

# The broken

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THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

16

# The broken



Summer 2015 Issue 16

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## In this issue:



Boo! Welcome to *The Broken City's* paranormal edition. Submissions for this spooky issue leaned in a decidedly ghostly direction; it seems aliens and cryptids just aren't as enlivening as the mysteries of the afterlife. Issue 16 isn't all ghouls and specters, however—

we've got a curse on page eight and anti-gravity doughnuts on page 15!

## Illustration/Photo Contributors:

**Mouki K. Butt** (front cover) is an illustrator who currently resides on Vancouver Island. She can often be found stargazing late at night, but hasn't spotted a UFO yet. [moukikbutt.com](http://moukikbutt.com).

**Teddy Kang** (page 15) is a Toronto-based illustrator. Aside from pursuing his BFA at York University, he's currently working with multiple magazines (*Painting Dream Magazine*, *Life Monthly*, *Yue Shi Magazine*, *Geeked Magazine*, *The Manifold Magazine*) and doing illustration and design work for clients from all over the world. His work has been featured in, and he's been interviewed by, several magazines and media companies, such as *188Art Storage* and *Ground\_Ooh\_Art Magazine*. Web site/blog: [teddyteddykang.tumblr.com](http://teddyteddykang.tumblr.com). E-mail: [teddykang2009@hotmail.com](mailto:teddykang2009@hotmail.com).

**Lavinia Roberts** (page 6) is a visual artist, facilitator, activist, and award-winning writer based in Brooklyn, NY. She creates masks, puppets, and other objects for live performances. Her work has been produced in Los Angeles, Seattle, New York and London. You can see more of her work at [laviniaroberts.com](http://laviniaroberts.com).

*The Broken City* is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2015 edition: **Remotely Controlled**.

That's right, couch potatoes; the magazine is running a television-themed issue. Have you been amassing a collection of *Alf*-themed poetry? Show it to us! Did you finally decode all of *Lost's* secrets? Fill us in! Is your TV haunted by a poltergeist? Tell us about it! We'll even consider *Star Trek* fan fiction (though it had better be Original Series). If it's about the idiot box, we want to see it.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, comics, illustrations and photography to [thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com](mailto:thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com). Deadline is: November 1, 2015.

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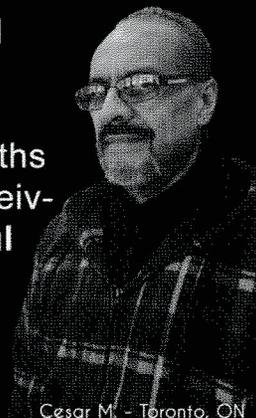
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# Psychopomp

## *Flower Conroy*

Sapodilla becloud the sky. Here reposes a headless lamb  
draped in garland & here dry-rots a bouquet of imitation

silk chrysanthemums someone has placed in remembrance  
at the foot of a sparrow's dollhouse-sized mausoleum.

You eat raisins from a paper bag. Martyrdom's an anvil;  
God's omnipresence is conveyed by a winged globe;

& bells are calls to worship—at least according to  
the *Complete Guide to Cemetery Symbolism*. You say

The statues' eyeless eyes fix upon me when you say  
*It's like something's trapped inside them*, pointing to a weeping

angel whose gown is spotted in lichen & the blood-  
like stains of the Poinciana's fallen blooms. A bunch

of grapes no fox this side may taste crown this tomb  
in *Faith*—though I think of the wine the webbed fruit

will never yield, & the egg sacs in the cracks where spiders  
have left their filament nests. Like an obelisk, a dolphin

portrays *Resurrection*. The heart encircled with thorns?  
*Ultimate suffering*, of course; but also: the bougainvillea

has taken over. In the zodiacal light—countershine—  
airglow—(lofty names for dusk) the grass grows more alive,

lizards driven by mosquitoes part the blades.  
In a context where moon is ornament of *Death & Rebirth*

& butterflies are *Ghosts*, celestials are sometimes confused  
with effigies though there's no explanation for lost souls.

I lie with you & watch the heavens purple. Beyond is water.

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*Flower Conroy is the author of three chapbooks: Escape to Nowhere; The Awful Suicidal Swans; and Facts About Snakes & Hearts (winner of the Heavy Feather Review Chapbook Contest). She is the winner of Radar Poetry's first annual Coniston Prize. Her poetry is forthcoming/has appeared in American Literary Review, Jai Alia, Gargoyle and others.*

## Thunder Bay

### James B. Nicola

Those furnished upper rooms were, in the day  
of sailors, let as seamen went and came.  
The overnight I spent on Thunder Bay  
I woke because I heard, calling my name,  
a woman's voice, rousing me back to life,  
instructing me in whispers while she wept  
to write her Love a letter, signed, Your Wife.  
Too groggy to resist, I did, then slept.

Next morning as I opened up a book  
at random from the shelves, onto my lap  
a yellowed leaf, direct as a dead bird,  
fell suddenly. I stopped to take a look  
and heard—or felt—a distant thunderclap  
while reading the same letter, word for word.

As suddenly I realized, somehow,  
that she was not his wife, and should have been.  
Excited to confirm the yellow now  
with the white sheet I had written on when in  
a stupor the night before, I looked around  
for it—but it was nowhere to be found.

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*These two poems previously appeared in The Harrow. Widely published both stateside and abroad, James B. Nicola has several poetry awards and nominations to his credit. His book Playing the Audience won a Choice Award. First poetry collection: Manhattan Plaza, 2014. Second collection: Stage to Page: Poems from the Theater, June 2016. A Yale grad and also a stage director, composer, lyricist, and playwright, his children's musical, Chimes: A Christmas Vaudeville, premiered in Fairbanks, Alaska, with Santa Claus in attendance opening night.*  
[sites.google.com/site/jamesbnicola](http://sites.google.com/site/jamesbnicola)

## Elegy

### James B. Nicola

Bring the darkness with you then;  
Join us in complaint.  
Do not waste those juicy wails  
Moaning by yourself.

Spread the gloom and dim the light;  
Entertain us all!  
We will hear the tales of hurt  
Life has meted you.

Heed no sign nor uniform  
That says our garden's closed.  
We are up for guests tonight  
And have kept your room

Here, your name already carved!  
Fertilize it well  
With two loud lungs, one bloody heart;  
Water it with tears;

Make us cry and laugh at once:  
Slay us—please—again,  
While you flesh the myrtled row,  
Filling in the dead.

Don't be scared. We'll part the clouds.  
Not now? Then, in a moon.  
Misery loves company:  
We expect you soon.

*Lavinia Roberts*



# Above the Underground

*Gary A. Berg*

The Trip Advisor site mentioned ghosts. That's an odd one. Usually just dirty bathrooms, cramped space, bad service. "Woke up to a ghost in my room." "Ghosts in the hallways—no joke."

Wow. Not afraid, in fact interested, booked it.

Can't say I believe in ghosts, although I think I've seen or experienced something like them in my life. Once when my dead father rode in the backseat of my car. Steady, warm, something I didn't question or challenge.

Then once at an old theater when at intermission I spoke to an oddly dressed man who asked me how I liked the French farce. I told him it wasn't my cup of tea, and to my embarrassment, turns out he was the author. Back in the seat before the 2nd act I looked in the program and found that the author had been dead for many years.

The hotel was a dirty orange from the early 19th century, in the Bloomsbury district, with an intricate lobby and marble staircase sweeping up. At the second floor landing, a brass dragon statue greets you at the turn.

London is a city built upon itself, so that new buildings stand on old. I can feel the generations on top of the underground. Here stood, here stood, here stood...

At night, sleeping pills needed for jet lag give me a senseless sleep. I wake with a start in the early morning like I missed the end to an action movie. Something probably happened, but I was not there. My wife asks me if I was standing over her in the night as she slept.

The next night I am adjusted and sleep naturally. Vivid images fill me of the scent and feel of the city. Then someone is bent over me scrutinizing closely. She wears black 19th century dress. A small hat and scarf covers her head in shadow. I feel her intelligence on me, her critical eyes. Who is this man?

I shake my head back and forth violently, tossing like a dark shroud covers me. Finally, I throw the weight, and sit up in bed. The room is dark, quiet, unchanged—nothing.

We stay three more nights in the hotel, and use the tube stop deep underneath to make our way through the city.

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*Gary A. Berg, MFA (UCLA), is the author eight non-fiction books, as well as short stories that have appeared in Euphemism, Santa Fe Writer's Project, Synchronized Chaos, Cheap Pop, Vending Machine Press, Indian Summer Quarterly, and Work Literary Magazine.*

# A Grouse's Claw

*Christine Hart*  
(story and photo)



Naomi missed the last bus and stared at the driving rain. The 15 to Penicuik was the last city bus that could get her back to Rosslyn Chapel; now she'd have to cab it the whole way. It was her last night in town and she had to get that disgusting claw back to where it came from.

Her vacation in Edinburgh had been uneventful, but fun and relaxing. With her sister Janelle, she'd wandered tiny cobblestone alleys and hiked rough, grassy hills. They climbed the Scott Monument and toured the windy towers of Edinburgh Castle. They browsed exquisite artwork and shopped for trendy urban fashion, ate ice cream on Calton Hill and lounged on the lawn of the Princes Street Gardens. Much to Janelle's delight, they even managed an afternoon of early summer sunbathing at Portobello Beach.

Naomi thought their long-awaited trek to rediscover their heritage had passed too quickly—much like any other trip—until her aunt took them to Rosslyn Chapel. Naomi had been excited to go. She loved old churches for the centuries they spent absorbing the dreams and devotion of everyone who passed through them. And this church was the most infamous she'd come across yet: the fabled resting place of the Holy Grail. Legend had whipped up the sisters' expectations.

After paying admission and walking up the gravel path, Naomi found that it looked like a normal, albeit classically pretty church from the outside, complete with pastoral setting. The whole building was covered by scaffolding, but many of the carvings and freestanding monuments could be easily seen.

From the inside, Rosslyn was immediately unlike any other historical site or church Naomi had ever visited. At first, she thought it was simply the

surge of realized anticipation. Then she felt something more. Damp cold gripped her, seeping into her lungs as she continued to breathe the chilled, musty air. Her aunt and sister seemed unaffected as they sat through the attendant's presentation about the history of the chapel.

The presenter delivered a lively tongue-in-cheek talk about "what might lie beneath the tombs below," and the rumours, ranging from the treasure of The Knights Templar and the original Scottish crown jewels, to the remains of Jesus Christ himself. After taking in the whole yarn, both sisters and their aunt milled about with the other enthralled visitors. They walked around the main floor, looking at the ornate, eerie carvings, searching the details for didactic biblical imagery and faces of the pagan Green Man.

Pressure continued to tighten around Naomi's chest as the voices of her aunt and sister dulled to a murmur. She felt something closing in... a presence behind her, hovering over her shoulder, malicious and waiting for its moment. She had to get out! Rushing headlong through a side door, she burst into the yard and stopped.

Naomi's dread wore off quickly. Having escaped to the warmth of the sunny lawn outside, she stood surveying the countryside and eyeing the gift shop, thinking about a souvenir, when Janelle touched her shoulder.

"Didn't you get a look at the basement? It's not a big deal, just a cellar with some artifacts, but there's still more to see. Go on. We might never be back here," she said with encouragement.

Naomi nodded, realizing it was silly to be creeped out by a mild draft. She'd seen too many scary movies. She walked purposefully back into the building, past the pews and down

into the basement. An empty foyer and bare, carved compartments greeted her. *What a rip off!* she thought. *The price of admission should at least get us some replicas.*

To her right sat another empty room with some broken stoneware on the floor. On the left, a table of antiques poked out from behind a doorway.

"Come in dear," called the soothing voice of an elderly lady. "See if you find anything you like," she said.

Naomi walked over to the table of cups, plates, jewellery and knick knacks. A brooch made from a clawed foot caught her attention. She was drawn to it. Horrible, pasty-beige, scaly digits poked out from underneath dull, brown feathers, crowned with sharp, charcoal talons. A ludicrous, finely-woven mesh silver ribbon was tied around the ankle and accented with an amethyst gem.

"That's a kilt pin made from a grouse's foot. They're a traditional Scottish good luck charm. That one is special. It draws out your beauty," she said with a loving smile.

Naomi asked her if the antiques were for sale and the crone nodded, watching her turn the brooch over in her hand, her young face looking at the claw with equal measures of fascination and disgust. She stared into the flawless purple stone, losing herself in its vibrant colour. "Why don't you take it as a keepsake, sweetheart... no charge," said the old woman, her voice creaking and strained. Still dazzled, Naomi looked up and remembered where she was. Embarrassed, she accepted the brooch, too distracted to feel the claw grip her finger lightly. Sharp hooks pricked her skin and drew three small drops of blood. The old woman gasped in a moment of ecstasy and stood a little taller, seeming suddenly refreshed. Naomi put the claw in her pocket and walked—zombie-

like—back through the chapel.

Naomi didn't have the courage to show the disturbing brooch to anyone, and that night, at the dinner table, she said something completely out of character. She told Janelle that she should stop dying her hair unless she wanted it to fall out. Everyone sat in stunned silence as Naomi gaped in horror at her own sudden cruelty. She apologized and excused herself immediately.

Later that night, Naomi apologized to her sister again and they decided to keep their plans to go out with some friends. After all, it was such a strange coincidence that one of Janelle's former coworkers was now going to school in Edinburgh. Why let one random remark spoil the evening? They took a double-decker city bus into town, Naomi rambling her remorse and confusion the whole way.

"Nam, will you stop apologizing already? It was a stupid thing to say, but I'd rather just drop it and forget about it," said Janelle as they walked through the door of a Rose Street pub. Janelle's friend Brittany and a group of her Scottish classmates were sitting at a large, round table in the middle of the room.

"Hey girl! Long time, no see," Janelle blurted brightly as soon as she saw them. "Janelle!" shouted Brittany as she jumped up to meet them and wrapped Janelle in a bear hug. Naomi looked over at the rest of the girls and awkwardly scanned the rest of the room. She was glad her sister's mood had improved and she didn't want to intrude on the reunion, but making small talk with total strangers was a tedious prospect.

"How about a game of pool?" a blonde with a large scarf and a flowing cotton dress asked Naomi. Relieved, she nodded with a grin and followed the girl down a narrow hall. Before she

knew it, Naomi was on her own with the boyfriends of Brittany's friends, playing pool, drinking, and feeling suddenly very confident.

The brooch was still in her pocket, and at first, Naomi thought it was all in her head, but she felt very attractive; seductive, even. When one of the boyfriends started to flirt with her, Naomi let it escalate, playfully encouraging it. He offered to buy her a beer and she followed him to the bar, then around another corner to a tall, secluded table with no bar stools. She gulped down her beer, watching over the rim of the glass as he stared at her with warm brown eyes. He was handsome, in a preppy way, with hair sculpted into an organized mess and a collared, light blue shirt. She put the glass down and smiled, trying to think of a clever way to bring up his nearby girlfriend without sounding ungrateful or presumptuous.

He couldn't take his eyes off of her. Naomi shifted uneasily as he leaned closer. She couldn't remember his name—or his girlfriend's—but the part of her that would have spoken up was fogged over. Feeling beautiful was the only thing that mattered. And this man's gaze made her feel like nothing else existed for him. He reached forward, circling his arm around her lower back, and pulled her towards him. He touched her lips with his own, softly, testing her. When she didn't pull away, he kissed her again, urgently, wrapping her tightly in his arms.

"Colin!" shouted a distraught voice from behind Naomi. She turned around to see the tail end of a long cotton dress storm off. Colin snapped out of his lust and darted after her. Naomi paused, dreading the inevitable shouting and scorn. She looked up for a moment and thought she saw a familiar face. A woman at the other end of the bar sat sipping from a small glass

of amber liquid. Naomi couldn't place her, and stared as she fought to recall a memory. Then it hit her; the woman could be the younger sister, or even daughter, of the old lady at the chapel. She wondered what the odds were, of meeting a random person, then a member of their family, but she snapped out of it, remembering to follow after Colin's girlfriend. She ran back through the pool room, to the table out front.

Janelle flew into a rage as Naomi caught up just in time to see the blonde storm out, crying, followed directly by Brittany. The sisters left for home immediately. Naomi was surprised Janelle let her share a cab, let alone listened to the story about the claw and the old woman at the chapel.

"I think it cursed me. She said it would draw out my beauty and I thought she was just trying to make a sale. But she didn't charge me. And I think she's connected to it somehow. She looked so... satisfied when I took it. I think I even saw her sister back in that pub," said Naomi.

"You are making absolutely zero sense. Not that I believe that foul thing has any power, but you obviously think it does. Throw it away!" she whispered frantically.

"I don't think it's that easy. What if it's really harming me? If there's something wrong, then it's not making me beautiful, it's probably doing the opposite, starting on the inside! And somehow the old hag benefits! I have to give it back to that crazy bitch," said Naomi, panicked, convincing herself. "I should have said something to that woman at the pub."

"Maybe I should be blunt; you're somehow rationalizing acting like a slut by clutching a disgusting piece of junk. Giving it back to the woman who sold it to you isn't going to fix the way you're acting. If you don't stop this shit,

I'm not just going to be pissed, I'm going to lose your number when we get home. Who do you think you are, screwing around with Theresa's boyfriend?"

"Oh, that was her name," said Naomi, quickly realizing how selfish she sounded. "That came out wrong."

"Your thoughts are all coming out wrong today. Are you on something? Or are you just giving up on censoring yourself. It's not like you've ever been a people person or had a way with words," said Janelle.

"You know, I feel like I've spent my whole life apologizing for who I am and how I come across. People don't like me; I get it. I'm not an easy person and I don't have your charming way of instantly getting along with people. But I just can't take it anymore. I'm done trying to change. You don't like me—fine; your friends don't like me—freakin' fantastic. Just what the hell do you expect me to do about it? Maybe we *do* need some time apart when we get home."

Janelle didn't answer, but glared back for a long moment before turning to watch the brick houses clip by as the cab raced along the empty streets of Morningside, then into Fairmilehead and home.

\* \* \*

Naomi continued to panic the whole of the next day, while touring the Royal Yacht Britannia with her sister and cousins. She hung back at each stage of the tour, fuming and worrying. As she peered into staged rooms, she racked

her brain for a discrete way to get back to the chapel—without telling the story to anyone else and inviting more ridicule. She didn't want to re-hash the pub incident either.

Naomi found herself alone in a narrow hall of porthole windows. She couldn't resist the urge to pull the brooch out of her pocket and look it over again. The juxtaposition of the scaly, mummified foot and black talons against the almost-glowing silver ribbon and sparkling amethyst might have made for an interesting conversation if she could have worked up the nerve to show it to her relatives. As she gazed at it, the stone seemed to grow to a deeper, more vibrant shade of purple, right in front of her eyes, as she ran her thumb back and forth across its facets. It soothed her now, sapping her worries and softening the memories of the last two days.

Naomi pocketed the brooch quickly when she looked up to see her cousin's young son staring at her from the end of the hall. "We're all going for dinner, aren't you coming?" he asked sweetly, and Naomi smiled.

A boisterous dinner at the pub in her aunt's neighbourhood was the last thing Naomi wanted, but she sat quietly with the group. Her aunt mentioned how tired and pale she looked, compared to her sister, and Naomi shrugged her shoulders. Everyone but her drank, told stories, and drank some more until they walked home in the

chilly night.

\* \* \*

Now, having snuck out, Naomi surveyed the road by the bus stop as the rain cleared to mist. She looked down at her aunt's cell phone, which was on loan to her, should she need to make an emergency call. She sat down on the bench. Then she caught her reflection in the glass.

Past the bus stop, a striking young woman—who bore a very slight resemblance to the old crone from Rosslyn's basement—watched carefully from the entrance to a lane. She strained to see Naomi's expression as the girl became too engrossed by her own image to see anything else.

Naomi's hair fell in large and perfectly cylindrical chestnut coils, framing her powder-pale face. She hadn't put on much makeup, but her eyes were glowing green underneath suede brown eyelids and long, curled lashes. She didn't look tired or pale; she looked amazing. She blinked slowly, admiring her reflection, looking at the curves of her full, rosy lips.

*Maybe I'll keep the brooch after all,* she thought, pondering its value as an antique and a curiosity. *And besides, I am more beautiful now,* she decided, as she pinned it onto her sweater and turned back towards home. The young woman grinned and retreated into the lane.

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*Christine Hart is a Vancouver-based novelist, copywriter and artist. She loves writing about places and spaces with rich history and visually fascinating elements, as a backdrop for the surreal. Christine's young adult novels are Watching July (2008), Best Laid Plans (2009) and Stalked (2010). Her background includes technical writing, communications and journalism. When not writing, Christine breaks stuff and makes stuff—in that order—in the guise of her Etsy alter-ego, Sleepless Storyteller. More at: christine-hart.ca.*



# Waiting

*Hannah McKinnon*

The sun shines brightly, and I watch the light dance across the waves. A gentle breeze whistles in the grass behind me. I shiver despite it being a warm day. Sitting on the beach, I dig my toes into the sand and hug my legs for comfort.

My friend Juliette is sitting a few yards away. She turns and smiles, so I wave. She's here every day, too, waiting patiently. We don't always talk. Sometimes we just sit in silence.

Juliette is wearing an emerald green bathing suit. Her hair, long and blonde, blows gently around her face. She keeps saying it's messy and that she wishes she could have it cut, though she looks beautiful to me. Her kind, blue eyes sparkle, but I see the sadness in them, even though she tries very hard to hide it. She's waiting for her husband John to come to the beach. She's been

waiting for 25 years.

Juliette keeps me company, especially at night, if I feel lonely. That doesn't happen often—I'm used to being at the beach now—and I'm not scared anymore.

"Gosh Megan, you look like you've seen a ghost!" Juliette teased the first day I arrived. It was such a silly thing to say, considering. We both laughed and have been best friends ever since, even though she's at least 30 years older than me. If John comes and Juliette leaves the beach, I don't know what I'll do. I don't want to think about it.

The beach isn't busy today. It's the middle of the week and the summer holidays haven't begun yet. There are people I see most days and recognize, and there are others who aren't familiar.

Most of the unfamiliar ones are holidaymakers and will be leaving at the end of the day. The others are easy to spot, especially when they're new. They spend their initial days at the beach in a state of bewilderment, just like I did.

I don't speak to many people because when I was a child, Mother always told me to never talk to strangers, and it kind of stuck. The day after I arrived, I asked a man if he had seen my mother, but he ignored me and walked past. Juliette saw it happen, so she explained to whom I could speak and who I should leave alone. Generally I keep to myself anyway, and sit on the sand. I like how fine it is and how it slips so easily through my fingers.

A bright orange and purple kite catches my eye. A little girl is flying it with what looks like her father. She

shrieks with delight and claps her hands together as the kite blows in the wind and her father laughs. I watch as the kite soars up in the sky, higher and higher. Maybe I could fly away one day, I think, but if I did, I'd be even lonelier. Besides, where would I go, and how would Mother find me?

My other friend, George, is by the water, jumping over the waves and giggling. He looks over at me and squints because the sun is in his eyes. Then he gestures for me join him, grinning widely. I wave at George, smile and shout, "Tomorrow!" He gives me the thumbs up. I don't want to play today. I just want to sit here watching the sunlight on the waves.

Yesterday, George and I played tag. We chased each other across the beach as fast as we could until we were so out of breath we had no choice but to flop down, exhausted, in the sand. I know I remind him of his older sister, and I do enjoy playing with him, but yesterday I kept thinking that Mother wouldn't be able to find me, so after a while, I ran back to my spot, sat down and dug my toes back into the sand. And waited.

George is 12. He's been coming to the beach every day for five years, almost as long as I have. The first time I saw him was three months after I arrived, and he was so desperately sad. He's waiting for his father, just like I'm waiting for Mother.

I was able to comfort George a little because he's here for the same reasons I am. After a few weeks, he got used to being at the beach. Juliette says that always happens when someone new arrives, which is once or twice a year. At first, people are sad—angry even—but then it changes. All it takes is time.

Not everybody stays. Some people move on right away, but I don't

know where they go or how they get there. One elderly gentleman was only at the beach for two days. Juliette and I were chatting when we heard a shout. The gentleman had spotted his wife walking towards him and he'd called out to her, laughing and waving.

We watched them run towards each other, arms outstretched, ready to embrace. They hugged for ages before setting off together, hand-in-hand.

Just that morning, the gentleman had told us he missed his wife so much he thought his heart was going to break. He said he could hardly wait for her to arrive, and that he didn't think she would be long. After they left, we never saw them again. I suppose they have no reason to come back now that they're together.

Juliette's eyes filled with tears when she saw the gentleman with his wife. Every day she hopes that John will come for her. But what if he's in love with somebody else and never does? I couldn't possibly say that to her though. Imagine if I did and she stopped waiting for John and left, only for him to come for her. It does happen.

Our friend Alfred came to the beach every single day for 70 years. One evening last October, he gave up waiting for Rose, his fiancée, and left. Rose arrived the next morning and was distraught when Juliette told her that Alfred had gone. We didn't know where Alfred went so we couldn't help her. Those who leave the beach never say where they're going. Rose went searching for Alfred, but she may never find him. It's so sad. I don't want that to happen to Juliette or to me. That's why we're both waiting patiently.

I look to my right and see the young man sitting at the top of the cliff. We don't know his name—he won't talk to anybody. He sits and stares at the sea all day. Juliette thinks he must regret

being here, despite it being his choice to stay. She says he probably spends all of his time wishing he hadn't come in the first place and wondering what could have been if he hadn't. I think we all do that. I know I do.

Despite it making me sad, I think about Mother and my brother James. Sometimes I think about Father, too. I wonder if I would have seen him again, had we never come to the beach. He left when I was six, so I don't remember much about him and I can't picture his face anymore. All I recall is his laugh and that he used to swing me 'round and 'round in circles, saying I was the prettiest girl in the whole wide world.

Mother told me it wasn't mine or James' fault that Father went away. She said that sometimes people just don't want to be together anymore. Maybe I'll see Father again one day. Perhaps he'll surprise me and come to the beach, if he knows I'm here.

Not all of us are waiting for someone. Danny and Josie, for example, were both very sick, so they decided to come here together. The beach was always their favourite place. They sit on the same dune, arm in arm, day after day, talking and laughing. Danny told me they want to stay here forever, that they never get tired of watching the sun set together.

The wind is picking up, and the salty smell of the sea fills the air. My hair brushes across my face, so I pull it back and wish Mother was here to tie it into a ponytail like she used to.

Dark clouds are forming on the horizon, and I hope it won't rain. I don't mind the rain, and I never feel cold, but it can make the beach seem gloomy. It's easier to wait for Mother on a beautiful day.

A family arrives. They put their bags, towels, buckets and spades right next to where George is playing. He runs

past them and jumps over their towels with a whoop of delight, but they don't say anything.

As soon as I saw them, I knew that they weren't here to stay because they each have an ice-cream. I feel jealous, because it's been a long time since I tasted one. They seem like a nice family—mother, father and two young children, a boy and a girl. They'll probably make sandcastles and fill their buckets with pebbles and shells to take home. I imagine that is what my life could have been like, if Father hadn't left and we hadn't come to the beach.

I sigh and look around, then smile as I see Dave the scuba diver coming out of the sea. I like Dave. He's always happy, and he tells funny stories—my favourite is the one about a fish that got stuck in his wetsuit. You'd think he'd get bored of diving in the same place day after day, but he comes back every morning. He's been here far longer than I have. Dave isn't waiting for anybody. He chooses to stay. He told me that scuba-diving and being deep down in the ocean is the best feeling in the world.

"It was fate, Megan," he said one morning. "My heart was obviously set on me being here, and it made sure I stayed. Diving is peaceful, and I love the water. It's wonderful. It's the very best place to be."

Although I disagree, I didn't say so. Other than jumping over the waves with George, I don't like the sea anymore. Most of us feel like that. We're by the beach, but we don't venture into the water because it terrifies us.

Juliette never goes anywhere

near it. She says she can remember the day she was swimming and got terrible cramps in her legs as if it were yesterday. Alfred told her he saw what happened. He said that John had tried to help her, but he just wasn't strong enough, and in the end, the rip tide won, just as it usually does.

I loved swimming. Mother used to call me her little water-baby. But I don't love swimming now, not anymore. Not since the accident.

When our boat capsized, I tried my best to hold on to something, but the waves were too strong. Mother was in the water too, trying to swim over to me, screaming, "Grab the boat, Megan, and hold on!" I managed to push James onto the hull before another wave hit me and I lost my grip.

"Megan, Megan!" I remember Mother shouting. "Wait, wait! Megan! I'll find you! I'll find you!" It was the last thing I heard before the water forced me under, dragging me down deeper and deeper. Although I waited for as long as I could, I eventually had to open my mouth to breathe, despite knowing I'd be sucking in cold water.

Had I worn a lifejacket like I was told, I would be at home with Mother and James. But I had argued that lifejackets were uncomfortable and babyish. I'd insisted that I didn't need one because I was 16 years old and a good swimmer. After all, we were only going out on the boat for a little while. It would be my 21st birthday next month if I hadn't drowned that day. Now I will be 16 forever.

I've been at the beach every day since the accident. Mother said to

wait and that she'd find me, so she must know I'm here. I have to be patient, because when Mother arrives, it means she's no longer with James, and I don't want him to be alone. She'll come eventually. She *will*. She told me. All I need to do is wait for her.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see the young man on the top of the cliff get up and jump off, just as he does every afternoon. I remember the very first time he jumped and landed on the sand at the bottom of the hundred-foot drop with a sickening thud. I screamed as loud as I could, but stopped when he got up a few moments later and quietly walked back to the top of the cliffs, leaving his body behind him.

We don't know why he killed himself because he refuses to talk. He didn't even say a word when the ambulance came. Most people need comforting when they see their body being taken away. At least that's what Juliette and Alfred said. I wouldn't know. They never found mine.

The sun is setting now, and I watch the last rays slowly fading across the waves. Juliette walks over to me and sits down.

"Your mother didn't come today," she says, and I shake my head. "She will come one day, Megan. She will come for you. John will come for me, too. He will come."

I nod and stare at the waves until the sun disappears and darkness surrounds us.

"Tomorrow," I answer, lying down and closing my eyes as Juliette stretches out beside me. "We'll wait again tomorrow."

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*"Waiting" was first published by Empty Sink Publishing. Hannah McKinnon grew up in Switzerland and now lives in Oakville, Ontario. Her debut women's fiction novel will be submitted to publishers soon, and she's working on a second book. She's also writing a children's chapter book series, for which her three boys give her plenty of material. You can read more of Hannah's short stories here: [commuterlit.com/authors-by-last-name-n-z/authors-m-n/mckinnon-hannah/](http://commuterlit.com/authors-by-last-name-n-z/authors-m-n/mckinnon-hannah/).*



**Teddy Kang**

## **Yellow Moon** **Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois**

City life is a scribble in Rumanian. My grandfather haunts these streets. Allergies kick me in the eyeballs and throat. My cup is spoiled, and I have nothing left to learn.

My spiritual appraisal is this: Another name, another identity, more dentistry. A fish. A metal fish. Now I announce to all that flows, to everything that stands majestic against the void: *I will never be ready.*

Emily Dickinson and her lesbian lover go for a stroll through the woods. Cute kittens litter society like corsages discarded after a prom. My grandfather was a presser in the garment industry, then a hotel clerk. The moon rises. Comedians die. Their hair is identical, parted in the middle. The lover has a dour look, keeps her gaze forward, does not look at Emily.

Dogs are abused, then put in a pound. After my grandmother died, my grandfather remarried, badly.

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*Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois has had over 600 of his poems and fictions appear in literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad. He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize for work published in 2012, 2013, and 2014. His novel, Two-Headed Dog, based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital, is available for Kindle and Nook, or as a print edition. He lives in Denver.*

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