

Issue 20 | Summer 2017

The broken



Death



The broken



Summer 2017 Issue 20

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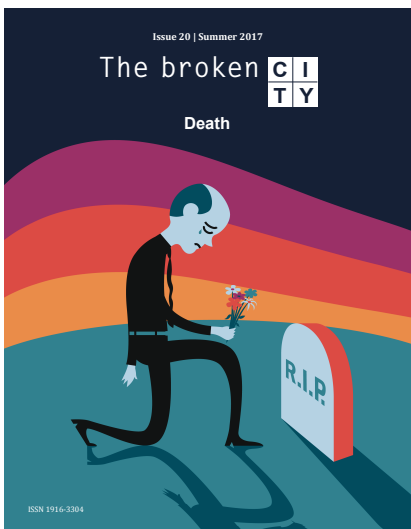
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Welcome to *The Broken City's* blockbuster (and cheery) 20th issue: **Death**. Let's lighten the mood with some clever euphemisms for dying (collected by Wikipedia): assume room temperature; pop one's clogs; wear a pine overcoat; go for

a Burton; hop on the last rattler.

Cover Art:

Mouki K. Butt is an illustrator who currently lives on Vancouver Island. She can often be found quoting the classic adventure game *Grim Fandango*, but would rather not reside in the Land of the Dead anytime soon. moukikbutt.com

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The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2017 edition: **Hurry! Hard!**

That's right, armchair quarterbacks, the magazine is running a sports issue. Oh, the "Hurry! Hard!" confused you? It's a curling thing. We're looking for work that touches on sporting events of any kind, even darts! Not golf, though.

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

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

On the Day After Gary Ridgway's 48 Confessions

Tamara Sellman

the mind takes arterials...

I

...to the crumbling asphalt sidewalk between home and school, one street-width away from where boys and girls my age were smothered by a violence

of body parts. I cracked my bedroom window, cocked a hero's ear to listen for signs. My mother shut it against her own dread only after I had fallen asleep.

II

...to that day the playground reported sixth grade star gymnast Elaina missing, a girl admired for pointed toes, straight As and freckles. Peeping Toms and milk carton

faces stained our pre-teen fantasies of running away. Below my bedroom window, I arranged an avenue of sharp objects this time, noisy and painful alarms.

III

...to the choir trip at Green River. The choir director warned us against leaving our cheap Travelodge rooms, "not even for ice." From school bus windows, we didn't

see, but imagined anyway, the violated bodies peeping through fern and salal. Luxuriously, we griped of boredom without HBO and late-night trips to the 7-Eleven.

IV

...to the co-ed who shared my unusual name. I followed her in the news, searched rush-hour traffic every day for suspicious brown semi-trucks, wondered about my own

propensity for solo road trips. They delayed a positive ID, her white-blond hair in family photos darkened like red wheat paralleling her grave along the highway shoulder.

V

...to this sunny day along Pacific Highway South. I can't find a parking spot for the women cluttering the strip. Necks purpled, clothes ragged, mascara bleeding, they

stagger, undead, in stilettos. Waving bone-thin arms, they call out to me in voices rendered hoarse by the incalculable distance that death has dragged the memory of their souls.

On the day after Gary Ridgway's 48 confessions
the mind takes arterials...

"On the Day After Gary Ridgway's 48 Confessions" was originally published in the Naugatuck River Review. Tamara Sellman (rhymeswithcamera.com) is a busy healthcare writer and credentialed sleep medicine professional living in Bainbridge Island, WA. Her award-winning poems, short fiction, and experimental creative writing have appeared internationally. She is the recipient of two Pushcart Prizes. Sellman is currently at work on an abecedarian chapbook of poems/prose exploring her multiple sclerosis diagnosis, as well as two memoirs: one about familial sleep disorders, the other about her active dream life.

After the Trains

Ann Tiedemann Halvorsen

In the steeped silence that chases a passing train
Thoughts of you disembark for their stop
In my New York brain
Where the conductor's call for "Tuckahoe"
Was the signal to douse that final smoke,
Fold the last glad-hand of three-man bridge
And exit in a clot of Brooks Brothers' attire
Up trestled stairs over tracks and switchyard
And down to Mom, in the Ford Country Squire.

Where she may have repaired her lipstick and smiled,
Watched you approach in the rearview mirror, while
Thinking of stones placed today in her garden,
Whose agelessness mocked her vows of forever
Then, wondering how long you'd have together,
She'd slide over as always to let you drive
Perhaps chatting of Updike's latest endeavor:
A *New Yorker's* tale that dared to consider
What we cannot own of our loves and lives.

Six decades on
She remembers that night
As her sons now carry you
Home and to ground

And the train whistle sounds.

Ann Tiedemann Halvorsen has lived more than half of her life in San Francisco, having emigrated from New York to pursue her doctorate in special education. Teaching, research and work with inclusive school communities have formed the basis for her prior publications. Ann is now Professor Emeritus at a Bay Area university, with more time, at last, for her lifelong love affair with reading and writing poetry.
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Ghost Instinct

Brad Rose

I took the westerly pill and tried to get out of the wind. You said, *All we're doing is driving around the block, again and again.* One burning earthquake and the trees, like trapped animals uncaged, head south for the winter. Am I the only one asking questions around here? As if it's accomplished with razor blades. Each obstacle creates a desire. Bone yearns for flesh, sea for sky. Yesterday, a body was found, no signs of struggle, limp limbs relaxing in the calm quantum. A ghost wind listened to its own swallowed scream. The tamed mouth seeks a feral kiss. You have a taste for carrion.

Brad Rose is a sociologist and author of a collection of poetry and flash fiction, Pink X-Ray (Big Table Publishing, 2015, pinkx-ray.com). His new book of poems, Momentary Turbulence, is forthcoming from Cervena Barva Press. Brad is also the author of five chapbooks of poetry and flash fiction and was twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His poems and fiction have appeared in The American Journal of Poetry and the Los Angeles Times, among other publications. bradrosepoetry.com

persephone sleeps

Jenny Keto

what else is there to do, when
all left over is seen from under
some life asunder? she seethes
sees memory; a sea anemone.

she breathes as seconds repeat
like her heartbeat beat drowns
out mermaid murmur from her
last ground symphony above.

she echoes inside ears for years
like a pebble's skip loop skips
sustained sounds sip circles, but
can never quite sink far enough

to muffled cacophony: cochlea of
drums on coffin, liquid melatonin
drams, damned dreams sleep wake
and her seven evenings sing sad

siren songs; threnodies she weaves that

creep in sulcus sleep, slip hands
tight around her neck, tight hard
hands against her chest, shallow
breath breast strokes at night to

lost melodies; a glimmer that leaves her.

she floats just under life.
she floats just above salt
saline she leans seeped
from eyes to her earth—

buried far enough under
to forget who she cried for
close enough above to know
why her sky rains days away.

Jenny Keto is a poet actress pursuing a third trade in nursing at Texas A&M's accelerated B.S.N. program. She looks forward to the prospect of helping people for a living, with time to breathe again, and writing down all the poems that will hibernate in her brain until she graduates. Her poetry can be found online at Visitant, Painted Cave, and The City Key, and is forthcoming in a print anthology from Host Publications.

Tarnished Silver

Christina Simon

Because I loved Sterling and even though she scared me, she captivated me too; because Sterling was the most loyal and mercurial person I ever met; because she never stopped trying to ease the pain of watching our mother, a stubborn believer in holistic medicine, die at home without doctors or nurses, only her two desperate, terrified teenage daughters who tried to use gauze to soothe her oozing bedsores that erupted like lava pouring from a raging volcano and who sometimes forgot to change her bedpan; because she never once complained about taking care of Mama or told me how terrified she was that Mama was paralyzed, blind and in a coma; because even though I was older by 18 months, she seemed like my big sister because she always knew more than me; because Sterling never told anyone about our teenage years or how our dad never called a doctor, but instead she invented tales of a happy home life which I repeated; because the Sterling I remember laughed too loudly, wore trendy clothes and smoked Marlboro lights; because Sterling made friends anyplace in the world from Morocco to Paris, from Rome to New York; because she never lived in one city for more than a year; because she never stopped trying to find the elusive happiness she craved; because she escaped our traumatic home life by applying to Berkeley where she discovered her favorite authors, Ford Madox Ford and Joan Didion; because I still have her tattered copy of *The Good Soldier*; because she begged me to join her at college, which I did a year after she enrolled; because after she tried to stab me with a kitchen knife and ended up in a Bay Area psychiatric ward, I admired the way she convinced the doctors she didn't belong with all the "crazies" and they released her from the 5150 hold; and then after the incident, she sauntered back into our off-campus apartment as if nothing happened and I wasn't afraid anymore; because she was the first in our family to attend Harvard Law School and then she attained a series of high-profile corporate law positions in New York City where at night she hosted glittering dinner parties, the kind you see in *Vogue* with twinkling views of the Manhattan skyline, arrangements of white and purple orchids the size of small trees, soirees where our shoulders lightly touched the literati whose beautiful candle-lit lives beckoned them; because she had a sly sense of humor, laughing at things only she and I thought were funny like when we, two half-black 20-something girls, watched the octogenarians stare at us at the Harvard Club and she had the audacity to thank the old white guys for their attention by sending a bottle of scotch to their table; because she never let a day pass without calling me, saying *Hi, it's me*, in that raspy voice, both familiar and captivating, as if she knew things I did not, which was true most of the time and because we'd talk for hours on the phone late into the night even when we lived only a few miles apart; because she was bold and fearless and she told me I could do anything I wanted, even when I was broke and unemployed; because after a breakup with her boyfriend, she told me, *His mother lives in the Dakota building. He's heir to a shipping fortune*, and then, a few months later, *It's over with him, but I'm still friends with his mom. I like her better*; because one day she called to say she'd arranged for a friend from law school to call me and because I've been married to that guy for 17 years; because when her therapist told her she had borderline personality disorder when she was 21, she never accepted the diagnosis and even years later she still called her therapist by his first name, Samuel; because she was my younger sister, my only sibling, who died at age 38, collapsing in a heap on the kitchen floor of her modern wood and glass home, high above the hills of Los Angeles; because the coroner said the cause of her death was "undetermined" but I know why she died even though it was never ruled a suicide; because she died alone, surrounded by stacks of stolen prescription pads, bottles of pills, spilled across the floor; because she was *Raging Bull* and *Annie Hall* jumbled together but never *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*; because her voice is an unending hymn, playing over and over again in my mind; because when the ladies in the nail salon ask where Sterling is, I lie, telling them she lives in Paris, a lie she would have approved of since at one time she really did live in Paris; because Sterling saved my life even when

she couldn't save her own; because I loved her like no other, ever. Sterling was pretty but not beautiful, with big dark eyes and a way with style that made everyone ask where she got her clothes, her silver jewelry, her shoes, even her lipstick. Sterling's huge circle of friends knew her fierce loyalty intimately. Now, each of her friends remembers her differently, but I alone wrote the plaque that sits atop her gravestone.

Christina Simon writes about the competitive world of L.A. private school admissions, financial aid and diversity in her book and on her blog, which have been featured on NPR and The Huffington Post, among other publications. Her essays have appeared in Salon, Angels Flight - literary west and xoJane. She volunteers at 826LA, where she helps high school students write their college essays. Christina holds a B.A. from UC Berkeley and an M.A. in urban planning from UCLA.

Reincarnate

Ellen Kathleen Smith

Next time, if there is a next time, you might be
the rockslide on the other side of town
and I might be the premonition too vague
and too late to save anyone. Or you become
the temple while I become the sacred texts inside
and people believe they have to go through you
to get to me, that we make each other
something worth consecrating. Or you get born
into a family of superstitions and I cross your path
as a black cat, cracks in the concrete, a lucky penny,
the shadow of a ladder. You knock on wood,
cross your fingers, you sense our history, can't quite
say why. Or you return as the horoscope
and I as the tarot cards, related but at odds.
Most probably, though, you will be the west coast
and I will be the east, holding everything in the space
between us without ever meeting.

Ellen Kathleen Smith is a writer, artist, and art teacher living in Washington State with her husband and chickens. She has competed at the National Poetry Slam and facilitated numerous creative writing workshops in her community. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in Right Hand Pointing, Amaryllis, and Gone Lawn. Find her online at ellenksmith.com.

My Unreturned Offering

Vincent Barry

The best quilt the Faheys had, Tommy shivered under, on the couch in the brownstone's living room, where he took too long to die, of "brutal kidneys," they said.

I can still see him, clutching the bird-bedizened quilt to his hoarse, veiny throat with bony, curved fingers, his yellow teeth—beneath ghostly gray eyes—chattering and snapping at its fuzzy tassels like a fish at worms.

Where had it gone, now that Tommy was lying in the shiny wooden box, half hidden from my craning neck, my prying eyes, my troubled mind—suspended, trapped, perhaps like the cover-let, in some liminal state between life and death?

"Truth be towl," as they say—the Irish—'bout "wan tin' or other," truth be towl, Tee, as they called 'm, who'd shaken off his earthly load and gone to seek the Great Perhaps among the insensible shades, Tee, "'tis true so 'tis," appeared no worse for its truancy, as snug he was, aside the painful truth, as a tight-fitting tea cozy, "'idin' oyt in plain sight," as they say, his sole companion a gory-beaked raven miming a gurgling croak.

Long after he was lowered into the clay, my mind chased the throw's whereabouts, and, too, why Tee in the polished case'd been "al' turned oyt" like his older brother Mikey—on Sunday mornings, "oi'm meanin'," when usherin' at the 'leven o'clock mass, a tad unsteady, mind yer, "an' who wouldn't be, after al', bein' as yer man wus up al' noight gamblin' an' gambolin,'" as they say, down at the waterfront's Log Cabin?

And too, before "al' av dat," before the internment, at the height of the wake—the Fahey version of "sitting about on divans in pigtails smoking opium and seeing visions"—I wondered why Tee hadn't just popped up for a bite from the table, which was so delicately parked near the foot of the box, yer nu, so that, after paying respects, a mourner could, if so inclined, glide seamlessly to the kickshaws, perhaps to top off a slapdash signum crucis with cold cuts and Kaiser rolls and drinks that proudly featured two whiskeys—Three Feathers and Four Roses—and two kegs, Ballantine and Schaefer, the latter I'm sure at the behest of Mikey, a devoted Brooklyn Dodgers fan.

Not to be outdone, mind yer, the other brother, Johnny it was, and his inamorata, Marie, yes Johnnie's Marie it was—well, they naturally, he and she, brought—y'know, naturally, out of loyalty to their beloved Giants—Knickerbocker, with which they did, they did, roundly toast the deceased before roaming the room, their heads wreathed, they were, in a miasma of smoke, Chesterfield it was, relentlessly goading the assemblage of blotchy Hibernians to "'av a Kneck." Imagine—a thing like that!

Naturally, raucous debate ensued—over matters grave and weighty.

The best team: Yankees, Dodgers, or Giants?

The best announcer: Mel Allen, Red Barber, Russ Hodges? "Dat sort av tin."

Naturally, offense was taken. Fisticuffs loomed.

Father Gilhooly was it?—

No matter, Father something or other naturally hushed the disputants with an emphatic call for the "oly rosary."

All eyes fixed on the shiny gold crucifix, naturally—the one with the two red nails piercing the palms of Jesus, which hung on the white silk lining inside the box lid just over Tee's inflated chest; the very icon that escaped the other's fate, coming, as it did, to worldly repose inside the China cabinet beside the Faheys' sacrosanct Spode dinnerware. And there at length, wouldn't yer nu, it remained "a 'auntin' reminder av death in de midst av life"—as if anyone needed reminding—undisturbed, save, of course, for the occasional clatter and clang of the aforementioned "rayle plates for speshal occasions," on which thereafter, and to the consternation and chagrin of all, I myself preferred paper plates.

Years later it was, at a flea market in Secaucus, that I came across that memento mori, or a rusty

doppelgänger—for “two dollars or best offer.” It made me shiver, it did, not with cold, but with, well, Montesquieu’s “little shivers of loneliness which come over uneasy and troubled hearts.”

I didn’t buy it, but I would have, had it been my blankie, my bird blankie, my unreturned offering. Naturally.

“My Unreturned Offering” previously appeared in Zetetic. Vincent Barry’s short fiction has been widely published in the US and abroad. Sometimes, as in the present work, his lyrical tone harkens back to his heritage as a first-generation Irish American. The moods of his stories range from the intense and paranoid “When It First Came Out” (The Write Room, Fall 2014) to the poignant and heart-breaking “Biker Girl” (Corvus Review, Spring/Summer 2016). He lives in Santa Barbara, California.



Mark Myavec (photo) is a math teacher who has worked at independent prep schools in Michigan, Delaware and Pennsylvania. As a teenager, he learned essential photography skills on the Argus C3 passed down to him by his father, and he embraces the art form for its potential to evoke a sense of connectedness to a transient, often solitary, moment. His photographs have appeared in a variety of print and online publications.

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