compartment
Bruce MacDonald

having parents
backed into a corner
from ground seed to room sound
root branch to negligence
in the cold and away from the center
bodies beyond sight
how could something be beautiful
in such a strange light

guess what i am
Bruce MacDonald

holding once
i get around
to writing this poem
peacefully slipping through
a small opening
in the foot
of Imelda Marcos
finding dead fingers
in strange positions
around the dictionary definition
of surrealism
written on the tip
of the tongue
of one of her shoes
a canvas sneaker
she wore to the gym

Knowing What You're Made Of
Michael Maul

There's a value, I suppose, to knowing the core of things.

I was making the case to my nephew why he must return to the VA hospital.

In exasperation I said what everyone was saying:

that he came back a different person than the one who went.

He stared amazed. "Well sure. Now I'm made out of mostly titanium and dead people."

And so it goes. Each day the IED blows,
though this time without surprise,
detonating remotely, I see, in the deep of his eyes.

Cut loose by the Percocet, Demerol and Vicodin
he watches himself ambling a fairgrounds midway
lapsing in and playing out snips of circus scenes:
A volunteer is called from the audience and stands awkwardly on stage.
Unpracticed, picked at random,
But then whoosh... vanishes in a bang, on cue, exactly like a pro.

Leaving dazzled gawkers in the grass,
Straining to see what they just saw:
that super men, encased even in armor,
can float up so high, carried off so far
with only the clap of a hand.

A Reporter's Poem on the Occasion of an Autistic Girl's Death in
Toronto
Michael Maul

For two days a thousand people searched,
Authorities, families, the hordes who hoped to find a girl
Only half frozen by the winter,
With maybe toes and fingers lost but
Essential things enough remaining to be barely
Coaxed to life.
But you, you would not be found,
And we began returning
Finally, each with no autistic girl to warm.

I went and waited in the morgue
For the family to come identify the body.

"Is this the right frozen girl?
Have we been talking about the same one
all this time?"

"Yes."

Watching you on that table of hard endings
I hoped you might seize this moment to thaw out utterly,
Rise up from this ordeal no longer numb,
But full of words, gushing ideas and over-due scoldings.

But the facts are you chose a different end
And threaded through a thousand men;

To reach darkness at the tunnel's end,
You threaded through a thousand men.

Freeway Shoulder
Samuel Piccone

The week old
carcass of a

red-tailed hawk.
Beheaded.

Clipped,
most likely,

by a semi-truck
driving with the sunrise,

speeding to make
a deadline.

Trailer full,
mice in cage,

a dream of
river shade.

24

Mower's Morning
Samuel Piccone

After the yellow
chains are
un-clasped,
and the trailer gates
are dropped, after
the dew
has sparkled,
has risen,
has settled and the
morning has finally
decided to abandon
twilight and shine
metallic on the cold
shell of the mower,
I climb in.
A pull
of the choke,
a twist
of the key,
and the engine
folds and kneads itself
to life, waking with
a diesel smokers cough,
waking up
homes and
children and
birds with the graceful
thumping of the
blades, blades that
tire themselves endlessly
just to trim the world
clean for a few
short days.

25

Before You Leave

Danielle Campoamor

Before you leave I want to stain my skin with your scent and dip my frame in your smell and staple the edges of your shadow to my scars. I want to carry a layer of you wherever I go so the outline of your ghost will lay beside me in an empty bed, tracing my face with whispers of your fingertips.

Before you leave I want to waste a day with you under twisted covers and over stained sheets. I want to map the route your tongue takes down my spine and kiss the freckles on your shoulders until they tattoo my lips. I want to lay underneath your weight and desire and need, until your imprint is punched in a mattress I can revisit every night.

26 Before you leave I want to stay attached to a couch and glued to a TV, growing a gaming controller as an extra appendage. I want to revisit my youth with every extra life and relive simplicity with every hidden level and taste the nostalgia that colors your complexion. I want to be a child with you, if only to remember when time travel was possible.

Before you leave I want to sink into darkness with lifelines of melodies and raft boats made of rifts. I want to breathe in lyrics that defined our beginning and highlighted our middle and will allow us to prolong our end. With my head on your chest and your hands reading my body's braille we'll stop time with music, existing in a history only song defines.

Before you leave I want to dance with excess and take shots of addiction and flirt with obsession. I want to feel your concern hold my hair or your compassion wipe away lingering mascara or your sympathy serve me a glass of water. I want too much whiskey and too many hangovers and too many late nights so that I can drink them in with you, knowing I'll never have too much of you again.

Before you leave I want to make your bed and fold a wayward shirt and leave pieces of me in an abandoned note. I want to cook a meal I'll likely ruin so that your laughter will vibrate the walls and your surprise will brand my mind and the memory of sharing kindness with someone can be locked behind my ribs, behind the corner of my heart you live in.

But I can't. I can't fall in love with you before you leave.

The Salt-Soaked Dreamer
Ellen Webre

Over night and in the dark, I received such a fright, that I feel I will not sleep again. For through my window came a gushing of seawater, and slippery green fingers pulled me into its depths. Down, down to where a great ship rested in in the bowels of the ocean, its rotting limbs as bleached as a pile of bones. The salted sea glittered with moonlit sparks, casting waves of shadows over the groaning corpse. Out of the cannon ball maw came forth a carpet of crabs, and above them the skeletons of lords and ladies who once gazed at the sky. They beckoned to me, the fleshless women, still trapped in their rusty hourglass corsets, caged forever more. They smiled with barnacles for rouge, crusted in brine, fish swimming between their ribs. A strain of music twined into my ears and the ship lit with ghost fires. Silver turned into champagne, and the dance was irresistible. Oh how I took those slender bodies in my arms, and we waltzed over prow and sails, to the beating of my own heart, slower, slower, slower. A thousand years passed and my hands withered, holes showed through my stomach, the fish had nibbled my ears right off. All my kisses and gnawing at my ladies' lipless mouths and collarbones had worn out my teeth. When I could dance no more, the lights dimmed, and we all collapsed into the ship, and all the gold and silver turned cold as ashes. I awoke so soaked with sweat, I believed

myself drowned, but I have lived a thousand years in a night. If sleep touches me again- Oh, oh! I will surely, surely die for real.



USA attacked by weapons of mass destruction
Alex Nodopaka