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Editor's Note

five poems and a flash
roosting on the same pine branch
once upon a time

— Laura Garrison

Expectation Nightmares

Yash Seyedbagheri

every night,
I'm in a car
and I'm cruising faster and faster
the steering wheel is impotent
like rubber
and the horns blare
among all the exhaust
faster, faster, faster

and I'm at a party
where mustaches bear into me
telling me what to say, how to do it,
but I have to go to the bathroom
one jiggle of a toilet handle
and the room explodes
with only the frowns left
in the dust-covered clouds
I can't even flush

YASH SEYEDBAGHERI is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA fiction program. His stories, "Soon," "How To Be A Good Episcopalian," "Tales From A Communion Line," and "Community Time," have been nominated for Pushcarts. Yash's work has been published in *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Write City Magazine*, and *Ariel Chart*, among others.

The Geese Are Back (in Town)

Iain Grinbergs

They often wander along the artificial lake and ruffle their way through the small beech-colored field behind my rented apartment. I still wonder what they eat. I could look it up, but sometimes I'd rather not have an answer. I wonder, too, how they stay warm here in a North Florida winter—their feathers don't seem adequate. But who am I to critique creation? God, I hope this poem doesn't sound like a knock-off Mary Oliver. But if that's what I'm worrying about, I'd say, for now, I'm doing quite well. Often, though, nothing ever feels enough. I hope I don't sound dramatic, but I've looked up assisted suicide. *You need to join a Zen monastery first.* I'd just like to go out silently, not cause any fuss. I'd just like to disappear into myself like a mindful black hole. I've lived long enough to know that to get through the day, we must count small successes, like how I've stopped picking my right thumb; how, at this moment, I do not crave alcohol.

IAIN GRINBERGS (he/they) is a PhD student in creative writing at Florida State University. He's a finalist for Black Lawrence Press's Fall 2021 Black River Chapbook Competition. You can find his recent work in *Wilderness House Literary Review* and forthcoming from *Ghost Parachute* and *Juke Joint*.

Dump Bear

Isabelle Doyle

The dump bear is so hungry. People see her plodding,
weirdly elegant, around the green dumpster. They see her
on two legs banging a tuna can like a battle drum,
slapping flies away from winnowed chicken bones
with weary paws. They see her crouching in the parking lot,
naked and vulnerable, over half a cinnabon.

People don't know what's going on with the dump bear.
The dump bear gets nervous about the disintegration of the planet
in a way where it's like Girl, you can't do anything about that.

She insists on humiliating herself in public,
and this makes everyone feel uneasy.
Everyone is reminded of many unpleasant things
watching the dump bear feast on garbage
and listen—the dump bear picks up on that.
If the dump bear is making everybody else uncomfortable,
there is a good chance she is making herself uncomfortable as well.

The dump bear used to worry that maybe
she isn't as self-aware as she thinks she is—
but no, the dump bear understands
that she is constituted through action,
that her classification is a consequence of her own decisions,
that she could stop anytime, walk back into the woods.
But the dump bear is so hungry. No matter what, she will eat.

ISABELLE DOYLE lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and loves chrysanthemums. She is between twelve and thirteen feet tall in high heels.

Any Other Person

Craig Brownlie

She discovered she had turned into the wrong person.

Tamsin motioned to her lady in waiting and ordered her to bring the mirror from her bedchamber. “Don’t look at me like that. Get one of the pageboys to help you if you can’t handle a simple task.”

While she waited, Tamsin listened to the knights continue their endless debating with her husband. She hated the king for his indecisiveness and pandering.

Across the oversized table dominating the throne room, Tamsin watched her attendant struggle with the floor length mirror along the walls. The young woman had chosen a new page to carry the other end.

Eventually, they placed the gold-framed looking glass beside Tamsin.

“Bring it closer, within arm’s reach.”

She admired the biceps on the burly lad. When she arrived in the kingdom, Tamsin found herself in the middle of an affair with one of the knights, who proved inattentive and dull. She sampled a quarter of the round table and a similar number of pages before seeing the futility. They were either drunk or rushed.

Tamsin gave the room a final survey and found it unchanged from her arrival. She licked the tip of her finger. She winked at the page who looked terrified. Then, she traced her reflection with her moist index finger.

She discovered she had turned into the wrong person.

“Excuse me? Are you going to give me the rest of my change or not?”

Tamsin pulled back from her abyss and refocused on the customer in front of her. "Yes, sorry. Three, four, five dollars." She gave the man in the Blink 182 shirt a professional nod and looked to the girl behind him.

"A pack of Marlboros," demanded the adolescent.

"I don't think you're old enough."

"They're for my mom."

Tamsin considered the four impatient people behind the girl and reached up for the pack.

"Could you make it a carton?" The girl smirked.

"No."

"Fine."

Six customers later, Tamsin saw her opportunity and made a dash for the restroom. Inside, she stood before the mirror, licked her finger, and...

Tamsin heard the librarian approach. She looked over the top of the study carousel.

"You can't keep staying in the library," said Cynthia.

They had been roommates their first two years at university, only ending when Tamsin moved off campus to live in her boyfriend's studio apartment. Tamsin did not want to get into a whole thing, so she kept her voice flat and unequivocal.

"I have a big project due Monday first thing. It's not like I'm the only person that ever gets locked in."

"You are the only person we've locked in for five nights running."

"Give me until Monday to sort something out. I need this."

Cynthia made the dramatic sigh she had perfected their freshman year and nodded.

Tamsin waited for the dimming of the overhead lights before taking the mirror out of her backpack. She touched up the concealer on her face. She licked the tip of her index finger.

She discovered she had turned into the wrong people: a girl chatting with a hookah-smoking caterpillar; a pregnant gunfighter; a suburban soccer mom; a tomb raider; an unexpected guest.

She discovered she had turned into the wrong person.

The stench of drunken pirates hit Tamsin first. Men littered the deck of the sloop William. Somewhere in that mass, she would find her lover, Captain “Calico Jack” Rackham. Mary Read stood beside her, the pair being the sober exceptions. Tamsin followed Mary’s eyes out to sea and watched an English privateer draw closer. They both drew their pistols.

“We are doomed,” said Mary.

“They are bound to find us out.”

“Damn Jack Rackham.”

“I’m pregnant,” hissed Tamsin.

“So am I.”

“Damn Jack Rackham.”

Mary shifted her pistol and took her friend’s hand. As the first cannonball flew overhead, Tamsin lost her nerve.

“Does Jack still have that mirror in his cabin?”

Tamsin shifted books about in her carousel until she located her mobile.

“Cynthia, I’m sorry for calling so late, but you were right. I don’t want to spend another night or even minute here. Can you come and let me out? And maybe I can stay at your place?”

CRAIG BROWNLIE was born in East Orange, New Jersey, and grew up in Youngstown, Ohio. Among other endeavors, he has washed dishes, spun records on the radio, directed and designed stage shows, joined the Pennsylvania and Federal Bar Associations, and managed software development projects. His first published book was 1987's Financial Commercial Loan Handbook from Financial Publishing Company (uncredited). In addition, he has written numerous plays, books, short stories, poems, and non-fiction pieces.

I Am Jacql Jacquelyn Shah

*Jackal: opportunistic; frequents rubbish dumps
in pursuit of food; most active at dawn or dusk;
represented as wily, a trickster; makes unique
sounds to deliver a message; used as literary
device to illustrate loneliness.*

I am jacql
crepuscular, incredulous
Had I been god there would be
no dust lint lust loneliness
or seasons of treason

I am jacql at dawn
listing to the side to avoid
a leaking of inner anger
No rage here
just hunger

Jacql, my cunning
and trickery trigger
a tracking of shimmering
words, to purloin
repurpose and twist

As jacql at dusk
I close eyes to see not
what one more day has been
in the Land of Missing
Truth

Truth?

Oppportunistic, I'm jacql
I chew on residue left
after its slaughter, and slow
awful bleeding out
What I eat is acrid,
but then, I'm jacql

JACQUELYN "JACSUN" SHAH, iconoclast, pacifist: A.B., English (Rutgers U); M.A., English (Drew U); M.F.A., Ph.D., English literature/creative writing (U of Houston). Publications: chapbook—*small fry*; full-length book—*What to Do with Red*; poems in journals; Winner: Literal Latté's 2018 Food Verse Contest. She loves what's quirky and/or surrealistic in literature . . . and life.

Drum as noun

Michael J. Galko

An ugly fish,
scraped metal scales,
blotched,
sucking at rocks
beneath the docks.

Or a skein of skin
sun-dried and bleached,
holding the thump
of a wave— drum as verb
and reverb.

MICHAEL J. GALKO is a scientist and a poet who lives and works in Houston, TX. Michael is the owner, creator, and curator, of "Haiku House", a residential art project less than a mile from downtown Houston. Michael was a Pushcart Prize nominee in 2019 and his poems and haiku have appeared in dozens of poetry and haiku-themed journals over the past few years, including *Gargoyle*, *Gulf Coast*, *Paterson Literary Journal*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Noon: Journal of the short poem, descant*, *Frogpond*, and *The Heron's Nest*.

On the cover:

“Birds”

PRETTYSLEEPY chose their name because they are a night owl and most of their artwork is created at night. Prettysleepy puts an abstract spin on objects, landscapes, and the world in a variety of styles. They also design book covers. Their work and contact info is available at facebook.com/prettysleepyart, at instagram.com/prettysleepy.art, and at their website, prettysleepyart.com.

