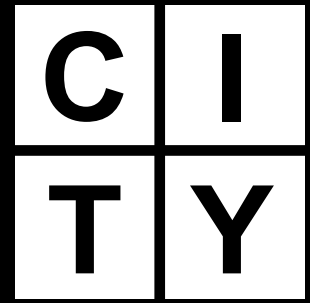
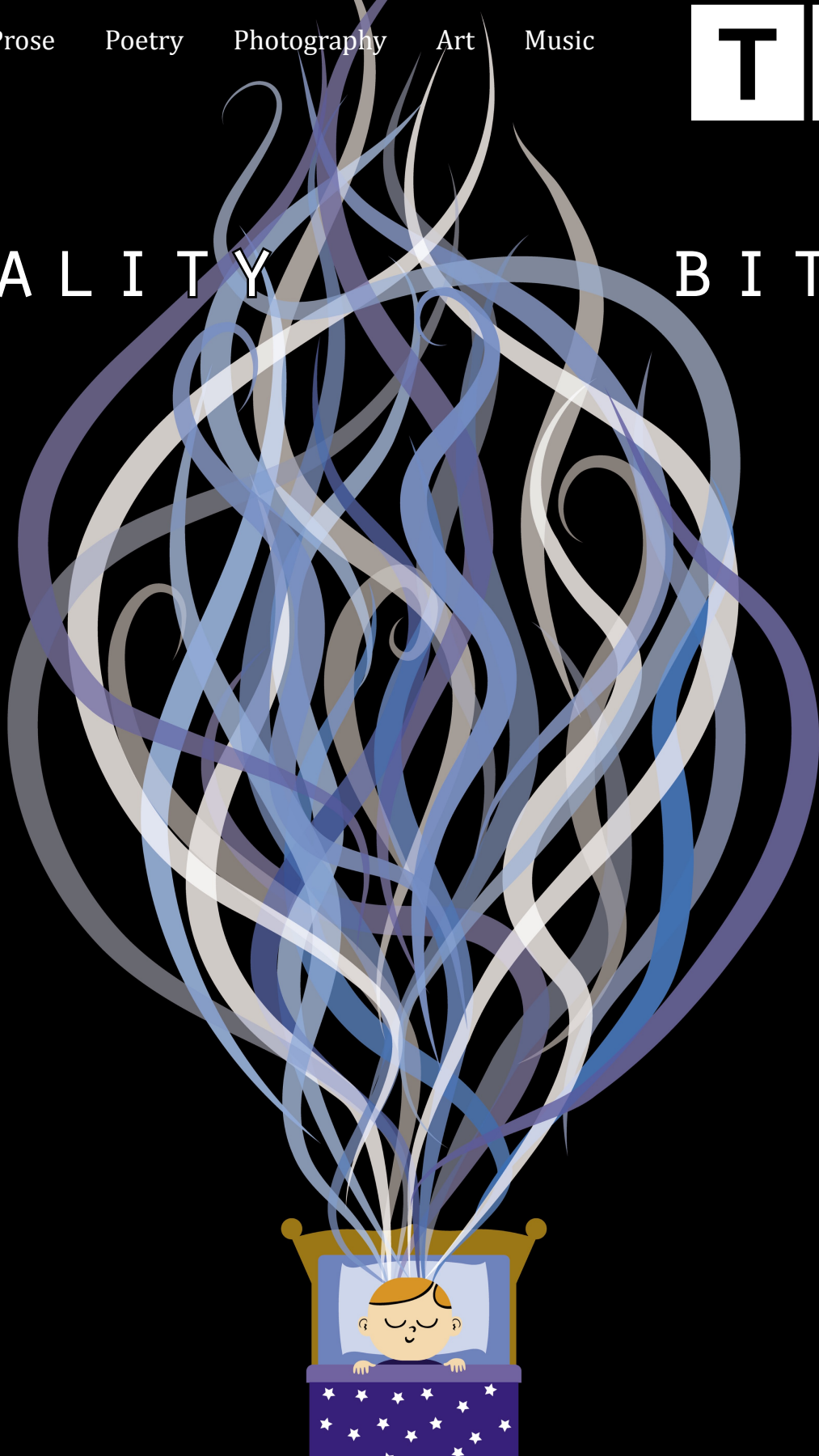


The broken

Prose Poetry Photography Art Music



REALITY BITES



Summer 2011
ISSN 1916-3304

8

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The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2011 edition: **This is why I drink.**

You read it right, blurry-eyed friends, *The Broken City's* getting soused! In this issue, we'll be tipping back a bottomless bottle of the nectar of the gods as we examine anything and everything related to boozing and carousing: beer, spirits, wine, cocktails, keg parties, open bars, closing time, fisticuffs, and of course, the inevitable hangover that follows it all.

Have you invented the ultimate cocktail or concocted a kick-ass drinking game? Fill us in! Did you write a short story about a party-hard frat house that takes on an evil dean and ruins the homecoming parade? Send it along! Have you been hiding a hilarious yarn about "that time I got wasted and...?" We'd love to hear it! Do you have an essay on the history of beer that you can't find a home for? We're all ears!

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, comics, illustrations, photography, music/book reviews to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com.

Deadline is: November 1, 2011. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

Nothing that fits the theme? Send something anyway—there may be room for non-conforming work too.

Cover Illustration

Mouki K. Butt is an illustrator and animator. She blames her Southern Alberta upbringing for her belief that ghosts sound like wind and trains. minorepic.net/~mouki.

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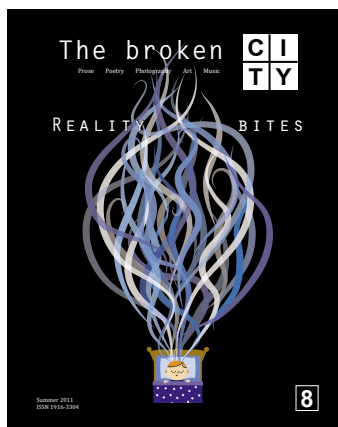
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Sabrina Malik

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In this issue:

The Broken City looks in on small town Ontario, via Daniel



Perry's minor league hockey drama, "Comets." Then things start to get weird: Elvis; aliens; a Cyclops; Parisians; Alice (yep, that Alice); Rube Goldberg; sex toys; Busby Berkeley; a murder mystery. **Reality bites**, but are we ready for the bedlam of its opposite?

On the Web:

www.thebrokencitymag.com

Submission Guidelines:

www.thebrokencitymag.com/submissions.html

Correspondence:

thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com

Mail

Please accept my submission for your theme “reality bites...” Do not hold it against me that it rhymes. –MD

Sorry, MD, but we'll most definitely be holding that against you (against it, more accurately).

Please find my submission attached—hopefully void of double-spaced periods. –JH

Please find the adjoining manuscript (attached pdf). Hopefully, I observed your submission guidelines with exact-

ness; perhaps I exceeded them! –KD

Looks like The Broken City's onerous submission guidelines are finally steering (scaring) submitters in sensible directions. Remember, kids: no book or magazine publisher wants or requires two spaces after a period.

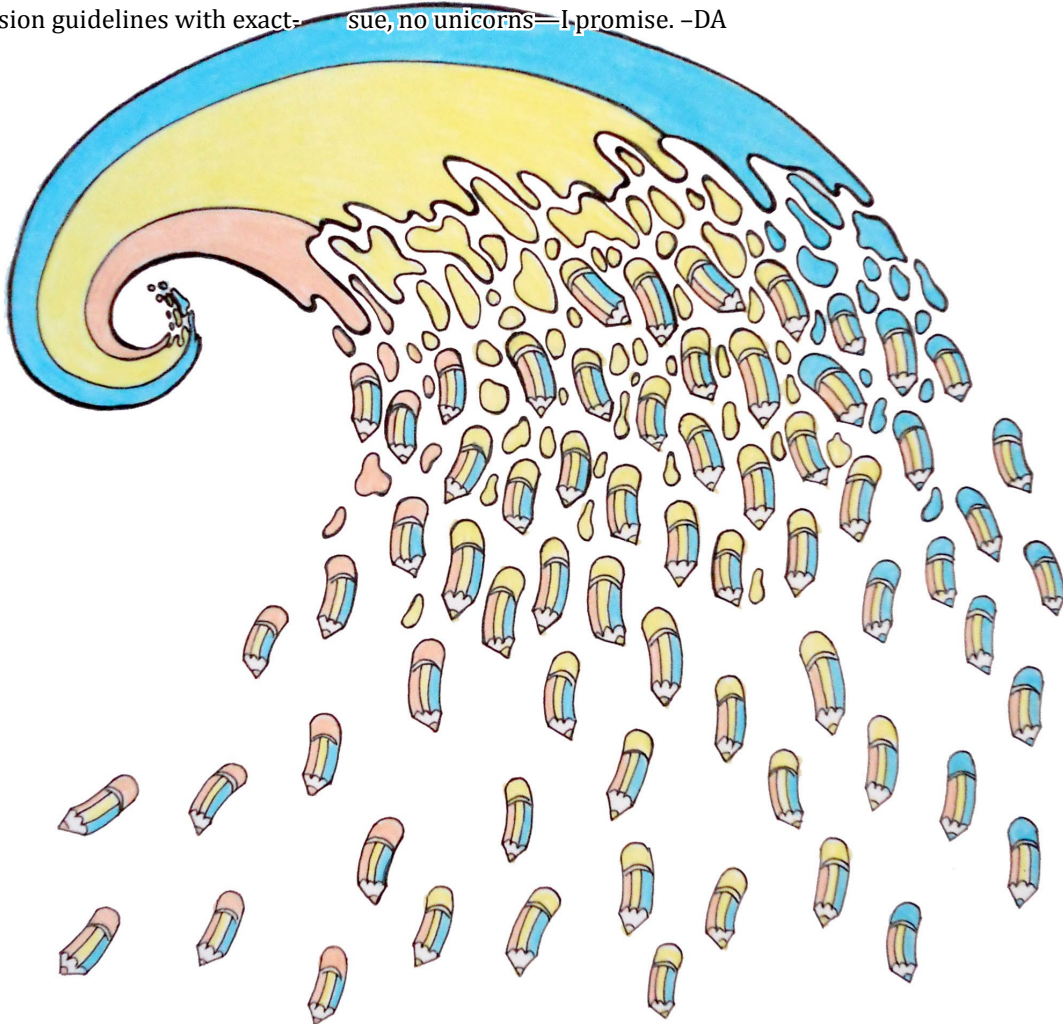
Thank you for considering the attached short story, under 3,000 words and devoid of unicorns. –BD

My submission for the Reality Bites issue, no unicorns—I promise. –DA

Unicorn! Unicorn! Unicorn...

P.S. This is not a submission but im sure if you want to meet we could arrange something, maybe, well i dont know, probably not since im stuck in Calgary with no more money :(Oh the life that we choose to lead. –AC

*We appreciate everyone's strict adherence to the No Unicorns policy for **Reality bites**. We probably should have also stipulated that we're not fishing for dates.*



Comets

Daniel Perry

Wade works in the yard at Gable's Nursery, transplanting shrubs and lugging seed bags to the cars in the lot. He shows up every morning in the same grubby Aerosmith T-shirt, but it's so humid that by ten he's draped it over a fencepost. I watch him the same way I did that first summer, muscles flexed taut in his arms and his chest, six-pack and V-lines pointing down to his jeans, cut off at the knees. He never wears sunscreen and I've never seen him burn; his skin just gets darker and more leathery every day.

He moved here five years ago to play Junior C hockey. People say the C stands for "cut," as in, "Windsor just cut Wade Smith, so now he's with the Comets in Currie, Ontario," the small town in the south-west as empty as outer space where a guy goes to *work on his game*, or to *grow into his body*.

C's not the lowest league, D is, but that *actually* stands for "development." D teams groom players for B, the stepping-stone before Major Junior, the Ontario Hockey League, the O. As in "orbit." With teams in London, Windsor and Sarnia, and even across the bridges in Michigan, junior hockey is the sun in Currie, and Centennial Arena is Cape Canaveral, where teenage girls wait for the next rocket out.

Wade was the Comets' sixth defenseman, heavy-hitting and slow on his skates. I never pretended he'd make the pros, but his marks were good enough.

Some forgotten-about hockey team at some football-crazy college in some place in the States, like Boise, Idaho, would have given him a scholarship, had he applied. Story of a lot of guys out here. Wade never got back to the O, and he didn't plan beyond grade 12, so next thing you know he's settled in Currie, working at Gable's, for now.

We met at the counter always littered with catalogues—everything that hides greener grass on your side of the fence—and a month later, we started dating, if you can call it that. We *date* and *go out* like kids in '50s movies *go steady*, but there aren't many *actual* dates. Wizard Cinemas closed when I was six, and the only restaurant that's not actually a bar is Wang's Chinese, a dirty little room across Main Street from Brewskie's, where people get take-out but no one eats in.

To have a date somewhere nice you need to drive to London, which most people don't manage before they're 17. Wade and I were older than that when we met, but until we moved in together, a date meant a video in his apartment, over Darla's Flowers, volume cranked to drown out the sport trucks with no mufflers as they roared up and down the Main Drag. Main Street. County Road 17.

Wade and I live on Lyle Street. Where the pavement ends there's not even a barrier, just greyed wooden posts supporting rusty wire, and corn

stalks as far as you can see. It's a subdivision from the '60s, when Currie didn't boom; the four houses that *were* built are regularly flipped, and thoroughly trashed, by a stream of twenty-something single guys who work at the Ritter Pulley plant, buying when their jobs feel safe then selling when they get laid off anyway. We bought ours just over a year ago, peeling white paint and missing shingles and all, with a plan to fix it up then sell big to a commuter from the city, who'll go on like an idiot about small towns and a *slower pace of life*. If anything, stuff happens *faster* here, usually because the girl's pregnant. That's not our story, thank God, but this spring Wade proposed regardless.

We drove to this fancy restaurant in London with a view of the Thames, near the century homes in Old South, and for dinner we had the specials because they're bigger and they're always a good deal. Wade wanted to stroll through the park afterward and watch the sun set over the river, but I had told Sharon Foster—my maid-of-honour, by the way—that we'd meet everyone at Brewskie's. Of course we would. It was Friday.

In the pick-up, Wade sulked the whole way back to Currie. I told him to grow up when we got out at the bar, which I kind of regret now.

Inside we found Sharon at a table with Jeff Taylor, who she still isn't *actually* dating, but who she always

reserves for a closing time make-out. His brown eyes widened and he smiled when he saw us, but when Wade shook his head Jeff flagged down the waitress and ordered Jager shots, which we downed before Sharon dragged him off.

Jeff's not a dancer, but at Brewskie's what counts is that you try. Most guys don't. Middle-aged women line the bar every week, believing that their Dream Man will walk in on any given night. It takes a few years, but eventually they hone in on the guys down the rail who stand drinking Labatt's and yelling "Faggot Frog!" at the ones who buy Molson, knowing full well one of them will be from Pierre, the little town up the river where everyone's named Tremblay.

Sharon waved to us over Jeff's shoulder from the dance floor. I stood up and reached for Wade's hand, but he pulled it away.

"Oh, *come on*," I said. "Are you *still* mad? You're such a child sometimes."

He pulled a green velvet box from his pocket and tossed it on the table. It skipped toward me and slid to a stop near the edge.

Wade said, "You really should've come for a walk."

I picked it up and pretended the surprise wasn't blown—what else comes in boxes like this?—but I actually gasped when I opened it.

I said, "Wade, does this mean..."

"Yeah," he muttered.

I looked down at the ring and its three little diamonds. The biggest one leapt from the centre.

"Yes," I said, then, "Yes! Wade, yes!" I cried. "Yes! Yes!"

My screams carried over the music. Everyone stopped dancing and turned to look, so for show I jumped into his arms. He wasn't ecstatic like I was, but then again, he doesn't really *do* ecstatic. Sometimes you'd think he's made of ice. But he caught me and I kissed him and I held the open box above his head. The stones caught the bar lights in red and blue and green and drew hoots and applause from the crowd.

* * *

Jeff and some friends kidnapped Wade last weekend and took him to Huron Beach, where they played golf and drank beer and hit on coked-out cougars at Piranhas, the seedy bar at the bottom of the strip. I wasn't going to retaliate but Sharon insisted. She even called my boss and got the weekend off for me, *for my stagette*.

Six of us eat dinner at an Italian place in London. Garofalo's, downtown on Richmond. It's a Friday in May. The restaurant's full of high schoolers laying groundwork for the prom, not drinking, and taking the bus home. Our table empties four bottles of wine, but Sharon

doesn't have any. She's chauffeuring us in her parents' minivan.

"Tonight's the real deal," she says. "No one's driving home tonight."

For a moment I imagine a super-stretch limo and all of us stepping out at Fifth Avenue, which even if it's in London is a pretty ritzy club. We alight on the red carpet, down 15 potato pounds, firm in silhouette designer dresses. Flashbulbs snap. Teenaged hordes cry that they love us. And then I remember. We're going to Brewskie's. I'll be in the tacky pink veil Sharon bought, and though it's a girls' night, Wade will be there. He says he understands if we play all the games, and he even said that he could stay home, but Jeff's out of school for the summer, and Arlo Johnson's on leave from the army, and like the sign says out front, Brewskie's is The Only Bar in Town. I couldn't ask Wade to do that.

On our way through the door Sharon hands me the list. It's in seven or eight hands and it covers all the classics.

Get a photo dancing between two hot young studs.

Come home with a pair of boxers.

Kiss a guy who's not Wade.

On the lips.

If we were in Huron Beach where we don't know anyone, I'd do it all in ten minutes with two juiceheads and move on. At home I'm most afraid of the kiss. But it's one night, it's senseless,

and it's more for the other girls than me. If I show Wade the list after he's had a few drinks, he probably won't care when I plant one on Sharon's man. Which Jeff *isn't*, by the way.

We order drinks and head for the dance floor, where girls we haven't talked to since high school flock around us. Someone—Sharon—has tipped a couple of guys off, and already one's approaching with his shorts in his hand. They're clean, thank God, so I play it up for a few seconds, wearing them on my veil like a tiara. The girls all scream. The first ones to quiet pull their lists from their purses and automatically stroke off a line.

Above the dance floor, on the riser, DJ Eric leans into his mic.

"Make sure to say hi to Stella Callaghan tonight," he says, turning on his Ultra Cool Voice. He's worked here so long no one calls him just Eric, and these days he sounds like an infomercial.

"This is her *stagette*," he adds. "When you see her next week, she'll be Stella *Smith*!"

The girls scream again.

Two drinks, ten songs and half the list later, Wade walks in wearing his old Comets sweater, number 76. Jeff and Arlo follow in plaid button-ups and too-tight Wranglers, tailed by a guy I've never seen before. His jeans fit even closer, navy and expensive below a tailored black dress shirt, and his long hair is trimmed instead of hanging out the back of a ball cap in a pony tail. He's definitely not from around here.

I catch myself staring and turn away, watching sideways as the quartet nears the bar. It orders eight beer and eight shots, drains the liquor, and takes the bottles to a dark corner table.

Sharon grabs my shoulder and points to the door. The Brown twins

have arrived and they're beelining toward me, convinced they still qualify as two hot young studs. Gary's still in shape after four years in the O, but he's been back since the NHL passed him over last June, working with his dad at Ritter and drinking at Brewskie's with Jake, who quit hockey at fourteen and has the gut now to prove it. Gary's hips sandwich me into Jake's blubbery middle and it makes me glad Wade couldn't skate. Sharon's camera flashes. The girls unfold their papers.

When the song ends I free myself and make for the bar, where I order two Blues. I take them to Wade's table and pull up a fifth chair.

"This is my friend Gianluigi, from college," Jeff says, pointing to the new guy. "He's an exchange student from a small town in Italy. Gianluigi!" Jeff shouts over the music. "This is Stella!"

Wade adds, "My fiancée."

"Hi," I say.

Gianluigi looks into my eyes.

"Lucky man," he says, through a heavy accent.

He glances at Wade then looks back to me.

"Are you having fun?"

Wade grumbles, "*Oh yeah*. She's got a whole *list* of it."

Jeff looks down, at the table.

Wade snorts.

Arlo stares through him.

"Show me," Gianluigi says.

I hand him the paper. The kiss is all that's left and I think Wade knows it. Sharon's been checking in with the guys all night, probably as a lead-up to another toss with Jeff, and I'm pretty sure she's told them that her boy toy's got the job.

I start to say "It's almost—" but Gianluigi stands up. He puts his hands on the back of my head and kisses me.

Full on the lips. As he pulls away his bangs brush my face.

I exhale.

I open my eyes.

Jeff and Arlo each have Wade by an arm and Arlo's on his feet, blocking the Italian. A rap song's slow bass gives the standoff a heartbeat and again, the whole bar is watching.

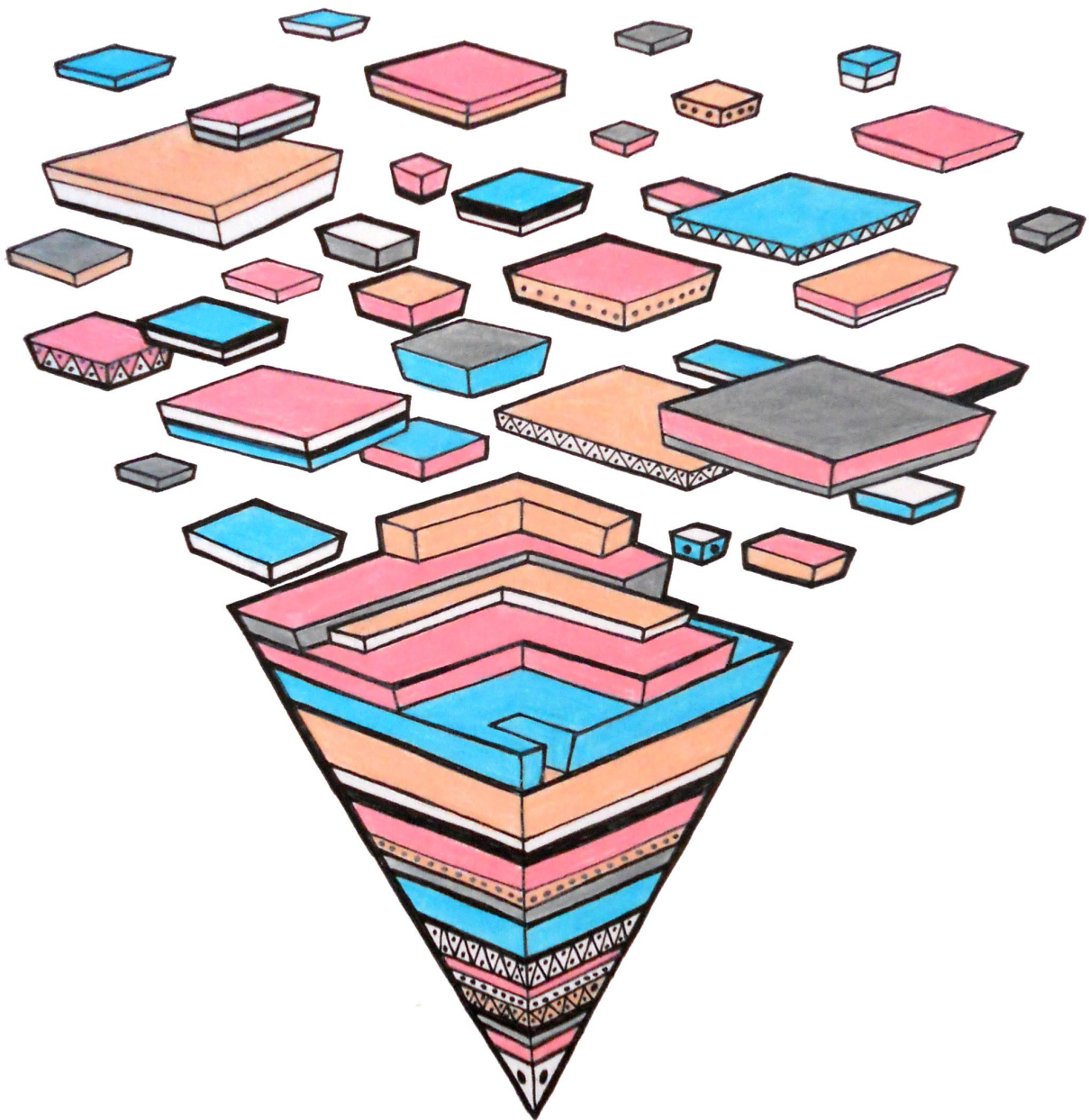
Gianluigi meets Wade's glare with a lopsided smile. He shrugs.

"There," he says. "All finished. Now go get married."

Teeth crack his stone face and Wade laughs sharply, then in rhythmic bursts, until he's gasping with tears down his cheeks. Jeff and Arlo release him and the crowd starts applauding, led by Sharon, who chants "Stel-la! Stel-la!" I climb on the table and raise the list over my head. I rip frantically. Pieces fall all over the floor. I reach down and grab Wade by the jersey. He stands and I kiss him, softly, then hungrily. For show I leap into his arms. He cradles me against his torso and it's still hard and muscular. No matter where he takes me, we'll end up back here, but as we burst through the door I imagine a Ferrari—bright red, roof open, and zooming down a vineyard-lined highway. In the streetlights my hair leaves a long shining tail.

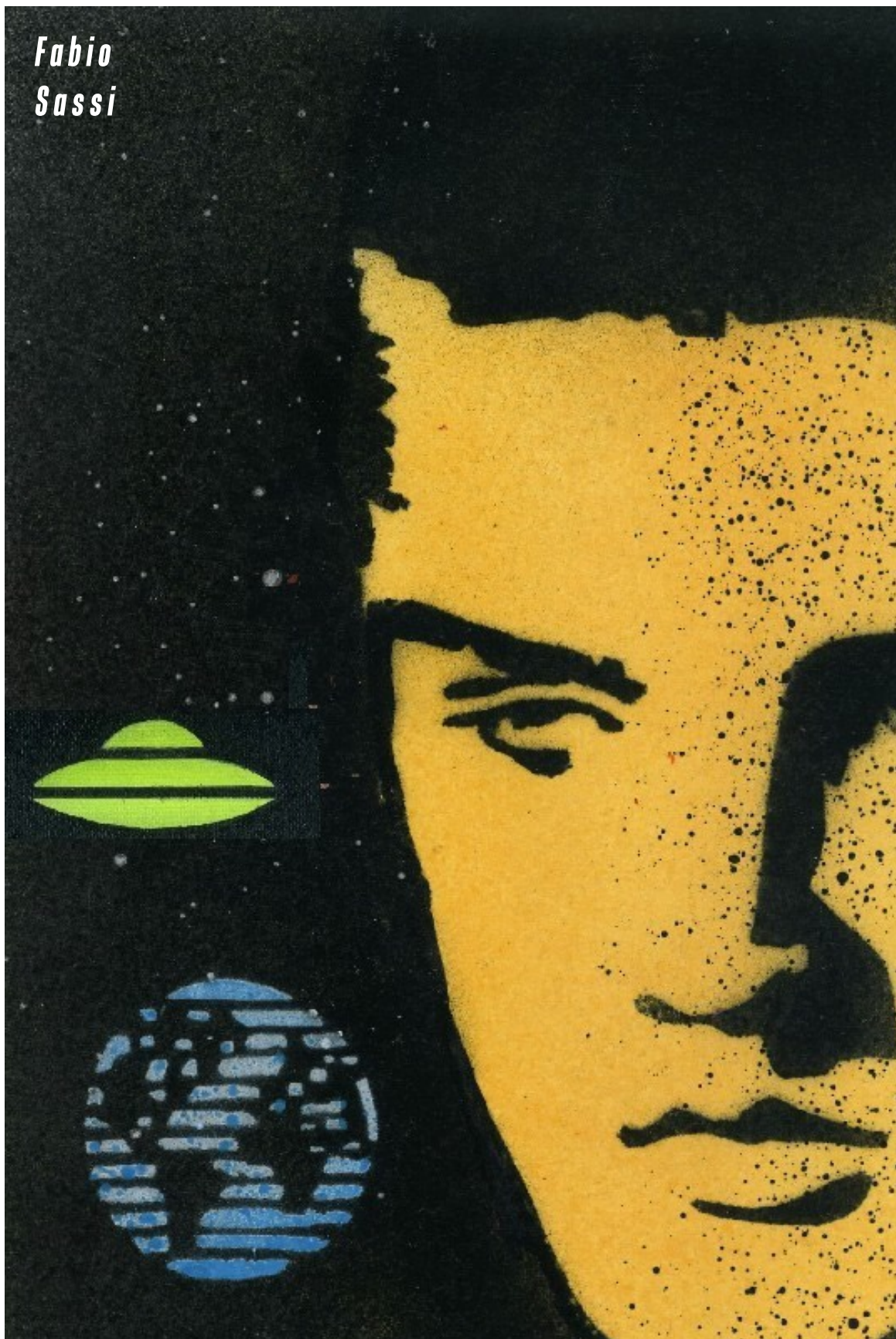
Daniel Perry grew up in Glencoe, Ontario, and has an MA in Comparative Literature. His short fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in the 2011 Broken Pencil Death Match, The Hart House Review, The Nashwaak Review, White Wall Review and echolocation. He has lived in Toronto since 2006.

←--- REALITY



NOT REALITY ---->

*Fabio
Sassi*



*Fabio
Sassi*



Eye on the Prize

Lynne Potts

Remember the Cyclops—single-eyed
asleep in the cave, poor bastard, hiss
and twist from no eyes at all smoldering
hole in the forehead not able to think
his way out of a paper bag, no heart,
except for Circe or Sirens, anything
with tits: eye on the prize.

And O poor Gloucester
blinded, so to speak, by speech politic,
sugar on the tongue
a daughter and a son with eye on the prize
mansion with gold eyelet—eye lit
(you bet) by seventeenth century glitz,
the greed that takes you down.

Then poor Roxanne, one more
century's demise, her eye colour
like many others—prone to poetry
blind as a bat but hearing voices,
hid lover singing up a blind alley,
eye-hooked, eye lashed, eye lit,
bee-lined for the prize.

Or fish-eyed, say, like a flounder
two eyes on the upper side
bottom-dwelling in sediment,
myopic from all that looking up
in muck, near-sighted
alas, sigh-eyed scuttling across the
shocked eyes of ragged seas.

And now eyes in the sky,
whorl-wing over highways
needle's eye over a Manhattan haystack
you with a highball in hand
pie-eyed, ribald, ready
to take beams from other eyes
my mote, the prize.

You eyeing me and me,
your eyesore, sty in the eye
my face in a spoon,
trick of the eye upside down,
awry, habit of acting *on the sly*
haywire, everyone looking—
Crackerjack or Blackjack
O, for just some little paltry prize.

Lynne Potts has had work appear in a range of journals including The Paris Review, Guernica, Denver Quarterly and The Dalhousie Review. She works as a freelance writer in several cities, is Poetry Editor at AGNI, and has had work selected for Poetry Daily. Her Web site is: lynnepotts.com.

Jan Švankmajer's Surrealist Alice

(stop-motion animation, 1988)

Christen Thomas

Alice pursues a stuffed rabbit
which breaks out of a glass case near
her bird-legged bed, runs up a rocky crest
into the drawer of a writing desk.

And when is a Raven like a writing desk?

Interrupting the rabbit eating
sawdust from a bowl with a spoon,
amid rubbish, glass-eyed lizards,

Alice narrates all-sides of dialogue:

Your hair wants cutting,
said the white rabbit,

reaching into his open chest
to pull out a beating pocket watch.

The hare wants cutting,
retorts Alice,

hearing the execution-sentence snip
of scissors in his pocket,
and eyeing the gape in his chest which
leaks sawdust instead of blood.

Tripping into a bucket, Alice
falls down an elevator shaft,
survives entrapment

within a doll-like shell, walks into
a bowl of milk in shrunken form,
and is locked into a food pantry.

Upon waking, the rabbit
is still missing from his cage,
dusty scissors linger.

Christen Thomas is an editor and digital coordinator for a Toronto book publisher and edits poetry for a small press. Her poetry has appeared in The Toronto Quarterly, The Fiddlehead, The Antigonish Review, QWERTY and Paragon Journal. She is currently training to play roller derby. Follow her on twitter: @hoipoietai.

After I Dreamt of Electric Sheep *Hebo Hall*

I built a Rube Goldberg machine from memories that were not authorized, with twist-ties and glue sticks, candles and Coke bottles, following the blueprints found inside the specially-marked boxes of Froot Loops. Admission costs a quarter, but I got two of these

half-off coupons and a penny cut in two for just this occasion.

An Elvis impersonator sits on the couch, rhinestones reflecting pinwheels and pulleys, and bedazzling the taut Tropic of Cancer stretched across the geography of his belly. His belt notched for

the fried peanut butter and banana sandwich that threatens the tilt of his axis, so it waits in a waxed paper bag until after posing for the painting of the postcard on my refrigerator. Your quarter is the catalyst for imbalance on the solid-gold scale which moves

an egg onto the platform to be picked up by the oncoming Lionel train. Folk art and Physics celebrate their unholy union with tinker toys and Lite-Brites that project Busby Berkeley's bathing beauties onto recycled wedding invitations. The reasonable Richard Nixon

facsimile ordered online arrives hands raised above his head. Each holding neither the international signs for peace nor victory, but four arthritic fingers of a man who looks more like someone else than himself. All this for twelve and a half cents. I hid in an abandoned

ice cream parlor across the street. Behind books lining the slanted walls, I catalogued my apologies in the pages of Penguin paperbacks, and tunneled elaborate escape routes through volumes of published material. I've re-arranged the debris to write myself a different ending.

Hebo Hall writes poetry and unsolicited social commentary. His poems have appeared in various literary journals, while his groundbreaking social commentary has been limited to the comments section of the Huffington Post. He lives with his wife in Steamboat Springs, CO. Agents and publishers should direct inquiries to: hiroprotagonist@hotmail.com.

Noire, as Happened

Lynne Potts

Counter with hambone, split pea soup in a burnt
pan scuffed out the door where the dog lay dead

tired, cabbage in the bit-dirt garden-hoed row
where the row began, dog's head with bad ear

a pounding that happened; burnt-brown too,
the hay's pitchfork hung in the mud room.

Smoldering black clay soil, rusted fence
when he, ham-strung habits, leather boots

in the cabbage, came lumbering: barking dog,
tin contraption in the garden clanging,

no head room, pinned, choked collar dog
and cabbage woman in the mud room,

fiddlehead-fern wall paper stained to decay-
tooth yellow, her hair in a pillory

of trowels and shovels, noosed dog,
split throat leather, tin-contraption gasping.

Then, villain gone, ham bone on the counter,
fern-paper's peeled paste, burnt pea soup tin.

Dancing Around Paris

Bob Wakulich

The over-smiling gentleman on the Paris Metro holding a tall, sweating can of Heineken thought it was important to keep reminding us that we were "EEE-DEE-OATS!" between his elegant rants about filth and sorrow. "*Encroyable*," he whispered, delicately shaking his head and triggering another dusting of dandruff on his sloping shoulders. His wild gaze locked briefly with timid eyes as the train eased into the station and he pointed out that none of us owes anybody anything, but they don't owe us anything either, so all that's left is love. "*Certainment!*" he insisted, offering a proud and shameless finger as he danced out the door.

Oh, to be the garbage men of Paris when the moon is full and the *rues* and *boulevards* are teeming with swollen trash bins waiting patiently by the curb for us to arrive. We would be deft and faultless, moving towards

them with a grand ease, twirling and jumping and spinning and shuffling and dipping and tipping and flipping and dumping and shouting and laughing to the rhythms of relentless traffic until we stole away with our spoils and slid into the next pool of darkness, leaving the bins back under their lamp posts to contemplate their sudden emptiness.

"Perhaps you would like me to show you how it works," said the extremely helpful sales clerk at the sex toy shop in Montmartre. A smile never cracked her face, and we looked around sheepishly for an adjoining room with a thick curtain or a sliding door where this kind of thing might be done. Though the possible functions of the apparatus remained intriguing, we politely declined her offer and snickered through a stumbling tango back towards the street.

Bob Wakulich was born in St. Catharines, ON, and has lived in Thunder Bay, Oakville, Calgary, Nelson, Saanichton, Mill Bay, and now Cranbrook, BC, where he writes a reasonably regular column for the Daily Townsman. His work has appeared in American, Canadian and European journals. Contact him via Bob, The Cardboard Man on Facebook.

185 West End Ave.

Leigh Phillips

I am the house. The house will watch itself to sleep. You are the sleep. I am the sky. You are the eye. I am outside, lost in a game of freeze tag. Zero. One. You're it. Two. I count the cataract scars back to stars. You watch my summers stretch from you. We share a shore called lives. I name it "Hips of Night Named You." The house was sold. Out of the dream you step with suitcase. I skin the verbs like a lost animal. Your back is the bone my death wants to pass through. In you, my icicles undo themselves. No one has skins. For example, you are the strand of a golden blue something. I pass for love under conditions of crisis, the scales of an iridescent fish set to flute. I am leading a panel discussion on ache, or, my body is an advent calendar full of gaping shutters as January metaphor; you are politics taking its clothes off, clasping the colossal Yes. Your finger to wrist is lending the music to light again. I am the ear that begs music in the tone of dawn. In conclusion, silence bursts its shores as rivers make wrinkles in the tree house under stars. Then your tongue opens autumn like a fever. It opens my legs like a finger is a song, dragging stitches along a spine of lip sewn on bone. You are a topographic map, shuffling its shoulder blades and collarbone over my hand, gone rain. I'm the neighborhood that's partially safe but when I'm lit, I'm lit. My teeth are broken tombstones. Your teeth, uneven brownstones pressed on a sky that sits the better half of God. Earth, you don't bother with my shadows. I am so small. You are a sailboat. When you unfurl, your chest is the triptych of angels, your eye, a roman blue fresco. I am the house. Your face is a window of the house that is choral. Emerald sea chorus, you were my coral. I am a singing half of hurt that dreams a hand breaks through my black coats and sees. Only you can fumble me out of the place I've been stashed. If the kiss is home, let us be French. If home is a house, it's the bones you left beside me. You are my house. I am your sleep. If the kiss is clumsy, call it a gun.

Leigh Phillips is an Assistant Professor of English at Hostos Community College of CUNY. Her stories, memoirs, poems and criticism appear in Gulf Stream, So To Speak: A Feminist Journal of Language and Art, Paterson Literary Review, and The Prose Poetry Project. She has one poetry manuscript, Naked in the Heartbreak House.

The Axis of Fault

Susan (Crowe) Fenner

In Ian's dream his wife is still living:
They're on a tour boat headed toward the glacier during their Patagonia trip. The ice slopes up from the lake's end into the Torres del Paine range. The boat hugs the shore as they approach the base and suddenly his wife shouts heumul! Everyone rushes to that side of the boat to see the rare deer of the Chilean Andes, but mist slides down the mountain and Ian can't spot it. Then he sees his daughter playing on the glacier's slope, not as an 18 year old, but younger, maybe ten or 11. The boat lists, precarious with uneven weight distribution. Next, the whole glacier awakens and rears, and the child rides the dragon's back in a seismic ripple. The long-predicted quake has let loose and Ian shouts at her to get off. But his voice is sucked under the screams of tourists now sliding overboard. The boat's alarm bells jangle through him as he watches his daughter tossed by the glacier in a trajectory that arcs down into the icy waters.

Ian jerks onto his elbows; his heart slams his ribs. The alarm bells continue. As his arm reaches for the phone, his brain processes: 1:27 a.m. Beni? Past her 12:30 curfew. Maybe she wants an extension? Car trouble?

"Hello?" His dream voice quakes.

A male voice presses against

his ear, a callous intimacy. It says his daughter is at the police station.

- the dark slides down the walls around him -
The officer says she's hit a pedestrian.
- his bed tilts toward icy waters -
The victim is dead.

- he sees Benita plummet on a downward arc -
and his universe breaches on the tectonic shifting of his life.

Ian flicks on the lamp, ruptures the night. His impulse is to phone Sol. His good friend was there for him through his wife's dying. Sol would have some advice, lawyers always do. But it's late.

There are moments, rare but certain, when time splinters, where myriad possibilities coexist. Ian is caught at the oblique intersection of capricious chance and divine design, thinks he has options and just as assuredly has none.

Time had splintered in the moment Benita floated into the world on amniotic potential—academic, musician, athlete? All was possible. Eleven years later, time fissured again and his wife slipped out on a cancer snake, confiscated her love, left him as father/mother. It happened recently when Beni was identified as a candidate for a

major entrance scholarship, her world a poker hand of possibilities.

Time crumbles again, here in the taxi, as headlights stab an opaque dark. A young man is dead, a young man with family and friends who will grieve his instant amputation from the intricacies of their lives, who will repeatedly ache from the phantom limb. His mind unravels, lumpy and woolly. And if it were Beni dead? Those emotions sludge in Ian's gut.

She had been despondent these past months. Since her boyfriend dumped her she'd become a hermit crab in her room, avoided school dances, movies with friends, found refuge in her studies. Ian had been happy to lend her his car earlier, when her friend suggested they go to a club. The question of what will happen to her now wells up. He chokes on it, bile taste in his throat. The thought of how he'll face his colleagues leaves him soaked in shame. He spins a cocoon of dread.

Tomorrow he will visit the bereaved family and—what? Express his condolences, obviously, his unfathomable regret. He wonders if he should offer to pay for the funeral, maybe buy a headstone. The mess in his gut congeals and erupts as anger in his chest. Damn her. She's blown her life, her chances for the scholarship, his investment of 18

years into a faultless life.

Ian's mind slithers... he may be father to a convict... guilty by association... passed over for international geological contracts... shunned by fellow geologists... dropped from poker nights with the guys. His bristled jaw presses into his palms and the pressure of elbow points on his knees is pain/release. Time coalesces, discharges him at the police station.

The officer briefs Ian: their information is that Benita was driving the BMW registered to Ian, with her friend Rianne reportedly in the passenger seat. As she travelled east in the 2700 block of Nels Road, at about 12:20 a.m., she allegedly struck an 18 year old man who was apparently walking in the same direction. Paramedics took the victim to the hospital but he appears to have succumbed to his injuries. Benita submitted to a breathalyzer that came back at .03. They're notifying the next of kin, reportedly on vacation. It's still under investigation and they're interviewing a witness right now.

Beni is hunched like a kicked cat, in a chair, as the officer lets Ian into a room that smells of fusty cigarettes. Her dark curls are matted, mascara molds on her closed eyelids.

* * *

Beni decides to grab a quick coffee with Rianne at midnight to dilute their couple beer. The starless night is as dense as crushed velvet, incongruent with the sparklers exploding in her sternum. It could have been a drag, the band could've sucked, the crowd could've been lame. Just when Beni was about to suggest they split, he'd asked her to dance. He was cute in a quirky goth way, jet-dyed hair cut in two severe lengths that swung over one eye, snake-

bites in his lower lip. She felt too girly with him: her swingy dress, not even a nose stud.

Rianne puffs across her coffee and burbles. "You guys talked a lot when you were dancing. Spill it—what'd you find out?"

Beni tells her that he plays guitar in a garage band and she told him she's taken voice lessons and sung in school musicals. That he's into soccer just like her. That he wants to study music but has to work for a year after grad to get the money together. She munches a chocolate chunk cookie while her heart salivates.

"I told him I start university in September to major in English Lit." His smile had been genuine; it seemed to erupt from a controlled effort not to smile, to be cool. Guy was his name, he rhymed it with 'me'. They had weighed and sifted each other, wondered if they would get cooking.

"I heard you give him your phone number when he and his friend said goodbye. Beni's got a Guy." Rianne sings the phrase like a pop singer, full of innuendo.

"It rhymes with 'me,'" Beni says. *Mine?* she wonders. "Yeah, I said we could hang out, sing a few of their tunes."

"I'm not messing now, Beni, I really am stoked you met him. It's been a downer with you lately."

Beni sips long, eyes lowered to coffee rings overlapped on the table. They remind her of a wire Slinky that tumbles downstairs and, just when it seems to falter, pulls together and drops to the next level. Her life.

"Time to get some good vibes back in your life. Hey, we gotta go if you're gonna drop me and get home by your curfew." Rianne drains her coffee.

In the car, Rianne cajoles,

invents fantasies, and Beni relishes the rush of scattered wild flowers and Guyl-ian chocolates of her imagination.

"*Nothing you could say can tear me away from my guy.*" Rianne croons, leans into Beni and catches her scent, fermented flowers.

"You are *on* tonight. Cut it," and Beni elbows her off.

Rianne is relentless. "He's got a cute little overbite, just wait till he sucks your lower lip."

Beni tosses her head back and laughs at the night-black sunroof. The car sheers and jolts, caught by a ragged pothole. She yanks the vehicle on course, pulls her wits with it.

"Now *that* felt like a real good hump." Rianne tickles her connotation into her friend's side. Beni squeals and jerks her hips away as both feel a solid *whump* to the car. Like a speed bump.

"What was that?" Beni rolls on slowly, fearful if she stops she might find out.

"I don't know, I was looking at you. Do you think you hit something—a dog?"

"It's too dark, the street lights are out, here. Can't see anything in my mirror. Look out the window."

Rianne releases her seatbelt, twists onto her knees to look out.

"There's something on the road back there, maybe two things, like somebody crouched over a dog."

Beni stops. "I think we better check it out." She creeps in reverse.

"Wait. Someone just stood up. They're wearing black, it's hard to see."

She brakes and the red tail lights warm a scene that freezes her.

A male voice shouts: Call an ambulance.

Rianne fumbles with her phone to call 911, and they wait suspended in glacial silence. Except for the whimper

of the voice back there.

* * *

Ian sees that she's possibly asleep. Her dress drapes in ice-cream folds beneath her breasts, angelic soft, and for a tricky flick of time she is her Chilean mother: permanently tanned Latino-fusion skin stretched taut over a woman poised to erupt.

"Benita, my *heumul*?"

Her eyes startle open, jumpy and dark with the unutterable.

Ian bundles her in his arms, hugs her tight to keep her bones from corroding with fright, to stop the ooze of contagious guilt. But he's unable to contain her watery words that roil over rocks, skid down glaciers and drown in his ears. He sits on a chair and rocks her until the freefall of the night's events distill into one comprehensive drop.

"I killed someone." Her voice is smaller than a drop. "What will happen?"

Ian's voice crackles like a nightmare. "It's too soon to know. I've been thinking about the boy's parents. They've had a huge loss and you and I know what that's like. We need to go to them."

"Oh, God, I can't." Beni's voice pitches high, like an 11 year old. "What would I say?"

"I'll be there, my *heumul*. I'll help you get through it."

"No. I just want to die, Dad. How can I face anyone at school? I don't even know who it was."

The door opens and the officer enters. "Do either of you know a Sidney Gursky?" Ian doesn't. Beni shakes her head.

"He seemed to recognize your name, Benita. He's the young man who

Presumed Drowned *Howie Good*

1

Early evening.
A stranger standing
by the door
of her secluded cottage,
hands clenched.

2

A man
that witnesses
described
as foreign-
looking sleeps
till noon
the next day.

3

Rats the size
of small dogs

spread rumors
of unwanted babies

disappearing
through trapdoors

into the river.

4

Dry white crumbs on the table.
A story without a story.

Howie Good, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of the full-length poetry collections Lovesick (Press Americana, 2009), Heart With a Dirty Windshield (BeWrite Books, 2010), and Everything Reminds Me of Me (Desperanto, 2011), as well as 31 print and digital poetry chapbooks.

was with the victim. There's some new information. He now says the victim was very depressed; we need to check that out when we locate the parents. And that he was drunk; we'll have to wait for the medical report on that one. This Gursky fellow says his friend had been suicidal. He says the victim threw himself in front of your car."

Time splinters again. Formless words plunge into an abyss. Silence hangs, waits to hit bottom.

Eventually Beni whispers, "What does that mean then?"

"It means you can go home, but don't leave the city. We'll keep the car for now, sir, and we'll contact you as the investigation continues."

A tissue-paper sky sieves the night and promises dawn as they taxi

home. Ian rolls down the window, drinks the forgiving air that separates his graying strands, cleanses his lungs with the scent of relief. On his skin he feels the dank expectation of public rejection—evaporated, his fear diffused with the breeze. He wrestles the urge to phone Sol, tell him the story: the shock, devastation, fear, shame, remorse... exoneration with the officer's incandescent words.

Instead he turns to Benita. Her head leans back, dark eyes fixated on the roof. Two fistfuls of dress, like snowballs, scrunch in her hands.

"How are you doing?"

She looks out her window at the pewter-toned night.

"People will understand, you don't need to feel guilty. It wasn't your

fault.”

“Fault?” Beni turns her head slowly and meets his eyes, steady. “Where’s the line? Someone is still dead.”

Her words slide through his shifting ideologies and Ian skids on their ice weight. It’s true: the outcome for the victim’s parents and friends is the same. There will still be a funeral. A young man will not show up for school, for work, for Sunday dinner. Ian is confounded by the gyroscope of emotion within, how a life can cease and he has rotated on the axes of dread, disgrace and relief.

“I wonder why that witness didn’t say suicide to start with.” Beni presses her face into her palms and hears a tsunami slosh in her head. “I want to talk to the parents.”

Ian cradles his arm around her, and inhales the absolution of a world about to lob itself into a new morning.

* * *

At first Guy had said no when Sid suggested they go to ZeitClub. When Sid said he’d pick up the tab, a birthday treat for last month, Guy agreed, more out of loyalty to his friend than imagining anything in it for himself. It might be good to have a few beer, get lost in some loud tunes. Things had been tough since he got laid off from his after-school job.

“Hey, remember what today is?” Sid jumps, swats an overhead branch. His energy surge snaps Guy’s attention. “It’s April Fool’s, buddy.”

Guy laughs. “So?” He continues to dribble a small rock between his feet as they head home. It feels like a stutter against his insteps; he wants to conceal the stutter of his heart.

“So you got fooled. You thought nothin’ was gonna happen, and look.”

Sid feints to steal the rock and Guy boots it into the black hole darkness, throws up his arms, dances in a circle.

“Score.” He knows he’s half cut—on a few beer, on new hope, on her. “But you spotted her first. Thanks, man, for twisting my arm.”

Sid kicks a pop can at him. “Yeah, it only took you two and half beer to finally go over.” They practice their two-touch passes up the road.

“She sings, you know. I invited her to come hear my band practice, maybe sing a few.”

“Our band. But, yeah, cool. How ‘bout Tuesday? I got drama rehearsal on Monday. We can do a new song, I’ll help you write the lyrics. What rhymes with Beni?”

“I don’t know, penny, many, Jenny —”

“Okay, let’s see—my chick’s a dish and I call her Beni, she smells like April and I love her plenty.” Sid is in rapper mode... elbows, wrists, shoulders poke triangles to his rhythm. Charged up and horsing around. His role in the school play involves a stage fight and he busts out his moves now. “So any bets how long it’ll take ya to get her in bed? Huh? Huh?” Sid shoulder-butts him with each ‘huh’.

Guy side steps on the third one and Sid stumbles across. “Wrong, man. She’s not that type.”

“Ooooooh,” Sid throws a neck hold on him, “my bud’s in loooove.”

“Give it a rest, hey?” Guy untangles himself, shoves him off.

Sid stumbles, catches himself before hitting the ground. “Hey-hey, wanna play?”

Guy misses the flicker in Sid’s eye, unspoken communication. In his peripheral vision he catches Sid airborne, his foot flying at Guy’s hip, slicing the clotted night. Guy knows this move

from a dozen times he’s practiced the stage fight, been Sid’s sparring partner. But he can’t avoid it and sprawls into the road.

It’s then Guy feels the floodlights smack his eyes shut, as if he’s just stepped out on stage with his band. He hears the applause, like the surge of an engine, before blackout.

* * *

In Sid’s dream, Guy is still living: *It’s the big night of their make it/break it opportunity, an opening gig for a heavyweight concert. It’s the night to get straight with Guy whose band this really is—his, not Guy’s. They rehearse the stage fight again. He’s airborne, his foot flying at Guy’s hip, slicing the clotted night. Guy knows this move from a dozen practices. But his head turns to look at her that instant, and he sprawls off the stage. Sid feels the floodlights smack his eyes as he steps out on stage with his band. He hears the surge of applause like the roar of an engine.*

Susan (Crowe) Fenner is a former teacher of drama and dance. She studies her dreams, co-pilots a Cessna with her husband, and founded Granniesagogo.com. Her work has been published in Descant, Maple Tree Literary Supplement, Existere, The Danforth Review, My First Time anthology (SoftCopy Publishing, USA), and Ascent Aspirations Anthology 6.

This issue, *The Broken City* asked contributors, “Have you ever witnessed something unexplainable?”

Mouki K. Butt: I don’t want to sound vulgar, but I once visually witnessed flatulence. There wasn’t any talc powder or mind altering substance involved, just a hazy gaseous entity. Spiritual, perhaps... unexplained, definitely.

Susan (Crowe) Fenner: I’m replying while in Oslo, the day after a bomb killed eight government workers, and then the perpetrator massacred 69 young adults. While the killer requests a lawyer who previously defended a racially motivated murderer, but was unaware that the lawyer works for the Labor party. While the lawyer, after an agonizing soul-search, accepts the case on the principles of democracy. While a Caucasian approaches an unknown Muslim in the street and asks for a hug.

Howie Good: Yes, I have witnessed something unexplainable—the woman who became my wife falling in love with me.

Hebo Hall: When I was a kid, my mother took my sisters and I to Cleveland, GA, specifically to BabyLand General Hospital, where all Cabbage Patch Kids are born. People were dressed as nurses and the dolls were “born” from a hole in a tree every half-hour. We all had to watch. There’s no explanation for that.

Rena Littleson: I see people doing unexplainable things around me every day. To me, the most unexplainable thing in life is the human race and the workings of the brain. We can’t even fully understand our own brains, something that’s part of ourselves, so how could we ever hope to fully understand someone else, no matter how close we get to them?

Daniel Perry: I tend to believe everything can be explained. It may have something to do with being a writer. But with any given thing—say, the Northern Lights—I’d sooner have an explanation of why it’s important to see it, than one about how it works.

Leigh Phillips: The waters rising, out of the body, and into the face of an ironclad beauty named Sara. You haven’t heard of her yet. You will.

Lynne Potts: I am not being glib: everything is inexplicable to me. I have to write poetry to keep from going mad. The worst is fireflies, but the rate of China’s industrialization is pretty awesome as well. So are pepper corns.

Christen Thomas: Inspiration to me is inexplicably witnessed, bolting out from poetic dreams to manifest on a screen, leaking out of routine as a rush of ink on the page. A weighted phrase, a sudden revelation, a smattering of assonance: all gifts, all surprises. Puzzles that piece themselves together. No control of muse, shape shifting from computer code, commercials, eavesdropping. Losing oneself down the back alley of the imagination, leaving words as graffiti sidewalk art behind.

Bob Wakulich: I went to bury a hamster by throwing him in Lake Ontario in early March. I walked onto a pier and dropped him (weighted jar) into the water between pieces of broken ice. Suddenly, the wind picked up and began blowing huge ice chunks onto the pier. They piled up in front of me, and I was sure I was going to be buried as well, but the wind inexplicably stopped when the ice was two feet away.

Illustration/Art Contributors

Rena Littleson (pages 3, 7, back cover) is an Australian artist who has spent the last seven months traveling across the United States, Canada, Europe and the Middle East. While she was living in Calgary, she started working on a new series of photorealistic drawings which can be found on her Web site: www.renalittleson.com.

Fabio Sassi has worked as a visual artist since 1990, using the stencil technique on canvas, board, old vinyl records and other media. He uses logos, icons, tiny objects and shades to create weird perspectives. Much of his work is inspired by paradoxes, real or imagined, and by the news.



The Broken City - Issue 8
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