

“moon bathed in starlight” by Sam Bailey

Inspired by Derek Boshier's, *Night Dreamers*

Moon bathed in starlight

it's not what she is
it's not what they are
it's a moon shifting shadows
under some distant star
near a world slowly idling
that slips into gear
and moves with a beat
only some of us hear
and that moon bathed in starlight
reflects on a world
where something exceptional
trying to be born
weaves the moonlight
into patterns and forms
creating a scaffold
a matrix for life
not as we are
and not as we were
but as we should be
under some fresh young star

“dance” by Sam Bailey

Inspired by Carole E. Feuerman’s, *Tree with Leaves*

dance

each fall
she’ll experiment
with fleeting fragile colors
teasing us with her exotic dance
she’ll slowly cast off leaves
and then when the striptease ends
and winter comes
she’ll stand cold and bare
the memory of that dance
will be impressed upon our souls
conjuring wondrous shade-filled dreams
but remembrance is not enough
and we’ll wait patiently for another spring
knowing she will wake
put on her dress of leaves
and get ready once again
to perform her stunning dance

“DOPPELGÄNGER” by Donna Barkman
Inspired by Stefanie Gutheil’s, *Big Cat Squeezing*

I wear a mask that looks like me
 so no one knows the difference
Stretch into a skin of verisimilitude
Exhale a false veracity of breath
 and shed a fake fidelity of tears
Perform smiles and laughter
 authentic enough to pass
Speak a sincerity of fraudulent words

I tire of trying to impersonate myself

Tomorrow, no – this very night, I will
 wear a mask that looks like you
Dream your dreams, feel your nightmare
 screams – do your devil’s dance.
Dare you to dare me to care.

“ELLE” by Elizabeth Burk

Inspired by Maria Tomasula's, *Ceremony*

She is the bride
the widow, the grieving
daughter, advancing slowly
down the aisle, dressed
in black silk, tight-bodiced,
a mantilla of Spanish lace draped
head to shoulders, the click
of red flamenco shoes echoing
through the cathedral.

*Whore, your faith shimmers
like a worn ruby*

In her arms she cradles
a baby of red roses,
her mouth a slash of carmine
over a tremulous smile, her train
rustling behind her, sweeping
the cathedral floor.

She walks past
wedding guests, past
mourners in wooden pews,
a procession of one—
heads crane as she glides
towards the altar, the organ
spewing dissonant chords
recalling Teutonic knights tossing
infants into a pit of flames.

In the distance
her son and her lover
await by a casket in black tuxedos,
to walk her to her destination.

Weep, rejoice, the choir sings,
the wheel turns from birth to marriage
to death and back again

*Putaine, your presence glows
in the bloody embers of dusk.*

“To Feel Love (My Couch)” by Elizabeth Burk

Inspired by Nathan Ritterpusch’s, *Where is the Madness that you Promised me*

is to feel your cushioned body
under mine, the velvety texture
of your skin, the way I can tuck

my fingers, toes, into your crevices,
stretch my body, my limbs, the length
of your frame, rest my head against

your ample arms—curved, yet soft,
resilient. I love to snuggle my butt
up against your well-padded back,

your body absorbing the thrusts of
my bony knees, elbows as I twist, turn,
and flop on top of you, while you adjust,

accommodating to my every position.
Often I eat perched on top of you, sitting
cross-legged or slouched sideways,

your stuffed seat cradling my haunches.
Covered in shades of red you easily absorb,
blend with tomato sauce and strawberry-

beet souffles. Chosen years ago for
durability and dimensions—length, width,
depth—your aging frame is frayed, faded,

sagging now in places where the weight
of my hips, thighs, ass, has dented you, still
I will never trade you in for a newer model—

in your speechless embrace I take refuge
from a noisy, demanding world, you are
where I recline every night with a sigh.

“The Record Player” by Tess Cronin

Inspired by Nathan Ritterpusch's, *Where is the Madness that you Promised me*

suburban frustrations left at the door,
shag carpet beneath my knees, absorb me.
file through, searching for happiness
colored square after colored square,
Aha!

This one.
Lift the needle, place it down.
Soft sounds fill my polyester prison
and flow through me,
relief.

“Surreal Vision of Someone Still Surprised” by Ruth D. Handel

Inspired by Stefanie Gutheil's, *Big Cat Squeezing*

You never know what you'll get
when you lead love in,
pussycat or feline mammoth squeezing
its all-knowing nose into your clutter,
hooking its claws
into the scatter of little
catch-as-catch-can incidentals
you never liked anyway,
a predator gazing
with a cool green intensity
that promises no favors.
Watch out! That line you're dangling
doesn't joke. It can snap at a pounce
or strangle.

“Old Story Old-fashioned Poem” by Ruth D. Handel

Inspired by Saul Raskin's, *The Beggars Dance of the Dybbuk*

Those old folklorists shrewdly
repaired what was often askew
by conjuring mystical realms
where promises might prove true.

The beggar grasps hold of the bride
but she is consumed within
by the lover's wandering spirit,
intruder beneath her skin.

While drunkards and grotesques
circle with stomps and leers,
the bride by dybbuk possessed
hears a voice strange and weird.

The rabbi's candles cannot save her,
and the ram's horn has no power
to rouse the pale and lifeless body;
she must join her demon lover.

Not in this world's poor village,
but somewhere off to the side,
consummation of what was vowed,
ethereal groom, ethereal bride.

“Chair. Museum. Survivor.” by Tony Howarth

Inspired by Joel Otterson’s, *Hot Wheels*

Polished. Padded. Fifth so elegant Avenue.
Stared at. Caressed. Sold.
Sat on sat on sat on. Monopoly games. Jumped
on. Candles and wine. Cigars and brandy. Sat on.
Arms come loose. Moved into the corner.
Set aside in case of an overflow crowd. Replaced.
Dumped. Sidewalk garbage. Pocked. Rain,
Tour bus truck splash and bash. Grime.
Scrounged from the pile. Bodega dominoes. Sat on.
Cigarette burns. Beerspills. Tossed in a fight.
Legs much fractured. Redumped. But.
Nimble hands. Found. Pulled apart even more.
Painted. Bright. Second chair. Pulled apart too.
Rebuilt. On wheels. With music. Cushions.
New. Unique. Fragments of both attached mixed up.
At home in a corner. Stared at. Admired. The
bending close to study the putting together. But.
No touching.

“Alone” by Tony Howarth

Inspired by Richard Wathen's, *Edgar*

Auburn fur with fresh white legs.

I built his cage myself, two compartments,
chicken wire and scraps of wood.

Fed him dandelions and chunks of carrot,
let him loose, to hop in the grass,
held him close to my chest, soft and warm.

One night, a scream and a slamming door –
I scramble out of bed and creep downstairs,
find my mother in the kitchen kneeling on the floor,
blood on her forehead, my father gone in the night.

Day after day, wearing blinkers, I come and go,
resigned to everything outside of my self.

One morning, Rarebit in his hutch,
frantic, flings himself against the chicken wire;
I keep walking, late for school;
when I return, he lies flat, starved.

White legs plastered by his filth.

I hold him. Wailing.

Bury him. Tear the hutch apart.

Light a fire. To burn the memory.

“Knit-Purl” by Mindy Kronenberg

Inspired by Charles LeDray's, *My Baby*

Knit-Purl

Baby-mine, eyes bright as buttons,
fingers and toes fitted like spools,
your cries unravel in a skein
of white wool, for so long
I've been knitting you
a veil on a cage of love growing cold.

My needles and nipples are ready
for suture and succor, my heart
a pincushion waiting to be pinned.
I hear you fuss as I scissor the ends
of loose threads, small knots like tiny

fists marking the face of my fertility clock.

“We” by Mindy Kronenburg

Inspired by Emil Alzamora’s, *Longue Dureé*

We

Where was it when was it
you were you, away and unknown?
Where was I how was I
in the world, not aware
of your breath, your shadow,
your footfalls on the earth?

Which is the dream—
our blended migration
captured in a trance,
or time turning back
to the blur of one
and one dancing out of sight?

I am you in the heat of your hands
you are me in the pull of my arms
let the moon shine dimly
and wander out of site,
let the sun cast its verdict
on the stars
We’ll orbit into the burning light.

“A Catfish Secret” by Robert Miss

Inspired by Debby Davis', *School of Catfish*

A catfish breaks water
Pretending to be a bass,
Hooked all the same.
What does a catfish eat?
What's his most favorite treat?
Something that comes in a can.
Cut up little squares of Spam.
Wham!
I think I hooked a big one.

“Dreamscape II” by Robert Miss

Inspired by Derek Boshier’s, *Night Dreamers*

Bright moon at pre-dawn,
Sweet cacophony of birds,
I dreamt you were here.
Did you whisk past
into the vaulted chamber,
or did you embrace me naked
in the moss green shade?
I can’t remember.

“Me and Him” by Alicia Morgan

Inspired by Paul Pretzer's, *Ich und Ur*

Nibble bone. Crack tooth.

Wretch.

Throw open glass, bed covers twisted, last meal thrown cross eyed on the floor.

Untangle overstretched wifebeater and knotted hair.

Hop- leg on jeans, gather change for the coke machine. Sniff the piss foul air.

Leave half can carefully on the nightstand, pull off jeans, insert thumb into mouth, and curl left hand round his body.

He grunts and coils below, tensing.

Press lips as he twists his face away. Dry mouth finds zipper, pump, spit hand.

Cum slaps lip ring.

Phone sings.

Fumblethumbs find belt loops, pinch reddened nipples to clockhands resembling desire, pointing at quarter to three. Spray smellgood under arms. Lazily swipe puss.

Fly down broken stairs.

Backseat belt snaps and hard pumps, bum bruised legs turn up and over. Cackle breath. Sour tongue slithers silver.

Two twenties and a twenty.

Fly up broken stairs.

Robe ties and skin pricks. Lick blood and pick scabs. He turns his face and knocks away the lamp, rising up, pinning, his weight bearing down, the heat and the stubble and the pin eye and the stink, the glory and the grandeur.

Lick small white traces off nightstand. Wash arms and face in sink.

Slide down bathroom door, hands round violet ribs. Finger each one with delicate desire.

Kneel as cool rag dips inside. Crawl on hands and knees, carpet burn style, four paws shaking.

He grunts and turns away.

Thumb in mouth, curl tight round him.

“28.” By Richard Jeffrey Newman

Inspired by Robert Mapplethorpe's, *Ken Moody*

The preacher's coiled voice erased the line
you drew, condemned the sin you freely chose,
and flicked its tongue into your ear, a rose
fully bloomed and waiting. Your eyes sought mine,
but mine now are less than empty air.
Forget your duty to the rest of us.
Forget the long-winded, meticulous
Price you had to pay. Forget despair.
Without a word of English on her tongue,
that migrant woman lied. You should have listened,
but you're a man, convinced yourself love glistened
at the tip of every sound she uttered. Still young,
you blame yourself for chasing her away.
It doesn't matter. She's gone. You're here to stay.

“30.” By Richard Jeffrey Newman

Inspired by Carole Feuerman’s, *Tree with Leaves*

Imagine bark as skin, ponder roots.
Interrogate the love they implicate.
Because you're a survivor, take off the boots
you stole to walk among the dead. Don't wait!
Learn the way before they strap your feet
into stirrups, before they press their lips
to the hollow of your mouth and breathe. The heat,
a surprise at first, will fill and lift your hips.

Of how and where my other family died,
I never speak. Revenge defines that line,
keeps fresh the suppurating wound. I've tried
to play the part you wrote; the failure's mine.
Ask if you must. I still refuse your name.
Remove the mask without me. Spread the blame.

“Two Children” by Charlotte Walsh

Inspired by Sherry Kerlin's, *Two Children Floating in a Boat*

Left at dusk to drift
in dark muddy waters,
they glide blindly
circled by impenetrable mist
Eyes filled with fear
without tears gaze
toward a shoreline
that might not be there.

Afloat in a childhood that wasn't,
caught in a current of absence,
alone, with no compass to guide them,
they might appear somewhere that isn't

“So this is how it ends” by Lily Wolf

Inspired by Thordis Adalsteinsdottir's, *Woman and Cat Lounging*

So this is how it ends

satin yellow panties smeared with rouge and ash from your cigarette lovers

arms stretched and skinny as your hair

did the art drive you insane?

Was it the paint (you are made of), the lipstick, the dog lapping at your useless hands?

Your fingers haven't created in years

Your body.....uninviting

when your irises and your toenails stain the same diseased yellow

yyoouu have descended from art

to depravity

“Death and death” By Lily Wolf

Inspired by Paul Pretzer’s, *Ich und Er*

I am old, and woolly

Tousled + wide-eyed

my ears hang low to my jaw and get tangled in the mush that’s easier to feed me these days than

fresh meat, tender and juicy. I can taste how baby-dead you are and I love it when

I imagine all the days you’ll lap at fireflies and how curly your fur will grow, the days you’ll live in bliss

!!!my ears perk up, I am excited!!!

before you are too old to have your own happiness

Cheeks ruddy and sanguine, blushing with the burning sun

and you have to pass it on to the next—

You lay down beside me, eyes empty, heavy with memories. I want to run around because there is white-hot light inside of me and this house is too small to contain it and it might just break, like the sound the sky makes when it cracks open during a storm. I could chase the breeze over grass blades for my entire life, but your brown fur grows redder with each passing thought and I know you want this memory too. Family is not only a concept for humans. The light leaves you and enters me, and I could eat a thousand fireflies and have room for more.