









# [Alternate Route]

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*Thank you for reading!*

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## **Alex Gust**

was born in Spokane, Washington in 1974, the only child of Auri Gust and Bill Spencer. He was raised by his mother, Auri, from the time he was one years old. He has written several screenplays, Blaze, The Unworthy Ones, The Case of the Misophonia Revenge, and The Break Fast Track with his wife, Angela Gust. They went on to make these into short films on YouTube under their production company, Alz Gusta Presents. His areas of focus are suspense, dark comedies, poetry, and women's empowerment. While growing up, he witnessed the struggles of his mother in a misogynistic work culture and how she has overcome these obstacles. Because of this, he focuses on stories that deal with womens burdens and he aims to shine light on their triumphs in the face of such adversities. Additionally, growing up with dyslexia made learning to read difficult. However, he sees this as a gift that provided him with a different way to see the world. This is reflected in his writings. He lives with his wife in a small town near Olympia, Washington. Alex continues to craft screenplays, as well as poetry. He also spends time creating oil paintings, acting at local community theaters, and making short films with his seven grandchildren.

## Cold Blood

I see the hole  
in the ceiling, there

The whole existence of  
one, gone, in this  
home we call ours.  
It lies over the top of his once,  
that is now ours. Rest

Rest in peace  
Not so much, I see the  
hole, there. There, there  
dearly departed.

Our neighbors, they  
said, *he was such a nice  
man, but he had  
a drinking problem, ya  
know.* In cold blood.  
Makes my blood go  
all cold, thick with  
ground up bone.

The floorboards  
are all new, shiny and  
homey. No stains to tell  
the tale, but there's an empty  
round space up there, filled in,  
yes.

But it's there, there!  
And his ghost sneaks in  
with the wind and the

rain. This dish towel can't  
mop it away. But,  
The floor is nice and  
shiny, yes.



## **Francis Bede**

lives and writes in Tasmania Australia. He is the author of *Bad Clergy* – a question in five fantasies and its companion volume *God in the Humane Machine* – a theobiography.

He's had poems published in magazines such as *StepAway Magazine*, *Terror House Magazine*, *Literary Heist*, *Oddville*, *Whimperbang*, *Cordite Review*, *Tinge Magazine*, *Quadrant Magazine*.

## Springtime

Drifts of rain cascade lightly over shoulders  
Of the strolling eco-romanticists;  
When in smogging London  
Everything is melting  
Smog on streetwalkers  
Who assault the High Street  
With credit cards on galaxy limits.  
It is springtime, the lord above  
Smiles behind cautious sunrays  
And sends sweet aromas to fumigate the bleak  
In this carnal time,  
When a young girl displays her breasts  
Before an April flecked mirror  
And behind which a young man stands  
He could touch her, but not yet  
Her shyness has not fully melted.  
Sun showers gliding, flippant and askance  
Over soiled pavements  
And traffic moves slowly enough  
To leave imprints

Of tyre sweat of the overworked bitumen.  
Everything is melting,  
Grime of conservative buildings seep slowly  
Down to the junction of wall and footpath  
And lubricate revolving doors.  
A bystander lingers just slowly  
For his clothes to melt into spring fabrics;  
Everything is melting  
It is springtime and windowpanes  
Distort into psychedelic faces  
Pedestrians recognising themselves  
And look away.  
The hours of spring lose their way  
As clock faces on church steeples melt;  
The minute hand shakes hands with the hour hand  
An agreement to merge  
Its springtime and everything is melting.

*Previously published in Terror House Mag back in 2018.*



## Bored vs. Bored

Untimely but true, it's the beatified daily  
Reportage of the unseemly few;  
Beatified celebs, chrome celebrities  
Celebrating themselves by remuneration,  
A groan of pop art incidents  
For the wordless we, passive celebrants  
Gesturing to ourselves, genuflection  
To the daily void, boredom becalmed  
By the bored who worship themselves bored.  
Feeding on arid sentences  
We've lost control again  
Like the anonymous everyday  
Burdened by a messed-up identity  
Reports to sell a glossy gossip mag or two,  
The readers and the celebs  
With tales of their secret fears to share.

*Previously published in Terror House Mag back in 2018.*



**William Doreski**

lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Venus, Jupiter* (2023). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

## Lives of the Wood Lice

More vicious storms pile up  
to scrape us off the planet.  
The light tingles with excitement.  
Housepainters clean their brushes  
and take down long quaking ladders.  
The road crew rumbles its trucks  
home to the town garage where  
a poker game terminates the day.

We sip a late-afternoon latte,  
large, iced, and too expensive,  
at a picnic table running wood lice.  
I watch these harmless creatures  
bustle about their little errands.  
They dodge around each other  
without touching or greeting  
in any discernable manner.

You ignore their tiny presence,  
their bodies almost colorless,  
their purpose almost transparent.  
The hard rain won't trouble them.  
The steep wind won't addle them.  
Hail won't impact their worldview.  
We share the latte to the bottom  
and dump cup and ice in the trash.

Someone empties the can every  
few days without thinking  
about the lives of the wood lice  
unfolding a few feet away.  
Whenever I feel small enough,  
especially on days of heavy storm,  
I fear my own transparency,  
so easy for others to scorn.

## Pennsylvania Everywhere

A photo I just took in the rain  
reminds you of Pennsylvania.  
Blurry not with downpour but  
with many accumulated ghosts  
of ancestors dead behind a plow  
or crushed in collapsing coal mines.  
Not our ancestors but those  
of people we admire or deplore,  
whose genealogies blossomed  
in Germany, Holland, Belgium,  
and left snail tracks in the dirt.

But such an innocent photo.  
A corner of a Federalist house.  
A power pole in the foreground.  
Weeds splashing dark green accents  
against a puddled dirt driveway.  
I shot it from the verandah  
of the village café where two  
or three famous writers and one  
world-traveling photographer  
cluster like flies on a cupcake.

That photographer wouldn't bother  
with the dull picture I snapped  
to express the lack of future  
poised over us like a deadweight  
suspended by a frayed rope.  
You see Pennsylvania everywhere  
today, but I see only familiar shapes  
with slightly rounded corners  
and those satisfied people chatting  
regardless of unkempt ancestors  
tilting against the weather.



## **Ronald Fink**

Ronald Fink's fiction has appeared in such publications as BlazeVox, Fresh Words, DeComp, Ginosko, Global City Review, the North American Literary Review, and Tampa Review. Ronald is a journalist as well as a fiction writer and currently serves as senior editor at Harvard Business Review Analytic Services. He resides in Brooklyn, NY.

## WHITE LIES

L texted to say she admired the novella he'd written and had sent to her, lauding his willingness to tell "the unvarnished truth," but no longer wanted to see him. Their backgrounds were too different to continue the relationship, she said, though she wished him well. He'd met L online a few weeks earlier and they'd gotten along well the four times they'd met. But now he texted back to say that he understood and added the same wish for her well-being.

All this left him in something of a quandary, however. He seemed increasingly incapable of writing pure fiction, his characters invariably lifeless and narrative aimless when not contrived, and so his writing had grown almost completely autobiographical. Auto-fiction, they called it these days.

But the self-exposure this involved now risked isolation, or so at least L's reaction seemed to indicate, as his life experience had been reduced when not working at his job as an editor or trying to stay in some sort of physical condition through yoga, swimming laps or surfcasting in Montauk, to a futile chase after romance, given his advanced age and weakened sexual potency, and then writing about it. Yet the dating sites beckoned like a siren call at sea, and he answered as if he had no choice but to sail directly for it.

And what could he say about his writing to a subsequent prospect given the demise of his relations with L, incipient though they were? To suggest that the novella, for example, was pure fiction would be absurd, in view of the narrator's complete lack of physical or emotional disguise. And the narrative was obviously too close to any biographical detail he would be expected to share to be taken as anything but fact. Could he really hope that another woman would be more "understanding?" Unlikely.

So he was left, it seemed, with no choice but to hide the fact that he had self-published the manuscript on Amazon or that he'd written the thing in the first place. Yet how could he disavow the work he'd spent the past two or three years of his life attempting in his own fashion to perfect, this after laboring in obscurity for decades upon decades?

In fact, such an outcome would be little different from the reality he faced regardless. He'd sold all of three copies of the novella, two to close friends and one to his ex, with whom he re-



mained on good terms. But too much of his existence seemed to hinge on his self-image as a writer for him to simply stop writing or asking others to read it. And the fact was he had no idea what to do with his free time other than to write. It had become a habit, an emotional addiction, a psychic itch.

The only way forward then was to omit any reference to the novella until he somehow grew confident enough in any relationship to let a romantic partner in on the truth. Until then, he would say nothing about it to her, even as it represented his true history, and so he would set aside his attempts to come to terms with, to transcend, to make a pearl out of the dirt of the most embarrassing or painful episodes of his life, in any idle and innocuous conversation about himself with a woman he hoped to continue to see. But he failed to see how any conversation would be anything but in light of his need to hide not only his past but his efforts to write. Oh, he could make things up about himself, but white lies upon white lies added up. And there would disappear any chance to develop the honesty necessary for an enduring relationship. To believe otherwise was to bank recklessly on the human capacity for forgiveness.

The choice otherwise was to give up writing or give up women, in other words, none at all, for while his enduring hope for success with either seemed futile at this point, and increasingly so, such hope represented the only thing he cared about at this point other than his three children and his solo pursuits.

Facing the blank page this quandary effectively represented, it occurred to him that his best course was to reimagine his existence, at least in its future form, and then write about that. Yet where to begin?

He sat down to meditate in hopes an idea would simply come to him, following his breath, repeating the mantra “so hum” as in “I am that” over and over and over until he forgot he was doing it, but no revelation came in the wake of such oblivion. He put off the idea until the following weekend, when he drove out to Montauk to fish from the boulders in the coves he loved. For once he didn’t care whether he caught anything, so bound up in his mental quest for a fresh beginning he could then describe on paper. And in wetsuit and studded boots with rod and reel in hand, he caught a sizeable bass on his first outing at his favorite spot, an easily mounted flat boulder at the apex of a triangular reef below the bluffs of Camp Hero. The idea of a fresh start to his existence was the furthest thing from his mind.

Back at the rental cottage, he gutted, cleaned and filleted the fish, grilled it in olive oil, salt, lemon and oregano, and ate it with a crisp Sancerre. Afterward, he drank whiskey, smoked a cigar, and checked the dating sites for messages from distant, pseudonymous admirers, again without a thought to what he might do instead when none materialized.

Back in work in Brooklyn, however, there was no escaping such thought. And he began to try to work out a set of actions he might undertake that would be worth writing about. To start with, it would have to represent a departure from his current existence. Fine. But how and what might he do differently that would be interesting enough to keep a reader's interest? A crime of some sort naturally suggested itself, though it obviously would destroy any chance at romance unless he found a Bonnie for his Clyde. He immediately dismissed the idea anyway as too cliched, not to mention derivative of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov. Much the same applied to the entirely opposite notion of becoming a Buddhist, complete with saffron robe and shaven head. Surely this would be no less unappealing to women, especially if he would then beg for alms. Too, this seemed unfair to those who really suffered from poverty or homelessness. Still, he recalled the example of a pair of young men he'd come across on the beach at Ft. Tilden the other day. The pair were naked except for branches of bushes they'd tied around their groins and buttocks and approached bathers for anything they might be willing to offer according to a plan they described to cross the continent to Los Angeles in this fashion within 30 days, starting right then and there at Ft. Tilden. Daniel listened to them describe this adventure to a solitary black woman sitting nearby and proceeded to offer them a pair of faded red shorts from which he'd changed into a bathing suit. The woman offered them a beach towel. Another bather offered him a brown cotton tennis shirt. And within a few minutes, the men had shed their shrubbery and were on their way to L.A. Yet what could be more derivative than emulating their example?

Daniel could nonetheless think of nothing more novel than this, not to mention appealing to an attractive woman. And when his phone beeped and he saw it signaled a message on a dating app from one a few years younger than himself, he dropped all notions of existential change and texted her back. Much to his surprise, S responded immediately, and he was on the phone with her the following evening and then out for coffee the afternoon after that, all the while telling her that he was a writer who had

published short stories here and there but leaving out the fact that he had recently completed a novella. S seemed impressed enough without that information, and Daniel had left out certain other details about his past, skipping past them or coloring them in such a way as to make them palatable, even those that might otherwise sound off-putting—infidelity, a child with another woman, friendship with his ex from whom he was not yet legally divorced—with no untoward result, as S made note of the fact that in her view “everyone has baggage at this point or you haven’t lived an actual life.” As time went on and Daniel and S saw more of each other, he grew increasingly certain that they might get along, at least until she read his novella and perhaps even thereafter.



## **Catherine Bell**

is a best-selling author, transformational leader, poet, and Founder of The Awakened Company. With a reputation for radical innovation, she co-founded one of the fastest-growing organizations and now consults to elevate corporate cultures globally. Her approach, founded on her practical experience, business research, and best-selling book, blends passion, purpose, and playfulness to ignite organizational change.

She has two upcoming audiobooks with Sounds True on Relationships and Creativity with her colleague, Russ Hudson.

Catherine also spearheads The Awakened Project, a social venture aimed at lifting women out of poverty through entrepreneurship. Holding an MBA from Smith (Queen's School of Business) and a Sociology degree, she is Riso-Hudson Enneagram certified and a yoga instructor.

Beyond work, Catherine, a wife and mother, enriches her life through yoga, travel, and a broad palette

## More Than Enough

Because your presence in my life is more than enough  
and everything is leading us to love in some form or another,  
my heart bows to you.

We both have a daring and bold love of life that keeps us here,  
that cannot be quashed.

It's a wild love that chooses life, time and time again.

Life is calling us with reckless abandon, there is nothing to know  
about the future,  
all there is, is this.

I trust the beating of the universe's heart  
and that it will move us and our work together in a stream that  
may be illogical  
yet full of what is real, positive, and full of magical mysterious  
logic.

## Bubble Baths

Left my clothes at the door, jewels in the next room, and tiptoed  
into your basin

I melt into your harmony, your holding

Dodge the razor sharp edges of my soul head towards my sweet  
heart and grounded centre

Swirling water in the riptide of my alphabet mind

Knitting poems together amidst the bubbles

My outside is my inside, I'm an abyss

Letting go of the fragments and pieces of my work day

Gently I see spirit is everywhere and find life to be the provoca-  
teur

Water, you wash away energy that no longer serves

Sweet sensual gentle orgasmic water, you remind me my edges  
can be softened

Enter me through your eyes

## A Home That Was Never There

I get a lot of incorrect assumptions

How can that activate a new sense of humility and patience in the brain?

It's quite painful and it makes me want to help in healing

For what hurts you hurts me too.

We are all a unique story with winds, rocks, and waves from former places,

It is indeed a spiritual longing for maybe a home that was never there for us.

Yet everything is just right with strength, rest, and ease.





## **Omar Acevedo**

is a student of the mind, a single ripple in the The Universe, always curious, and eager to explore how emotions and human experiences alter the perspective of an individual, and how actions evolve an individual over a period of time. His passion lies in the heart of art, but has a love for poetry and music specifically. Omar is also a part of the artist foundry MassMakers, residing in Boston, Massachusetts, feel free to check out their work on their website [mass-makers.com](http://mass-makers.com).

## KARIM 6/15/22

Karim disintegrates  
To the madness of the Brightest Star  
In the fog-thickened day.

That star,  
Empowered with the strength of a  
Thousand soldiers  
And their passion,

And the cunning wit  
Of the Great Apollo,

Stretched the fabric of linear veil to pause  
The illusion of society

For a moment

Outside of dementia.

## KARIM 6/16/22

Syllables mixed,  
Meaning dispersed between the two conscious minds,  
Connecting them,  
One.

But yet no sound was made.

The Brightest Star  
Just smiled and waved,

The wind  
Blowing though the rays that embrace Karim  
Like a strait jacket of light, blinding bias.

Karim could hear the ants in the mycelium;  
Manufacturing temples.

Tears flowed to the present light.

His tears then created the Nile River,  
Where the stream keeps their society alive,  
Engraving their history into ours.

Since that day,  
Karim could only smile and wave.



**Sam Mansourou**

is a writer and teacher. His fiction has been published in literary magazines. His articles have been published in nonfiction magazines.

## In Your Twenties

Shredded hearts turn villainous, his turned adventurous. He wanted to see everything he daydreamed of as a child, and he wanted to get lost in it. If it was the ocean, he wanted to be alone in the middle of it. If it was the desert, he wanted to be alone at night in its middle. It was there in the desert or staring out at the horizon in the ocean that the road would finally stop calling from a bedroom window or a line at the supermarket.

He would often catch himself in a daze, staring off some place, thinking of somewhere. His friends would tease him for it. And it was one night on a sailing boat that he found himself staring down at the darkened water from the deck. Leaning over the edge of the stern, it wasn't long before he was taken away from the conversation by the water's movement in the boat's light. It was sooner that the other two were silenced altogether as he gazed curiously upon the welcoming surface.

There was no sea life around, and there was nothing on the surface in any direction. It was as if the ocean was calling out to play, dancing for him in a show that only he could see, only he could understand.

In a moment he dropped his phone onto the deck, kicked off his sandals, unbuttoned his shirt, and jumped in.

"The sharks will get you", one of the friends called out from the deck.

Swimming away from the boat, he called back, "No, it'll be OK."

The other two were from Brazil, and they had met at a bar in Los Angeles during a Germany-Brazil World Cup match. Jessie felt bad for them by the 90th minute and offered to buy them a round when the score was 7-0. They accepted.

As he swam in place, they talked about whether or not sharks have a taste for humans, about how once cow blood was poured in the ocean but attracted no sharks. Glancing at the void beneath his moving legs, he wondered what the bottom looked like, if there was any gold on any sunken ship, or a jeweled gift that fell off a careless millionaire or wife. But once his eyes hit the night sky, he would be unable to take his eyes from it. "This is surreal," nodding upwards toward the painted night canvas.

He continued to swim in place until long after the other two had lost interest and had gone back to their conversation. By the

time he got on the deck of the boat he was exhausted. He dried his hands on a rag and let the warm air dry him. He took a drag off a cigarette and stared down at the glowing boat-lit surface of the water, the only viewable part of the abyss below.





Researcher

**Terry Trowbridge**

's poems are in Pennsylvania Literary Journal, Carousel, Lascaux Review, Kolkata Arts, Leere Mitte, untethered, Snakeskin Poetry, Progenitor, Nashwaak Review, Orbis, Pinhole, Big Windows, Muleskinner, Brittle Star, Mathematical Intelligencer, Journal of Humanistic Mathematics, New Note, Hearth and Coffin, Synchronized Chaos, Indian Periodical, Delta Poetry Review, Literary Veganism and more. His lit crit is in BeZine, Amsterdam Review, Ariel, British Columbia Review, Hamilton Arts & Letters, Episteme, Studies in Social Justice, Rampike, and The /t3mz/ Review. Terry is grateful to the Ontario Arts Council for his first writing grant.

## Sea Cryptid, Less Known

Selkie? Selkie. Not a mermaid.  
Lycanthropic sealion, though.  
Sleekly luring sailors to leave  
their shoreline houses and tack to a wind  
that pushes lyrics into their minds.  
Therein, swells promise, swells romance;  
the mind recalls psalters and canticles  
about time. Monotonous repetition, like waves,  
with no sign of and end; except for a selkie,  
whose love would make the only difference  
in all that horizon of swells of sameness.  
Not a mermaid, but the same sort of bait  
as on that lure, and the same danger  
when a sailor's salt-streaked shoulders  
are cramping all that distance from shore







## say what i am called

i am  
watching my hands in the sink  
wringing in soap,  
drying out skin.  
they have crossed the astrophysical state-line  
-and my reflection above them  
is all well,  
though traveling, perhaps.  
it peeks at me  
and i jump back —  
what is in those rude, brown eyes?  
their sight is surely not mine.

no i  
am pounding  
a balloon against my skull  
begging the collagen to break apart  
and liberate what i am.

## Plastic Gavel

something primal happens in the grip.  
the unadorned arms of the boa, squeezing  
tight on my veins.

looked up and down by the mister,  
his office birthed me into a lie.  
i was begged to blanket the truth  
to the jury of patriarchy —  
blind and raw  
in any case.





## **Mykyta Ryzhykh**

Winner of the international competition Art Against Drugs and ukrainian contests Vytoky, Shoduarivska Altanka, Khortytsky dzvony; laureate of the literary competition named after Tyutyunnik, Lyceum, Twelve, named after Dragomoshchenko. Nominated for Pushcart Prize.

Published many times in the journals Dzvin, Dnipro, Bukovinian magazine, Polutona, Rechport, Topos, Articulation, Formaslov, Literature Factory, Literary Chernihiv, Tipton Poetry Journal, Stone Poetry Journal, Divot journal, dyst journal, Superpresent Magazine, Allegro Poetry Magazine, Alternate Route, Better Than Starbucks Poetry & Fiction Journal, Littoral Press, Book of Matches, on the portals Litcenter, Ice Floe Press.

\*\*\*

Copper night knocks  
On the back of the head, asks:  
"What street is this?"  
And this is not a street,  
This is the whole life.  
Here at the age  
Of 4 I drank sleeping pills,  
At 14 I lost my virginity,  
At 24 I lost my family,  
At 34 my father died (thank God, my father died).  
Now I'm free like the cry of a newborn.  
I'm single, like when I was born.  
A lonely body without everything  
Meaningful, invented, composed.  
The body, by its movement forward,  
Has reached the very beginning.  
Ashes close to dust.  
And suddenly the night opens its  
Lunar hood, and now death looks  
At me with its bony eyes.  
"Come on, friend," I said to death,  
"I hope you don't turn me into a zombie."  
The door of cast iron milk opened.  
And I started drinking.  
My teeth turned black and fell out.  
Birds pecked out my eyes.  
My body fell off me. Copper night,  
Pig-iron milk, golden memory.  
And suddenly: emptiness.

*Reprint by Crank, May 2023*

\*\*\*

We were stolen at birth and brought into this world. This world has robbed us. Cats will never again sing under the window about their nine lives in the nine circles of hell. We are no longer cats. We are no longer dogs. Only occasionally does one of us like to sit on a leash in puppy latex. We are heavy, sir. We are light, Lord, like fluff. We are airy, Lord, like chitin. We are homeless, Lord, like heaven. We are rich, Lord, like the poorest poor man. We are your angels, Lord. Wash our feet, Lord, we can't stand you. We love you, Lord, like dogs do. We are on your leash, tied to you, Lord. We are the gods of death in your realm, Lord. Ash. The last candle for your rest in our hearts, Lord.

*Reprint by Crank, May 2023*

\*\*\*

neighborhood crying  
hand of anger  
anger of the heart  
weeping cities  
^^ ^^ ^^  
and these are birds  
look over the heads of the war birds fly

*Reprint by Lothlorien Poetry Journal*

\*\*\*

aluminum birds  
even they come back  
from warm countries hime

*Reprint by divot*

\*\*\*

children making sand castles  
adults making sand castles  
high tide

*Reprint by Neologism Poetry Journal*

\*\*\*

This poem smells blue  
| | |  
The color of wrinkles in the sky  
☪  
Black shapes in clear water  
Δ  
This verse will be picked up by crows in the morning  
And they will be thrown from heaven  
On icy concrete heart rocks  
~  
All in vain  
.

*Reprint by Stone Poetry Journal*

\*\*\*

the bird became foliage and flew away  
what can the human soul compare to a bird?  
we were born in silence by the trees  
we were born in the foliage of whitman grass  
we were born in the same body  
we were born for hope

*Reprint by THE BIG WINDOWS REVIEW*







## The Missing Piece

I feel as if I am suspended from string  
exposed in the air for all to see.

I dangle with my wrists and ankles tied up,  
like a ribbon on a gift.  
my stomach hangs waiting, as an empty space

I am low enough for you to reach.  
I am an offering for you, and I wait

Finally, you penetrate my stomach with the knife

It hangs there bloody,  
    my blood washes over you,  
and it is all as it should be.

## Pickled Boy

Pickle me  
Put me in a jar  
Fold me up tenderly  
And say one day you'll remember me.

Use the salt from my tears  
And the vinegar of my memories  
Add some honey to keep me from running  
Away. Add whatever you want  
Don't listen to me  
I don't know what's best  
For a pickled boy to be.

You plan great recipes  
That you say I'll be perfect in  
And write them all down in your little notebook.  
I peer over your shoulder  
and get excited for the future to come.

But now, I sit  
Alone in the back of the cupboard  
Pickled beets and pears  
Forgotten just like me.  
Through the summers others have grabbed your attention.  
You have forgotten the way we used to laugh  
As you bended my knuckles to fit in the glass.

You have outgrown your notebook,  
Our cookbook long gone  
It seems only I have thoughts of you,  
But only because I am stuck in this brine.

Sometimes I think you're reaching  
To grab my jar  
Open it up to let me breathe.  
But your fingertips reaching  
To find something better, ew yuck  
Nobody wants a pickled boy for supper.

## Kiss of Death

I keep a bucket of tar  
under the bathroom sink --  
to keep people from seeing it  
when they come over.

When I need to  
I lock myself in the bathroom  
with the bucket  
and sit and drink.

It gurgles thick down my throat  
turning my mouth black and sticky.

I appreciate the taste.  
The way it chokes me  
from inside,  
blubbering its way down  
to bring warmth  
to my stomach.

It stains my teeth,  
even after I brush.  
I pick and poke the black tongue  
in the mirror -- only a mirage  
of what's to come.

It intoxicates me  
is all I can think  
so I sit with my bucket  
and drink and drink.





## Broadcast

Low-beam headlights gloss the *Welcome to Stonefield* in a humming Cadillac fat with rusting streaks and wide dents. Pastel pines stand nicely at sideroads and just ahead is free country littered with a few leftover houses. The radio sticks from its slot like some rude head and the button glitters there from moonlight alone. Fog on fog means just the metal body cutting and chewing into new land barely seen; man flicks the radio on. Clicks and scratches—a static breaks out with some virile calls. Tarmac tongue rolls and rolls so that the houses far out rise and fall with him.

Alabaster wings flail and dry out into black forest. Man headless with stemmed flower stuck into a soiled throat, the azure bumps with the fast road and there his cerebral plant arrives and now only still it stays. Front of a country home, Flowerhead shifts out his car, and the humming reaches the ground that makes it tremble beneath his feet. The eggy moon glowers at this Flowerhead and away falls light shrouded with noctilucous curtains. Out from the birch door dances a man with a chest of ivy and face of deep-rooted brush. He booms a noise and Flowerhead wilts his emerald roost and looks on him.

“Come to fix your window.”

Ivychest sidles into the railing. Flowerhead makes his way and into the small cottage home; the window strumming amber glows. Cramped box with a dinner setup and two loungers.

“Problem with the HiStream4k?”

Ivychest comes aside Flowerhead.

“Stuck on orange—got me a lady come over one time and clicked her shoe on that box. Don’t know if that mean anything.”

“No, it doesn’t.”

“What do you wanna see outside?”

“I don’t know. I was thinking some of them real nice palms waving on a beach.”

“Gotta pay extra for graphics like that.”

“That expensive?”

“Think so.”

“What you mean? It expensive or not?”

“Came here for circuit repair, don’t know if that covered.”

“Man, I’m asking how much.”

“\$400 easy.”

Fiery hands and bright body. I see a man with a flower in his throat and another with ivy on his chest. Pane of glass long as my arm span, and they cannot see me. Maybe a wave will do. Stringy arm swipes the air on top. Flowerhead keeps his fists-on-hips and Ivychest with his tasseled greens hiding his sides. Flowerhead comes kneeling just below me and down I'm looking—he fidgets with something out of sight. I shout. Nothing. I shout, again. Both plants rustle and now Ivychest joins Flowerhead below my waist.

Breaking this panel should do it. A big thump hits the screen, and a gray bar flickers. Ivy juts his look right up at my belly. Flower focuses on whatever's down there.

“Your service is way out of tune.”

“What's that mean?”

“Someone tampering with the power chords.”

“Can you fix it?”

“Maybe. Thing is there an anomaly in there.”

“What that mean?”

“Means there'll be things in there you won't like.”

“Deluxe don't fix that?”

“You don't got deluxe.”

“Oh, yeah.”

Flowerhead ticks some flames from his fingertips to solder the torn wires back into place. Some beeps and clicks—the switches flick and buttons mash for this circuitry box to close. Ivychest scratches the face of his bush; he steps over to his couch for a two-buttoned remote and on comes the television.

Fizzling blue and I'm turning into something giant. This bustling beach full of palms and crabs and towels. The window looks no larger than my ankle. I'll try to move my head around. A huge snap forces my eyes back down on the beach. I switch my head to the right just slow enough, and I can see just an endless wash of sky, sand, and water. That panel down there is barely shining on the sand.

“Hell are those poles out there?”

Flowerhead reels from his crouch and stands with Ivychest. A perfect horizon with no clouds, but those columns were shaking just enough to notice.

“Those are legs.”

“Legs?”

“Yeah, that thing can flip out your programming. Maybe that’s what did it.”

“Well, go on! Get it out then!”

“I don’t know.”

“What you mean, ‘you don’t know’? Get that thing out my damn window!”

“May screw up the programming in the province, and that’d fry—”

“It can’t, and it won’t. Just fix that thing, already.”

Ivychest tosses the remote away and shovels into his pockets; he produces a billfold and a white, plastic pill.

“Said \$400?”

“This got nothing to do with deluxe.”

“Then how much?”

Flowerhead runs sweaty fingers around the frame stuck to the wall. Completely smooth runs until a bump on the bottom peels some skin.

“This can’t be fixed.”

“Hell you mean now? You just come here to tick me off?”

“Got a defect, see there? Bottom-side?”

“What about it?”

“Probably tapped in from neighbors’ windows. Pumping out enough energy to keep on.”

“This gone kill me, ain’t it?”

“No, it won’t. But it also can’t be safe.”

My eyes are blurry in the throw of hard light. I have no nose. My legs are burred into the floor, and my only feeling is the shaking. My arms grow heavy, and I turn small, and I am forced into four legs. Hair on my head mats into a thick flush of fur and ears curl into ivory horns.

The scene changes again, and once more am I disoriented. Only white panic in my eyes, that’s the only thing I can understand. This place of constant change buckles my knees, so I fall onto my stomach only for brown, curly coat to fluff. Forest with soaring redwoods and babbling brooks; the grass green and shiny. My stomach growls so I stretch my long neck into the blades and itch in my throat forces me to bleat.

Vision split into narrow fields, my sides so clear and so wide.



Plants reduce to potted vestiges and a man enters his apartment. Outside stands other buildings—concrete jungle in the middle of nowhere. The dim room sparks into oak tables yellowed with light and stuck foliage bustling with breeze. The man stands front of the monitor, and he begins to remove his office attire and leaves to another room. The lights are stronger now, and I feel my mind empty. I clop my lunulas up and down; charging for the monitor, my coat tugs on my weight and my senses go shot.

The weekend's soon; that'll be nice to finally have time to see what new store downtown is about. Maybe I can see to talking to someone about getting a different job. The commute is out of my way, anyhow.

Back into the living room, my nightwear is still rumpled. Maybe a quick snack before I just head to sleep. Too tired. Fridge has an onion, milk carton, and granola bar. Bar'll do. A huge thump sounds from behind his head. He swivels to his countertop, looking at his bedroom's window—it's intact. Where'd that come from? The same thump bangs from the television. He makes his way onto the couch as the granola teethes himself.

Screen whorls some green and blue into a globe icon; a documentary showcasing animals in non-native environments. A rainforest. Cameras focus on some bulky creature in the center-fold of some stretched trees, and there below sits a still ram.



## **Lynn White**

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<<https://www.facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/>>

# Monsters

It's the monsters who come out of the light  
that are the most fearsome,  
but those that sneak up from the dark  
are the ones we fear the most,  
even though they're smaller,  
and often as afraid as we are.  
That's why they  
hide and sneak  
in the dark places.  
The ones hiding in the sunlight  
are the more difficult to see  
and the most monstrous.  
They lie in wait  
blending in  
and waiting,  
waiting to pounce  
and destroy  
destroy  
us all  
to destroy  
all.

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