

2019

# REFLECTIONS

RED BANK CATHOLIC  
LITERARY & PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE







## Intoxicating Freedom

I regret staying up late  
Each and every night,  
But the escape is enough to have me hooked,  
not much was needed, A fine-print page at most,  
You could say I'm drunk on words.

Taylor Downing





## Reality's Dream

As much as I'd like to drown myself in these words,  
There is an inevitable wall blocking my view  
Of the glorious sea and I am trapped  
On the shore once again  
Trying to sprint through buffeted rocks  
To escape reality.

Taylor Downing





## Moon

She is the moon, yes;  
bright and shining in the sky.  
I want to be her...

Joanna Normandia



# A Sunbeam at Seven in the Evening

He's spread out on the blacktop,  
Blue eyes like a massive, ancient star  
Staring at the end of its life.  
In a way,  
That's exactly what he is.

"What happens when we die?"  
He asks me.  
The boy I love,  
With hair like straw  
And a mouth shaped like a secret.

"We go."  
It's all I can say,  
Because it's all I have to know.  
I can't tell him what I am,  
After all.

I can't tell him that he will die tomorrow.

He stares at me,  
Silent.  
Despite the storm on the borders of the eastern sky,  
Golden hour is at its high.  
He is a dream,  
He doesn't just "look like one."  
He is a dream,  
And he's my dream.

I shrug,  
Helplessly,  
And lean over to kiss him.  
His mouth tastes like a back street in Brooklyn.

When I pull away,  
He eyes me cautiously;  
He's searching for whatever he missed  
In the first one thousand times  
That he looked at me.

"You're beautiful."

I smile.  
"You make me feel like a sunbeam at seven  
in the evening."

"Warm and safe?"  
He tucks my hair behind my ear.

I smile wider.  
There are tears in my eyes.  
"Golden."

Ava Jensen



# Drenched

I am covered in colors.

I am his opposite.

I look to my old friend--  
Death, hello, how are you?  
--and wink.

Death,  
As ancient as I,  
Nods.  
He doesn't wink.  
He is much more designed by order;  
I am much more designed by chaos.

"Are you well?"  
He asks.  
He never gets a different answer,  
Yet he always asks.

"Aren't I always?"

Today,  
I am lying.

The universe stretches out,  
A boundless realm of possibility,  
And life is floundering  
While death flourishes.

An odd balance.  
It will change in a day.

"If that's all,"  
Death says,  
Hoisting his net.  
He has to carry all those souls somehow.

"It is."  
I hoist my sword and shield.  
I have to defend all my souls somehow.  
"I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yes."

His black space of shadow flickers  
And shimmers  
And flies away.

I gather my colors and begin my march  
To the edge of a planet far away.  
A tiny place,  
Still made of fire and rage.

Earth.

I am life.  
I am drenched in colors  
And I must give them away.

Yes,  
Blue and green is a much better look on you  
Than the violence of red  
And gray.

Ava Jensen





# Victory Rose

Glory to you, gracious host  
Glory to you on this blessed day  
My old calf has been removed  
And in the quiet moments I recall my past:

I was born in a dark void  
Weak in heart as I was brought  
An out unknown to inside out  
Destined to die in vain

I smelt the aura of Frankincense under dim lights  
And heard the voices of generations born and to be born  
A rose appeared to me from autumn's gate  
Oh how lowly, oh how poor

When I came back into the world, the pains started to fade in again  
Abandoned by friends  
Scorned and gorned  
Errant days filled my life

But by spring fog  
I let my soul bring forth your hands of pure  
To speak through my ardent works.  
For me not to rejoice in wrongdoings,  
But to rejoice in TRUTH

Ever loving, ever kind  
My heart now beats out to all  
My lowly flower has rebirthed itself  
To blossom into your sacred heart, my victory rose.

Heart to heart, hearts ever open  
Versed in your name I sing:  
"Jesus, meek and humble of Heart,  
Make my heart like unto thine!  
Jesus, meek and humble of Heart,  
Make my heart like unto thine!  
Jesus, meek and humble of Heart,  
Make my heart like unto thine!"

Let all who flow through the river of life be guided by your peace, oh  
Lord.  
Let peace be inscribed unto the hearts of all men!

May Heaven bless you in your calm  
To all who bear these words.  
May Heaven bless you all.

Luis Merino







## The Finale

They--the humans--called it The Dark.

It swept their planet like what they called "wildfire,"  
Annihilating almost anything in its path.  
They were not sure what it was,  
Because nothing like it had ever been seen before by them.

Ah, those humans.  
So small and precocious.  
Yet it led them to their own demise--  
For they discovered a clutch of Simbriar eggs  
While mining in the meteorites of their puny "Asteroid Belt."

The Simbriar.  
A monster capable of killing whole planets.  
And yet they took it anyway.

Now their land is awash with darkness and silence  
Where once light and noise abounded.

There are, of course,  
Pockets of survivors.  
They send out radio waves into their puny atmosphere,  
Searching for each other.  
But they are too far apart and too few  
To find one another.

I almost feel sorry for them.  
Almost.

But life is quickly receding from their tiny sphere of existence,  
And in time the Simbriar will find the remainders.  
All that will be left  
Is the natural life  
And ashes.

Such is the fate of another planet.

I turn my ship out toward the Grengriar constellation  
And offer my consolation to the one human that I saved.  
She doesn't reply,  
Only stares out the window of my cruiser  
Down,  
Down,  
Down,  
At her dying home.

Is there hope? she asks me  
In the broken, scratchy tongue of human speech.

I shake my head slowly,  
A human signal of the word "no."

She eyes me steadily,  
Then turns to the window  
And weeps.

They--the humans--called it The Dark.

And now their lights are extinguished.

Ava Jensen



# The Avalon

The sky cools down its wayward flames  
And glows the color of spring

When I was a child, I stood soullessly loud  
About pains that meant nothing, pains that meant a lot  
But once I experienced the impossible gift  
My voice now sings the songs of pure

I know how to handle things now  
And when the time comes for me to need to stretch out my hands  
I know that wherever I'm going will be good to me

But for now, I'll keep climbing the mountain  
And even if I have to climb in the shadow of death  
I'll still climb just to be your one in a million

Look!  
Look at us  
We've made it to Avalon  
Where all of virtue inherit their rose!

And I'll use all that's left in me  
Every dream that I've ever dreamed  
For this moment  
In this space between  
You and Me

"At last, At last  
Atlas has made her peace with the world  
Atlas has been made anew"

Luis Merino







## Stump

"Atlas died on her throne of pride  
And when Death came to send her home,  
He found a broken mirror beside her.  
Her children were dissolved into the heat of the Earth.  
Left to wander the sea of tragedy

What are you going to do now, Renee?  
Are you ready to climb down?"

Stump  
Surely a sad state to be in  
When the world made a choice to rise against rule  
Growth stunted me.  
All that awaits us now is a sea of pain  
And all we can do is to try to hide

"A grand gesture Atlas was, for sure  
To try shining her light in a black void.  
Too bad she never glowed any of it in herself.  
And here YOU are!"

I don't need to spell it out  
I just wanted to set the world on fire  
So just leave my woes be!  
And let them grow to be a fortress to console me

"Once in the space that filled between you and me  
There grew a special bond  
A bond that connected us to the world  
And when our bond flew away that day  
I fell to my knees and grieved.  
Please come back to me"

Such a gracious word in a cruel world  
That you've bled unto me.  
You've planted an opalescent seed in my heart  
And have taken away my mourning drain

Blessed love, your love I've seen  
From the tie that grew to mean so much to you  
I'll try to withstand all of what the world gives  
To repay the love that you showed to me

I pick the dirt off my feet  
Hope for the best  
And watch a new sun take form  
Over the mountain

Luis Merino



## Snake

Societal standards wrap your head, a snake around a mouse  
“Fit the mold and look perfect”, they say  
Who cares how you feel at the end of the day?  
Take care of the children and stay in the house  
Your only job is to take care of your spouse  
Watch how much you weigh  
These ideas should be what you espouse

But what they don't know is how strong you are  
Underneath all the makeup is a brilliant mind  
A strong, independent human  
That can carry the children and go to a job for hire  
You belong to the strongest gender of mankind  
For you are a woman.

Brenna Koppel







## Playing in Georgia

When I play it's different  
I live my dream  
A beautiful day  
Sweat dripping  
Eyes getting salty  
Hair drenched  
Playing in Georgia  
It was rough  
But I'm living my dream.

John Nimeth





## The Vehement Gaze

Strong.  
Unwavering.  
Determined.  
The expressions I get from Her face  
Are intimidating.  
Her eyebrows are lightly creased  
But in what I do not know.  
Whatever emotion she feels,  
It is directed at me.

She blends with the background  
Yet also is the only thing to look at,  
Brown, bland, neutral, monotone.  
She reminds me of a cup of coffee,  
Dark, bronze, and firm.  
She is matching the landscape  
In brown attire layered onto her  
As you would layer chocolate on top of caramel.

I am now with her  
Standing in this pasture  
Alone.

The wind howls with great force.  
One of the many golden flowers  
Placed in her hair descends  
And slowly falls and lands at my feet.  
I grab the flower and hold it.  
Yellow, dehydrated petals  
Do not have the life they once held;  
I can feel the decaying.  
They are not plush but thin,  
Not like velvet but like sandpaper.  
I find myself worried for the fate  
Of this decrepit golden flower.  
What can I do for this flower?

I look up from the flower  
And she is still there-  
The same stern gaze, yet now  
She is waiting.

Isabella Ferrigno



# Unwelcome

I didn't know who the man was. He was a spectacularly ordinary man. 5'9", mid-30's, Asian, possibly of Chinese descent. I don't know which of my parents invited him to their dinner party, but strangers in our house are nothing out of the ordinary. My parents host an elaborate dinner party every other week. In part because they like to eat, but mostly because they like to show off to their coworkers and impress potential clients. The man was just another face in a sea of unextraordinary dullness. I wouldn't have remembered him if he hadn't shown up later that night.

My dog woke me up at three in the morning. He was running in circles on my bed, which is his way of telling me he needs to go to the bathroom. I groaned as I rolled out of bed, and wrapped myself in my fluffiest robe. My dog followed me to the front door and I let him out into the cool night. I closed the door against the chilly air and waited for him to be done. I gave him a couple minutes before I decided it was time to call him back. I opened the door with "Kibbles!" on the tip of my tongue before I snapped my mouth shut. The man from the dinner party was standing at the foot of the stairs of my porch, just staring at me. He was doing nothing else, just standing there with a frighteningly blank expression. Now, I'm just standing here, completely incapable of moving and at a loss for what to do.

He opens his mouth as if he's about to say something, flaps it a bit, and snaps it shut.

Should I ask him what he's doing back here? If maybe he forgot something? Even if he had, I can't imagine it's so important that it had to be retrieved at three A.M. I end up opening my mouth only to close it again awkwardly when no words come out.

I should just slam the door in his face, but this guy is a weirdo and Kibbles is still out here. I would die if anything happened to him because I was too afraid of this freak. And it's not like he's physically threatening in any way. He's not much bigger than me so I could theoretically take him down if I needed to. Still, I longed for the boxcutter I keep on my bedside table. It's no help to me now.

I should whistle for Kibbles, and slam the door the second he's inside. But before I can the strange man rounds his lips and emits the whistle- the special whistle that only I know.

Kibbles comes waddling up the porch steps completely disregarding the unwelcome intruder on our property. My valiant protector.

Kibbles is inside now so I should just slam the door. Then the man begins to pantomime something. I feel terror when I realize he's mimicking the motion of closing and locking the door.

And that's when I realize he's been copying my every action seconds before I do it. He knows what I'm thinking, and he could stop me if he wanted to. I slam the door anyway. Safely behind solid oak I scream for my parents. The police are called. The man is never seen again.

Ana Zeb





# Open

What I see is relative to me  
It is different, unlike to him and her  
Sometimes we see what isn't there  
As if we are staring through the air  
Sometimes what we see isn't true  
Like a smile hiding the feeling of blue  
Or sometimes we see a beautiful landscape  
As when we drive down the Jersey Cape  
Sometimes I see what you cannot  
So open your eyes and give it a shot.

Shannon Tringola



# Graduation

(after Linda Pastan)

One must have a mind of college  
To regard the graduation ceremony filled  
With sentiment;

And have been prepared for weeks  
To be robed in the emerald gown,  
Draped similarly among past classmates;

To feel the June sun; and not to think  
Of any melancholy in the salty drops,  
In the sound of the wavering voices,

The voices that were once so familiar  
Yet soon will be no longer  
Ringing in the eardrums of the class.

For the listener, the bittersweet symphony  
Of pride in conclusion  
Signals what once was will be no more.

Maddie Tascione





# Ruins

We have disappointed you  
I am sorry that we are the people  
Living in the city named after you  
You deserve better than us.

During our prime  
You must have been proud of us  
Helping, assisting in our strategic plans.  
We dedicated our triumphs solely to you.

Both ends of the earth  
Ventured to this city  
To see the center which you blessed.  
In this building, adorned with sculptures of you  
There was a shrine  
Handcrafted so as to please you  
With only the best white marble known to us  
We offered up cattle, our beloved livestock  
In the hope of developing a connection with you.

Our greatest treasures  
Abided in your place of worship  
We promised to please you  
And to fill your house with only the qualified furnishings  
Swords from the Persians,  
Statues made of sacred metals,  
All built to impress you.

Even with your vast wisdom,  
We could not expect it.  
The initial explosion was frightening.  
Looking outside my window  
There, I saw your home decaying.  
All I saw was fire,  
A smoldering, blazing inferno  
The flames erupting and encompassing the pillars  
The roof caving and disintegrating into the soil  
I saw greatness crumble into ruins.

Isabella Ferrigno





## Thought in a Raining Forest

When does the bus leave for home?

February already feels so long

And I can't stand its color.

Lemonade never feels happy when the sun never comes

And when sunshine never comes everyone else feels the same

But we continue to brush our feet across the sidewalks

A field of souls trapped inside a frozen river.

Luis Merino





## Merriweather

I tried looking outside to see the world  
Oh, how every little thing hits me all at once  
Busy nights and the voices of children catch on  
And everything in me feels unorganized  
I'm not scared of the world, I just want to understand  
its pulse

When I swallow my wind and creep out of my forest  
Humanity hits its mark  
My eyes fill with sparks  
A new ladybug lands on my head

May's daring jewels make their way into my system  
veins  
And shine new lights I've never felt before  
An array of colors and feels  
That kindle us to see the beauty of living a lifetime love

I have nothing left to hold back in the now  
I have a new fire in my heart  
A flame that doesn't hurt me anymore  
I have a new fire in my heart  
And I don't want to let it burn out

Luis Merino



A hand holding a piece of amber against a blue sky and ocean background. The hand is in the foreground, holding a small, translucent, brownish-gold piece of amber. The background is a bright blue sky with a few wispy clouds, and a blurred view of the ocean with white-capped waves in the distance.

## Atlas

Up between Earth and far-reached Space lies a gracious thing  
And she's called Atlas  
No souls from her outer rind will hear her sons and daughter skirl  
They'll never see the shining pearls in the eyes of her children

Tired from all she sees of the decadent world below  
When you look into her eyes  
There's darkness  
Bold darkness  
Daring darkness  
Darkness that lights a fire to the mind  
But burns the heart

The children, out to defend their mother  
Will make all look deep into her eyes  
Those who resist will be scorched by the flame  
And eaten alive by the darkness

Oh Atlas, bearer of the world's pains, make me strong through your  
woes  
And let those out of your sight come into your dingy light

Luis Merino



## Due Mondi

This society is a cage  
Its unions are a cage, about a cage, about a cage  
It has a voice, an undaunted howl  
That creeps its way into the hermit caves  
And into my humble ears

Where do I stand in your sound's embrace?

Last night I threw away all the things that made me think of  
her

To forget the burning moments of her pride  
And yet, I still feel the same way she does  
Those burn marks are still there

I'm caught in between two things in a never-ending cycle  
A moving wheel of soulless idyls rolling down a hill to Hell  
And when that wheel rolls over me on its way there  
It'll blame me for getting in its way

Will I ever find my peace?  
Who will ever grant me my peace?  
I don't know.

Luis Merino





## April

Every day  
We win or lose  
No matter what  
Our egos will always overcome

In April  
I stay at home and don't even bother to go outside  
Everybody's tearing each other apart  
And I just can't stand to look at the world again

Last night  
I woke up because of the early morning rain  
My dreams were taken so far away from me  
I was too anxious to go back to sleep

Later  
I looked outside  
And saw a rotting carcass on the ground  
Enclosed by giant crows as its only mourners  
And now everything makes sense

When morning came  
I looked outside and saw the morning sky bloom  
Its citrus color calls all to its presence  
And then, the morning sun bleeds out its juices.  
Something's happening here

Luis Merino







## Inverness

Atlas is coming  
Coming by a sailor's warning call  
Coming to kill us all!

To kill us for the stories  
Of generations lost in time  
They will pierce our hearts with rays of fire  
None shall be spared

What then shall I do when the morning red sun rises?  
Should one stand against her darkness  
Or be tormented by the light?

Trouble finds itself deep in her eyes  
Her false words and false heart  
My cup overflows with the plague of pride  
Filled by the paragon born of broken ties  
Atlas now fills the world with her art  
Babylon's new edifice

Trouble finds itself in the morning red sun  
My hope for humanity is by their misdepart  
My morals undone  
My heart kept warm for no one  
My faith, torn apart.  
My love's damnation day has begun

And when I can't love anyone  
My world stands still  
And when the red sun comes out of the sky  
And into my mind  
The sparks in my eyes fade like ash  
I see the world as it truly is  
Negativland

Luis Merino





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