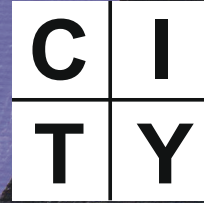


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The broken



LIFE OF THE PARTY

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The broken



Winter 2016 Issue 19

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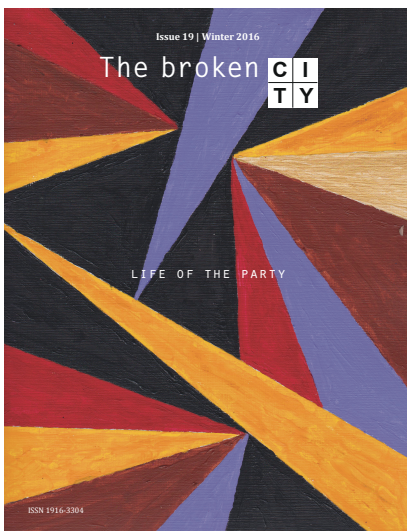
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In this issue:



Welcome to *The Broken City's* celebration of celebrations: the party, in all its shapes and sizes.

Of note: a surprising number of the submissions for this issue involved boozing and the morning after; it seems

drinking and merriment are inseparable for most.

Cover Art:

"Headlights"

W. Jack Savage is a retired broadcaster and educator. He is the author of seven books including *Imagination: The Art of W. Jack Savage* (wjacksavage.com). To date, more than 50 of Jack's short stories and over 900 of his paintings and drawings have been published worldwide. Jack and his wife Kathy live in Monrovia, California.

Contents:

Poetry

Kersten Christianson 3

Nancy Scott 4, 5

Hamza Saleem 7

Fiction

Duff Allen 6

Rue Baldry 8

The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its summer 2017 edition: **Death**.

Well, there's a cheery way to celebrate the magazine's 20th issue. As you may have surmised, we're looking for work that tackles that final curtain call (kicking the bucket... sleeping with the fishes), whether it be somber, silly or celebratory.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, illustrations and photography to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com.

Deadline is: June 1, 2017. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

Elixir

Kersten Christianson

A full martini, a toast to Monty
my daily drunk neighbor;
a tribute to living in the trailer
with the Chia Pet moss roof,
the back ass sliding,
sliding into the slow muddy creek behind it.

Lift a glass to Monty
for not running over my kid
after Happy Hour at the Moose
when he blasts up the cul-de-sac
in his shitty, serial killer van.

On warm May evenings,
Monty's music drifts like spruce pollen:
*Rhiannon rings like a bell through the night
and wouldn't you love to love her?*

What do you call beauty
in the darkness of addiction?

So cheers, Monty,
to booze that kills the pinprick
of living from one job's pay to another.
To booze that balms the working grind
of refrigeration, fiberglass, the bottle
that props you upright even when sober.

*Kersten Christianson is a raven-watching,
moon-gazing, high school English-teaching
Alaskan. She earned her MFA in Creative
Writing/Poetry through the University of
Alaska Anchorage in 2016. Her recent work
has appeared in Cirque, Inklette, We'Moon,
Sheila-Na-Gig and Pure Slush. Kersten co-
edits the quarterly journal Alaska Women
Speak. When not exploring the summer
lands and dark winter of the Yukon Territory,
she lives in Sitka, Alaska with her husband
and photographer Bruce Christianson, and
daughter Rie. kerstenchristianson.com*

Snapshot of an Ivy League Faculty Wife

Nancy Scott

This Saturday morning
I'm sitting cross-legged on the bare wood
floor of the Chancellor Green rotunda,
my long hair pulled back and wearing
my husband's Oxford shirt, sleeves rolled up.
It's showtime, folks.

Tonight's the faculty Christmas dance.
My assignment—whip up a diamond-stud
décor, lots of pizzazz and greenery.
Would garlands of balsam
look more festive wound around
columns or swagged from balcony railings?

Later, I slip into a chocolate velvet gown,
darken my brows, dab on pale lipstick.
Oh so late to the dance, eight of us
stoned, laughing at nothing and everything,
until someone gets wildly silly, sets fire
to the linen tablecloth.

My husband's chairman asks me to dance,
his arm brushing my breast, his fingers
weaving through my dark hair.
The sacrificial lamb, I keep smiling,
oh how I keep smiling, and the band
won't stop playing foxtrots.

*Nancy Scott is the managing editor of U.S.1
Worksheets, journal of the U.S.1 Poets'
Cooperative in New Jersey. She is also the
author of nine collections of poetry, her most
recent being Ah, Men (Aldrich Press, 2016),
a retrospective of men who have influenced
her life. She writes about subjects as diverse
as: social justice (Running Down Broken
Cement); humor (The Owl Prince); memoir
(Midwestern Memories); and ekphrastic
poetry (On Location). nancyscott.net*

Wedding in Fargo

Nancy Scott

I was one of six bridesmaids
in a canary cap-sleeved dress
and dyed-to-match satin pumps
which I left behind
on the way out of town
during a freak summer blizzard.

The bride, a petite Swedish blonde,
my roommate from college, who'd said,
I've come East to study Ibsen,
translated—*I'm at Chicago to find a husband.*

We'd shared an apartment on Hyde Park Blvd.
Dorothy discarded two guys named Ted,
one with six toes, the other a Texas preacher,
hooked up with Tom, a wired artist,
after he'd painted a life-sized lion
snarling on our living room wall, with oils,
the kind that takes four coats to cover,
like goose grease spatters
when our holiday bird blew up in the stove.

The wedding was acres of tulle, champagne,
and tomato aspic, the groom in tails, his beard
untamed. I prayed for the marriage.
Tom could swallow Dorothy with his roar,
she had a way of dissolving,
leaving fisted words
that could make snow-laden corn stand tall.

Nowhere Near Like Lines Written in the Fannie Farmer Cookbook or Anything Like That (Or: Being Interrogated Over a Homemade Oatmeal Cookie at the Block Party)

Duff Allen

At the block party, Kip had asked me what the oatmeal cookie was like. I decided I wouldn't give him a lecture on anything that was too much unrelated. I was, however, sorely tempted to discuss ad hoc what in his *Poetics* Aristotle says about metaphor. That, in turn, would have led to my resuscitating one of my favorite lines in Ezra Pound's *ABC of Reading*—which, when I was an undergraduate student at Tufts, I had found a copy of at Rodney's—where he discusses metaphor as a “range-finder” and nothing more than that. There were any number or manner of things I might have said to Kip, who stood beside me, hanging over an aluminum turkey roasting tray filled with homemade oatmeal cookies for the occasion of neighborly friendliness, wife spying, and by nine or ten o'clock at night a bunch of grown-ups splayed out half-cold in rickety lawn chairs, drunk in the middle of the street, and the kids of all of them somewhere, running amok like a mute pack of dogs.

I really had wanted, when he asked me the question, cookie in hand, just before my lips, just at the moment I was about to bite into half of it and his interrogative had interrupted me, to pause myself and extend my forearm back out and pose to him, like the great rhetorician Demosthenes: “How is this a block party? To me, Kip, right, that's your name, a block party is filled with carnival sweepstakes, Italian sausage and peppers, cups of melon squares for sale, fried dough, and mobs of people who wander into it by luck and chance right in the middle of some Greenwich Village street with all sorts of tacky paper banners saluting some unimaginable virgin saint who gloats over the whole thing and who we festively ignore, not out of malice or disregard, but out of urban oblivion, so much unlike this suburban getaway of ours amidst the emerald green verdure of our postage-stamped lawns where once annually our township's quiet road is marked as being closed by virtue of

the town police having placed by dawn's hands unseen two pairs of orange rubber traffic cones, one on either end, with the town's logo spray-painted or stenciled or embossed or something like that onto their conical sides, which, by the way, is something of a feat, just as it must have been a feat to paint or to torch in the image of a snow lion or cave bear or some such now-extinct creature, tens of thousands of years ago in what are now voluptuous caves in Spain or France.”

Instead, I went in an entirely different direction and took a bite of the cookie and said, “Paint me a picture of Long Island Sound.” Paint me this, and I am a boy sailing across the Sound in a Lightning, a wooden-hulled craft, a quick racing class sailboat with a centerboard. Have me in this boat with my dad at the tiller, and after having sailed all day, he reaches down and pulls out from a crinkly-sounding plastic package a single oatmeal cookie. And just as he is about to warn me, before handing me the cookie, not to spill from my lips any crumbs into the bilge—and Kip interrupted. “Jesus! I just asked you what it was like!” And I looked at my neighbor in his pink, short-sleeved polo shirt with the sorta marijuana-leaf emblem on the upper left-hand breast part of it, and his pleated rawhide Ralph Lauren shorts, but did not tell him, though I thought it in my head in a whisper, “That is exactly what I am doing, Kip; I am telling you what it is like. And what it is like, to me, is a little journey across the water. That is what it is like, Kip. It is like a special sailing trip with my dad, one I cherished and have cherished for 45-plus years of my life, in direct contradistinction, Kip, to my same father's having prompted me to electrocute myself by ordering me to walk into the puddle of water next to my train set table and plug the cord of the lamp into the electrical socket for him to be able to see what was causing the overflow of the toilet water into the basement. I am telling you exactly what it is like, Kip, something so special

to me you have no idea how few times and how few persons
ever in my life I have ever told this precious tale of mine to.”

“That’s all I was asking, Jesus!” he said, to no one in particular. “Just try one,” I said to him, and took another one myself.

Duff Allen is a writer who lives in upstate New York. He has an MFA from Bard College where he teaches writing in The Clemente Course in the Humanities. Recent fiction of his appears in The Columbia Journal, Burningword Literary Journal, Pure Slush, Down in the Dirt, and other publications. He welcomes readers’ comments at duffallen4@gmail.com.

Ornate

Hamza Saleem

cloistered. trapped. the city’s veins pulsate with a million platelets. perfunctory connections, like paper people chains. a marvelous panoply. ornate and ordained. rows and stacks of building blocks, droves and packs like livestock. triptychs of doors and walls. bejeweled matryoshka dolls. firebrand thespians of keeping up appearances, with not a nous to abuse. living for the sake of living. endorsements of mediocrity and minutia morsels. waiting for the next luftpause.

it rains in disdain. amber from the street lamps seeping into the deluge. huddled in refuge under awnings. befuddled. fawning over gossip in the haze and cigarettes. disturbed by the rain on the curb by a drain, a woman hails a cab that was weathered and drab. she held on to her hat as she sat in the back, a mystique from the pages of Sylvia Plath. on her way to a decadent soiree or a seedy boudoir. allure and elusiveness of a film noir.

hermetically sealed. the city breathes its own putrid air. dreams on hold, foretold with baited breath. denizens of this dark and demure domain abstain from pain with cocaine and other arcane concoctions. no purchase on money and no money for purchase, living paycheck to paycheck, victims of circumstance. dance and prance in happenstance, drinking to forget, forgoing a chance at happiness. tightly packed places to order plates of pabulum and pastes of waste. humdrum in the doldrums of bars with dimly lit light fixtures to order mixtures of toxic tinctures. a toast to the good life! they all cheer, blocking out the blaring sirens of frenetic police cars.

Hamza Saleem is an accomplished Senior IT consultant residing in the UAE. He writes poetry and short stories in his spare time and is inspired by themes of existentialism and melancholy. He is currently working on a compendium of poems in a project titled Death and Relaxation, which deals with introspection and loneliness. Contact Hamza at hamza.saleem01@gmail.com.

She Did Go To The Ball

Rue Baldry

My sister unbuckles a strap and peels it from the red groove it has eaten out of her ankle.

'It's not bloody fair!' she says, yanking off her shoe by the stiletto heel with a vacuum-breaking squelch.

It never is. 'Spoilt, beautiful cow,' I agree.

'I thought she wasn't going to go to that ball. Why did she have to change her mind?'

Church bells start up from somewhere beyond our window, even though it's long gone midnight and not yet morning. Probably the palace chapel; probably to announce the engagement.

'Oh I don't think there was ever any chance she wasn't going to go,' I say, pulling out hairpins one by one by one. 'We should have known.' The pins rattle like rain onto the vanity table. 'I expect she thought we wouldn't go if she didn't. She knew how much we were looking forward to it so she wanted to take it away from us.'

'After the months we'd spent planning? How could she have thought that?'

Our mother married her father seven years ago. Goodness only knows why. He's got no personality, not even enough backbone to stand up to his own daughter. All he's got is money, and not an enormous amount of that.

I'm not saying none of the cash goes our way, not claiming we go without ball gowns and clutches, but it's not worth it. If we'd had any idea what our stepsister was going to be like, we'd have tried to talk Mom out of it.

But the poor little girl had lost her mother and she was young and

pretty and, to start with, sweet, so we were nice to her. We let her play with our toys and we didn't complain when she got the largest bedroom. We did complain when she pulled our hair, but nobody believed us. So, when she ate our Easter eggs, we didn't bother saying anything. When she bit me, I did, once, bite back. She lay sobbing for hours on the kitchen hearth for all to see, wiping her eyes with soot-rubbed hands while I was sent to my room in disgrace. From then it was us who got the blame for every destructive thing she did.

My sister is unlacing her ridiculous underwear now, saying, 'I don't know why I bothered. She always gets what she wants. Just for once...' she trails off and pulls her comfy pyjamas out from under her pillow.

'She's an evil, manipulative bitch.' I say it without emotion. It's fact. 'At least she'll be gone soon.'

'But she gets to go live at the palace! How unfair is that?'

'She won't be our problem anymore.' I stab my fingers into the cold cream and smear them over my face to obliterate the make-up I applied so carefully this afternoon.

'I actually allowed myself to think she might stay home for once and we might be able to—' This time when she stops talking it's because she's crying.

I climb onto our bed, put my arms around her. She soggies the shoulder of my dress, staining it with mascara and foundation, but I don't care. My cold cream coats her flattening ringlets.

'What a way to choose a spouse,' I mutter. Of course her feet are small. What part of her isn't delicate?

We're big-boned, we sweat, our features aren't sculpted like hers. We are not, in fact, ugly, though I know what people say. We are just ordinary looking. And a goddess would look dowdy if she had to stand behind our stepsister all her life.

We'd had a lovely afternoon deluding ourselves that we were going to get to dress up, go out and actually be noticed. We were giddy when we gazed at the beautiful, lit-up palace as we stepped down from our carriage. Flunkies bowed us in over the red carpet, through the grand doors which were wide open for the first time I can remember.

Crystal-dripping, wheel-wide chandeliers lit the ballroom, casting tiny rainbows onto the marble dance floor, which stretched away for furlongs. There were cocktails and punches and delicate, foreign-looking snacks on sticks, none of which we dared to taste because we'd spent so long on our lipsticks. The most handsome and eligible young men in the kingdom were there, dressed in their finest, smelling like scent and hair products, and for once some of them were looking at us. We were asked our names and opinions, offered arms, complimented. I was dancing with a duke when it happened. I'd never been so happy.

Enter the stepsister. Late. Wearing something neither of us had ever seen before: a dress which sparkled and clung in that way which can only be managed by designers we can't afford. The musicians halted mid-note. The room was silent. Every man was transfixed by her. She made her entrance, straight to the centre of the room, and was immediately surrounded.

Would she like a drink? How lovely she looked! Would she care to dance?

And of course she would. Because she loves to dance. She can't get enough of feeling their arms around her. Not just on the dance floor, either. She looks like butter wouldn't melt in her pretty little mouth, but I wouldn't like to say what's actually been in that mouth.

We were deserted. Me, my sister, and every other lady there. We all slunk back to the room's edges and watched. Resting my back against the chill of a window, I could feel the warmth of the spot on my hip where my duke's hand had rested, but I couldn't even see him.

It was only a matter of time, of course, before the Prince himself approached her and the rest of the men had to retreat. He danced with our step-sister all the rest of the night, from end to end of the ballroom. No man could tear his eyes from her face and figure long enough to request a dance from anyone else.

We should have gone home then. There wasn't really any point in staying. But instead we stood around on our high heels, lower backs aching and feet pinched, bare necks and arms cold, and we stared, too.

When the clock chimed midnight, she stopped moving all of a sud-

den, wearing that attention-demanding look of dismay she favors. The Prince was so startled he tripped over. She skipped backwards away from him, hands raised, positioning herself inside the rose-tinted circle of light shed by one particular chandelier, gave a delicate little scream, and ran from the room. It took us all a moment to react. Then, en masse, we followed her.

She had vanished by the time we got outside, but, in the centre of the top step, the moonlight falling onto it just so, stood one of her crystal dancing slippers.

The ball ended early there and then and we were all sent home.

We had to walk; our carriage wasn't due to collect us for hours. My sister pulled out her ribbons as she went, letting her lacquered, angular mess of coiled hair fall all over her face. We were exhausted, blistered, disappointed and hungry. We hadn't eaten since breakfast: too excited before the ball and too disheartened during, having only had a brief time to care about our lipstick. The passing vehicles splashed us with mud. I loosened some of the fastenings and bindings of my dress under cover of my cape, not that anyone was watching.

Neither of us spoke until we were home. We came in the back door, straight into the kitchen. The King's

messenger walked in on us eating leftovers out of the saucepans. He was carrying her crystal slipper.

We knew whose shoe it was, of course, but we weren't about to say. And, though we knew it wouldn't fit, we made a good show of trying it on, like we thought there was a chance it might. I'm glad my blister leaked onto it: a smear of pink pus marring its priceless translucence.

When she made her way downstairs, we knew the story was ending. We hobbled, forgotten, wearing one shoe each, up the back stairs to our bedroom.

'I'm still hungry,' I say. 'Do you think they've gone?'

My sister blows her nose on a part of her ball dress that isn't muddy. 'They'll be back at the palace by now, drawing up seating plans or picking hymns or flowers something. Do you think I'll have to clean this up for the wedding, or will her dad shell out for a new one?'

'If we're invited.' You can be sure that we'll be presented as the villains in the official press version of tonight. I search out another clean spot on her dress to wipe off my cold cream.

In dressing gowns and slippers, we head down to the pantry.

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