



DEAD FLOWERS

A Poetry Rag

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PRESENTS

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A Poetry Rag

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Denise Long lives in Lincoln, Nebraska. She works as a freelance copy editor and an English instructor, and sometimes, she writes short fiction. In her spare time, she is also a wife, and a mother to two young boys. You can find her occupying a tiny chunk of the Internet at www.denisehlong.com.

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Indifference to Poetry Statement

I'm a writer, reader, copy editor, and English teacher. I'm *supposed* to like poetry, right? But, honestly, poems just aren't my thing. Often, I avoid reading poetry with aplomb. But, sometimes—sometimes—I accidentally read a poem that kicks me in the gut. Words strung together in such a way that perception becomes altered and I'm glad for the experience. Indifferent? Pretty much. But, man, when that indifference falls away, I know it's happening for a reason.

~Denise Long

Breakfast

The bacon was piled in a heap.
The coffee was cold.
The egg was sunny side up
—yolk intact.
The toast was there, along with the gun.

She looked at the counter, once more.
making sure everything was set right.

He walked in, like always,
sat down on the stool,
and looked toward her.

across the room,
leaning against the kitchen sink,
cleaning the rest of the cheap china,

she stood silently looking back.
the rag still wrapped around a dish,
soap dripping on the floor.
into a puddle.

~*Agnes Kamalnath*

Agnes Kamalnath is a student at UCLA, Extension School. Her major is History. She studied in the United Kingdom, completing A-Levels at Mander Portman Woodward and attending university, majoring in Chemistry with Biochemistry at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL).

Moss on the Bones

I have been on this long road
all grown up with weeds
plantain, peppermint where the water is close by
since the time when I still heard my own name
over the whisper of the bugs in the grass
the wind in the branches
when I could remember the surface of my face
through the ripples over my reflection
and imagine what it might look like
in the flickering firelight where I sit
huddled against the cold

I am moving west, guided by the water
and the sentinels in my dreams
their swaying lantern lights creaking
through the fog
hearing the rush of the sea whispering
the way against my neck
telling me all the ways the salt became
part of the water
scooping handfuls of wet warm night air
into my pockets

There once were nights
when the steam would rise from the sidewalks
bathing the glow of the street lamps
cleaning the dust from the surface of the glass
and they would cry out
through the air slowly thickening in the heat
of the short wet summer
and I could almost see their eyes
glinting beyond the walls
of the electric lights
faces tangled in the undergrowth

Their cries were wilder than any sound
I had ever heard or would ever hear again
songs of blood and joy

of dimming woods and birth and death
rotting and decay, flower and bloom
and the eyes that pierce the darkness

And I would become very still
and the breath would catch in my throat
heart beat drum beats in unison
with the rhythm of their cries
answering their questions with the sound
of the blood rushing through my veins
so loudly I could hear the whisper,
the sound of a hand brushing against paper

There are days here, now, as I walk
when I will stumble over
bits of old stone, crushed marble
foundations moldering in the green,
memories scorched and ashen on the forest floor.
And screams and laughter echo through the silence
and I wonder if it all could have been a dream

In the leather pouch around my neck
I hold a green stone, a scrap of fragrant wood
and a fragment of bone, carved like the moon
I run my finger along the edges to remember
and still they cry through the night
though their eyes are my own.
We walk on.

~Jacqueline Turner

Jacqueline Turner is a writer living in Austin, TX with her cat and wilding gardens. She is the editor of Red Kitty, a collaborative art and literary zine. Find more of her writing and work at <http://jackietea.com>

Unexplained Disasters

It was not until the pressure
cooker of his brain erupted
that we knew about the boy
sweet next door neighbor
with the arsenal in his closet.

It knocked the Lord out
of his lounge in the living
room buried in a shock wave
full of BB's and nails
bullets and rightful intention.

While Elvis sent the castor
bean cooked down in his mind
like a fine powder of death
to be sent like shrapnel around
to get the point of a point across.

"He was a fine person," he said
"Not one to do such things."

But the people in the church
sing the songs again and again.

~Brad Garber

Brad Garber has published poetry/essays in *Cream City Review*, *Alchemy*, *Fireweed*, *Uphook Press*, *Front Range Review*, *theNewerYork*, *Ray's Road Review*, *Flowers & Vortexes*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Generation Press*, *Penduline Press*, among many others. Nominee: 2013 Pushcart Prize for poem, "Where We May Be Found."

HAVEN'T YOU WANTED, SOMETIMES TO

walk into some painting, start a new life? The quiet blues of Monet would soothe but I don't know how long I'd want to stay there. Today I'm in the mood for something more lively, say Lautrec's Demimonde. I want that glitter, heavy sequin nights. You take the yellow sunshine for tonight. I want the club scene that takes you out all night. Come on, wouldn't you, just for a night or two? Gaslights and absinthe, even the queasy night after dawn. Wouldn't you like to walk into Montmartre where everything you did or imagined doing was de rigueur, pre-Aids with the drinkers and artists and whores? Don't be so P.C., so righteous you'd tell me you haven't imagined this? Give me the Circus Fernando, streets where getting stoned was easy and dancing girls kick high. It's just the other side of the canvas, the thug life, a little lust. It was good enough for Van Gogh and Lautrec, Picasso. Can't you hear Satie on the piano? You won't be able to miss Toulouse, bulbous lips, drool. Could you turn down a night where glee and strangeness is wide open? Think of Bob Dylan leaving Hibbing. A little decadence can't hurt. I want the swirl of cloth under changing colored lights, nothing square, nothing safe, want to can can thru Paris, parting animal nights, knees you can't wait to taste flashing

~Lyn Lifshin

Lyn Lifshin is a prize-winning poet with accomplishments too lengthy to list here. Please visit her website for books, bio, photographs: www.lynlifshin.com.

Then time

His daughter sighs
And he forgets days and years.

She breathes quickly
A small noise like a whisper,
Like she is talking.

Moving her hands, her legs
Like a snow angel.

Lips mimicking sound
Eyes rolling under closed lids
He cannot stop watching.

She wakes in starts and fits
Grabbing his finger as an anchor.

The washing machine as background noise,
as soundtrack,
to new lives.

Then time

Exaggerated family bonds,
Attempts at reconciliation
Gracefully retracted.

Emancipation and a feeling of guilt.
A long drive through a familiar desert,
And another encounter.

Distance interpreted through a baseball cap,
The un-confidence of blue eyes,
Hugs instead of kisses.

Forgotten affection,
Tradition, and ceremony.
People separated by plane rides.

~ *Morgan Bazilian*

Morgan Bazilian has been published in *Exercise Bowler*, *Pacific Poetry*, *Eclectica*, *South Loop Review*, and others.

Collective Forgetfulness

Neighbors are burning dry leaves
From history books,
As if that allowed the past
To start all over,
Making up new memories
Whose black smoke darkens the sky.

~Michael Karl (Ritchie)

Michael Karl (Ritchie) is a Professor of English at Arkansas Tech University, where he serves as advisor to the undergraduate literary magazine, *Nebo*. He has had three small press chapbook publications [*Closing Down The Hearth*, O-2 Press 1983; *For Those In The Know*, Caterpillar Press 1976; *Night Blindness*, La Huerta Press 1976] and work published in various small press magazines, including *Gihon River Review*, *Margie*, and *The Arkansas Literary Forum*.

Curtain

A hospital room partitioned
in the center by a curtain—
In the first half of the room,
garbed in a gray-dotted gown,
I recline catawampus on a bed
covered with crumpled white paper.
My leg is dressed with gauze
dappled with blots of drying blood.
All that I can see of the second half
of the room is the silhouette,
cast upon the curtain, of a doctor,
among others, as he declares
the death of the patient
in the bed next to mine.
Relying on the accuracy
of his wristwatch, the doctor
instructs one of his colleagues
to document the time of death:
seven past one, he says.
In front of me, the clock on the wall
reads five past. On my side of the curtain
that patient is possibly still alive.

~*Matthew Drew Williams*

Matthew Drew Williams is a poet residing in Western New York. He is currently working to obtain his master's degree in social work at Roberts Wesleyan College. His poetry has appeared in a number of publications; some of which include *DIALOGIST* and *Literary Orphans*.

Blue oranges

I like how you can peel them in one big continuous peel and set the peel on the table still roughly holding its round shape while we place slices in each others mouths and I love the tartness of the orange and you sitting there in your lime bikini smiling at me ogling your bruises from the riding crop you asked your boyfriend to use on you last night but you change the conversation back to my website and answer my previous question about the monthly analytic explaining who is visiting and why and how they got there using various search terms like moccasins and macintosh apples and violent sex so that I have a sense of what I should concentrate on in the long term though for now I will continue my list of songs that make me cry like Give Me Love by George Harrison and I Live For You by George Harrison and even Isn't It a Pity sometimes by George Harrison none of which you say you've every heard until I sing them to you watching the blue orange peel or rather the spaces between so as to avoid looking at you again and again

~John Yohe

Born in Puerto Rico, John Yohe grew up in Michigan, and currently lives in Portland, Oregon. He has worked as a wildland firefighter, deckhand/oiler, runner/busboy, bike messenger, and wilderness ranger, as well as a teacher of writing. www.johnyohe.com

committed.

It was decided over tea
imported by way of Prague,
you would become the sole proprietor of my body—
for open arrangements of past
had left me deprived of the
umbilical charge
that runs soul to soul,
knocking on stark windows
to be let in
with hopes of settling into
a life together.

It wasn't meant to sound
callow,
but it felt somewhat related
to this concern I've carried—
that we hide away the ugliness,
the degenerative parts—
not getting close to death
in the embarrassing act,
the marshlands of matchstick crosses,
the feeble fabric and grey matter,
and bloated reality
propped up like a carnival game,
only to be shot down again.

In one night,
I heard two stories.
And I'm still unsure who
to believe:
The Afghani who has witnessed
murderers in his streets
and speaks of a
levitating rock over Mecca.
Or the white doctor
of rhapsody,
who tells tales of Russians
stitching up mouths and nailing

their testicles to cement
as a statement—of their
endurance for pain.

I want to commit my faith
to both,
just like I want to commit
my body to you,
as a show and conviction
that I understand
the difference between
giving all freely,
and the covered bride
who rides in on the skinned horse.

~Sarah E. Caouette

Sarah E. Caouette holds an MFA in Creative Fiction from Southern New Hampshire University. Her work has appeared with *The Citron Review*, *The Good Men Project*, *Cigale Literary*, the forthcoming *Vagabond City Journal* and has been recently selected to be read at the literary event Word! Portland. For the time being, she currently resides in Maine, believing there's something about the air.

Guilt

It occurred
one night, years ago:
The phone rang.

An unknown woman -- her voice
sensual, physical -- tells
ME,
*I am lost, despaired, I wish I would
die,*

I stand in front of the window,
Naked, while outside, everything is
Soft and quiet,
Staring at my own reflection, and I
Think about helping her,
Wondering if I will honestly say some
lie
about me, about her, but
I can't.

Instead I have an
erection -- her voice,
the night -- and
I hate her for
invading my life with
HER
ache.

It occurred,
one night, years ago:
I never forgot her.

~ *Alain Marciano*

Alain Marciano writes short-fiction and poetry. His work appeared in *Animal farm, Forge, Down in the dirt, Circa, Decades Review, Scissors and Spackle, Gloom Cupboard*, among others.

Failing Grass

April grass struggles in vain
patches ugly as tufts on an
old man's hair. Sprinklers
spit arcs of false rain, but
the only music that rings
through morning air is this
symphony of atonal loss.

~ *Steve Klepetar*

Steve Klepetar teaches literature and writing at Saint Cloud State University in Minnesota. His work has received several nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. His latest collections include *Speaking to the Field Mice*, from Sweatshoppe Publications, and *Blue Season*, a chapbook collaboration with Joseph Lisowski, from mgv2>publishing.

The View from Then

It moved while
while we were in there,
though to you it's history.
For us it was in full color
and the latest of everything:
the finest thoughts and the
smartest and loveliest people
doing the most awesome things
though we might not have used
that specific word.
History, of course, was much
shorter than your version,
but it was every bit as broad.
Our fashions were decidedly
better as you can see from
images of our time.
We had love and literature
and music and theater and art.
Sad to say illnesses cut us
down sooner, though it felt
about as arbitrary and
was sometimes more merciful
than your long hospital tortures.
We had mothers and fathers
and the whole panoply of family
but you couldn't get away
from them as easily.

~Paul Many

Paul Many has fled New York City and, so far, nobody seems to be gaining on him. He writes children's picture books in his spare time.

Behind the Choices

As my "indifference" statement shows, I'm not much of a typical "poetry person." I love to read, but prose, both fiction and nonfiction, has always been where my interest tends to begin and end. I love a strong story told in clear, yet graceful, language. Poetry just always felt like it was *trying* too hard to me or that I needed to be trying harder as a reader. It just felt like work.

For that reason, I wanted to embrace my duties as guest editor for *Dead Flowers* and avoid the feeling of "work." I wanted to simply read the submissions, enjoy them, and let myself naturally gravitate toward those that I would include. I hoped for an authentic and organic experience with the hope of avoiding letting my mind dwell on how horribly underqualified and inadequate I am in making any kind of judgment or decision regarding the writing of others.

Narrowing down my selections was a bit daunting. There were far more that appealed to me than I was allowed to include, but when I eventually reached my final selection, a theme immediately emerged to me.

Possibility.

Because, really, isn't that what the best poetry—the best *writing*—is all about? With possibility comes opportunity and, for me—a decidedly ambivalent and lazy poetry reader—I wanted to embrace my objectivity and my opportunity as guest editor. I wanted to let the possibility of each poem wash over me. My experience, overall, was replete with possibilities. The possibility of each writer's work, the possibility of a new reading experience, the possibility of introducing readers to a new voice, the possibility of making thematic connections across different styles and types of verse.

The beauty of possibility is that it comes in a variety of forms. There's the possibility of love and relationship, as can be seen to varying degrees in "Blue oranges" and "committed." It can be the possibility of situations we find ourselves in that change us in strange ways, as in "Curtain" and "Guilt." The typical connotation for possibility is positive, but as "Breakfast" and "Unexplained Disasters" illustrate, possibility can be ominous and dangerous. And as "Haven't you wanted, sometimes to" presents, possibility exists in our desires, our imaginations, and in the tiny and vast places where we let our creativity exist.

Overall, possibility is what keeps us going. Not only as writers and artists, but as human beings. Possibility is the opportunity and the chance that life will surprise us and invite us along on new journeys each day, each moment. Embracing that

possibility, however, is something we must work toward, whether our indifference haunts us or not.

Please enjoy the beautiful works of these writers and see the possibility in them and in the world around you.

~Denise Long