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Spring
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THE ROARING

MUSE

SPRING 2012

**The
Roaring
Muse**

Spring 2012

Cover art by Cassandra Brown
Untitled

UMD Literary Guild
410 Humanities Building
10 University Drive
Duluth, MN 55812

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Published 2012

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Leaves
By Katrina Menze

The Autumn Lark

By Ryan Schultz

There's time enough, there's time enough, it sang
But time enough for what, I do not know,
For where among those whispered leaves that hang
Sleeps whispered life beneath the fabric snow?



Apricot Lips

By Eliza Kraker

Before

When I felt the need to see a friendly face
Shadowed over a tall round glass of heavy liquid
Barley hops of bubbles mimic hops of memories
Rising to the cusp of my apricot lips
Their skin wrinkled and sweet.
Bitter liquid gold soothed the smoke
That lingered on our coats from years ago.

I craved the retelling of our stories
Like I crave unconditional love,
What I found in the swell of glass
In each purse segment of an unripe lime.
Fate is never late.
It's just the stories I crave, our love already came
And went.

Death and despair

By Ryan Schultz

Let the wind bleed it out,
Breathe deep in the rage perfected,
It's the same as will ever be,
Something new, now infected
With the laugh of mystery

They drew you in the rain,
'Cause sorrow
Has to keep us sane, like before
When we ran through the streets and in our thoughts,
Still caught in the cold snows of night.

The animus will sleep more full,
Once we learn to love
Our fate, in puppet strings.
It will humble you, this old wind
Even as it plays
Destruction, upon your hand
Lightly.

Ten Thousand Lakes of Summer

By Kimberly Hyatt

Summer slightly distracts
winter's feeling
of solitude and loneliness.
Sunshine allows my heart to rest.
Love is lost within smoldering campfires
and imported flashes of freedom.
Busy bees we all become
while tourist flock to be under
Minnesota's sun.
All beneath the stars
you stand infinite to one.
To become humble, liberated.
Drunk from heavy rain,
and the original Belt of Grain.
With shaky hands,
we toast with cheap wine,
to anticipated, cherished,
summertime.

Bliss

By Eliza Kraker

I love the Northern winter
Clouds hang close to me
Frozen stars fall far
From the two arctic kits that chase tails.

I worry these long periods of rest
Make my appeal like the fading sun, but
When the wind whispers louder than the words (Father)
Winter whisked away,
I know I am no good to another being.

I want bread
With butter
I hide lumps of cheese under my extra large sweater.
A cat waits for me to open my lap and
I pull the quiet inside me and
Try to make friends with it but
Snow Whiter than a virgin veil,
A linen page,
Elusive,
Abyss.

Woken

By CTM

Woken alone
Blue eyes bloodshot
Subconscious unsewn

In darkened bars
Lonely faces
Dreams beyond black stars

Blonde shadow cast
She sang to me
And the gods waltzed past

Revolving, they
Laughed and they cried
Till night bled to day

Ah red sunrise!
Never forget
These blue, bloodshot eyes

Snapshot
By Jennifer Zbacnik



A Snapshot
By Jennifer Zbacnik

No restrictions or reservations—
That's what got me to where I am now.
My memory of that moment—
Never forgotten.

Of Sea and Sand

By Justin Ellis Daniel

I look toward the sunset, and there I see
the eternal embrace of sea and sand.
From the beginning, till the end of time,
the two of them, hand in hand.

I say to them, "Tell me, what is the key?"
They look at me, but there they stand.
Then they answer, "We are sublime!"
I thought of this, but did not understand.

They continued to speak, "We are free!"
With a smile they state "Together, we are the
strand."
As I try and put this together in my mind,
They tell me "Together, we are grand."

As they walk away, they smile at me,
Then continue on, hand in hand.
In these words, the key we find,
What one can learn from sea and sand.

“To Escape into a Northwood Dream”

By Tyler Flint

Among the elder trees of the Northern forest,
A fair-skinned beauty lies within a circular clearing—
A snow angel silhouette surrounds her.
The woman rises;
Crisp air and pine aromas intoxicate her.
Crunching snow and old pine cones speak to her.
Frost envelops the forest elders’ once green needles—
Rainbows shimmer off their white tips.
Nature’s morning light show draws out the woman’s breath,
And she watches the vapors hang in front of her face.
Father Winter takes his own breath,
Sending snow into the air.
Snowflakes:
A geometric mystery,
Dancers performing an intricate ballet on Mother Nature’s stage;
They tenderly fall around the woman.
A solitary flake glides across crimson lips—
Its touch delicately tickles,
And the woman’s radiant smile slowly melts away the morning cool.
Her light blue eyes stare at the oceanic sky,
And she begins to warm under the heavens’ fire vessel.

let me clear you some space

By Sam Elmquist

shoveling newspapers onto the floor
relentless the papers keep falling
a life time of headlines
falling and becoming a waterfall of objective journalism
soon it is merely a torrent of black and white
the occasional sunday splashing color playfully

End Theme

By Ryan Scultz

It's been too long
My style is rusty,
Rustic at its best,
But I'd be damned to not keep shooting
Towards that feeble moon.

The pain is simple.
The soul is damaged.
Diffracted, rather.
It may have been better when
We tried to try,
But I prefer the subtleties,
The clear wine and the afternoon parties
While the snow is still settling
On eaves and ancient hills,
And the cry of winter lightning
Lingers, greets the mind.

Is this yet America? The Dry Salvages—
The same pretentious thing.
I could not think to think
In the clutch of sleet hail, image of bone arises,
Relic of gunslinger and the empty of the empty plains,
The better legacy, ignoring
Where idealism and ideology never met.
No, I put the pieces away, put the history right out of mind
For the sweeter intoxicant of clear ambition.

This seems the industry of industry,
Yet sometimes all I find is
The rage of being—the abstraction. Please. Don't disturb the poet,
I would forget the finale.
We all must build what we can hope to build.

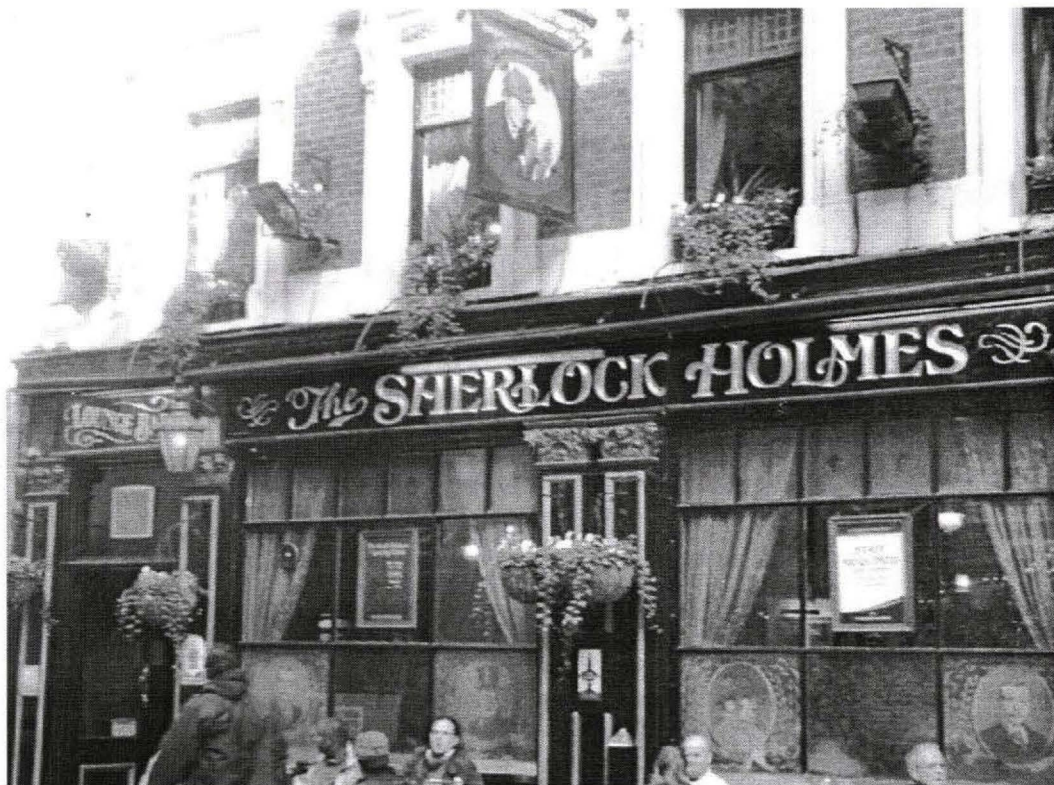
Cocaine

By Ryan Schultz

It's the answer.
To every problem, every question.

But sometimes you can find an idiot
Trying poetry.

The Roaring Muse



S.H.

By Jennifer Zbacnik

“A Young Woman’s LSD Orgasm”

By Tyler Flint

Eating the Sun’s fire She awakes
Warmth pulsates down Her Body
An Ecstasy of kaleidoscopic Beauty
Illuminates her Soul

The Eternal Battle

By Catheryn King

The blood boils
and the seas roar back with anger and might
The heavens reciprocate hell’s fury
as the damned battle bellows
The air thickens and chokes with blood and sweat
The aching bones and sagging spirits...
all crashes in with time
As age-old smells and tastes of fear and hate fill the dusty air
all the loathsome, agonizing nail-biting saga comes to a head
and the air bristles with mistrust
And O the voice
The voice
The voice says
“Your call is important to us, please stay on the line”

Femme

By Nicole Birch

Shades of crazy mystery,
collector of shoes and other useless cute,
sparkling and delicious devils of delightful seduction.
An agent of creation,
fragile and strong,
wispy and determined,
unexpected delight or surprise terror.
A tangle of contradiction offering a soft embrace.

Irrelevant

By Nicole Birch

I shake you like dirty water,
left to be trampled into the ground.
I choose to be free.
I expel the liquid of your poison from my skin.
I emerge cleansed.

You do not exist moss on irrelevant rock,
cast into the dirt.
Disappear into the musty forgotten decay.
You are irrelevant.
Unmentioned.
Unnamed.

I purge you like a cold winter breath.
Irrelevant you are.
Irrelevant you have become.

Taut

By Amy Seibert

I look upon the water
And view the sky's reflection.
My own shows lines grown tauter,
 In hasty recollection.

This bitter place holds love adrift,
And I wonder: how glee
Has drowned and died so swift.
... And in its wake, so much.
Debris.

And so, love is the senselessness
Gained from losing it all.
But time forces my inertness,
Cleaves. Makes lovers the thrall.

Solomon's Thread

By Ryan Schultz

There is also a time
When light does not excel darkness
And a time when the fool
Is right to eat of his own heart,
Yet it is always the unraveling
That fascinates the elegance.

They gave their hearts to know it once again,
And now are vexed to vex it once again;
Bewildered by a star, the one alone
Will seldom tell the things the dark has known.

The Secrets of the Heart

By Katrina Menze

As the sun set upon this night,

Tears sweep down her cheeks,
His voice pounds through her head,
Each coarse and bleak,
He told her that he loved her,
That he would forever care,
But it was as fake as the gems that little girls wear,
The black Raven caws at her as she watches her life unfold,
They told it would never work,
For she was way too old,
She calls back to the raven,
“It’ll work, you will see”
But down, down the tears struck,
All but one fate has been released,
They stood in black around her,
Their talons scratching and their voices screeching,
She stood silently hiding her face,
Taking it all in,
A knock came upon the door,
A crash came from the bedroom,
Her tears killed her they cried,
As they searched for another heart to pry on,
But what happened to the man’s fate with the flowers in his hands,
For his fate was eaten by those nasty crows,
They left him bleeding
For no compassion had been won.

Untitled 1

By Stephen Naglak

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ—
Dichotomy like fire and ice

The lamb roars. Rips. And crushes—
The devouring demon dead

With this: boast in the skull crack
Instead of painting it with wax
Highlight it with paint, red
and the healer will wipe clean your head

Fight by resting
Kill by loving
Stand by falling to bloody knees
rejoice in tears
that water the grass
thick vines and fruit have come to pass

Part I: Dreamy Lunatic

By Elisabeth Pederson

I try to gaze through all your tricks, you lunatic
As *together* we dream such young dreams
Or so it seems

You wouldn't know just how it could feel
To know that nothing is real
Because you make me sick
 You make me burn
In this erratic reaction
To the way you love to rebuke me
and your refusal to completely elude me.

And I wouldn't have it any other way
Just so long as you pretend
like you are here to stay

.....

On this night
you had a look that drove my imagination
to desire unknown sensations.
You unveiled your thoughts,
and gave me a glimpse of your world-

I saw the moon in your eyes
as it reflected off the lake.
I listened as you revealed memories
of your mysterious history.

You said you were getting chills,
and you asked me if I could feel it too.
I tried to conceal my revealing smile in the dark,
but when I saw your reflection in the window
I had to turn toward you.

...

Motionless and speechless
-I saw the moon in your eyes
expose all the light
of the dark night.

Untitled 2

By Stephen Naglak

It blows my mind
In the space
of an hour—
I can be
changed by grace
like a flower—

And bloom.

Untitled 1

By Lexi Ackerman

his skin smells of pine
and dirt and sweat
when he sleeps
i love him
because he reminds me of nothing

and i need him to stay
unfamiliar and to stay at
the same time

Untitled 2

By Lexi Ackerman

It's the demeanor of homeless men that get me. He who has seen the world roaming on nickels and splitting sunflower seeds. An autumn leaf seconds away from turning brown and crumbling towards land. He has clean hair and blue ice eyes. Saying

Will you stay with me? I've nothing and you're something but I cannot feel more.

I love him

I also love the sky, and am not certain anymore if there is a difference.

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Duluth
Katrina Menze

Fragments

By Anessa Kemna

I leave bits of myself everywhere I go
I lost my ear in a cocktail lounge,
carelessly misplaced after an evening out.
My finger sits in the blind woman's teacup,
an oversized tea leaf... is it too hot?
I sent my feet away by priority mail, toes and all,
a victim of mistaken identities and badly printed labels.
And my nose sits, neglected, on the floor of the bus.

I used my eyes as currency,
and gambled them away, a poorly planned bet.
and my tongue, bitten off,
rests at the bottom of a too-empty bottle of wine.

I leave bits of myself everywhere I go,
carelessly scattered in corners, under tables,
unimportant refuse and disregarded trash,
picked up, examined, dismissed, and thrown away.

But my heart, that I will guard,
clutched in my four-fingered hands
fighting off would-be intruders with my mouth, missing teeth, tongue, lips
I will leave bits of myself everywhere I go,
But that, no. That is one you will never find.

Sato's flaw

By Ryan Schultz

*No moon; only an aching heart
Conceives a changeless work of art—Yeats, "Meditations"*

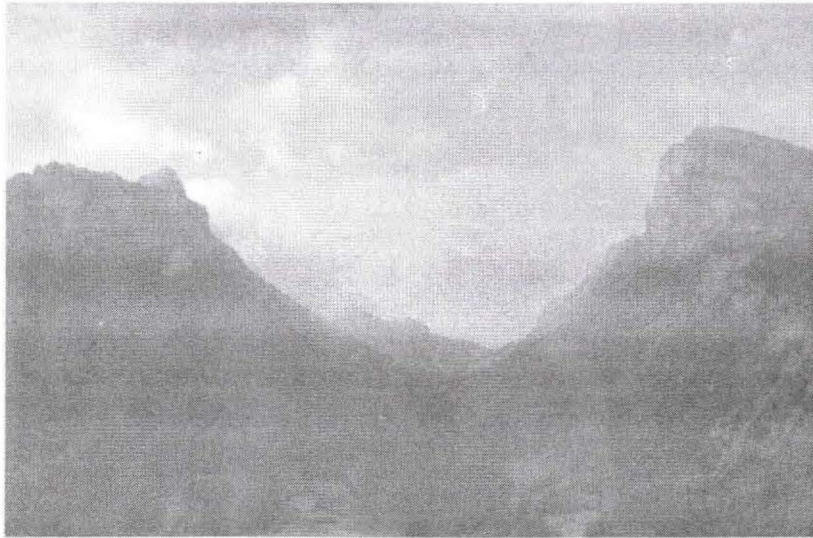
Easter turns around again
When ninety-six years fail for time.
Yuki no Sasayaki, sleep the centuries away
Sharp edge tainted by the tumultuous toil
And that desolate beauty,
Beneath the shrouded folds
Of the calm and the dereliction and despair
Of that same 'whisper of snow'

The mind's eye is troubled
Worse than before
Siege of images
The burning bridge at the precipice of reason,
Old rhymes to sing old dreams away,
And the same fallacy of a tower that rises
To corrupt even this, my friend, the justice of isolation.

I am finished with the news.
No more pictures of war, but I find them
And the same feeling accompanies
The question of necessity
The pomp and grandeur of a more uncertain death

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Should freedom's dream unsettle,
The carelessness of an old man will ruin the bitterness of youth
Down to squandered fabric of the soul,
To the tearing and the rage
That is the rage of life, my only pride.
Did Sato dream this when he failed to dream?
And another century turns, sleepless
Towards the purest shroud of snow.



Pathway
By Melissa Horner

Untitled

By Alethea Tusher

parched lips slip, fit
together. uplifting light
do we sing. beats
under sheathed garments
ornamental gathering
flesh unto flesh
speckled, freckled
shown through
each vein a pale portrayal
how no one, but maybe two,
can hide away within
herself, yourself, God's self
made manifest, imperfectly
we corrupt the image
love drawn
across rage saying
sister, i never knew you.

showing color crimson light of day
drawing closer,
breaking veins, graffititting walls
coloring people
the light shines
from the world hidden
humans make room
to lay the dead and cover
their exited faces from the darkness
that they could not but now
accurately see, surrounding everything.

The Roaring Muse



Unbound
Melissa Horner

Breakfast with Inanna

By Charles Grabuski

I invited Inanna to breakfast
and she bled red and black on the tablecloth
of our history.
I told her not to worry about it,
conscious of her trails.
And she said through a nail-gouged tongue
clear as the sky
“What would there to worry about?”
I poured her more coffee.
my head bent in supplication and shame.
“I called you to ask a question...
how do you live with your sister so far away?”
Her eyes burned bight with the heat of the sun
and she set her mug down,
brown rings over the white, black, and
red.
Removing her gold crown and lapis earrings
she cracked her knuckles
(I thought I heard Ereškigal in the scraping of bones)
And with the surest and simplest of motions
She Ripped out my heart.
She set it upon the table,
more red, more brown, more black
and it still beats there
this is a power of all Goddesses
to continue the human heart
Pumping away as if it had done this forever.

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I gasped. I flailed. I spit up breakfast and lunch
and dinner and everything ever held in.

I was hurt and it was unbearable.

Only all hot tears and ice tears and sometimes
violent jack-knifing of limbs reaching for
contact and restraint.

I could see only Inanna,

I could see only Ereškigal.

I could feel only that space where she used to be.
simply, clearly, transparently

“There.

That is how you live with your sister not next to you.

When bringing her eggs or sugar or arms is a
seven-hundred mile sojourn.

You breathe with shallow breaths.

Your limbs will grasp at O₂ and N₃ to find her.

Your ears will only hear

the space between pumps

that use to be where she was.

the space between chests

that where she is now.

That is how you will live.”

I fell backward

on to the floor, on to the earth.

Attempts were made to grasp at anything

violence, tears, shame, god

my fingers finding solace in compost.

The Roaring Muse

“And you will be still
until she puts your there,
Right under your fingernails; her dirt
Right through that space she made in your heart;
her hook; her nail; her spike
too hot to not touch
you may not remove it”
And finally I stopped
 it all stopped in an utter-able moment.
“Silence is your sister; is my sister.
She is a far away as we chose.”

Nikon

By Anessa Kemna

The cardboard box on the shelf looks unassuming enough. But as her fingers stretch for it, as she rises up onto her toes and reaches, she can feel her heart fluttering against her ribs, a little thrill of fear and excitement making it stammer like it hasn't done in years. Her fingertips graze over the rough cardboard, and she can feel the dust there; it hasn't been moved. No curious child, seeking for Christmas presents or forgotten items, had ever disturbed its resting place. Good.

She grasps it, pulls it down, and tells herself that her fingers are shaking because it's heavy. But the box, for all it should weigh a thousand pounds, really is very light. Pictures and letters never did have much heft to them, physically, at least.

She stares at it for a moment, debating whether to stash it up on the shelf again, whether she should bury that part of herself again. It would only hurt to reopen that door. But she has never been good with self-control, and now is no different, no different than the cigarettes, no different than the drugs that had thinned her out when she was younger, stretching her like frayed rubber bands, leaving her with those stretched creases still in her face. That was how it had always been: she knew the consequences, they simply didn't matter. They were a problem for a future self, a self made so much more resentful by being saddled with baggage from so many previous lives.

Setting the box in the middle of the carpet, she walks over and flips the lock on the door, then, fully aware that she is simply filling the silence with more movement, stalling, she walks back to the middle of the room and picks up the box, carrying it back and sitting down with her back to the wood, an extra barricade to the outside world.

Her nails are long, and slit the old tape easily. Now that she has started moving, it is getting easier; she's losing herself again, losing her caution. She pulls back the flaps of

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the box, wrinkling her nose and inhaling the musty smell of old paper and stale gum from more than a decade ago.

The first picture sitting on top of the pile is of a teenage boy, tall and lanky. His brown hair touches his ears in a way that still makes her belly quiver, and even from far away, his eyes are very blue. He obviously didn't know the picture was being taken; his smile was too genuine for a photo. But it's a nice picture all the same. She brushes a finger over his tiny face, clearing away the dust, looking at the edge of her own cliff.

The next item is a note, and the paper has already started to go yellow, so that she doesn't dare to pick it up with more than her fingertips.

Brittany,
Meet you on fifth street. 5 O'clock. I'll bring pizza.
Love,

It ends with an illegible scrawl, and below it on the page is a roughly drawn map, from the school to Fifth Street, drawn in a hand that was quite obviously shaking.

Gum sits next to the note, carefully wrapped in a piece of paper. She doesn't unwrap it, but she knows it by its smell, his smell, and because she remembers folding it carefully in that paper, hidden under her desk so no one would see, her fingers shaking all the while. And though she can't see the paper, she remembers the way the pencil bit into her hand as she drew their names inside hearts, almost manic with the hope that if she pressed hard enough, if she wanted it badly enough...

The gum sits on a tiny packet of pictures, paper-clipped together. She picks these up very slowly, and removes the clip with a sort of hesitant reverence. The pretty boy sits at a table with a girl, and they are both smiling and laughing. She remembers the pictures, remembers that long beautiful night with an almost painful swelling of emotion

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that is still just as fresh as it was then. There was dinner, and dancing, and it had been perfect, and he had said 'I love you.'

It had been easy to get the pictures with a good zoom from the other booth, obscured by the plants in the restaurant. He had never figured out she was there, nor had Brittany.

Slowly she sets the pictures back in the box, puts the rest of the things in on top of them, and closes the box before rising to her feet. The doorbell rings, and she can feel a tiny smile tugging at her lips. The box goes back up on its shelf, and she strolls out of the room, no longer shy and hesitant, but languid and confident.

When she opens the door, the smile she gives the brown-haired man standing outside would be considered vulpine, if he knew what to look for. She notes, with pleasure, that he hasn't cut his hair, and that his face looks so much nicer when viewed up close, without the glare of a flash bulb.

"Brian, it's so good to see you. I'd heard you'd moved into the neighborhood."

She wonders if he remembers her...it doesn't matter, really.



A Slant of Light
By Jennifer Zbacnik

Little Ant Big Wish

By Kimberly Boisse

The night was young and the sun was just setting. There were drops of dew that glistened throughout the grass. As Timberly marched back to the ant hill after collecting dew and crumbs from a small child's cookie from at the park the other day, she notices something big!

It was a ginormous bright glowing object filled with dark speckled gray spots. There were spots big and small. She asked herself, what is that most peculiar thing? Hmmmm.....I wonder who put that there she says. But haven't I seen this radiant shining object before?

As Timberly stood there flabbergasted, her grandfather, who is considered the wisest living ant on earth came up to her and said, what the hell are you staring at? Grandfather! What is that Timberly asked in an astonished voice? She was pointing high up in the sky! As far as her little arms could stretch. Grandfather's reply was, you mean the big glowing object that gives light to us at night? Timberly nods her head. That's the damn moon you nitwit! Now hurry inside the nest before the locust fly in and eat you.

Timberly didn't want to be eaten and always did what she was told. So she ran as fast as her little ant legs could take her. When she was safely inside, the first thing she did was eat her supper. The dish was cookie crumbs, jellybeans and fresh picked dew. After Timberly had finished, it was time for bed. Her mother came to tuck her in safely away from the brain-eating locust that come at night and as her mother kissed her forehead and said good night, Timberly asked her mother if she knows about the moon. Her mother responded with a big smile and said of course. It comes out every night if it isn't tucked away under its blanket of clouds. Why do you ask my child? Because I swear tonight was the first night seeing it in my life! It's like it came out of nowhere! It's the coolest most beautiful thing that I ever laid eyes on. Timberly's mother kissed her forehead once more and said good night.

Twelve years had whizzed by and Timberly was now growing into a young lady. Her

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birthday was actually just a month away. With Timberly now being older, her mind expanded into greater possibilities. She spent the last twelve years admiring the moon. Watching every phase and studying every detail through her vary own dew drop telescope.

One night when Timberly was peering through her magnificent looking glass, grandfather was taking one of his nightly walks as usual. He approached Timberly and had a curious question to ask her. Timberly my dear, yes, said Timberly? Why do I always find you staring at that moon? It's too beautiful not to she replied. There is something about the moon that takes me to my deepest desire and I don't know why or where it comes from, but I think about it every time I see it! I wish the moon to be mine one day. Not to keep for myself of course, but to sit upon it at night and look down from the stars above any time I wanted to. Oh for heaven's sake! I didn't ask you to write a story about it, grandfather replied sarcastically rolling his eyes with a little chuckle in his voice. Next time I just won't ask. Now hurry to bed. You have a very important day tomorrow. Good night said Timberly as she hugged grandfather. Good night child. Sleep tight. Don't let the brain-eating locust get you tonight.

So the World Will Never Find Them

By Erika Adams

Masquerade!

Paper faces on parade...

Masquerade!

Hide your face so the world will never find you!

-- Andrew Lloyd Webber, "Masquerade"
from *The Phantom of the Opera*

Alvin felt like the quintessential little boy who ran away to join the circus. But he was not a little boy. Not anymore. And this was no ordinary circus. To him, it never was.

Alvin was now in Paris. He still couldn't believe he had actually pulled it off! All those months of preparation had gone toward this. He now had a brand new life in the most beautiful city in the world, and the best part was that he did it all right under his parents' noses. As Alvin strolled serenely across the Pont Marie Bridge, which glowed pleasantly in the twilight hanging over the Seine River, thoughts of all the excruciating times he had suffered back in the States came to his mind. Since childhood, Alvin had had to put up with his parents' ridiculous obsession with "proper" child-rearing and moral decency.

To them, anything with anything frightening in a non-human sort of way was to be avoided like the plague (Alvin couldn't help smiling at this analogy). Speaking of the plague, God forbid they ever knew of his "forbidden treasures"—literary and cinematic versions of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. He had many others, but his absolute favorite was *The Phantom of the Opera*. Whether the lovers ended up together wasn't what mattered; it was that they pursued love and truly meant it as they did so. What really captivated Alvin was how such monstrous creatures could put humans to shame. Not even their gruesome forms or bizarre

origins stopped them from becoming magnificently passionate gods who could charm the loveliest mortal angels.

This was more than he could say of the age he was unlucky enough to be born in. *America the beautiful*, Alvin reflected sarcastically. Nothing but teenage, testosterone-pumped idiots who screw any spoiled, dim-witted bimbo they can get their hands on—assuming that their breasts are big enough in the eyes of those perverts. Nothing but adults complaining about how they are too poor or too fat while they gradually kill themselves on steady diets of droning jobs, frozen dinners, and late-night T.V. Nothing but a nation of deadened spirits and lost souls.

It had taken all the stamina that he had to get ready. He mastered French thanks to the Rosetta Stone computer program he had snuck home, endured endless torrents of McDonald's orders for miniscule wages, and waited in agony for his eighteenth birthday in order to avoid suspicion when getting his passport and plane ticket. Once everything was finally in order, actually executing the plan turned out to be easy. He had packed everything he needed in his backpack and left "for school" as usual. *Goodbye and good riddance*, thought Alvin with grim satisfaction as he looked upon his parents' mannequin faces and their sanitized existence for the last time. Then he turned away; the world was waiting. Alvin walked to a bus stop from which he could quickly get to the airport, figuring he would already be over halfway to Europe by the time he was missed. About ten hours later, his plane touched down into France.

Alvin had spent weeks searching for an apartment that was both comfortable and cheap. The landlord eagerly welcomed Alvin, and was even more pleased to discover that Alvin spoke fluent French—they could get acquainted all the quicker.

"J'espère certainement que vous serez heureux ici, mon ami!" (I certainly hope that you will be happy here, my friend!)

Alvin smiled. *"Mon bon monsieur, j'ai attendu des ans pour venir ici, et je ne pourrais pas être plus heureux."* (My good sir, I've waited years to come here, and I couldn't be happier.)

He amiably shook hands with the landlord and stashed his things away in his new home before going out for the evening. He breathed in France's evening air, its

smell a mix of fresh baked bread, rich perfume, and ferry smog. Now, he could finally enjoy life unmolested.

The Eiffel Tower was even grander up close. Its brilliant point seemed to pierce the very heavens. *Rockefeller Plaza's Christmas trees have nothing on you*, Alvin thought as he gazed at it with wonder. He wagered that he could see the whole country from the top!

Alvin's awe changed to yearning as he walked on past some cafés, outside of which couples sat together at small round tables, perfectly content with each other's company. He had never fooled himself when it came to love; he knew exactly why no female eye had ever fallen fondly upon him back in America. Even so, he couldn't help wondering if he might not be luckier here, in the City of Love. Alvin sighed wistfully as he watched one man reach tenderly across his table for the hand of his lady friend, who smiled lovingly back at him.

Lost in thought as he moved along, it took Alvin a good while to notice that the number of people around him was growing, as was the volume of singing and laughter. Curiosity spurring him on, Alvin watched as the number of people in everyday dress dwindled, and more and more people appeared before him wearing...*masks*.

Alvin was running now, wanting to know the reason behind all these wonderful disguises. He followed the thickening crowds until he finally made it to the *Palais Garnier*, where he gasped as he witnessed his dream come to life. Night had completely fallen, but the stars and street lights revealed a closed-off street filled with masquerade dancers and revelers. Royalty in extravagant attire. Fools with tongues that wagged like the jingling bells hanging from their four-tined caps. Animals that shrieked, barked, and roared. These were true Phantoms. Even the eighteenth-century-esque orchestral musicians at the center of the square had a wild look about them. Their only purpose was to keep the public entertained, yet they still upheld a noble dignity, a kind achieved only by denouncing the real world and embracing the night while commanding its respect, like the servants of aristocratic vampires. This was truly a hell on Earth, a heaven in which mortals could make merry with demons of a terrible, powerful—and irresistible—beauty.

Alvin noticed with repugnance some people in normal attire interspersed within the crowd, an eyesore amidst this splendor. Then he remembered his own appearance and bitterly regretted that he had no costume of his own. Nevertheless, he seemed as perfectly welcome as anyone. The dancers greeted Alvin like he was an old friend. Indeed, many of them invited him to partake in the “spirits of the spirits,” practically showing glasses of various fine wines and champagnes into his hands (along with the occasional pilfered Spanish cigar or two).

Alvin accepted everything, not only to have a good time, but to live as though his very existence depended on it. A storm of colors and lights swirled around him. From within the eye of that storm, otherworldly faces hovered in every corner of his vision, threatening to overwhelm him, but Alvin was not afraid, for he was now one of them. He danced, leapt and flew, caught up in the revelry like a spirit purged of his own mortal grossness by Queen Titania herself.

A slender hand suddenly reached up from behind, pulled his face toward its owner’s, and the next thing he knew, Alvin found his lips caressing those of a young lady. Despite his shock, he closed his eyes, exploring and enjoying the feel of her warm flesh and the sweet and spicy taste of her tongue inside his mouth. Their faces parted. Alvin opened his eyes...and beheld the loveliest creature he had ever seen. Her dress was a rich gold with a turquoise blue sash around her waist, accentuating every exquisite feature of her voluptuous shape. Her hair fell down her shoulders in sparkling cascades of cinnamon. Upon her back was a pair of wings with chocolate brown feathers streaked with waves of the softest caramel. Her mask was feline in shape, its velvet fur jet black and its ears handsomely erect. A vision of the Egyptian cat goddess Bastet flashed through Alvin’s mind, and her angelic sphinxian form now stood before him in the flesh.

“Uh...hi, I’m Alvin.” He groaned. *I cannot believe that just came out of my mouth. And why the hell does my voice sound so thick?*

“Alvin,” said the masked lady. Her English was heavily accented and her voice deep, yet as soft and smooth as her wings. “A friend of elves.” She chuckled at Alvin’s confusion. “It is Old English, *mon ami*. That is what your name means, so it is all the

more fitting that you should be here among us. I have seen you make friends so easily.”

Alvin, his heart full to bursting, blinked and swallowed. “I’m afraid,” he said as calmly as he could, “that I’ve had so few friends in my life, *Mademoiselle*. Thus, I am especially sociable tonight.” He tried to maintain a gentlemanly poise and to steady his trembling hand as he took hers. He raised it to his lips and gently kissed it, gazing all the while at her silver-speckled violet eyes. “And, to speak the truth,” he added, “mere mortals do not suit me.”

The lady smiled charmingly. “Your manners as well as your name attest to that.” As Alvin blushed, she stepped closer to him and put her hand to his chest, feeling a steady beat against her palm. “Another truth I know...you have a *very* good heart.” She pulled Alvin’s ear toward her and whispered, “Let us see how strong it is.” The lady then spun away and sprinted with catlike grace into the crowd.

Alvin shook his head as if to clear it before giving chase. Navigating through the mass of party-goers was like wading through quicksand. He couldn’t seem to follow the lady who had vanished from his sight. The thought of losing her, the first girl to ever even look at him, made him choke. The revelers’ voices boomed, muffled in the distance, but Alvin’s ears throbbed from the assault of cruel laughter and heartless songs celebrating his inevitable defeat.

At last, he reached the edge of the street barrier where the crowds thinned out. Frantic, he looked around. *Damn, where did she go?* A distinct laugh rang out. He turned toward the sound and his eye caught a flash of turquoise. He immediately followed the new trail.

For many hours Alvin staggered after her in a maze of dark alleys. Eventually, however, his body refused to heed him anymore. Alvin’s stomach heaved as his legs buckled beneath him. His head seemed to swell so that it teetered dangerously upon an impossibly thin and weak body. He clutched his blazing chest. His heart pounded as if trying to escape its prison of flesh and bone. His face was thick with sweat that flooded like acid into his blood-shot eyes.

He was on the verge of passing out when he felt a familiar hand upon his cheek. The lady gently pulled his face toward hers, and Alvin, his mouth curling sluggishly into

a smile, gazed at her as if she were an oasis in the shadowy desert he now found himself in. The lady tenderly said, "*Mon chéri.*" *My darling.* Alvin's heart skipped. The lady then stood up and then raised her hands as she announced, "Welcome to the Point of No Return!"

As if these words held magic, candles flickered into life all around them. Each light was held by a human beast: a fox with a mischievous leer; a dragon with twisted horns and fangs; a bat with a wicked snout and a pair of beady eyes.

So many of them... Somewhere in his inebriated mind Alvin sensed that something was wrong. He tried to focus, to keep his mind from drowning. *Only...people...in masks.* His glazed eyes searched for his beloved...and found something else. *Oh, my God.*

The black cat mask was on the ground, but the lady's new face was no illusion. She was nearly bald. Only brittle wisps of filthy hair billowed out of her scalp, barely covering her sunken and flame-eaten face, which now grinned toothily like an emaciated Cheshire Cat. "I told you," she cackled like a hag as more masks rained down around her, "how much I love a good heart."

"And liver," said the "fox" whose wide, smiling jaw hung on warped Glasgow hinges.

"And kidney," said the "dragon" with huge facial tumors and a bulbous tongue.

"And spleen," said the "bat," its nose scraped clean away, its eyes ashen and dead.

Alvin vomited old blood-mixed alcohol and tobacco before his captors. Some screeched with laughter, while others silently looked on with amused indifference. After a brief but severe coughing fit, he looked up, a plea for mercy in his eyes.

The lady's own eyes were soft as she said, "Despite how you feel now, *Mon chéri*, you are in truth more alive now than you ever were before." She then narrowed her eyes and smiled maliciously. "That is why you will give us so much life." Alvin was powerless to stop her as she crouched back down and impishly licked a drop of sweat off his nose. He shuddered with disgust and nearly vomited again.

The last thing she said to him as she glided into the shadows was, “*Merci*, dearest Alvin.”

Alvin, the pupils of his eyes now pinpricks of terror, gasped several times before gathering enough air to scream up to the heavens. A multitude of demonic faces loomed over him, their greedy hands anxious to grab whatever he had to offer.



In troubled but dignified silence, Detective Adrian Gringoire watched the faces of the American couple first stare blankly – their heads shaking like broken doors – then gradually collapse in grief, as the English translator related the findings of the investigation and their bleak implications. The investigators managed to find one witness, the landlord who had taken Alvin in, but this provided little solace. Gringoire knew that it was not only the French accent making it difficult for the couple to grasp what they heard. No amount of experience in this field could ever ease the suffering of a person whose loved one would most likely never be seen alive again.

Later that night, as Gringoire slowly walked home, his reflections were disrupted by the caterwauling of two drunkards. He was only annoyed at first at this breach in the nightly silence, but then his blood boiled as he discerned their words: the brief monologue preceding the song “Masquerade” from *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra*. Gringoire listened as one of them sang the final line of Monsieur Firmin with a mock, pompous gravity – “*What a pity that the Phantom can't be here!*” – before both men broke out with fresh, hideously cracked energy into the song’s flamboyant chorus.

Mon Dieu, how I hate that song, thought Gringoire, fervently wishing that he could show those dumbasses a real phantom.

THE END

Captain Hook's War

By Justin Ellis Daniel

This is the story of Captain Hook;
And the noble war he took.
It all started one day;
In a land far far away.
When Tinker Bell used Pixy Dust
to rule the fairies with an iron fist.

Captain Hook told Tinker Bell, "leave the fairies be
and turn over the Pixy Dust to me".

Tinker Bell refused,
That she ever had, or ever used.
Cpt. Hook places sanctions on the Fairies' land.
From place to place he would follow
Tinker Bell all across the land,
Looking for the Pixy Dust that she had.
Tinker Bell, tired of the pace,
Asked Peter Pan to end the chase.
Peter attacked the Captain:
Cutting off his hand.

"Peter Pan is evil" Hook would declare
"As is that pixy! All need beware!"

"They cut off my hand!"
Hook takes the war to the fairies and Neverland.
Hook attacks everything he sees;
The fairies become refugees.
Tinker Bell in a fit of rage, sends a letter to the fairies.

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Peter flees to Neverpeak to base his campaigns.
His land may be lost, but he still remains.

A thousand of Cpt. Hooks pirates have lost their lives,
But the war rages on, on both sides.
Lord Ombra criticizes Cpt. Hook for the war he took:
“No Pixy Dust found, no matter where you look”.
Tinker Bell is captured alive, in a fox hole trying to hide.
Lord Ombra stays quiet, swallowing his pride.
Hook declares his first mate governor of the fairies land,
And the fairies return hand in hand.
The pirates capture Neverland, “the war’s over.”
Cpt. Hook declares Rufio the governor.

Peter resists Cpt. Hooks advance
with bombs and a dance.
Lord Ombra sends the Shadow Thieves
to rally the wenches, “Captain, we beg you, please leave.”
Hook is furious at the Shadow Thieves
but no pirate leaves.
The girl lost in the meadow throws a fit,
she is asked to stop, but does not quit.
Cpt. Hook stops searching for pixy dust in the fairies land:
“It’s in the meadow, in the little girl’s hand.”

Lord Ombra says “I will no longer fund the war.”
Cpt. Hook replies “That’s what you’re there for.”
Ravello questions the wars length,
“How much longer will it take?”
The girl bargains for more time,

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“I don’t have any,” as she starts the production line.
“What? Pixy Dust!? The girl must be stopped,”
say the animals in the northern forest: “we can pound her with rocks!”
Cpt. Hook has two wars
and not enough pirates for more.

The wenches are irate,
Yet the shadow thieves spread more hate.
Lord Ombra damns captain hook
by rigging his book.
Cpt. Hook defiantly claims “till the end”
more pirates he then sends.
The wenches rise up with mutinous rage,
every one trying to take the stage.
Cpt. Hook says “when I’m gone just remember,
This war will never be over”.

A Simple Katabasis

By Charles Grabuski

When she collided with the lake, it hit her with all the force oxygen and hydrogen can manage, which is to say quite a lot. She had heard it would feel like hitting concrete, like when as a child she would jump from the stone wall to the sidewalk below. But it wasn't like that at all. The fall was much farther, the water much harder and surprisingly much more forgiving than concrete. Sure the impact caused a fist sized bruise on her right hip. She knew it would. The moment when her body met the water felt like opening of new bag of chips. For on that second, when the water reconsidered her weight and yielded to the whole of her body, she felt her former life being sucked up from her skin. The surface closed up around her and fell through, into the mirroring world. Her katabasis, her descent, had begun.

Through the tangle of hair she thought she saw her husband, whom she did not love anymore. Their marriage soured within six months of the honeymoon: honey preserves but the moon changes. Talk of children was too much too soon. They had discussed this before but he had never gotten so heated back then. Sex was now about love and children, about love and generation, about love and inheritance. The condom felt contrived. And small things like breakfast bowls left on the table—sticky with dry oatmeal—burned in her ventricles.

In the shifting light were the fragments of her job. She was once a forensic analyst for the police department. She was good at her job, or so she thought. But “budget cuts have caused us to...” She had a passion for photography and constructed stories brought to her by women and men in navy blue uniforms. High resolution was her life. She put down every detail from pictures onto forms and made meticulous notes on post-its. The questions of *how did this happen* and *why did they do it* were for her to answer and stuck with her long after she left for the evening. Every day it was another bullet wound. Fabric burns when it gets punctured by a piece of metal. Skin too. Women in black garbage bags. Children in crawl spaces. So many things attempted to be hid forever, now in glaring transparency before her eyes in two-dimensions. It had been her job

to make them real and to resurrect them on paper.

She took her own pictures on weekends. Sunrises and birds on window sills framed on the walls. Her fiancé turned husband turned ex filled the entirety of a one gigabyte jump drive. Her sister with a half empty wine glass as her desktop wallpaper. The cat she smuggled into her dorm room freshman year scrolling through her screensaver. Her mother's sixty-fifth birthday party sat on her dresser. That wheat colored dress look so good on her mom. The glow of the birthday-candle light reflected in her eyes. Wrinkles made into canyons by shadows.

She thought, *"It is much faster to go through a clear sheet of water than file endless divorce papers. It is better to start everything over again, fresh as dawn, than to rehash everything to pieces and attempt to mend them together again. It is more efficient to let air and water clean out all the images of terrible acts committed by terrible people than to bury the empathy under layers of more appealing photos. It is much easier to jump from a cliff and collide with the barest of elements to renew one's lease on life than to sit on a therapist couch and be told to "let it go."*

She let go all right. She felt the earth below her feet, then nothing and everything whipping past her face. The wind pulled hard against her hair, her cheeks, her favorite pair of linen pants. It was the most cleansing thing she had ever done. It was better than all the 5K charity runs. It was better than all the zinfandel shared between friends and sisters. It was even better than all the orgasms, self-induced or otherwise.

Do not think she attempted to take her life. She did not fling herself from a rocky cliff some fifty feet above the deep-blue to end it all, to cast herself into the underworld. She had seen the recluse teenagers and excitable college students' jump off the cliff many times before. *Just for kicks*. She knew she would not be following Orpheus' map into hades. She only needed a place where one could stand before the entire world and throw everything off. She wanted the air to free her of papers and film and women with glossy eyes. She desired to feel it all fall from her, the marriage, the job, the lack of passion and to crash through a translucent surface. She did it to come up from the chilling waters, to return and emerge a woman renewed. This was her descent with return, her portal fantasy in less than a thousand words. Six months from now, when she looks in

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the mirror after a shower and remembers the place where a great lake came up to punch her as hard as it could and then offer her a new life, she would have a hard time remembering anything before that falling, releasing, crashing, sucking, embracing, life-giving moment.

Released

By Jennifer Zbacnik

Sand running through my fingers like silk.
A warm breeze touches my cheek, tingling my senses.
I look to the sky-
Its oranges and yellows yearn for me.
A rush of warmth and my soul is released from its prison.
I was called to my home-

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Graveyard Skies

By Rachael Ellis

As long as the tombs are ripe with grief,
And the moon shines through the gate's teeth,
I shall be there, rain or shine,
Emptying the horrors of my mind.

Be not frightened wandering child,
For I will not harm thee.
For it is only the silent graves
That I have come to see.

Chills of ice run down your spine
For now you know that you are mine;
The autumn leaves dead and fallen
Create the bloody path unspoken.

To find thy quiet in the night,
Come to me with tears of fright.
I will soothe you, set you free,
From all your feelings of misery.

But for now, let misery be calmed,
For it's always darkest before the dawn.
Let the moon shine on your eyes,
Let your captor you despise.

For art thou not muted and abashed,
With the fearful secret in your stash,

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In your mind with thoughts so daunting,
Creating a cave so cold and haunting.

With this now I leave ye be,
That you may find your symmetry.
Whether rose or storms or the ravens that fly
Guide your tears into the night sky.

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Pluto is No Longer a Planet

By Melissa Horner

“Destroying things is much easier than making them”

—Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

When you tear a leaf from a plant,
Does it bleed?
Does it cry out in pain?
Who is it that claims—
Plants can't feel pain?
They say that science tells us—
What is the difference
Between right and wrong?
Differences claim the world—
Enveloping it in a bud from a flower.
Who is to tell us what right and wrong mean?
We go home to differences-
No home life is the same.
They are all different—
Just as every leaf is.
Do we not feel pain?
Do we not cry out?
Help us!—Help us!—
Who do they cry for but those in charge—
Who really is in charge?
They claim “we” are in charge—
“We” hold the power.
Who are the “we?”
The plants are so numerous—

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So many kinds do so many things—
Who is to say they are not in charge?
They play tricks on us—
Fool us into thinking we are safe.
Who is to say that it isn't a plan?
One wrong leaf—
One wrong berry—
That's all it takes to end us.
Who claims they can't think or fool?
They say science proves it, but –
Pluto is no longer a planet.

Ocean's Deep

By Catheryn King

Oceans deep
my grief
oceans deep
and plains wide
The horizon hazy with shadows
The perpetual gray sky promises rain
but never delivers
promises of sun
but doesn't hold true
Oh my heart
Oceans deep
my grief
Oceans deep

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Peaceful Morning
By Jennifer Zbacnik

Moon Family
By Erika Adams

(To my brother Noah)

Since the world was young, since the dawn of time,
The sun has had always a desire to shine.
He grew happy at the people's joy at his warm beam;
His light, oh, so nice, his very presence serene.
But at times, there came a sigh from the realm called night:
The Moon shed tears, he so envied Sun's gold light.
As people slept, Moon was lonely, for there was no other soul;
Not to greet or to comfort or to mend his heart's great hole.
When the Moon could at last bear his pain no more,
He called out to the Sun to lament and implore:
"Oh, Sun," the moon cried, "please tell me the reason,
Why every time, every moment, every day, every season
The people of the world rejoice in your glory
While my dark and empty nights still repeat this lonesome story."
The Sun faced the Moon, his gaze kind and soft,
And then he replied as he floated aloft:
"My dear Moon, I have no loved ones in this sky,
Thus, I turn to the people, lest I too should cry.
Dry your eyes, my dear Moon, look around, that you ought!
You've always had friends; they never forgot!"
Though puzzled, the Moon still looked about
And his eyes grew wide to see, with his heart full of doubt.
But how could Moon deny when he saw from afar,
New Moon, pale and shy, yet as clear as any star?
At a distance, another presence was made known:

The lovely Crescent, how her slender form shone.
The funny little Quarter, who would joke and who would jest
By revealing only half, while invisible was his rest.
At last, there was Gibbous, a jolly fellow, never dull,
But rather hungry, for he was never quite full.
“We feel your pain, Full Moon,” they said, “but do not despair.
We may be far apart, but with you we are always there.”
Once more the Moon cried, not tears of sorrow,
But of joy at the hope of every future tomorrow.
“Thank you, dearest Sun,” he said, “for helping me to find
My people, my clan, my family, my kind!”
“Rejoice!” the Sun shouted, “Moons! People! Let all know!
While friends may be gone, their love will always show!”
Through his glee, the Moon marveled at how little it took.
He had loved ones like the Sun; he just had to look.



Untitled
By Cassandra Brown

Two Trees

By Nicole Birch

Two trees grow along a river bank.
One the color of licorice and kiwi,
the other green apple,
bent over at the waist,
arms carelessly strung from shoulder,
dripping paint.
I would chose the apple green pine to entertain,
the licorice oak to lean against,
leave the river to drain the day away.



Trees
By Kimberly Hyatt

Roaring Muse Spring 2012

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The Roaring Muse is seeking submissions for its Spring 2013 Issue.

Poetry, prose, photography, and illustrations are all welcomed. All selection is democratic in a forum-based process. Authors remain anonymous until work is chosen. Material can be returned upon request. If possible, submit literature and artwork via e-mail.

Submissions can be e-mailed to umdlitguild@gmail.com or mailed to:

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