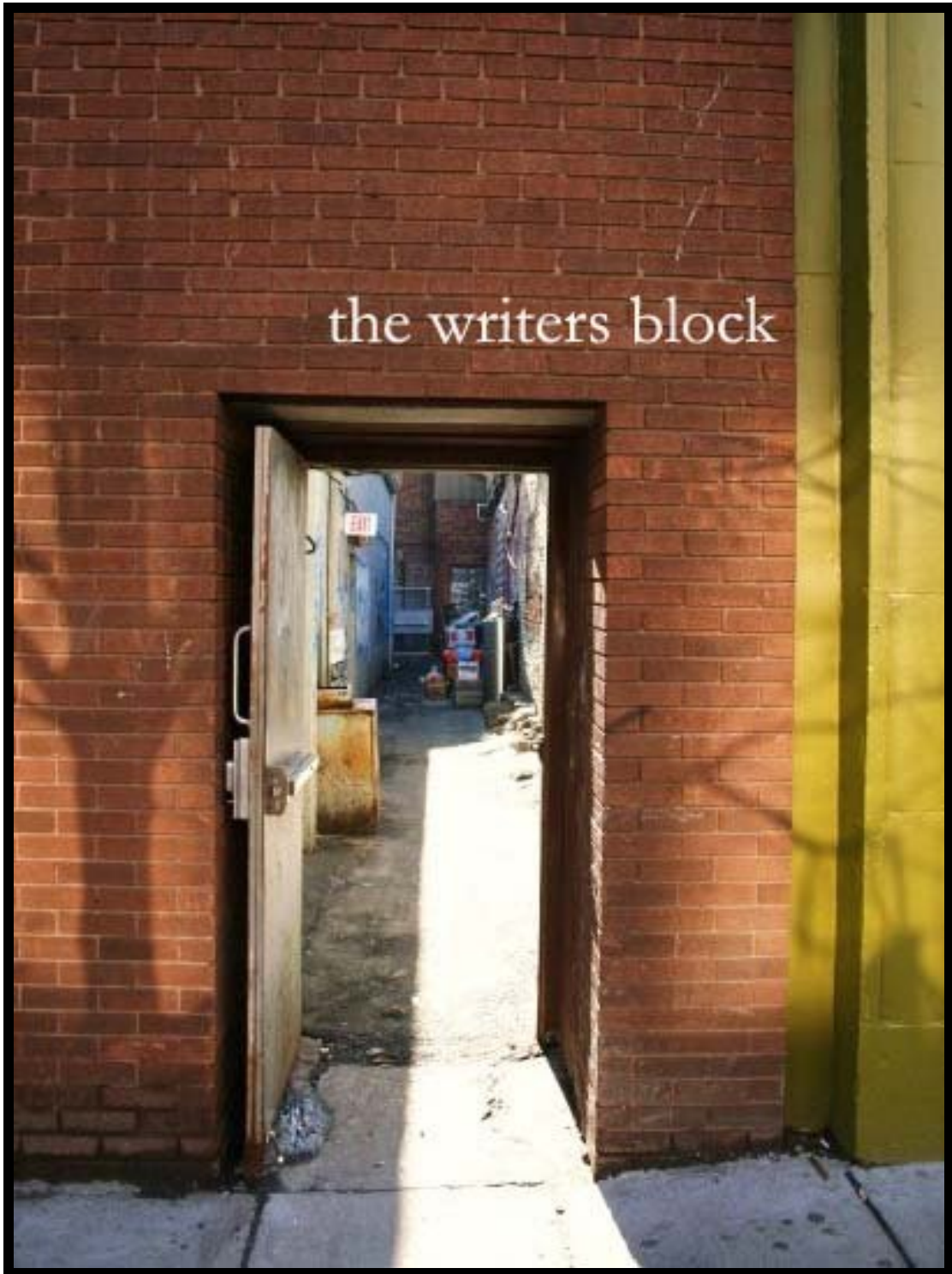


- thewritersblock -



issue six

Less fiction

and more poetry than normal in this issue, but the quantity of submissions and the quality of the selections have remained encouragingly high.

Many thank-you's

to everyone who took the time to submit, browse this online, or download the .pdf. Without you there wouldn't be a reason to have creative and artistic venues like this one.

This is the sixth issue now,

and the passionate ball that is The Writers Block keeps on rolling and rolling. Thanks for reading, and enjoy!

—Ben Gehrels

(Cover photo – “Rooting” by Ann Chang)

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angel ribs

j. fisher

pork/beef ribs

beer or red wine

large red onion

garlic

chili sauce

citrus fruit

jerk spice

vinegar

bay leaf

kosher salt

cracked black pepper

pre-heat oven to 375. cut ribs into pieces. don't go to pieces over the love dying in the other room. in an appropriate sized roasting dish, arrange riblets in a single layer along the bottom. try to ignore your more inappropriate actions. 3/4 cover with beer/wine/broth. pour 1/4 bottle of wine straight into your empty gut. bang the dishes in the sink to lessen the shame and the rage of letting her down again. roughly chop the onion and garlic, add to the pan under the guilt. open more booze. offer her a glass, God-knows she could use one. blame the tears on the onion, this fools no one. add half a bottle of quality chili sauce, 2 or 3 bay leaves, three caps of vinegar, sliced fruit and a healthy dollop of jerk spice. realize what a fucking jerk you are. stop grinding your teeth. grin and put in pepper and salt to taste. leave covered and cooking for at least two hours. when the meat is fork tender, remove lid and let liquid reduce. drink up all the booze left in the place. when the liquid levels are lower, and you're higher, remove the riblets. turn the oven up to broil. place riblets on cooking sheet, smother in BBQ sauce and return to oven. allow to blacken. serve immediately before you remember the betrayal she dealt you while you were busied playing chef and maid.

Stay

Daniel Rowe

Edge of a couple,
He's ready to leave for good;
manipulate now.

How To

Liz Kicak

Blood won't wash out
of handspun wool.
It can only be persuaded from the carpet
with cold water,
 a few drops of detergent,
hysterical scrubbing.

Fifteen years she'd been cleaning
their fallen hair from around that shower drain.

She bends down with a handful of paper towels
wiping up the hair
and bone
 and blood.

She chips bits of dried brain from the shower tiles with her fingernails.

His suicide note should have been more practical.

It was his last chance to teach her little things:

How to change the filters in the air conditioner.

How to fix the loose handle on the guest bath toilet.

Who should walk his daughters down the aisle.

The name of the kid who mows the lawn.

Their days for garbage pickup.

He should have explained

how to turn on the irrigation system.

What words of advice to give his son

the day his first child is born.

How to jimmy the front door when it sticks from the cold.

Why he chose her father's gun

to disbrain himself that April.

How to prune efflowered azaleas.

How to balance

the chlorine levels in the pool.

How to live with widow's guilt.

Trace

Manuela Popovici



Jagged Yellow Core

Amanda Stephens

I.

I sat on a curb outside Dairy Queen,
raspberries & vanilla ice cream—
the taste of spring at half past four
after the school bell rings.

My bike lay by my side.
With each jab from my nails,
purple paint flaked—
too many times I had left
it in the rain.

I thought I'd only be there
long enough to eat and go,
but then the man in the red car
slowed. He asked
for directions to the park.
Standing up to tell him where to go,
I saw he wasn't wearing pants.

He shook his dick at me,
as if it were my eventual prize.
I could place it on the dresser
by my baseball mitt.
I could hide it under the bed
until I was ready for it,
like my training bra.
I was eight.

II.

While walking through the woods
after a softball match,
my white pants caked with dirt,
my ponytail like a hot tongue in May,
I spotted my blue-eyed boy
sitting underneath the willow tree.

I shed my uniform.
My fawn shoulders melted

into damp pillows of decay—
branches of sunlight died
when he slid his body on mine.
We rolled, we fucked our childhood out.
I was thirteen.

III.

I come to you now—jaded—now—
a half-eaten apple left
on the kitchen counter—
half red, lush, sun-kissed in wicker.
Oranges hide my eaten side,
brown, rotting. Tasted.
Twenty.

Suffocate

Sarah Blevins

He is kindest in the morning.
Quiet while putting on trousers
or socks. The usual one-arm slink
into the overcoat. Smiling.

If I stifled you, it was because
you were too young to understand.
It was because you don't yet know
the significance of ritual. If my hand
came away wet and clammy from your
gaping mouth, it was only because

I could not bear for you take away
those cold, kind mornings.

He is slowest in the evenings.
Sloppy, while undressing from work.
His fingers snatching and clutching
wide-eyed buttons startled from their holes.

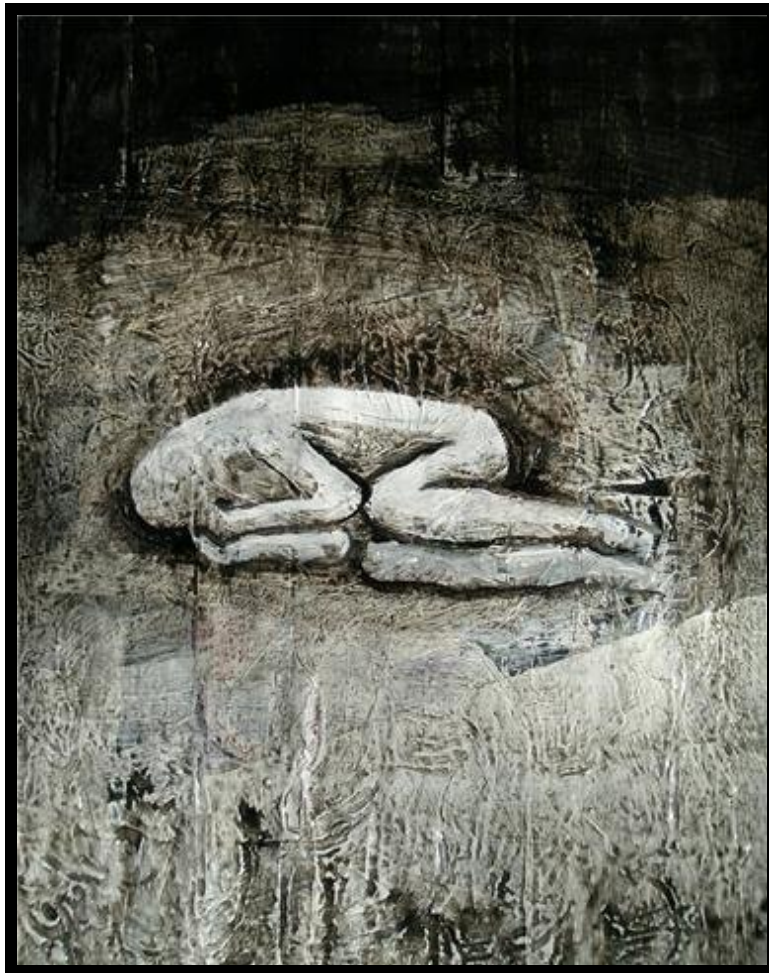
If my hands shook with desperation
and I hurt you with their clumsiness,
I promise it was for good reason.
You do not know him.
Later, while washing your hair
I spot the blue-black stain that
I cannot rub off.

and

I remember the horror of birth.
The cunning face of a doctor
as he let me glimpse the cord
wrapped around your swelling form.
Lethally silken and soft,
 blue as his best necktie.

Money Kill Research

Andrew Abbott



Max

Selene Smith

I know what you're gonna say. You'll say
 You were too young. You didn't know love.
And I'll look at you with this knowing look, and you'll believe me for a second,
you'll believe I knew, and then you'll shake your head and change your mind.

But I'll say

Just listen.

And you'll listen even though you have better things to do.

And I'll tell you about his hair, and his striped shirts.

And you'll grin that cynic's grin.

I'll tell you that I stopped him, and asked

Do you love me?

And you'll picture me, in my green dress, on the playground, next to the monkey bars.

And you'll say

What next?

And I'll tell you he said yes.

And I'll go on with the details, and the playdates, and the grilled cheeses. I'll tell you how we watched Barney on my daddy's bed. I'll tell you about that time when I was embarrassed because my drink was in a sippy cup, and his was in a grown-up cup.

I'll tell you how I fell in love and tore his picture in half. I'll tell you how I cut up a dollar bill to show him I was a daredevil.

I'll tell you everything I remember, and I'll make up things I don't, like what his favorite color was (black) and where we were when we first held hands (firestation).

And to humor me, you'll look me in the eye, and you'll say

You really loved that kid, huh?

And I'll look back with conviction. I'll say

Yes. And he loved me.

And I'll continue for a little while, about the birthday party when he was the only boy there and the cake my momma made but that I pretended to make, before I stop.

Then, expecting your skeptic gaze, I'll say

You're right, you're right. It wasn't love.

Before I even look up.

And then you'll nod and smile, because you agree.

And I'll smile back because I'm lying.

The Will of Sacrifice

Aida Zilelian

Megan carefully lowered the platter of roast beef onto the dinner table and her sisters helped nudge the other plates aside to make room.

“This all looks so lovely!” her mother said. She sat at the head of the table and smiled at her husband, who was sitting at the other end.

“It really does, Megan. These Sunday dinners are becoming such a treat for us,” he said, smiling at the mound of bacon-studded mashed potatoes and the roast beef sitting in its pool of ruby drippings. “Maybe your mother and I should work on Sundays year-round from now on.”

They were all quiet with anticipation as they each served themselves from the plates of food being passed around.

“Caramel apple pie for dessert,” Megan said, cutting her piece of roast beef into very small pieces.

Grace and Myra, the twins, sighed in unison with delight. “I can’t wait,” one of them said, but Megan wasn’t paying attention as to who since she was methodically cutting her mustard glazed string beans into the same sized pieces as the meat.

When dinner was over they didn’t let her move from her seat. “You’ve done enough,” her mother said. “Sit tight and we’ll serve dessert.” As she lifted Megan’s plate she noticed the small bits of food that were cut up and shuffled around. “Aren’t you hungry?”

“I was,” Megan said, “but I ate some of the mashed potatoes while I was cooking. I’d been starving.” She hugged her knees to her chest and pulled her over-sized sweatshirt over her knees. When she saw Grace cutting a fifth piece of apple pie onto the last plate she called out, “I’m too full for dessert!”

Waiting for her family to finish eating felt almost intolerable. Megan watched the seconds literally tick away on the clock above the stove, trying not to pull her sleeves over her hands – a sign (her mother had once noted) of nervousness.

“Is it okay if I go up and do some studying?” she asked when they were finished eating their apple pie. Unlike other parents, she knew they would not

question this; at least they wouldn't question her about it. Myra and Grace were clearing the table frantically so they could wash the dishes before their favorite T.V. show started.

"Of course," her father said, and it took her great restraint not to bolt out of the room and run upstairs.

"Thanks," she said, and sauntered to the foot of the staircase, and then very lightly she raced to her room.

Once inside, she locked the door behind her as she had for months now, and pulled out the digital scale from underneath her bed in one swift motion. She undressed completely, and as if diving into a swimming pool she took a deep breath and stood on the scale. There was a crinkled piece of paper scotch-taped to the top of scale where the numbers showed, and on it was written the numbers "105" - her new goal weight. She stared at the wall and let her body relax and then looked down. The scale read "110". She felt a familiar panic grip her stomach. Yes, she was tall - five feet and seven inches, three inches shorter than her father - but still. She couldn't understand.

She found her notebook and a pencil and frantically started making the list:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1 cup plain non-fat yogurt | 100 calories |
| 3 raw broccoli spears | 30 calories |
| 2 rice cakes | 25 calories |
| 3 string beans | 10 calories |

That was one item less than last week - the apple for breakfast she had cut out. It should have helped. Megan faced herself in the mirror, ignoring the pronounced bluish hue under her eyes, the ponytail sitting tight and limp on top of her head. "Don't cry," she said out loud and looked into her eyes. But that panic held on and she tried taking another deep breath.

She stepped back for a full view, still naked. She pushed her stomach out with force and then sucked it in. She splayed her hands across her ribs, which were now visible without the coaxing of inhaling deeply as she had in the beginning. She pressed her palms into her pelvic bones, felt the smoothness of them, how they jutted out. She felt reassured. Perhaps it was a bad day. Tomorrow would be different; she would have to revert to old rules, tried-and-true: no eating after 6pm (she could tell them she had stopped off for pizza

with friends after school), ten push-ups between every half a mile on the track before practice with the team, and then the same evening routine at home.

Elated with these new amendments, Megan threw her clothes back on and continued her evening ritual. She knew it all by heart now, this list that had morphed into a life for her: three hundred sit-ups, one hundred twenty-five leg lifts for each leg, seventy-five hundred push-ups, fifty leg kicks, and the list went on.

And at the end of these evenings she was proud! Who had taken charge after her mother had lost her editorial position at the publishing firm? Now on Sundays her mother helped her father tutor students at his school and then grade papers; her mother now worked the early shift at her grandparent's bakery during the week. She had undertaken her mother's carpooling schedule in the mornings, and dropped off her sisters at school before driving herself to class. After all this, she had her classes at school, the photography club and track. The Sunday dinners had also been her idea. She promised herself not to taste anything when preparing these meals if she could help it, and she hadn't – not even the roast beef she had finagled from the butcher for almost half the price.

This year was the “big year”, as her father had referred to it when she had started the seventh grade. When she sat with her friends during lunch they chattered away about the prom and limos and going to the beach after, and Megan would think, “It's only October! How can you fuss over these things when it's so many months away?” She would laugh along with them without saying much, and in the back of her mind loomed the terrors of Life that awaited her: college essays, applications to scholarships, safety schools and first choice schools, and something she thought she would never have to worry about until recently – student loans. The rope was being pulled from both ends mightily, the middle beginning to fray.

These thoughts raced through Megan's mind as she did her sit-ups. She had taped pictures of her two favorite models – Kristy Turlington and Kate Moss – low on the wall, and every time she raised her body to her knees she looked and saw the models meet her eye-level as she leaned back onto the floor. “I can do this,” she whispered as she lay on her side and started the first phase of her leg lifts. “I can do this.”

0109091416

Wade Gagich



Witness

Darren M. Edwards

You can hear her
screaming from the other side
of the room
wide eyed
tight toothed

close lipped
silent.
She's got this one
bulbous knuckle like all
the pent up screams
have pitched camp in the joint
at the middle of her middle finger.

Her three-year-old is pulling at the hem
of her pants and crying
Mommy, momma, mom, mom, mommy
and I can see it in the way
her cheek rises at the corner
like it's trying to pinch
a single sheet of paper to her eye—
She might lose it.
But the trick is
the paper being pinched
between her cheek and
that eye is scrawled
all over with marching orders
for those rising screams
saying
I don't have time to loose it today
I don't have time to peel back the eyes
and shock the minds of the people
in this waiting room with the thoughts
screaming through mine.
I don't have the energy to feed
this world with my anger.

And her three-year-old is crying
Mommy, momma, mom, mom, mommy

And the nurse is fumbling through files,
And the overgrown mustache sitting next to her
is eyeing the line of her denims as they round her hip
And the middle aged gaggle across the room is whispering,
not so quietly, about her inattention to the child
And I'm fiddling with my sun glasses
like a scientist watching the slow traverse of stars.

And her three-year-old is crying
Mommy, momma, mom, mom, mommy.

So, when she stands
sudden
unannounced
three-year-old attached at the hem
everything stops.

I can feel my shoulders tighten
as she lifts the child
onto her hip,
takes three brisk strides
to the nurse,
child now pulling at her blouse
her mouth opens,
 and the gaggle is holding their breath
 and their whispers
 even the mustache has traded his leer
 for a look of quizzical concern,
and I'm waiting for a supernova
some cosmic collision
another big bang
when she asks
in the most polite tone
how much longer might the wait be

and the nurse smiles
gesturing with the space between two fingers
just a little while longer.

Lowering the child to the floor
she retakes her seat,
where she can feel
the whispers
and the eyes
and she goes back to rubbing her thumb
in circles over that knuckle,
circle after
circle
to the rhythm of all those screams
marching on.

Extrusion

Robert Fontella

Back on New Years here in Detroit, after the gun fire,
called celebratory because it's not shot at people
just up into the sky
or lead into ground,
my friend and I talked about food. He's diabetic.
Corn syrup, is evil. I guess I knew.
And breakfast cereal's toxic
because it's extruded:
mushed-up and under extreme force
pushed through a tiny spout

like a pimple,
or a planet through a black hole,
or that people go
that gets sucked out of a tank
when a depleted uranium round goes
through.

I see it all the time now.

Most recently in Jenkin's, Architectural Brickwork:

"In 1875 the first brick extrusion machine was introduced
at Bridgewater, Somerset, and made the process even faster..."

With over a hundred color plates it was my uncle's book when he built
buildings

then tri

chloro

ethylene and tetra

chloro

ethylene built a cancer home in him and senators pushed
through

the Janey Enslinger Act for every Marine
who drank the water at Camp Lejeune.

I actually started making a list of all the things that kill people.

Mostly work on it while I watch TV.

From dirty sponges and toasters, to snake bites, road rage,
high altitude pulmonary edema, starvation, stampede,
defenestration, meningitis, premature burial, everything...

My diabetic friend said, I got one for you,

a guy was tasered in a puddle.

And the list will expand, I think

to include factory parking lots

behind razor wire

covered in clean snow.

It's going to be an early spring
the ground hog didn't see his shadow.

That's my Merv
in Manitoba
who came out of his hole.

I only trust Canada now, listen to its radio exclusively
leaking in from just across the river.

English FM at the desk
the signal goes static when I get up, pulled in when I sit down.

French AM in the car
the signal goes static under bridges, pulled in when I come out.

Carried through Belcarra, Coquitlam, and Musquem
the Olympic Torch has made it to Vancouver.

While here we're burning empty houses
leave when it's on fire, come back when the walls are gone
to pull out the copper pipes
and wire.

Sometimes I think in bed. Last night:

What would Detroit look like in a hundred years?

Nothing came to mind

So I tried fifty, twenty-five, less

Tried to see the skyline

Only unease

like a cop was walking up behind me

pulled over for speeding

I'd been drinking

no insurance

an ounce of marijuana

gun under the seat

I woke-up, the morning still dim

dog whining at a squirrel on the window ledge

was in the residue of a dream of an open wooden boat

a lapstrake dory bobbing on the edge of shore
putting my things inside
no oars, rudder, or sail
on the Detroit River which funnels into Erie
rushes over Niagara
to Lake Ontario

Out of coffee, I ran to the CVS
Starbucks and Bustello to mix, ½ and ½, and Gatorade for later
You tired? the woman asked me at the register
That's like my Mountain Dew, she said

While it brewed I turned on the TV
America's Test Kitchen
They were someplace green, the country, cooking outside.

Hot Dogs!

Really?

Who wins? Who wins?

I got excited

Nathan's?

What's a Nathan's?

No Hebrew National?

So I went to the web

Someone must have compared them

First hit: "I am tired of hot dogs that have all those fillers and crap

in it!

Does anyone know where I can buy a Nathan's Hot Dog or
Hebrew National in Toronto?"

So cereal might be okay

because hot dogs are extruded too

perhaps all the way to Canada.

Idol Worship

Stuart Miller



Stir Fry

Vancom

The carrots are alarmed
as the heat rises
but the steam has them hypnotized

The cracking of the sesame oil
brings them back awake
and the brocolli is screaming

The red and green peppers
are strangely quiet
the mushrooms chanting mantras

But the peas, the peas
oh my god, the peas.

Lemon Drop

Christian McPherson

“What the FUCK IS GOING ON?! IS SHE OK?!”

My wife is screaming
from down the hall
she doesn't want to see
what is happening

just last week
we had friends over
and they had their
one year old little girl
with them

all the kids were playing
when the little girl
suddenly went bug-eyed

the mother asked
“What does she have in her mouth?”

nobody answered
we all just looked at the baby

then the mother screamed
“WHAT THE FUCK IS IN HER MOUTH?!”

her lacquered red fingernail
scooped the inside of the tiny mouth
like she was digging out an avocado
she found a few teeth
and nothing else

the baby cried
the mother issued a series of apologies
“I’m so sorry, I thought she was . . .”

“CHRIS, WHAT’S GOING ON!” screams my wife
still down the hall

I flash back to the room where I spent two days
taking First Aid
I remember DON’T hit them on the back
I remember something about not performing
the Heimlich Manoeuvre on kids
my four year old daughter
is standing before me
eyes like gumballs
mouth open
her hand clutching
the base of her little neck
silent

I don’t know where
my daughter got the idea

either TV or a movie
but she had been asking me
for a lemon drop candy
“Pleeeeeeeeeease can I have one
please please please”

I bought a small tin of lemon drop candies
and now here I am
neurons painting images
of brain damage
of ambulances
of funerals

“DO I NEED TO CALL 911?”

good question

I grab my daughter
around the waist
and pick her up
and POP
the lemon drop flew
and TICK TICKED across the floor

then after the tears
and the calming down
I throw those little yellow
fuckers
in the trash.

BIOS

Daniel Rowe - I am a Montreal writer working as an English teacher at two schools and as a research assistant for a blind Applied Human Sciences professor at Concordia University. So it goes.

ManuelaPopovici hails from Romania, calls Canada home and is currently living and working in Cambodia. She takes pictures and writes poems in the stubborn belief that the world around her will one day make sense.

Liz Kicak lives and works in Tampa, FL. She and her dog, Finnigan, enjoy going to the park, reading great poetry, and eating Skittles.

Amanda Stephens - I recently graduated from Marshall University with a Master of Arts in English. I enjoy writing, reading Virginia Woolf's short stories, bicycling, and napping with my gray-and-white cat, Bitsy.

Sara Blevins is a graduate of Marshall University and is currently obtaining her Master's Degree in Creative Writing. She is both a feisty writer and a quiet librarian. Her work has appeared in the literary magazines Ect, Message in a Bottle, and Spilt Milk. She continues to work and learn from Huntington, WV.

Ann Chang is a recent "Writing, Literature, and Publications" (that's the name of the major) graduate from Emerson College in Boston, MA. I had my first book published by a club on campus before I even graduated and all the proceeds went to charity. It may be strange for me to be submitting photos to a literary magazine, but writing is not my only passion. I also moonlight as an extremely amateur photographer. I have a secret dream to someday get one of my pictures published. I love taking my camera for walks, my family, and building forts on rainy days.

Selene Smith - I am a seventeen year old high school student, and I have been writing since I was young...usually just when I feel compelled to, or want to tell a story.

Aida Zilelian - My work has been featured in Pen Pusher (UK), SN Review, Visions, Slushpile, Wilderness House Literary Review, Suss: Another literary journal, The Fertile Source and most recently, Halfway Down the Stairs. I have written two novels, for which I am seeking representation.

Darren M. Edwards is a performance poet, essayist and teacher. Darren received both his B.S. and his M.S. in English from Utah State University where he taught English for the past three-years. For much of this time he has also worked as an editorial assistant at *Isotope: a Journal of Literary Nature and Science Writing*. Currently, Darren teaches English for Stevens-Henager College.

j. fisher lives and works in Calgary Ab. he has released two formal collections with *Frontenac House*, and continues to be published in mags, ezines and trades the world over.

Born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, Robert Fontella has been a teacher, translator, intelligence analyst, and editor. He is an author of a collaborative book of poetry, *Lines Through* (Seetalk, 2009). His work has also appeared in *StreetWise*, *Subtletea*, *Pow Fast*, *Stride* and was performed at the 2010 Arizona Fringe Festival. He is currently pursuing a MFA in creative writing through the University of New Orleans.

vancom@universalmail.com - A reluctant writer afraid to find out that he can't really write so he rarely does. A man looking for meaning and beauty and purpose.

Christian McPherson is the author of "Six Ways to Sunday" and "Poems That Swim From My Brain Like Rats Leaving A Sinking Ship." His first novel, "The Cube People" is being published by Nightwood Editions this fall. He lives in Ottawa with his wife and two kids.

Stuart Miller - I'm a college student at William & Mary in Virginia, but I was raised in southern Louisiana. I'm a premedical student, and I'm in love with Australia - I plan to live there, hopefully practicing medicine somewhere remote. I'm not really a poet, I think, or a photographer, but I do enjoy writing poems and taking photos. I tried to be a fencer, and I tried to learn the ukulele - I was a little bit successful at both. I don't think that I'm a person yet, but I'm trying very hard to change that.

Wade Gacich

Andrew Abbott