



S/tick

Feminists on Guard

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*"Bring her right in and down the stair.
Let us have a good look at her."*

*above quotation / Elisabeth Blair / from "Daughter of Tyrannosaurus—," p. 5
cover art / Carole Bruzzano*

S/tick can be found at <http://s-tick.tumblr.com> and <http://www.facebook.com/stickjournal/>

The content of feminist creative writing and artwork often rocks the patriarchal world. It keeps the patrons of an exploitative, repressive, and violent global society on their toes as feminists raise up the mirror to reflect and reveal the content of patriarchal actions. But something just as important when it comes to feminist creative writing and artwork is *form*: the appropriation, criticism, reshaping, and complete rejection of the forms that came before. Form can tell us just as much about our meaning as can content. Are we as feminists content to crouch in the box that has been built around us? Do we trace the box's corners and crevices over and over again with our fingers, hoping that maybe someday somebody else will open the lid of the box for us? No! The more we branch out and change the traditions, the more we create our own ways of writing and working and living, the more we tear at those walls. For this reason, *S/tick* was originally established with the hope that our forms would reflect our contents: resistant, emotional, and honest. In this issue, you will find forms that won't stop talking, forms that number their grievances, forms that discover themselves on a scrap of paper, and forms that wobble back and forth between the voices of the head. To all readers and contributors, past, present and future, I encourage you to keep pounding away at the walls of Formation so that we can all spring out-of-the-box together in a vibrant movement of deFormation, inFormation, and reFormation! SK

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Daughter of Tyrannosaur— / Elisabeth Blair

perforated on the bottom so she can tear, tear, tear! Til we must do a maneuver to bring her in, then carry her over the Seine, passing a little man in a cape and further down, his mistress who stands and waits. Past the archduke with his clammy hands. Past the cherry trees in premature bloom, then under the Greek dawn carved by 18th century workmen. Bring her right in and down the stair. Let us have a good look at her. She swoons and makes to fall. Ah, and look, now she will crawl.



Birth to Monsters / Erica Law

and we walked from store to-
or went-
or shopped.
Always new.

sat in mall.
made up people passed by
shoppers walked, mouths moving to
people who weren't there.

Birth to monsters.

We laughed and laughed.

She took my hand.
I took her hand.
we went-
old place-
new place.

We went there holding hands.



dilated / Jan Ball

Dilated for the eyeball and the cervix, just a thought waiting for the ophthalmologist after the fat trainee in the crumpled shirt and white coat that didn't fit over his porky stomach dripped drops into my lower eyelids and secured my head into a harness contraption. I've seen horses in movies whose eyes rolled back into their sockets as white as ping-pong balls while they whinnied, a jerky tension in the neck like mine must have been straining for cervical dilation so many years ago when the gynecologist, in a better-pressed white coat, seemed to insert his forearm up my vagina saying when he came to check many times, "Only two fingers dilation, only two fingers dilation," until the final decision to have a caesarian section and now, too, my eyes not dilated enough so the very obese trainee drops a half quantity more, hopefully not drops like Claudius poured into Hamlet's father's ear, but less dramatically, I will return to the office from this red chair in the waiting section and the real doctor with peppermint breath and only one contact lens, so she's said, will put the halter around my face again peering into my finally dilated eyes and say, "You're fine," until next year.



Encounter / Natalia Andrievskikh

A young girl was meticulously throwing up behind a pretentious local restaurant called *London-Pub*. Back in the days, they say, the building used to be a stable. Now, the outside stank of city juice. Since there was nobody there to hold up her long hair the color of straw, she clung to the wooden wall of the building with only one hand, her sharp elbow rising above her head like a unicorn's horn.

She paused to breathe rhythmically, scrutinizing the ground under her feet peppered with earthworms after last night's rain. A solemn-looking toad the size of a bulldog appeared on her right, picking up the worms with his quick ribbon tongue. They looked into each other's eyes for a long heavy moment, breathing in from two opposite sides the damp air that stuck to the nostrils.

In the street in front of the restaurant, the girl's friends shouted her name and something about getting a taxi. Have you called her cell, she must have left with that bearded moron who sent a bottle to our table. I should probably go, the girl said, her voice making a sound of foam rubber against glass. The toad nodded with understanding.



Tuesday Nights at Femme Mystique / Nichole Riggs

SCENE: DJ Ozcar Wild3 is perched in his booth to the left of the stage. A fog machine spurts into the atmosphere, bathing the swaying orange buttocks onstage in undulating waves of enigma. Men at tables masticate their hot wings open-mouthed, licking their fingers. Some of them fish dollar bills from their pockets, orphaning them on the stage like kittens. The pulsing music fades, and the DJ waves away multicolored fog and cups his microphone.

Ozcar: Alright, alright, alright;
you know what time it is, gentlemen.

*An attendant drags the fog machine away
by the tail, the lights dim to a golden glow,
not unlike sunlight through beer.
Mozart's Requiem suddenly thrusts itself
into the auditory orifices of the room.*

Ozcar: The lovely, illustrious,
indomitable, and ever so sensual—
Lolaaaaaaaaah.

*The men sit upright, stop licking
their chicken bones, watch as a woman (LOLA)
with pink hair and sugar-shiny lips
slinks from between the curtains.*

Lola is
platforms with
terrariums inside,
bodacious book-page
loin-cloth.
She palms a scalpel
slides it across
her tongue
first, then up

the center of
 her stomach,
 pushing just
 through the skin.
 She pinches
 the corner of an incision,
 lifts her dermis
 exposing cinnamon
 gum-stick muscles.
 Lola peels
 her pink tenderness
 just to her ribcage
 slices it off.

*At this point, a man is drool-pooling
 into his fry-basket.
 Lola sees this—tosses her skin
 which slaps him over the eyes.
 His friends jump up and down,
 slap him on the back with extreme gusto.
 The room explodes into frenzy;
 there is clamoring for the stage.*

She dives the blade
 into her thigh this time,
 butchers a triangular
 piece of meat
 and weighs it in her
 right palm,
 purses her lips
 and tosses it underhand.

*The men slap bills
 face-down onto the stage,
 a deep voice in the back*

*of the room yells:
“Fuck yeah! Take it off!”*

Lola listens to her clientele:
strips away
an ass-cheek, a breast,
some of her shapely calf,
even a lump
of earlobe.

An electric bone-saw
lowers timidly
from the ceiling;
Lola snakes her fingers
around its girth
caresses the on-switch.
The saw whines,
struggling over
the pitch of
violins and chorus.
Lola holds it
to her forehead,
slides it around
the radius of her skull.

*The men have piled all
their bills into pert mounds
on the edges of the stage.
They throw coins instead,
which clang like tiny swords
inside ancient stones.*

Lola gets on all fours
and detaches the top
of her skull

exposing its
silk ribbon
curvatures.

*The men insert their bills
between bone and brain,
drop them into the skull-bowl—
hopeful little communions.*

VIOLIN MUSIC FADES

Lola drags herself
toward the red curtain,
stopping with
shallow breaths
just on the threshold.

*The men see this
and rush to her,
take turns using
the scalpel and bone saw.*

Ozcar: Alright fellas, be nice. There's enough to go around!

*Each triumphantly leaves
with a stretch of skin,
a nipple, a sternum -
tucks them into
their back pockets for later,
to rub between their fingers
and hold to their noses
like perfumed love letters
like stained rabbits' feet.*



Dark, isn't it? / Elisabeth Blair

The grey and gold hyacinth-like lighting. This room's been rummaged through, given the twice-over, marked by the dog and rented out to whores. See here, where the fireplace ends, that's been chopped by the ax of a government man, who also baked in the oven all the leftover flour til it was black. Hundreds of men then plowed through (none of them with a context) to ensure the place was trampled with bits of their DNA on the walls where they put their hands whenever they paused to move in a synchronized way, dancing like well-fed birds of prey. Each man in his own particular way of being. And it's dark in here now, and fatiguing.



Kitsune / Kika Dorsey

When he threw the glass of brandy against the house,
she left the next day to hunt,
her cache a bank account,
buried eggs and berries and moles
and the chickens from the neighbor's house,
their ironed clothes and the way their days
stretched like lazy waters, SUVs,
tiny pearls and soccer games.

A lady of the moors, she was used to the undulating
land, to horizons like waves, to grasses
and lovemaking that bit her like hounds
while she ran away from the galloping thoroughbreds,
her husband of strong bones and suits
and cock to rip her open, to plant seed of a son.

When he built the walls of their den and chiseled
maple for her into a hen, she took his gift
and kissed his rough cheek
but still he raged, and when he did, his voice carried
and she knew she was always the subject of neighbors' gossip,
of cultivated yards, hers riddled with weeds.

When he yelled at her son for spilling orange juice,
she thought she would wait five years then leave.
She walked on coals, her feet burning with each
step, and he painted their bedroom red.
The moor was afire, and the peat was
ablaze, and there would be bracken
and rough grass and nowhere
for the sheep to graze.

He painted their kitchen forest green.
When he held her hand, her fingers broke.

They had been married thirteen years.
She became the vixen of rising suns,
and each morning she jumped the fence
only to return to his arms at night
again and again
even though the land had lost its heather
and her son kept growing
and the sheep lost their home
and the berries of her cache rotted.

Yet in the corner of her eye she saw
sickle moons threshing the stars
and a kind of abundance like the forests
the moors once were, and the neighbors'
talk faded into the stormy sky.
She shed it like a coat and roamed the hills,
curved like her hips,
her reckless love.



Rachael F. Jkins

Raibun: for the House Sale after Phillip's Death / Rachael F. Sims

Moon, a bowl, side-tipped spills
fire-flies. they banter above the grass,
beneath rose mallow, their light, blue truth.

I sit by the fire, rusted bistro chair re-painted
dark green. my naked toes tuck around rung's ripped
rubber. I hold my dog on my lap. coyotes chortle.

I watch sparks weave paths skyward, mingle with fireflies.
I wonder that the insects disbelieve jets' blinking eyes,
overhead message. tree-toads trill. smoke stings my nostrils.

chemical scent of past lives succumbs to flame's sere kiss.
years erased leave jumble, soft ashes. beware. hot coals
may sleep beneath to burn a bare-footed dreamer.

winds bustle down the mountain through the trees. leaves sigh
as I carry loads from house to fire. I fear his death no more.
he is gone. I smell fabric's singe, see his photo-face melt. stones explode.

fragment hits my cheek. heliotrope powders grass where wild
strawberries nestle. perfumes my bedroom. uphill, peacock cries, cries, aiee,
a siren. dusk falls. I cry. pictures, letters, plans, grocery lists, dissolve. I cry.

rusty singed feathers,
roseate cage-door dangling,
song, hinge, voices creak.



these days after orgasm
i experience
debilitating migraines.

every climax is a small
death. i sense every
nerve ending is withering.

it's my body but I don't live there.
the one home I have
is a scalding dry salt bath.

perhaps it is a blessing
i have no partner
who comes with me this winter.

too much pressure to
perform my own pleasure. i
don't feel like faking.

it's virgo sex, not
pluto emerging from the
underworld with lube.

why won't the pieces
fit? square pegs in round holes. kill
your expectations.

he lasted longer
than i expected though not
enough for migraines.

i scaled that cliff with
him. having seen the canyon,
i jumped off again.

hands clasp. mouths meet. lips
unfold. garments unpeeling.
first times are lightening.

every first time is
the last. missing the present moment.
this thought: a sharp slap.

skinny dipping in
his bed, hoping sex burns. fly
from the cremation.

i am not a girl
made for one night encounters.
12 hours last for years.

morning meets me with
no bones. split stomach. dry heart.
eyes—once locked—won't meet.

i saw the train—at
10 miles an hour—coming.
i stayed on the tracks.

be the Beloved
or be the lover. choosing
one is not freedom.

i choose neither god:
daphne nor apollo, not
the deer nor the arrow.



How To Seduce a Woman in Mourning / Lauren T. Yates

1. Search for her on Craigslist with terms like “Afro-Punk” or “anti-mainstream.” Make sure her ad appears in the “Strictly Platonic” section, so you can fool her into thinking you only want a “friend.”
2. Mention religion and politics as soon as possible. For maximum effect, say you were an atheist before you were agnostic. Compare her to right-wing extremists.
3. Do not continue if she knows her father.
4. When she loses her only father figure, say you’re available to talk.
5. When she says she is a virgin, say, “Good for you.” Do not think of how tight she must be.
6. Say you’d like to take her on a date. At the first red flag, be ready to say, “Let’s keep things simple.”
7. When she wears all black take her to the park. As she sobs thinking of the dead, offer her a blunt. If she refuses, leave her on the front steps.
8. Say you won’t make her do what she’s not ready for.
9. When she’s ready, make her come to you.
10. Once she’s naked in your bed, guide her hand to your dick. When she pulls away, place its tip inside her.
11. When she says, “No,” pull out so she knows you’re no rapist.
12. When she confronts you, call her a tease. Tell her she never mentioned condoms and you only put it in 10%.
13. Don’t talk to her for a month. She’ll come back when you say you miss her.
14. Wait three days, then take her back to your apartment. Ask her, “Do you want to?” If she’s nervous, keep asking. On the third time, she’ll say it. She’ll say, “I want you to.”



“Tylor: Ty, like your shoe,” this is how I introduce myself to people so they remember my name.
“Tylor: Ty: Like your exhaling.”

I am married to a wonderful man.

...to the anti-Christ, and he is calling at me from the kitchen again.

It really doesn't matter what his name is because I was engaged to seven wonderful men before this wonderful man.

It is better to be happy and alone, than unhappy and with someone.

This is the only wonderful man I married, and our son was so cute in his tuxedo at our wedding. You could hardly see our daughter squirming around inside me. I met most of the wonderful man's family that night. They are from New Mexico.

Tylor: Ty: Your shoe...

My family was there, too. The free loading Stewarts that never miss a meal, laid out and paid for by the hard-working, upright Sergios.

What a hideous life my parents have had.

The wedding was beautiful.

At the Elk's Lodge #90 in Pueblo, Colorado.

It was the first time that my father and I ever danced together. We didn't get to do it again. He dropped dead nine weeks later. We found him lying in the middle of his field, mouth open and eyes searching for a reason. My mother nearly curled up and died with him. He had been laying there for hours and the sun had blistered his skin, and turned his clear blue eyes black. We could not have an open casket because of the bugs that used his flesh as a breeding ground.

He was also a wonderful man; the bearer of the beating and breath of beer. Daddy.

Now twelve years later my wonderful man and I live in a huge home with a very thick gate and fence around the perimeter to keep our family and stuff safe.

To keep out the people we used to be.

My wonderful man believes he is very smart. He works on things that cost millions and millions of dollars.

Window washers wash windows on a high rises that are worth a millions.

He used to put huge machines into big buildings, but I made him stop doing that job. He was always away on trips that lasted months at a time. I wanted us to be together as a family.

More time together. Tylor. Ty. Your shoe...

My wonderful man likes a clean house and I like Martha Stewart, so that works out. Our home has three different types of floors. One floor is a very dark hand scrapped Babinga wood. I didn't really like all of the patterning, and maple would have had the exact same look. But my wonderful man pointed out how much more money we would be wasting with the Babinga wood, so now we have Babinga wood. I have to be very careful when I clean the Babinga, it turns out that I am allergic to Babinga wood.

The blisters on my feet went away a few weeks later and really what was I thinking walking around the house in bare feet?

There is a pool table in one room with the Babinga wood floor. The whole family plays pool, and on my grandmother's dining table on the other side of the room, we play board games. I get very congested after a while, and on the way to another room I softly push through one shadowy layer of a Tylor ghost lying on the floor in a ball, bleeding into the very dark hand scrapped Babinga wood. There are many Tylor ghosts in this home.

I wonder how many layers there are to a woman, or are they like an onion, and if you keep peeling there will soon be nothing left.

I do love my children. They are fantastic. My son wants me to be cooler and never speak. He told me that I am too loud and whatever comes out of my mouth is sure to be embarrassing or vulgar.

It must be true, because my wonderful man says it too.

I love to make French toast with my daughter, and she seems to like it too. She comes downstairs in the morning and I have everything ready for her. She has special items that she likes to use, so I make sure they are present; wooden skewer, butter-yellow milk glass mixing bowl from the 1950's, metal measuring spoons, and blue eggs.

Eggs with the chicken yuck still attached to them, fresh from the farm, which now takes an extra 45 minutes from farm to table to get the eggs.

She never waits for me to help, maybe because we have been doing this for so long or maybe because she is a very big girl of ten. The eggs shells are discarded, a loose measurement of vanilla and cinnamon thrown in, then a splash of milk. The bread gets dipped and the bread that is now a dough ball splashes down onto a skillet that's always too hot.

How many times have I told her? Not too hot or it will burn, and who does she think is going to clean up that mess. Wonderful man hates a mess.

On the other side of the room, I can smell the first drip of coffee. We have a Keurig, but I like my drip coffee.

And I clean the old Mr. Coffee and put it away every time so that nobody will see it on our Soap Stone counter that my wonderful man "paid through the nose for."

Mr. Coffee gurgles and chugs, peeing out that beautiful walnut-colored steaming fluid that I will drink so eagerly it will blister the roof of my mouth. I will not be able to eat anything for the rest of the day.

That wouldn't be bad; because my wonderful man told me that if I could just get rid of that five, ten, fifteen...or if I lost the thirty-eight extra pounds I put on after the kids and my lazy period, I would weigh ninety-two pounds, just like when we met.

My daughter has finished her French toast and she is hugging me, kissing my cheek. Then she is up the stairs like a shot to get ready for her day without a wonderful man in it.

Alice. Just Alice, not Ali.

She will laugh too loud and talk too loud and probably say something really vulgar and the other kids at her table will gasp and tell her that they “can’t believe that she said that” and from somewhere in the room, a boy who is just wonderful will be waiting to tell her she should try to be a little quieter.

“And I will mom, because he is wonderful and I want so badly to please him.”

Then as they walk out of the cafeteria she will look back to the table where they sat and she will think she sees something stir under the table. She will not know of course, but I will. A very small thin layer, of her, will be lying on the floor. Bleeding.

How many layers do we have?





Rachael Z. Tkins

As a newborn / Heather A Warren

your father
strapped you down
the slide.
You cried
stones.

Then your mother said, "We will run away for six years."
Your father set the baby bibs, the clown dolls, the crib on fire.

My mother told me to sleep.
I could never fall asleep
with the night-light
as a pig-tailed
little girl on
her knees
praying to God for sleep.

I asked, "When is Dad coming back?"

My mother
she cried
gravel pits.

You cry
farm field
where
they trap you
inside white stoned
walls.



Houses Along I Can't Sleep Street / Jacqueline Markowski

What if the thirteen year old girl
drugged and raped by Roman
Polanski grew up and one day sold you
that fifty cent ticket to Chinatown?

Or Woody Allen's daughter decided
to blend in to society, got a job at the
video store, rented you that copy of
Annie Hall fifteen years ago?

What if no one told you about
your raging case of Tourette's
and you've been blurting shameful
family secrets up the Turkey's ass
every Thanksgiving?

What if a vengeful clown lives
under your bed? Or a need
for reverence beneath your skin?



Friend Zone / Lauren C. Yates

My grandma fears I've put her in the "friend zone."
Urban Dictionary defines the "friend zone" as: "a state of being where a man becomes the unwitting friend of a girl he's trying to woo." A man who's been friend-zoned might say this girl doesn't know what she wants. He was her crying shoulder, bought her gifts, listened to rants about her loser ex-boyfriend. All the quarters went into the vending machine. The "pussy" never came out. What if this girl knows she only wants to be friends? What if she's worried that admitting she doesn't want to sleep with you means you'll stop being her friend? My grandma fears I've put her in the "friend zone." She isn't a man, she's never tried to fuck me, but feels I owe her something. Once she asked me for money, promising to repay me. When it never came, I confronted her. She said, "Give back what I've spent on you. For food, clothes, school supplies, field trips, medicine, birthday cards, gas money, church offering. Give it all back." I never saw the strings attached. I thought these gestures were love, not payment in installments for what she expected of me. I get it now. Each new pair of shoes was for my business degree. The trips to the movies were for my future Republican husband, and the stories that would make her friends jealous. Men in the friend zone wouldn't have tried so hard if they'd known they weren't getting laid. My grandma wouldn't have put in all those quarters if she had known this was all she would get.



a warning. / afroze fatima ahmed

listen.

do not enter
my mouth
with your tongue
because my mouth is a quiet place.

I have bells as lips
and their sound
becomes muffled
when we kiss. arms raised to god

veins stretch into a sitar's strings
a womb busy building melodies
breath a harmonium blowing
a body that will not dance.

my heart can beat a dhol or tabla
reliable as a clock
or rain on umbrella
but it will not help you groove to bhangra.

my heart is not a metronome for your movement.
it is its own traveler of the oceans.
it moves around in my body and tonight
it is in my mouth



interaction with students / Jan Ball

I approach down the hollow corridor
in my comfortable black Reeboks
squeaking on the terrazzo floor.

I approach the three veiled women
huddled on chairs beside the candy machine,
the orange Reese's Peanut Butter Cup wrapper
glittering in the artificial light like faceted amber,
Milky Way sprawled across the slick brown paper
next to it in compartment E3 like Arabic writing
as I get closer and

I approach and see that Dana
from my reading class, who this morning
said she wanted to go to graduate school
is crying, the other veiled women trying
to comfort her so I ask, "What's wrong,"
thinking she has too much homework or
is homesick: desert home, phone home

and the veiled women at first just look at me
as if I were a jeep stuck on a sand dune
then Dana says, "I think I'm pregnant." I try
to force my face into neutral gear, slump
my body to look softer, project consideration
from my eyes, but still I wonder as I walk away
without my candy bar.





Carole Bruzzano

is the daughter dancing
waves away
with kitchen spoons;
wilted blooms
blue the underbelly
of her eyes.

She dances
upon shards
of glass.
Cuts between
her toes
suggest
her surrender
to a house
full of wolves.

She finds her son
dead in a plastic bag.
She finds her mother
crying behind the shadow
of a lampshade.
Unnoticed, the dog
eats dinner
dribbles bits
onto the carpet.

When he stumbles home: she will
play scarecrow coffin.

When he rattles doorframes: she will
pinch back onion downpour.

When he backhand-quick-jab-combos: she will
cry
blackbird. ■

Subject: The Taxonomy of My Kitchen / Nichole Riggs

I've stashed the brains in coffee cans in the cupboard above the refrigerator, next to my crisp copy of *Joy of Cooking* that glares at me from the shelf like a Bible. I keep the tupperware of baby teeth next to the corn off the cob, dilettantish little pearls that they are, gnawing at every place I put them. The children are long gone, along with any signs of marital life. I got tired of rummaging for the tongues that inch away like worms, so I nailed them to the wall above the stove, and they hang there sulkily, looking like a gam of dead koi. But there is this jar—brackish-blue, with Masonic etchings—it has an enormous heart inside of it. It hovers suspended in its fluid, pulsing every so often when the evening sun scrapes at it through the window. I have gazed through the bottom of the glass for hours, trying to make out if there is a name on it, a blood type, anything. But it floats, brushing the sides of its encasement in a stupor. I can't remember where the heart came from. Did someone forget it here? Have I used it in my pasta dishes before? ...It looks like it's on the edge of expiration, and there may be a few chunks missing. I wonder would it look best next to the right hook of a jawbone, or the floral overture of the ovary above the doorway. At times I feel I should drop it carelessly, rid myself of its brooding presence. *No*, the heart quivers in its cage—and I shudder, too, because I know I've done something wrong.



Lunch / Carole Glasser Langille

Emma got up and reluctantly opened her closet. The reading, after all, was at three that afternoon. She didn't know what to wear. "I guess I have to wear a dress," she muttered. She would have preferred to go in jeans and a sweatshirt.

She was glad Alanna was coming over. Even though her sister had told her more than once, "I'll come for the lunch, but not for the launch."

She didn't particularly want to go to the reading either. The few book launches she'd gone to, especially the poetry readings, were boring to the max. At some of the readings she couldn't look at the author, the work was that bad. She'd stare at the floor the entire time, hoping the reader would finish soon.

But this launch meant so much to her mother, who was downstairs now, preparing lunch for them. Emma knew how hopeful she was that Alanna would come to the reading. Couldn't her sister make the effort? How long could the reading be?

Emma heard the bell ring and her mother open the door. While her mother and Alanna were talking, she took out the aqua dress, the one that was tight around the waist. When she pulled it on she could barely get the zipper up. Well, she'd wear a lose cardigan over it. She looked good in this shade of blue.

"That looks good," Alanna said as she walked into the room. "Perhaps you could wear a cardigan over it."

"Good morning to you too," Emma said.

"You know, my gorgeous sister, if you wanted to lose weight you could." But the fact was, she didn't particularly want to. She just didn't want to care whether she lost weight or not. It was tiring to worry about these things.

Emma sat on her bed brushing her hair and looking at her sister. "Come to the reading," she urged Alanna.

Alanna sighed. "I don't mind that our grandfather was gay, but why do we have to celebrate it?"

Emma didn't answer. They had already been through this. Their grandfather had never published anything while he was alive. Their mother thought he had an important story to tell, and when she discovered his essay with his other papers, she wanted it out in the world. The man had been friends with E.M. Forster, after all. It was exciting to think about. Emma was touched that her mother had worked so hard to honour his memory, even though the journal that finally accepted the essay had a very small circulation. Most likely the only people who would read the narrative would be family friends her mother would buy a copy for. And unlike other readers at the launch, her mother had never read in public.

Their mother was such a generous woman, how could Alanna refuse to sit in the audience and support her? What was she doing here, if she wasn't coming to the launch? The one thing Emma did not want was to listen to her mother try to persuade Alanna to join them.

"Promise me you'll be discreet at the reading," Alanna said. "When you like something you nod and smile at the reader, so it is embarrassingly obvious when you can't stand a poem or story. A lot of these stories may be pretty bad."

They were both such snobs, Emma thought.

“Another thing,” Alanna said. “If you had your own place, you’d have more of a life, don’t you think?” Alanna half-smiled. “Then again, I have my own place, and look how screwed up my life is.”

True, Emma thought. It was not Alanna’s fault that her fiancé had died a few weeks before the wedding; she didn’t have much control over that. But her new boyfriend was, well, so self-centered, Emma wanted to punch him. Didn’t Alanna have to take some responsibility for being with a man who made everyone else feel stupid? All Emma could do was stand by and watch.

She said, “I’m planning to get my own place. But I do worry about Mom.”

As if on cue their mother called them for lunch.

Emma thought their mother showed great forbearance by not bringing up the subject of the launch as they ate their chicken sandwiches. Nor did she say anything when Alanna complained about her boyfriend.

“He only tells me half the story, or less than half, which is sort of like lying, don’t you think?” Alanna said referring to her new boyfriend. “I never know what he really means.”

“For example?” their mother asked, but Alanna couldn’t think of one.

“You know, your father’s band was fantastic but they desperately needed a manager. Then he discovered that I was very good at organizing, and my life was over!” She laughed. “Sometimes it’s best when a partner has a life separate from your life.”

Emma poured more tea. Her mother always wanted to cheer up her daughters, even if she had to wilfully ignore the obvious. A lying boyfriend, how good could this be? As for her father’s band, Emma always thought her mother had liked working with these musicians.

Emma was too young to remember the jazz band or to have gone to their concerts. But friends of her mother’s still talked about how brilliant the band was. Occasionally she would play a record her father had made when friends asked about him.

The phone rang as they were eating the shortbreads her mother had just baked, and Alanna got up to answer it. Her mother was a great baker. As a kid, Emma thought they should have a business, *Beckworth’s Bakery*, selling to friends and neighbours. Her father was dead by then, and she thought she and Alanna should do their share to help support the family. But her mother assured them that the salary she made from teaching was more than adequate, and the family would be fine.

Emma was glad her mother had mentioned their father. She rarely did. Memory lit up what was long gone, so you could see your way into the past. But it didn’t have to make you nostalgic. Her patients in the hospital, who were old, expected life to end. It was her young friends and her sister and she herself who secretly believed they would live forever. Emma was thinking about this when Alanna’s surprised voice intruded on her thoughts.

“So you want to come? So you’ll come here first?”

“Who was that, darling?” her mother asked when Alanna returned to the table.

“Was that The Great One?” Emma asked. Originally she had encouraged Alanna’s relationship with her new boyfriend, but once she got to know him, Emma had her doubts. But Alanna was smiling.

“He wants to come to the launch.”

“Why in the world?” Emma asked.

“He’s interested. In writing.”

“Oh, The Great One writes, does he? I suppose you’re both coming now?” It occurred to Emma that this guy had something in common with one of Forster’s characters. How ironic. “Did you see the movie, *Room with a View*?” she asked Alanna. “Do you remember the man Lucy Honeychurch was first engaged to?”

But Alanna didn’t answer. She had gotten up to comb her hair.



Rachael Z. Kins

The Grogoch / Colleen Donnelly

Erin was nothing like her sister. At eight she was a pudgy bookworm who could spell "nauseating" and "gargantuan" and read *Great Expectations*. She could have skipped a grade, but because she was already bullied for her four eyes and chubby 16X pants and skirts, her parents were afraid she would not survive the cruelty of the older children.

Shannon was only seven, but at three, she could do a cartwheel and shimmy up a tree, and now she had mastered a round-off from the balance beam and a spiral on the ice. Shannon seemed to have lessons almost every day, and her mother proudly sat in the bleachers knitting afghans, mittens, hats, and cable sweaters for every family member, while her father made sure to sign the checks for each coach and instructor, especially for the weekend morning sessions. Erin usually chose to stay home on the plush, sueded sofa with her books, computer programs, and potato chips rather than listen to the other mothers enviously complement her mom on Shannon's talent. It was enough to listen to her mother, though quite plump herself, telling her to put back some of the spaghetti she had scooped on her plate and suggesting she forgo the Rocky Road with sprinkles that the rest of the family was having for dessert. "Wouldn't you like to look more like your sister?" mother cajoled. "Just think, maybe you could get a two-piece this year rather than one of those one-piece suits with the ruffle skirts that are supposed to hide your thighs." Erin wondered if her mother ever considered what she herself looked like in a bikini, her rolls falling over the thong of the suit.

She wondered if her mother ever watched her father's eye follow the cute little coeds in Daisy Dukes. Maybe her mother didn't mind; she knew she could never compete, and she knew her husband recognized he was way too old to flirt with such young women—really little more than girls. Erin often found her father's *Playboys* in the bathroom. She'd peeked a couple of times, but she really only liked looking at the cartoons, and most of them didn't make sense like the ones out of the Sunday newspaper. Dad grumbled constantly about the cost of Shannon's lessons and coaches, but at the same time puffed out his chest in pride. He complained about the constant fast food, the restaurant prices, since mom just didn't have the time to cook, but honestly most of the time they were all relieved when they didn't have to eat her cooking. At night, he would smoke aromatic rum tobacco in the pipe the girls had given him last Father's Day on the back porch, after mom had complained about how tired she was and went to bed. Sometimes, when she would sneak to her bedroom window, Erin could see the smoke rings wafting up to the second story of their house. Erin couldn't remember the last time her parents hadn't talked about something other than what was for dinner or how her mother was burdened with all the responsibility for chauffeuring Shannon from lesson to lesson, or argued about the mounting bills—including mom's credit card "shopping therapy" when Shannon would make an inevitable mistake at a meet or Erin gained another pound.

Erin voraciously read all kinds of books—biographies, histories, novels—but her favorites were always fantasies. She loved the worlds peopled with unusual creatures, whose magic shattered stones, whose faces had no eyes, and who walked without leaving footprints. She would go to sleep by wishing herself into such stories she made up for herself, not as the heroine, but as one of the merry comrades, someone like everyone else, and sometimes those fantasies would fill her dreams.

The hardest part of the day was always getting up, realizing she had to go to school again and put up with kids kicking the back of her seat on the bus, calling her Bertha on the playground, and making faces at her when the teacher wasn't looking. How nice it would be to be home-schooled, but her mother would never consider such a thing; besides she was busy with Shannon's practices, meets, and making her cute little costumes with tiny waists.

Weekends were a relief. No school, no taunting, and her mom and sister were gone much of the time. Her father insisted that since Shannon had the practices that she loved, that Erin should have a few things to look forward to on the weekends too. What her father won for her was staying up much later than her sister on Friday and Saturday nights, since she had no practice to be at in the morning, and besides, as she told herself, she was older and deserved to get to stay up later. Shannon was off to bed at nine, and she and mom were out of the house by six a.m., long before the sun was up. But Erin stayed up with her bowl of buttered popcorn and liter of Pepsi watching movies, sometimes with her parents, sometimes until she fell asleep and woke up to the test pattern, turned off the TV, and waddled off to bed.

Then the dreams started—the ones that came early on weekend mornings. These dreams weren't like the usual movies she watched in her head on school nights. In those dreams, she rode with a band of androgynous creatures, all dressed in the same long robes and riding boots, and armed with silver-engraved swords, ridding the forests of evil spirits who took babies out of the cribs and replaced them with changelings whose limbs were deformed or who had malicious intentions to bring ruin upon the family or dullahans who beheaded unwitting travelers along the road. They always caught these hooligans, who would disintegrate into ash when a sword was thrust through their bodies. She could feel these new dreams were different. Somebody talked, always the same somebody, in a whispering husky voice. The first time she just felt warmth, like when Shannon would climb into bed with her when they were really little or when the furnace clicked on during cold winter nights. She could feel warmth lying by her body. She could feel a gentle light stroking, along her arms, down the front of her baby doll pajamas, up and down her legs. She was slightly startled at first, but the touch was so gentle and warm. And the voice lulled and reassured her: "You're so special to me . . . you feel so soft . . . I love you . . . I'll always be here to protect you . . . I would never let anything happen to you." She fell asleep again. She awoke in a gay mood hours later, feeling as if a questing knight had carried her off on his trusty steed.

The dreams continued, only on the weekends, and their intensity grew. A few weeks later, she could feel the hands no longer gliding over her pajamas, but under them, down her torso. The same hypnotic reassuring voice was always there calling her "his pet," reminding her he'd "always protect her." When she awoke hours later, there would be little gifts on her night stand, her favorite candy bar, cookies with frosting, an éclair—perishables. She was confused by the gifts. Hadn't she been dreaming? She was a bit confused as she chowed down the little present, opening a book and nestling back in bed. But she had soon forgotten her problems and was lost in the story, long before her mother had the chance to come home and chastise her about the extra calories. She quickly grew used to the dreams and the little edible delicacies.

How long had it been since they began? She didn't know. But something changed. Although that same reassuring voice whispered to her that she was his pet and that he'd always protect her, it was not calloused fingers or cool palms that she felt passing over her body. The voice was huskier, panting now. She had no idea what it was that was touching her—something that felt sort of like skin, hard yet flaccid, zucchini-like. Then he wasn't lying next to her anymore; now he was on top. She could feel something inside her, first fingers, then something else, and she began to whimper as the pain started to

grow. He stopped, stroked her hair with his hands again, comforted her with the same hypnotic words, calling her his pet, again saying he'd always protect her. Wrestling with her sheets and punching her pillow, she finally felt like she'd awakened herself from a nightmare when she rose two hours later. A chocolate cupcake with sprinkles sat on her nightstand; she took it to the bathroom and flushed it down the toilet.

Her weekday dreams began to change. Instead of traveling with her companions through dark forests and defeating giant spiders or tricking trolls into turning into stone; instead of huge celebrations where estampies and branles danced to the music provided by lutes and lap harps; instead of banquets with tables laden with gilded birds decorated in peacock feathers, flaming pears, and pastries and fruits shaped like marzipan into boars and hearts, unicorns and dragons, thrown by the king to show his appreciate for his brave warriors; now the trolls would catch and drown her. As the banshees flew screeching through the skies, Erin's tunic would ebb blood, and as she ran, the bogeymen would catch her in the pit and rope traps they set. Her companions deserted her. She was alone; she was unarmed, and she would wake sweating, just as she was caught. She told no one. She was a big girl, used to being left alone in the evenings; her dad had begun to work later and later, and her mother and sister were often at practice until almost bedtime. She convinced herself there was nothing to be afraid of, and limited her reading to biographies and classics her teachers picked out for her.

The weekend came again. She tried to stay awake all night on Friday, but finally fell asleep in front of the TV to awake in bed in the darkness of pre-dawn. He had carried her there. He said he had a special sweet for her. "Close your eyes and open your mouth," he whispered. She did as she was told, waiting for something like the taste of chocolate, and nearly gagged on the wretched thing she felt within her mouth. "That's all right," he reassured, removing it. He was lying so close on top of her she could see nothing but his chest. He adjusted himself, and she again felt fingers within her, and then something harder, hurting her as it seemed to push further and further up into her stomach. She tried to cry, but he was covering her mouth, while her tears streamed down her pillowcase. "It won't hurt for long. It will feel good in a minute," he panted with breath that smelled of stale rum tobacco.

"You're my favorite. We have a special secret, you and I. We share something special just like your mother and sister, and we won't tell them our secret."

The tone was almost pleading. He didn't remove his hand from her mouth until she stopped crying and nodded many times in agreement. He told her no one could ever know their secret, that they had a very special relationship that only the closest of daddies and daughters shared. Daughters too mature for childish friends, so grown up that the other kids made fun of them because they were jealous. That was why they bullied her; it wasn't her size or because she was a brainiac; it was because they were jealous, because she was special, chosen, and they weren't. He petted her and kissed her. A brownie sat upon the nightstand, and he was gone—till the next weekend. . . .

She now knew that it was no prince, no knight, that visited her. No, it was a grogoch who looked like her daddy in the dark. No, it was her daddy, and he was the hairy, smelling, and pokey old grogoch of Irish myth. But for the first time, she was the chosen one not her sister. The taunts of the kids in her class faded because, finally, she was special. He couldn't be a grogoch; he had to her protector, her knight, asking only her loyalty, her secrecy, in return. Such a small fee for such a large boon, which she granted for years to come. Even after she started to lock her door at night and put her desk chair under the door knob, after she outgrew every fantasy, years after she tried to tell her mother—who told her she read too much too long and slapped her for daring to make such accusations—years after her parents' divorce and statutes of limitations had passed, long after, she realized childhood dreams can become lifelong nightmares, and that once he has you in his clutches, the grogoch never stops whispering to you in the night.



Honesty / Elisabeth Blair

1. In her crayon mind is a papoose for her dead – the lost and ruined pens that she collects. They represent the hidden betrayal mankind's country stands upon; the appearance of a bounty but the lack of any inks. *Write with these*, the country commands, and so the yellow falls from her hair, like severed weeks from the calendar.

2. Hair, strings, nets, bows. The rotten cores of dead Dutch apples. Fishermen tossed in mines and barbers into sails. Several hundred pirates being sick over the rails. Something's wrong and still she's told *the pens are here*, as like rations, they are handed out to her. But where is the war?



afrose fatima ahmed is a writer, teacher and student/translator of Urdu poetry. She has 9+ years of community and campus organizing experience, always with gender and feminism as a central focus. Her writing reflects this focus on identity and justice, as can be witnessed in her first chapbook, *he won't dance with me*, released in December 2013. afrose rock climbs in her spare time, in order to gain perspective. You can read more of her work at www.afrosefatimaahmed.com.

Even though **Jan Ball's** poem, “interaction with students,” is fictional, she is always aware of the needs of women of different cultures in her tertiary ESL classroom, especially in relation to education, the door to female liberty in any culture. With “dilated,” Jan finds it interesting how we transfer images from one of our life experiences to another when we least expect to. 176 of Jan's poems have been published, and she has two chapbooks, *accompanying spouse (2011)* and *Chapter of Faults (2014)*, available on Amazon. When not writing, working out or gardening at the family farm, Jan and her husband travel and cook for friends.

Elisabeth Blair is a composer, poet, and doodler. Her conscious self has taken longer to catch up to her subconscious self as far as awareness of feminist issues goes. The poems included here were created through free-writing in 2011. A few years on, after a conscious awakening to feminism, she discovered *S/tick* and went rifling through dusty sketchbooks and old hard drives to see if she could find a poem that would be relevant to a feminist themed zine. To her great surprise, she discovered that nearly all of the poetry from her adult life, created through free-writing, was relevant.

Colleen Donnelly has been an English professor at the University of Colorado at Denver for over twenty years. She specializes in medieval literature and modernism. She teaches and publishes on medieval women and women in gnostic literature and is interested in exploring the true historical position and roles of women and the way in which their images and voices are recorded.

Kika Dorsey is a poet and professor from Boulder, Colorado. She wakes up at 5:00 in the morning and crafts poems out of dreams, runs her Border Collie in the mountains and plains, swims in aqua pools, taxis her teenagers between activities, reads French feminist theory, and researches myths. Her book *Beside Herself* was published in 2011 by Flutter Press; her book *Rust* is forthcoming. She writes about the experience of the feminine—the joy and ache of motherhood, the pain of pushing through barriers, the body that she knows she must eventually shed.

Rachael Z. Ikins is a prize-winning artist/poet whose early art was influenced by Georgia O'Keefe. Her book covers' designs are Rachael's work. In 2008 in Hamilton, NY, her first significant one-woman show, “The Vagine Ideologue,” featured a series of abstract female nudes, the intention of which conveyed woman's ownership of her own body. Rachael lives in a treehouse with dogs and cat and has hung a sign on the balcony railing so that any dragon flying past the moon knows s/he is welcome to land there. www.rachaelikins.com

Carole Glasser Langille, the author of four books of poetry, a collection of short stories and two children's books, teaches creative writing at Dalhousie University. Two people who have inspired her—Stephen Lewis and Eve Ensler. “You cannot continue to marginalize 52% of the world's population and expect to achieve a degree of social justice and equity: it's not possible,” Stephen Lewis says. Eve Ensler says, “If you are connected to your own internal being, it's very hard to be screwing and destroying another human being because you're feeling what they're feeling.” Feminism—what's more essential to the human condition?

Erica Law is an Instructor at Marshall University working on her M.A. In her poem, “Birth to Monsters,” feminism plays a subtle role in depicting the ideal of equality, as well as the “made up” people that the two characters in the poem laugh at. This refers to the makeup that women seemingly “have” to wear, and that others may view that as a replication of the projected and expected gender norms. Feminism has changed Erica's views of literature throughout the years. She hopes to continue to write literature that speaks to the subjects that are important to her.

Jacqueline Markowski's work has appeared in *San Pedro River Review*, *The Doctor TJ Eckleburg Review*, *Bird's Thumb*, *Rust+Moth* and is forthcoming in *The Knicknackery*, *Barely South Review* and *Emerge Literary Journal*. A two-time Pushcart nominee, she won first place at The Sandhills Writer's Conference and was a semi-finalist for the 2014 Auburn Witness Poetry Prize. The honesty of her writing often lends itself to a feminist theme as she reflects on gender, intersectionality and self through a constructionist lens. She is currently working on a collection of poetry. You can see more of her work at www.jacquelinemarkowski.com.

Nichole Riggs is a poet, dancer, and martial artist who resides in South Bend, IN, and is currently studying poetry for her MFA candidacy at the University of Notre Dame. She is interested in the idea of gender as performance, women's bodies as battlegrounds, in re-appropriating the feminine in order to empower, and in writing poetry that reflects the multidimensionality of the female experience. Nichole wants to raise questions (and eyebrows), and challenge gender norms with her writing. Some of her most recent work can be found in *Screaming Sheep Vol. 1*, and *Transcendence Magazine*.

Trinette Swartz-Markey does most of her writing while sitting amongst the dirty breakfast dishes waiting for her Kuerig to pee out that rich brown elixir she needs every morning. She is wife and mother and writer of things nobody has ever read. She is an English Literature graduate from Arizona State University focusing on African-American female protest literature. She spends the majority of her time within the tragic, colorful, amazing universe of her mind. Her life has touched six decades, and in her head the world is still laid out at her feet and ripe for the conquering.

Heather A Warren is a poet and musician from Fairbanks, Alaska where she is currently finishing her MFA in poetry at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She is an identified feminist and gender-queer living without shame in her identity-politic-poetic-agenda. Heather and poetry have become co-dependent, as the creative process is the perfect way to reshape the darkness, the trauma, (or the reality of the work the feminist and queer movement still has to accomplish) into *possibility*. Her work can be found in journals such as *Iris Brown*, *Narrative Northeast* and *Skin 2 Skin*.

Lauren Yates is a Philadelphia-based poet and graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. While at Penn, Lauren directed its premier performance poetry collective The Excelano Project. Her work is known for its personal subject matter, exploring topics such as childhood, religion, and depression. Lauren first realized the need to address feminism and gender after leaving an abusive relationship. Writing about the emotional and sexual abuse that she experienced allowed her to regain control of her voice and her story. Her goal as an artist is to aspire toward her most authentic self, not the self she was told to be.



*This issue of S/tick edited by Managing Editor Sarah-Jean Krahn
sarahjeancreates.com*