

miniMAG

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Old Scratch Press





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Robert

FLEMING



U.S. Immigration and Customs in Los Angeles CA, 6-10-2025

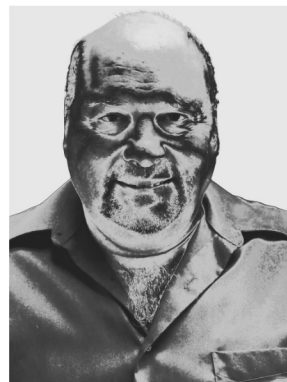
Robert Fleming digital artist self-portraits @ 62 years



realism



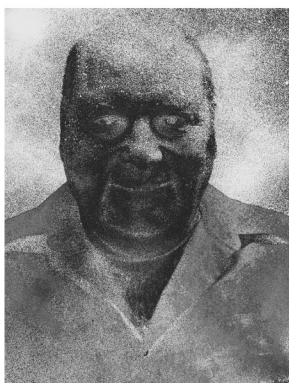
realism



impressionism



impressionism



impressionism



impressionism



surrealism



surrealism



surrealism

[Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a historical manuscript or letter, written in brown ink on aged parchment. The text is arranged in several lines across the top of the page.]

Robert Fleming

When I release my bun onto my back hair



it's end of bun

[Handwritten text in a cursive script, continuing from the top of the page, written in brown ink on aged parchment. The text is arranged in several lines across the bottom of the page.]

Beatriz

FERNANDEZ



Unmoored

Why is it that when I was young
walking in a strange city like Seville
at night, following the strings of lights
along the Guadalquivir river
to that golden tower, la Torre del Oro,
made me feel free, unfettered,
tireless and timeless—
and now, that same evening stroll
brings only a sense of unease,
a feeling of being unmoored,
set adrift on a river of time,
never arriving at my own?

Dark Matter

hiding in the curves of galactic haloes
made up of exotic particles
holding the universe together invisibly
pervasive – incomprehensible—
but it must exist

its mysterious presence felt everywhere,
a signpost of our ignorance,
our terra incognita
that must be mapped out
lest there be dragons—everywhere

Anthony

DOYLE

Witches

The witches of Wonderland
keep their hearts in Canopic jars
beneath cold beds,
where their muffled echoes
are heard throughout the night,
responding to every sound,
or touch, or dream.

Their tongues are kept
behind their ears,
like cigarettes, ready to burn,
and their livers they stow
in jars of whale oil,
where they seethe and lament,
crooning stormy ocean songs.
The witches stitch spells
into their swathings,
and murmur them softly
with barely moving lips.
Often mistaken for prayers,
these spells are their own gods.
Follow a witch into her garret
she will invite you—as lover,
friend, pupil, teacher—follow her
into her room of heartbeat,
whalesong, and burning tongue,
and watch the ceiling unspool

in stars

as the womb under the sink
swells with dark promise.



Anti-matter

Anti-matter is now portable.

**The cleverheads have found a way to transport it...
contained in suspension inside a magnetic capsule,
like a god's name in a protective cartouche.**

pure antithesis, it annihilates all it touches.

**Armageddon in a locket
worn around the neck of Hubris.**

**Expect weaponized clouds of antimatter rain
deployable on remotely guided winds**

**Northeasterlies of pattering death
not covered by the treaties.**

Just add lightning

**(See the umbrellas bursting into flame,
windows turning to plasma, cities flooding with fire.)**

It appeared, out of nowhere, on the trunk of a centuries-old oak, scorched into the bark. It was that morning when the statue in the grotto menstruated for the first and last time, and every man in the city woke up with a hard-on. Yes, they spent seventy-two hours erect, the whole bunch. The town's women produced abundant breastmilk during those days. All of them. Without exception. They froze it all in the supermarket freezer room. The tree with the image of the praying woman burnt into the bark became a tourist attraction, and influencers flocked to the town from everywhere to take selfies. After that, the image began to bleed from the eyes. They sent a cardinal to collect samples, and they tested them in the Vatican labs. Proven: human blood, I mean, divine-arboreal-human blood. DNA analysis showed that it was from a woman who was ten percent black, white, Indian, Asian, Semitic, Bedouin, Mongolian, Inca, Indica, Neanderthal. She apparently didn't like influencers. When the gents finally returned to their flaccid state, the freezer was overflowing with semen samples, all bottled and properly tagged. Milky male fluids on one side, female fluids on the other, and, in the middle, the meats and cheeses. The tree was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and remains safe in the village, protected from chainsaws and art dealers. An annual three-day festival was instituted to celebrate the Miracles of the Freezer, commencing on March 15. Some people pay to spend the night in the cold chamber, which thrums with vitality, and the supermarket has become quite famous for it. Every year, during the festival, the image on the tree smiles, and the foliage turns carnelian red. The fruits fall to the ground and scuttle away like crabs. None has ever tasted one and lived.



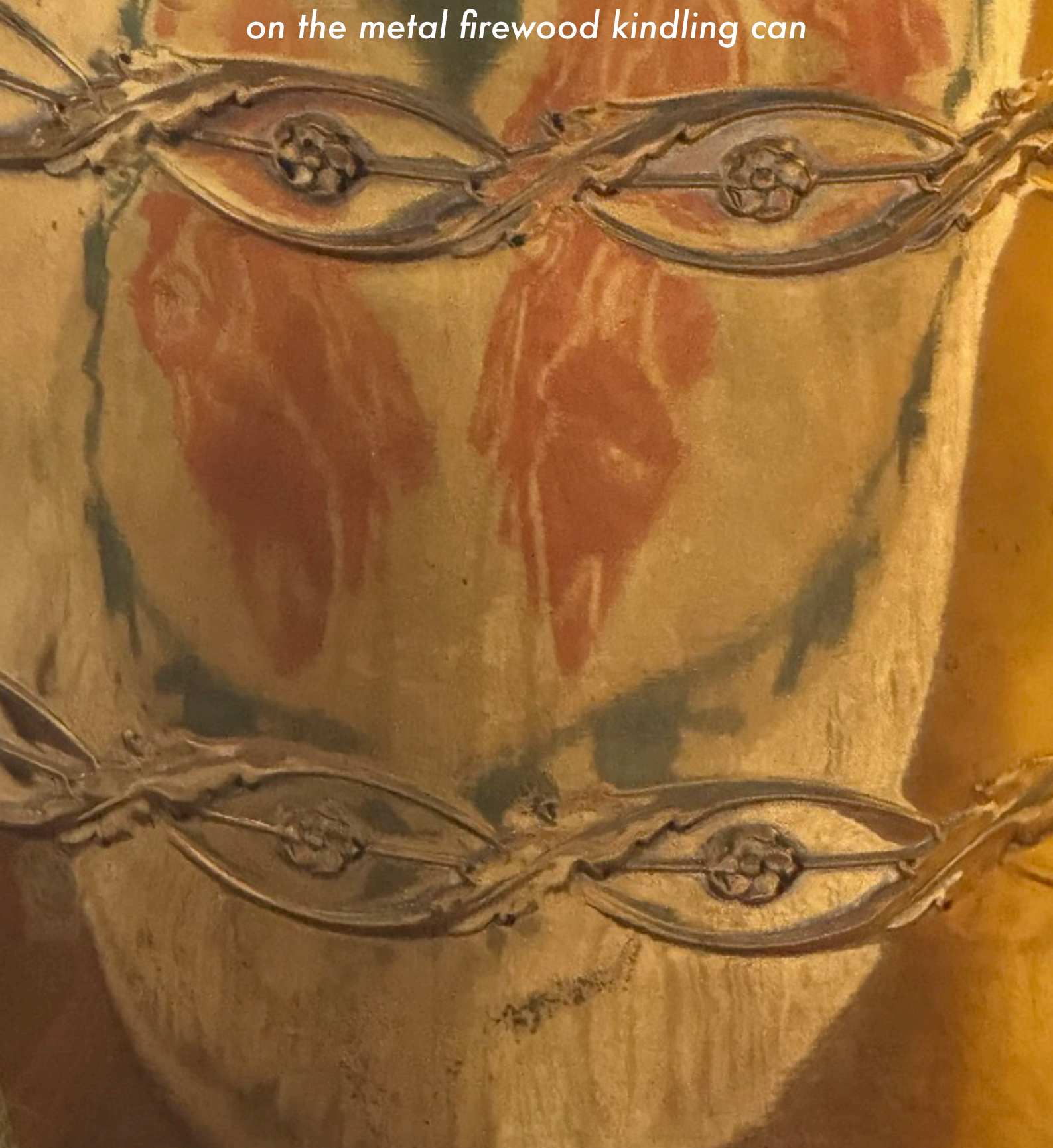
Alan

BERN

*lime green leafy branches—
Bright white clouds ring in the deep blue sky back drop,
o della Robbia*



Hi ho Copper!
masking the several
human face-eyes found
on the metal firewood kindling can



Virginia

WATTS

(future enslaver)

In the museum of art
among portraits
of the well-to-do's
founding families
their silver sets, blanket chests
grandfather clocks, chinaware
mahogany dressers tall as towers
one painting stops me dead

Rosy, round-cheeked boy
blue velvet clothes, ruffled collar
eyes turned toward me
smirky pout
a museum label
with details of his life to come
(future landowner, businessman)

has the nerve to praise him
for his patience as a young child

For, yes, it would take a lot
to train a grey squirrel
glossy-furred, collared pet
perching on the boy's hand
gnaws on a peanut
a gold chain links them
the creature's watery eyes stare
past my shoulder toward the nest
of its birth, thick, oaken trunk
tender, green-leafed limb
the one that caught and held
its last free leap

War

On my London hotel floor, in the middle of the hallway, ten stairs led downward to an old, paneled door I thought led to the lobby. It did not.

The door was small in size, not shiny black like all the other doors in the hotel, oak grain rubbed pale about the tarnished knob. The door was locked. I tried to think it as something charming, the way to a fairy land. I failed in this.

You see, like so many people, I've watched my fair share of World War II movies, so I thought of small children, small enough to think that door very, very big.

For days, I passed the door on my way to see the sights, told myself not to spin stories in my head, but as you know, stories are known to spin themselves.

Air raid sirens began to scream in the dark, bombs fell and fell. A human body compared to a bomb is so very soft.

Children and their teddy bears hid under wool blankets in the underground tunnels of London and just as an aside, there are a lot of teddy bears for sale in London.

Wishing to grow even smaller, and by that, I mean, wishing to be smaller in a Lewis Carroll sort of way, to *ungrow*, to shrink to the size of the rats that squeeze in and out of narrow places inside those tunnels, poking and squeaking, nibbling at biscuits clutched in the fingers of children. White teeth, it seems, even tiny ones, are something you can see in the dark.

Mother

At the edge
of winter field
so white that white
becomes color
one of those Catholic Mary's
arms out straight
palms open as if
she's catching moonbeams
not tufts of snow

Feet, hem of dress
buried
as are half the bodies
of stone children and a lamb
gathered round her
eyes raised up
they love her
believe she won't
let them drown

Trust then hope
often childish things
I rip my gaze away
hang it instead
upon naked limbs
rose bushes
on either side
of the woman

That sway
the language of wind
shiver and throb
don't stop, won't stop
until I try
and am unable
to unsee
their summer crimson
heart beats
unsure or afraid
I kneel
on a dead landscape

Dianne

PEARCE



Alone in the House

And the cats walk like serial killers
heavy back and forth
across the bedroom floor, the kitchen ceiling
stomp, murder, stomp

The husbands are on the camping trip with the
children
left that afternoon
for once the mothers, wives, left
alone
alone time
all of them
finally
gone

And this one fell asleep with her book
And this one had a hit or a few off that old joint
she'd been hoarding
the paranoia sub-optimal
for being home alone
for the first time in...
And this one binge-watched
And this one walked the dog around the
neighborhood again, again
very loose ends
And this one slept fitfully all night long until

Morning
Saturdays are for pancakes
but the pancake makers are all away
with the pancake eaters

This one takes a bit of cold toast
This one makes a dark coffee, instant
though it never gets quite hot enough *why make a
whole pot*
This one walks the dog around the neighborhood
again, again
This one nibbles half-hearted yogurt half-heartedly
This one wolfs a whole jar of olives because no
one can smell
her breath

Someday the alone will be for good
alone
alone time
the whole town will frown annoyance at that one
taking up a table at Starbucks with her book
or that one sipping a pino
so solo at the bar
That one out walking the dog

will never find her way back
the neighborhood having pushed her house out
onto an ice floe
If that one dozes in front of the TV
grown and forceful kids
will shift her
and the memory care wing has a locking door
while that one will be moved away *from*
waiting for what never comes
sleep is always fitful

But that's later.
This is just a weekend
There is time

After getting the laundry sorted and the dishes
to notice the light
that strange streaky August light
the world unpleasantly hot
unpleasantly dim
like starting down a steep hill instead of up
Or is it just
the windows haven't been cleaned in—
Have the windows ever been cleaned?

So many surfaces covered with so many things
today
there is finally time
clean it all
or sit and fret about all the cleaning
or try to remember what it was she wanted to do
for fun
let hands fall to her sides
put on the reruns again
for the sound
leave them on
and walk
the quiet quiescent dog
around the neighborhood once or twice or too
many times

A glass of wine when the sun goes down
a frozen pizza and a diet Mountain Dew
a hit off the damp joint
another chapter of the library book
nodding off
uncomfortably against the stain resistant tweed of
the sofa
while the cats walk like hefty serial killers above
for one more night
Live! Laugh! Love!
yells the powder room wall
everyone comes back tomorrow.

Sieg

Ilse Weber worked on the Graflex camera for months, perfecting the shutter and the intricate mechanism that would launch the curare-dipped dart hidden within, breaking the cellophane covering she'd fixed in place to hide the missing lens. It would work perfectly. It had to. Not that it would bring back Tante Frieda. No one had heard from her since she had gone to her now empty dress shop in Ostrołęka that beautiful September morning three days after the Reich marched in. Ilse had given up hope of her, but she had not given up hope of somehow helping to end the nightmare that had once been beautiful Berlin.

Ilse had conceived the plan almost immediately upon being hired by *Signal* magazine. Only Ilse's mother was Jewish, and so she had inherited her father's German last name and wavy blond hair. Her parents had emigrated to New York. *Signal* was delighted to have such a pretty young photographer on its staff. Eva Braun had seen Ilse's photographs of Marlene Dietrich, taken before Dietrich abandoned Germany for good, and had insisted that what *Signal* needed was society photos. She wished Miss Weber to photograph her and "Wolfie" beautifully attired and socializing with the other Nazi elite. Ilse's initial revulsion turned to eager acceptance when she realized this opportunity would bring her close, so very close.

Wolfie disliked the impromptu nature of society photos; he agreed only to a single photograph, with Eva, as a trial run.

And now, the day had come. Ilse stood behind the Graflex, beneath the black drape. Eva posed upon the sofa, and there was only the man himself, who needed to take his position behind Eva, his hand on her shoulder while she gazed up at him.

He finished preening his mustache, took his place. Ilse was not to speak to him. Just take the photo.

Ilse fixed him in the frame. Arm raised, she held the bulb. *Just squeeze*, she told herself, *just squeeze*. "Victory," she whispered.

"Sieg - ja, für den Führer!" the hiss, quiet, unexpected, close to her ear. A hand closed around her wrist, twisted it sharply, expertly.



448
shown in Fig. 5. Take some iron wire
about $\frac{3}{8}$ in. in diameter and make a
loop at the top of the rod for the head.
Wire this loop to the ring made in the
rod and make the head about this loop
by using canvas or gunny cloth sewed
up forming a bag of gunny cloth stuffed
either excelsior, cotton wool, or
arms are made of. The
or strong hem. The
square and 20
the shape shown.
Place the wood
of the head. Make
and fasten it and
to the top of the rod to
slipping down. A false face, or one
painted on white cloth, or one
trousers are put on the frame to com-
plete the dummy. If the clothing is
not too heavy and of white material so
much the better. To greatly increase
the spectacular flight through the air.

Deane 2026

Gabby

GILLIAM

Reawakening

I'm as useless as an indefinite article, an acute attack of ambiguity that assaults my confidence. You'd claim your domination of my thoughts as a victory, as if my self-deprecation is your credit to take, but the truth is there is no stronger enemy than my doubt. And without the promise of your continued presence, I find the constriction on my ribs loosens, breath finding a freedom it hasn't felt in more than twenty years. Who knew the fortune that could be found in solitude? The strength that comes when you cast off shackles you didn't know impeded your growth. I rotate my wrists in slow circles as blood returns to fingertips. As I remember how it feels to make a fist.



Robert Fleming, Rehoboth Beach, DE, Lighthouse in Mint Chocolate

R. David

FULCHER

The Weird of the Water

Sarah stood in the kitchen and peered around anxiously. Sebastian looked up at her and issued a confused "Meow."

"What do you think, furface?" she asked, scratching the cat behind its ears. "Think it's safe?"

Sebastian cocked his head, not comprehending the human's question.

Sarah turned her attention again to the new addition recently built onto the back of the Robinsons' house. The room's colors were quiet, and Sarah dreamed she could hear the gentle swelling of the sea coming from the painting of a lighthouse on the far wall. The rest of the house was dark and silent; hollow like all suburban homes feel when the owners are away at Disney World or other vacation spots.

But the new room was not silent. There, in the center of the room, rested the Robinsons' hot tub, gurgling its obscene liquid cacophony in the hush.

Sarah could hear her mother's schoolmarmish voice in her head. *Really, Sarah Lynn Thomas, to even think of such a thing! You have no business using other folks' property, house sitting or not!*

Sarah giggled to herself, and Sebastian turned up his jade eyes in bewilderment, which just made her laugh harder.

Why not? she thought to herself, feeling giddy and a bit wild. *I deserve it for having to look after this furball every night . . . and besides (more giggling now) . . . when the cat's away, the mice will play!*

Sarah quickly removed her T-shirt and shorts, her intoxication-by-laughter overriding any small feelings of guilt she might have had. Light spilled into the addition from the kitchen, and Sarah pretended she was a fashion model in the spotlight as she sashayed naked towards the tub. Sebastian followed warily on her heels.

After much prolonged fumbling Sarah was able to remove the hot tub's bulky cover. The water swirled, clear, pure, and pristine. Steam rose off its surface.

A chill suddenly shot up Sarah's spine. She looked down. Sebastian was brushing his coarse hair against her legs.

"Sebastian! You scared me, you damn furball! I should sell you to a Chinese restaurant for that!"

Sarah sat on the edge of the tub. Gingerly, carefully, she put her hands into the water. The warmth climbed up her arm and filled her with a delicious sensation of well-being. She leaned over the tub to turn on the jets and entered the now-churning water.

The water's embrace was wonderful and sweet, and soon Sarah's thoughts drifted to the smooth tides of the sea.

She awoke with a start. She was intensely hot and disoriented. She looked around in a panic. Sebastian was pacing back and forth in front of the tub, hissing at the base of it.

Sarah shook her head and raised herself up on the side of the tub. She leaned over and clicked on the tub's light. The colored reflection over the lens of the light bathed the water's depths with crimson.

A cold, invisible hand grabbed Sarah's ankle. For a moment Sarah thought about the time she walked barefoot through ankle-deep snow and how this alien touch was somehow so much colder than that . . .

Then she was pulled in.

She thrashed wildly in the water, but now the strong, icy grip held her by the neck, holding her under. Sebastian began to make a soft, pitiful sound in his throat. Sarah's thoughts became only those of temperature and fear, hot and cold, fever and frost.

For an instant, the grip around Sarah's neck loosened, and through the distorted perspective of six inches of water, she saw the horribly burned body of a small boy hovering above her. His face was no mask of hatred, no predatorial scowl, but rather displayed great loss and sorrow. It was as if . . . as if he were sorry.

Suddenly, the grip intensified, and Sarah's back was pressed all the way down to the well of the tub. She went through her death throes mechanically, uncaringly, and then gave up her will to the memories of a thousand snowy Januarys and a thousand thick, humid Julys. Her last words rose from her lips in bubbles and broke unheard on the water's surface.

Sebastian was pacing, clawing, and hissing at the base of the tub where something descended with a soft whisper like the swish of a satin curtain through the floor and the foundation of the house towards the remains of a little boy who burned to death many years ago. Soon the sound exceeded the range of even Sebastian's sensitive ears, and the room was once again filled with silence and the endless churning of the tub's jets.

Sebastian resumed his post on the side of the hot tub. A soft sound of pain filled the hairy throat as the young woman rotated slowly on the water's surface, her long hair fanning out like a thousand brown fingers.

The cat continued to stand guard until the dead hours of the night. Eventually, the animal drifted off, having nightmares of cold hands stroking his glossy black coat, hands that gripped him by the tail and dragged him into boiling water as he struggled to escape.

The cat awoke with a shock, awakened by a blast of freezing air that spilled across his face. He looked into the sunken eyes of an incredibly sad boy and his new playmate in death, a young girl with long brown hair.

"Play with us, Sebastian . . .," they cooed, and pulled him down.

NOTE: This story first appeared in the author's self-published collection, *The Cemetery of Heart*

Nadja

MARIL

Conch Shells

As a child I once possessed
a collection of seashells,
all shapes
and sizes.
Round and straight.
Flat and ridged.
Forever turning
in a spiral.
Delicate shells, thin and translucent.
Spiny shells.
Ones with sharp edges
dark stripes on their faces.
Soft pinks, mottled browns
matte and shiny,
I owned every kind I could find.
They lived inside a drawer for me to take
out,
hold, stroke, admire and arrange
until my mother told me it was time

to give them away.

On this beach I find giant Conch shells
buried in the sand.
Broken and battered by the surf
pushing them hard against jutting rocks.
Shells worn thin by sand.
Imperfect.
Green and slimy with algae
a circle of lumps
on which one might stub a toe.

Not glamorous and buffed
like my childhood collection of seashells,
they blend into the shoreline.
Sometimes covered by the waves.
Sometimes revealed.
Comfortable with the passage of time
and age.

Pirates on Little Cayman

Cock a doodle doo.

The rooster crows but I cannot see him.

There are feral chickens on this island

living in the brush

foraging for insects.

They cross the road.

Run back and forth.

Walk on the beach.

Return to shelter under trees.

Tiny feathers and fluff

beneath dried palm fronds.

No one gathers their eggs.

Chick hatch,

joining the menagerie of creatures

large and small

living around Booby Pond Nature Preserve.

The Frigatebirds soar overhead

swooping down to snatch a surfacing fish

Or rob and plunder dinner from

the Red Footed Booby

who reluctantly shares a regurgitated fish

receiving nothing in return.



Spring Contemplation

I descend the stairs and stare
at the view of trees
through our second story window.
This is my church, my sacred view.
So much better than colored glass.

No need for bold reds and royal cobalt
set in place with strips of lead.
No need for holy men, saints, or ritual.
The shapes of scrub pines through the small square panes
against the backdrop of blue sky lift my spirit.

II

I gaze out toward the road from our back deck
Spy a deer's twitching tail as she grazes in the marsh.
Green moss coats the spreading branches of an oak.
Brown leaves cover the ground.
They crunch underfoot as I walk the land
witnessing the damages of our most recent storm.

We are the caretakers of our world.
It is our actions that can preserve and protect.
Soil dumped by a neighbor years ago
filled in a corner of our wetlands.
The water attempts to return.

III

The beach erodes. The sand shifts.

It is a slow process.

Year after year, bulldozers return to rebuild the beach.

One day the bay may push into the wetlands.

Humanity is a reluctant student.

Morgan

GOLLADAY

Sky Cast

There are days when the sun bounces off the sea
and creates waves of shadow across the sand.

Bright days,
golden days,
days of energy, promise, movement.

The light calls me to action,
to reach and grasp and possess
the wind-blown energy of change.

Back home,
the hills undulate quietly,
their serenity disturbed by vehicles,
cattle, farms, wagons, people going about their daily tasks.
The bustle is there, also, with action fostered by need,
rather than leisure.
But beneath the action of doing lies the quieter business of being.

The light is different – a reflection of green and grey,
as the song of the sky softens the haze above the valley.

Here, on this flat shore, I miss the blue light of home.



The Old Scratch Press Poetry and Short Form Collective is dedicated to fostering an appreciation for, and understanding of, poetry, short-form prose, and hybrid forms of writing and art, as well as opportunities for publication and notoriety.

We provide writers with opportunities to publish short collections, contribute to anthologies, and work as part of the selection committee for submissions to Instant Noodles Lit Mag (a digital literary magazine sponsored by Current Words Publishing).

Mentorship is a core part of our mission, allowing experienced writers to support emerging voices by sharing knowledge and resources. Through our growing support network, we strive for members to gain access to publishing opportunities as well as invitations to readings, workshops, and other educational events. Members are also united in the mission of collaboration as a necessary aspect of success as an indie author.

This collaboration includes the work of promoting and managing Old Scratch Press and its authors and publications, trading labor for opportunities. Together, we cultivate a thriving community that celebrates the craft of writing.

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