S/tick

Feminists on Guard
“To the child listening on the stairwell  
In the dark.”

Above quotation / Natalie Crick / “The Blossom Tree,” p. 35  
Cover art / Sasha Fisher / Shame-Based Fun

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Storytellers / Eirini Ioannou

The mother is gentle and frail, the first to die, and father remarries instantly, for the sake of the kingdom of course. She happens to be beautiful and fond of mirrors. How could he know what went on? He was too busy, a king for God's sake.

Or the mother leaves seven children alone to go shopping in the city. Don't open the door to anyone, she instructs. Leaving them to bring food, their father also gone? What a mother.

Another sends her under aged daughter to her grandmother's through the forest. The grandma—how unique—sick and alone. Listen to what happens for sticking together through the hard times, little girls.

‘But honey don’t sleep yet, we’re only halfway through, a man will show up at the end and save the day’.
So What / Kathleen E. Krause

So what, I answer, warbling like a lost bird. Yellow and once elegant, crashing my beak on the sidewalk trying to remember the flavor of food. Is it gravel? Is it gravel that is food? Why do I need?

So what, says the furry lining in between the brain I had for another language.

He is embarrassed by my kindness and our honesty,
so he hides the cheese in his lap.

A flicker of moisture comes out of the sky, out of the eye of the street corner.
That’s what. There’s nothing to hide. Forgetting to put my clothes on, my dust scatters. Nipple labia thigh stomach - what to the world. So what to it?

A hidden place, yeah.
Back to the hidden place I know.
It’s too much to expect otherwise.
Grandma’s Recipe for Omelets / Clara A.B. Joseph

Send little Govind to purchase goatmeat -
Let him walk; he's across the road, the butcher.
Oh lend him the cycle! He's stubborn.
His mother was too. Ungrateful *thing*! Got pregnant
At thirteen - a ball upon a twig! By her foster father.
Dirty people! He was a good worker,
Though. You could see his bare back from here,
Bending over new tapioca plants, and he'd fetch me
Curry leaves. I'd call out through this window. See?
Curry leaves refuse to grow these days.
Cucumber leaves will do, to season,
With mustard, chopped onions, garlic,
Ginger, green chilies and - come close -
Star anise and black pepper. He said he knew
There must be a secret to my curry.
The aroma remained all night and the next morning
Upon him. Star anise and black pepper.
A slim, slow stream. It travelled down the middle of
His chest. You will see what I mean. You are old enough to know
How to cook. Crush cinnamon, cardamom, and of course some
Cloves. Grind chili, turmeric, and coriander into paste.
Oh! You have all these as powder. Chili powder! Turmeric powder!
Coriander powder! Ha! Life is easy for you. Listen!
These get burnt too quickly!
She tried to commit suicide. Twice. This is his son.
He's not back as yet? It'll be omelets tonight.
Origami Dinner / Karen Loeb

Having no idea what to make for dinner
I pull a multi-colored notepad that’s
perfectly square from a drawer. First I fold
flower shapes. I make it easy on myself and
choose daisies. After a dozen of them, I toss blue,
green, yellow and red blossoms into the real lettuce leaves
I’ve already washed and spun as if they were laundry.
Then I think, main dish, I need a main dish.
I fold a blue chicken, and call it a Cornish hen. I make
one for each person—my husband, my daughter,
myself, and Pearl the cat. I place a white paper
chicken next to the water dish on the floor.
She will not accept it as food—I already know that—but she’ll bat it around and pounce on it, treating it as prey.
Then I fold potato shapes, and while I’m on a roll,
I create dessert in the form of paper cupcakes,
folded and topped with a cherry. I set the table,
put a blue, green or red Cornish hen on each plate,
the salad in the middle, a rainbow of cupcakes to the side.
I’ve even folded steam rising from the potatoes.
I see the expectant looks as the migration from upstairs
begins, and they head for the table. They
won’t be disappointed. I aim to please.
Where are All the Hens? / Elaine Woo

walking the edge of brine and clams
    a storied place
from the pond of steel and glass radiating nasal duck chatter
    mostly mallards

    where are all the hens
        their functions: domestic mess management

turmoil along a six-lane freeway
    in monsoon season

    shattering the towers

the road back longer than a cross-canada trek

I want to leave the rain to its own devices

secure a final separation from our temporary acquaintance

    roast needs defrosting
        a lone hen    flapping blazes    berates three mallards
With little thought, her older brother pulls the knife, 
    the same one he uses to cut himself.
She watches him and 
    Lowers Herself 
    onto the couch.
Her fingers trace the bruise on her arm, a pink sunrise, 
    just like the ones on postcards from California.
She thinks of burning the phone books and hotline magnets, of forgetting 9-1-1. If 
    she just remains Silent, 
    and does Nothing, 
It Will End.
She won't try to stop anything 
    This Time 
    or ever.

Her brother presses the knife, 
    the same one he uses to cut himself, 
    against her father's throat.
She Wants to laugh, 
    as though its sharp metal is tickling her skin.
She measures her deliverance in steel centimeters.
He should do it Now, she thinks.
He's never come this close and might never have The Impulse again.
She feels weightless, 
    almost free, 
looking at her father 
    slumped 
    against 
    the wall.

Maybe her brother is as 
Crazy 
    as she suspects.
Maybe he's as crazy as the ragged swastikas carved into his arms. 
    Maybe he has all the Moral Certainty and R e solve 
She Wants (him to have) 
Right Now. 
He should hurry, she thinks.
The police (so familiar with their house) will arrive soon. She can hear her mother in the kitchen, dialing 9-1-1, not to protect herself or anyone else, except the trembling man slumped against the wall.

She wonders who, of The Unholy Trinity, She Hates Most. This could End, she thinks. Her father could be buried, her brother in prison, her mother Gone Somewhere. It would all depend on what she said to the undertaker, to the cops, to the woman from social services.

She's covered in bruises, she hears her brother say, and She wonders at his hypocrisy. Her brother has his own violent streak, as she knows all too well, and She wonders if he's talking about her or their mother. We Are Not, She Hopes, The Same.

She Dreams of living in friends' basements and finishing high school, Maybe moving to California, Doing Lots of Drugs and sleeping on a beach. She's never seen the ocean, but San Francisco is warm, She Imagines. California seems closer, now, as her brother puts his weight behind the blade. She listens to him talking, now, about Race Traitors and Cowards, What This Country Used to be, the Black People next door, The Conspiracy. Then, she hears the

Pause (The Silence of anger exhausted).
Her brother drops the knife,
  the same one he uses to cut himself.
His Rage and resolve, she knows, have been replaced by
  Contempt for a man
  Not Worth Killing.
The moment has passed.
She is Sick
  with disappointment in her brother’s Ineffective Rage.
Nothing Has Changed,
Except that she is more ashamed than ever of what
She Imagined,
She Wished
(only seconds ago),
And in her private shame
She is            Alone.

California is fading, now, and she knows all too well,
that the Cold will always remain inside of her.
She knows, too, though, that she will testify about her brother’s swastikas,
about how he, too, beat their mother, about the hunting knife,
  the same one he uses to cut himself.
She would have told the papers everything,
  even though he’s her brother, and
Family Should Stick Together,
  Always.

She slips out of the house Unnoticed,
  and stands barefoot in the snow until
She is Numb.
Her fingers freeze on the steel knots of the chain-link fence,
the same one that keeps out the black people next door.
When the police arrive, she tears the skin from her fingertips to
Free Herself.
She sits in the back seat of their heated car and studies
the road salt crusted on the windshield
and the
World Frozen | Beyond.
She talks about her brother and his hunting knife,
  the same one he uses to cut himself.
She talks about her mother’s prescription drugs,
  the same ones she uses to numb herself, and
She talks about her father, the Old Man slumped against The Wall (the one he always uses to support himself).

...oh sorry, Sasha. I know you don't like that word or whatever. But you have to admit......

from Shame-Based Fun / Sasha Fisher
sixteen, female, black / Dana Chiuheh

i.
he asks me what color my jeans are as i twist a lock of hair.
a habit i haven’t relapsed into since age ten. i say cerulean,
my favorite crayon in kindergarten.
he says they look good. that i can pull it off because i have the body.

ii.
what an ugly word relapse is.
wake up to a barricade of plastic limbs and mournful melodies.
angry shouts. like the first day of school integration, louisiana, 1960.
call them by name: leona, tessie, gail. the mcdonough three, and ruby.
still, all the mannequins at the neighborhood mall are white.
they don’t wear the jeans as good as I do.
that’s what he said, anyway.

iii.
here’s a drinking game,
take an illegal shot every time you see another white girl
at this party with lip plumpers or injections.
whatever. everyone here knows they’re as fake as her weave.
you call this appreciation? funny,
persecution never sounded like appreciation to our ancestors,
to our hair straightener mornings.
The Myth of Barbie / Elaine Woo

Way back down the line of time, I desired a Barbie doll like all the girls on the block had: the fashion doll with fairy tale credits as a licensed pilot, operates commercial airliners but also served in an equally important role as a flight attendant.

She speaks: *I’m egalitarian: my friends include Hispanic Teresa and African American Christie.* Or is she? Her women of colour friends bear unrealistically Caucasian features. Did Teresa and Christie undergo a misappropriation of esteem? Focus on white as the only beauty currency? Or did the product designers accentuate what they possessed as the only flight path? Is Barbie acquainted with economic disproportion? Did Teresa and Christie live the story of airline pilots? Or the tale of flight attendants? Or when she looks in her morning mirror and sees Teresa and Christie behind her, can she see past their maker’s inability to shape non-white noses? Do they persist in the text and vision of privilege? Does Barbie’s lifestyle insist on eco-hostility? Teresa says, *I’m blue.* Christie replies, *Yeah, our possible knows a ceiling. Does the word money stick?*

One sixth scale, she is an unrealistic 5 feet 9 inches, 36 inch bust, 18-inch waist, 33 inch hip, degreed by a Finnish hospital of insufficient body fat to menstruate. A 1963 vintage Barbie book entitled How to Lose Weight recommended Don’t Eat! Not recast for a wider waist until 1997. Teresa and Christie in tandem: *Does Barbie knit vulnerability? Or punish?*

University of Bath academic published in 2005, research theorizing that girls reject their Barbie dolls, punishing them by decapitation or microwaving: a rite of passage and a disavowal of their past “Barbie Syndrome.”

This cultural icon doesn’t live in my wide waist or psyche. Kudos to you, mom: you wouldn’t allow me one, sparing me the ritual of beheading.
Three Stars / Eirini Ioannou

My stars are not like their stars. My stars decorate a uniform consisting of a service skirt just below the knee. Tights. Pumps. An officer’s hat with a red ribbon; a woman’s hat. No mixing of hats possible.

Mrs. Commander sounds funny in their mouth. Are they implying I resemble a man. Are they addressing the Commander’s wife, instead. How should we call you, a polite one once asked. With a smile. Talking to a woman.

On my desk there is a picture of my children next to my two-way radio. I scan the room. It’s never too tidy. My handwriting is not my strong point. I didn’t change anything moving in.

They say the picture gave me away: I am gentle.

I am lucky for a woman, they whisper. Nice office, higher paycheck, strong signature. A red ribbon on her hat.
The Picture / Desirée Jung

Take a picture of me so I can think of something. I need to think of something. The picture will stare back at you, she alerts me. What do you want to see? I don’t know. You’re the one who asked for a picture. You must know. Show me your eyes, I insist, before she takes the picture. What do you see in the viewfinder? I ask. She’s reflecting. You speak with your eyes, your metaphors, whenever you speak there are images and poetic figures. Does it make sense? At the same time, she tells me that my images are fragile, while my words have more strength. Where the images are, you are not, she emphasizes. Is there anything else in your horizon that you want me to reveal? She asks. The verb and the gesture and that they come from the same place in the brain, I reply. There is a center, a tension, between my eyes, my hand and my mouth.

Can I brush your hair? She asks, putting the camera down. I don’t answer, yet she begins to brush my hair. She’s often like that, initiative. You know you’re not eternal, don’t you? Nothing is eternal. Because things get postponed, they come later. All images are the idea of a desire, she says. She lectures me as she touches my hair, staring outside the window. I love the blue sky. The speed of the color is so limpid. Tell me more about my picture, I ask. Does it love you back? Because I love you back like any reflex weighting in the mirror. Even if you shatter the image, it won’t break apart. My love for you is not in the picture. She’s somewhere else as I speak.

I wish I could tell what she’s looking at when she’s not too concerned about my stories. She says out loud, I am going to transform you. Listening to her, I am not sure if it is her gaze or of myself looking at myself that affects me.

There’s old age, a bit of old age in each one of us, she says, handing me back the camera. Your turn, she says. Have you taken it already? I ask. I wasn’t expecting this. I want to photograph you passing through time, is it possible? I ask. Leonardo da Vinci understands perspective as everything you show behind a window, inside and outside, so yes, why not? I don’t know where I am when I think about time, she says, staring at the camera in the front of my face. She’s no longer interested in me. She’s caught by the sound of the news, something about the military coup in Turkey, an old interview, weeks later. Is the Internet in real time? I question.

She looks back at me and I click, taking the picture. She smiles, as if she’s not surprised. You know, Homer didn’t know he was telling stories, for him what he narrated were facts. What to do with all these images? I just want to see my face through your eyes, I tell her, not really explaining how frustrating it is not have the experience of other bodies. It doesn’t make sense. She nods. An absence is a presence in every image. Are you looking for a totality? No, I say. What is not in the picture? Who is looking back at you? What Di Cavalcanti saw when he painted the woman with the conical breasts? He’s a Brazilian painter. I don’t know, I tell her, looking down at her chest. Come here, hold my breasts, kiss me know, she continues, and I put the camera down, kissing her back.
Once? I do it all the freakin' time.

Have you ever... I masturbated? I did it once, just once, though.
Run and Rum / Stevie Lamblin

I looked over the banks of the Nile river and wanted.

Wanted so fervently the mounds of her banks as they dipped in pigments and licorice twine slid along my spine.

Resting on my tailbone.

The indication of presence without action was my favorite part of poetic interaction.

I wished to be filled. Anything. Anyone. Willing to overflow my overabundance in appreciation of my flexible capacity. The boundary of my willingness to partake.

I lived for that go ahead of dominance.

The force of fake forcing.

If you please.

Tease my chemical inevitability with intellectual contradictions.

Let anger fuel the intensity of my climax.

I want to truly hate you when I feel what love substance marks.

Heaven / Kathleen E. Krause

I am clumsy college
Of human pretending

Smelling the open
Glue of the sea

Zero shapes my glass and
The little blue box

My hand in a bowl of pigment
I lean to the lunk

Curled up in a desire of ideas
The girlhood of it, expelled

Pinched by that creep in the field
I knew what to feel

Wasp
Urchin
Hard Hands / Ken Williams

Brutish hands
granite fists
decimating delicate features
Purples and blues flourish
bones crumbling
screams the night

Scarring
delicate flesh
Red rivers birthed,
savaging through
mountains swelling
She's violated by a
false god
Men inherit rights
inflict corporal pain

Male dominated
religions
justify what
Cruelty as
a sacrament
A right
Duty

Whimpering
Cowering
Trapped
in the corner
Why did it come to this

When
By what right
What wrong

The dark apparition straddling
desperate screams
tearing through the night
shredding her bruised soul
No one hears
No one wants

As cruel as violence is
To suffer alone
To be ignored
Discarded this way
Cruelest cut

She'll endure
alone
while The Keres
battle Thanatos
Only he
welcomes her home

He alone cares
turns his back
not
welcoming arms
extends
Faith gathers here / Sarah Bigham

Three men of the cloth meet
over lunch in the corner booth of a county mainstay, burger juices
forming rivulets from their gaping, preaching,
moralistic
mouths.

Two employ napkins to
dab away the river while the other holds court,
using a fat tongue to ebb the flow.

After 39 years of marriage, I give you this advice, he says between
gulps of beef or bun or pie,
don’t EVER make a decision based on your wife’s
feelings.
Listen to her if you must, but never make a decision on those ever-shifting feelings.
I tell my wife we are not going to make a decision based on how she
feels,
only on logic, and I’m the one with the logic.

The ordained trio speak of
women
who were eventually promoted in jobs because they
unfortunately
had more experience than the young men
for whom these pastors had
solemnly vouched.

They speak of their disdain
for those with mental illness
who always seem to
want help.
And I hear of suicidal behavior
blamed on families
who have not committed
strongly enough to their
faith.
These men of God swap stories of flock members whose attendance or offering plate contributions or modern behavior seem somehow substandard, and the empty pews worrying them all.

Perhaps these absent folks have seen the light. With luck, and prayer, the wives will follow.
All About Power
and
Control

-Elaine Woo

I went to have tea with my Hapa Scottish-Arabic friend, Grace. We began talking about our intimate relationships.
After dating only three weeks, I was surprised he called me his girlfriend. He’s Chinese-Canadian like me.

I did feel taken care of by his family.

Then, OMG! I find he’s all about power and control.

We waited three years before getting married.
Speaking of control... didn’t you have a biff ‘em, boff ‘em relationship with a Swedish sailor?

No, he was Scottish.

I’ll be the last woman you hit!

I wrote a poem about him:
You bash my head against the wall
I feel so small.

My snooty English friend said,
"Asian, both East and South, and Middle Eastern cultures are particularly abusive."

People pathologize and culturalize abuse.
Speaking of control... didn’t you have a biff ‘em, boff ‘em relationship with a Swedish sailor?

No, he was Scottish.

I’ll be the last woman you hit!

I wrote a poem about him:
You bash my head against the wall
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“Asian, both East and South, and Middle Eastern cultures are particularly abusive.”

People pathologize and culturalize abuse.
In Ireland, if a Protestant woman marries a Catholic, her own people shun her.

I know of a Protestant woman who was beaten outside her parents' home by people she knew.

The same happens when Catholic women marry Protestants. See McKerr 2007.

Before people accuse other cultures, look to yourselves.
Violence against women is a universal phenomenon.

*McKerl, Mandy, "Multiculturalism, Gender and Violence," Culture and Religion, Volume 8, Number 2, July 2007, pp. 187-217 (31).*
They (the maids) are calloused shadows,
Nameless: ____________________,
Faceless Women:
□ interchangeable and expendable
□ expendable and interchangeable (*please check those that apply.)
Migrants (silently) treading along
the carpeted peripheries of Our Vision.

They can be seen (but often are not),
pushing Heavy Carts past endless rows of identical doors on identical floors,
They are rarely seen organizing, sterilizing, sanitizing, and dying incrementally
from carcinogen scents, lilac and pine-fresh misnomers.
 (a rose by the same name is not necessarily a rose).

The faceless women could be (beautiful):
 □ Mexican(s) scrubbing toilets in Tucson
 □ Filipina(s) mopping melted snow tracked from indoor ski slopes in Dubai
 □ Syrian(s) peeling used condoms from shower stalls in Berlin
 □ Tunisian(s) sweeping the corners of Venetian pensiones

The Faceless Women could be beautiful.
The Faceless Women could have faces.

But: They rarely speak the language of those intimate strangers,
whose casual excrescence they know so well.
 Their intrusions are silent,
 Their humanity quietly expressed.

When they’re young, the faceless women dream of having money ($/€)
to buy their own coconut soap, and go back Home
 with an expensive haircut and new shoes,
 and a bulging envelope to hand to a struggling sister.
They dream of becoming Indispensable
 (or at least visible).

Weeping blisters and spreading varicosities, though,
deepening lines and lingering coughs,
soiled condoms, pubic hairs, muscle strains, wrappers and unnerving stains
push the glossy world of left-behind magazines
 Ever → Further → Out → of → reach.
And so, the Faceless Women push carts and dispense soap,
Because someone in Warsaw or Manila or Guatemala City needs their tips,
And Utter Despondency is a Luxury of The Rich - those with:
  • expensive therapists
  • the right drugs
  • time for long holidays to get away from “it all” (Again...)

Do you want to know a secret? 2 a.m. by the open cupboard / Sarah Bigham

the last time

we may never know as it happens and
once the door has closed, turning the knob
changes the hue

do you want to know
it is the last time,
or would that only sharpen the pain,
and add salt to a beautiful, shining
something, unseen because it is part
of the hum-drum, every Wednesday, routine of life?

do you want to know
it is the last time
she will enfold you, fitting her body to yours, effortlessly in April?

do you want to know
it is the last time
he will lift himself to love you, on a damp morning, as streetlights part the fog?

do you want to know
it is the last time
she will reach for you, and you will feel the warm undersides of her cool, bony knuckles?

do you want to know
it is the last time
you will inhale the scent at his neck crook, just below the old shirt he wears on January Saturdays?

perhaps you don’t want to know
but if you could capture, in a spare recess of your mind, these sweetnesses
and hold them gently
until you are ready

ready to see them
and the beauty that
they are

if it was the last time

would you want to know?

Woman / Natalie Crick

Each night
I shed my body

That is devoured
By the desire of man.

On the day of
Death

A songbird echoes
Funeral song

Silently watching as my
Bones grow old

Decayed
And half-forgotten.

Snowflakes began to fall
So thoughtlessly from the sky.

Wing fluttering, a
Butterfly in a rainstorm.

I lie as often as
The sun rises.
Lu presses the call button for the third time in 20 minutes with little hope of answer. Technically, the button, red with a white nurse’s cap—the kind they wore when Lu was a child although nurses haven’t worn them in over thirty years—doesn’t signal a nurse at all, but a receptionist, who sends a Personal Care Assistant. Of course, Lu doesn’t need a nurse to escort her to the toilet. She’s not convinced she needs anyone at all, but that’s not her choice. Two days ago she waited too long to press the button, and no one came for more than an hour. She grabbed her IV trolley and went to the bathroom on her own, feeling she’d have surely peed the bed otherwise. Once she was in the bathroom, the PCA arrived, scolding Lu for getting out of bed on her own.

“I was about to pee the bed,” Lu told her. “This was the lesser evil.”

“You’re never to go to the bathroom on your own until the doctor orders it,” the PCA asserted. “We wouldn’t want you to slip and fall.”

“And you aren’t liable if I pee the bed?” Lu retorted.

“Just press the call button, and we’ll come right down,” the one called Paulina insisted.

“It’s been more than an hour since I first pressed it,” Lu argued.

“Perhaps you didn’t press it hard enough.”

“Then I didn’t press it hard enough five times.”

“You’re probably experiencing weakness in your hands.” Clearly, Lu was at fault.

Now Lu hits the button with both hands as soon as she has the slightest urge.

She tries not to hate this place where they are supposedly making her better, though they haven’t figured out what’s wrong yet. After three days no one actually knows her
name, her condition, or whether she needs surgery. She’s in the no man’s land of hospital care, full of alphabet soup: CTs, MRIs, EEGs, X-rays. All have their commensurate discomforts.

Suddenly, a young woman appears, asking Lu what she needs “this time.”

“I need to pee,” Lu says.

“Where’s your bedpan?” The badge at the collar of her baby doll shirt reads “Samantha.”

“I use the toilet, Samantha.”

Samantha pauses, and then says, “Well, let’s get you up then.”

Lu tosses her feet out of the bed, pointing to the IV trolley, and they do-si-do to the toilet.

“Just pull the switch when you’re done.” Samantha indicates the levered red light above the sink, then, disappears.

Happy the girl is gone, Lu takes her time relieving herself, while reviewing the humiliations of the past week. Yesterday, she overheard an aide complain that the worst part of the job was waiting for old women to push out a pee. What about old men? Lu thought. Surely they’re no different. What makes old women more annoying? Then too, her roommate had an ugly encounter when the PCA forcibly removed her from the toilet before she finished. There was a shift change, and apparently bathroom time has an expiration limit. The roommate was mortified; she cried in her bed for the next hour, “But I wasn’t finished, I wasn’t finished.”

When the roommate complained, the hospital sent in a psychiatrist as though it were she and not the PCA who acted inappropriately. The psychiatrist’s assistant administered a psych test to determine whether the roommate was depressed or hallucinating.

“Of course, she’s depressed,” Lu wanted to shout. “Who wouldn’t be?”

Through all this Lu lay on her own bed wondering whether dying could be worse than all this manhandling, manipulation, and hopeless waiting. She hates that she’s a mass of complaints. She has lost her independence, her dignity and wonders what’s left. This constant poking and prodding is worse than physical pain. Yet, here she remains, lying in wait for yet another test result.

She leans back on the toilet and closes her eyes. As she does this, PCA Samantha returns. “Aren’t you finished yet?” the girl asks through the door.
The next day is more encouraging. Lu’s “medical professionals” determine she needs traction before having a spinal fusion to correct her myelopathy. At 2:30 in the afternoon, just before a shift change, the traction team arrives and begins shaving Lu’s head. She asks why this is necessary, but they say only that they are prepping her for the traction.

“How exactly does shaving my head help?” she asks weakly.

The male nurse mutters, “I’m not going to lie to you. This is a little unpleasant.”

Unlike everything else? Lu wants to ask. The traction team begins drilling small holes beside her ears.

The nurse leans in and speaks quietly as though he doesn’t want the traction team to hear what he’s saying, as though they’d disapprove of the explanation. “Ten to thirty pound weights attach to your skull with four prongs at your jawbone. It serves to open up the vertebrae so the doctors can do the fusion more easily.” Lu tries not to faint or barf.

“The bathroom?” Lu knows it’s a foolish question even as she asks it.

“You’ll have to use a bed pan or catheter if the pan doesn’t work,” as though the pan has a mind of its own. “You can’t get out of bed for four days before the surgery.”

Lu recalls a picture from a book about the Spanish Inquisition, in which a similar device figured in the torture of heretics. She feels like a heretic here, disbelieving, questioning the general faith.

“I’m going to need something for anxiety,” she grabs the traction person’s sleeve.

The woman, Beverly, according to her tag, smiles, “Of course. Shall we press the red button?”
The Blossom Tree / Natalie Crick

In Winter, I knew them all
As the dead.

But now I love to watch them live and
Blossom beautifully;
Sun-blushed pinks and whites.

Their petals fall like small hands.
I lie under the tree
Discerning each flower.

Mother: I am breathing,
I have senses, I have you.
I want to reach out

To the child listening on the stairwell
In the dark.
I know you are afraid, my love.

Petals flutter down like kisses.
The first time you fall,
It will be peaceful like this.
from Shame-Based Fun / Sasha Fisher
Sarah Bigham reads, teaches, writes, and paints in the United States where she lives with her kind chemist wife, three independent cats, an unwieldy herb garden, and several chronic pain conditions. She is committed to supporting diversity and authentically representing female experiences. Her work appears in *Bacopa, Entropy, Fourth & Sycamore, Phoenix Soul, Pulse: Voices from the Heart of Medicine, skirt! Magazine*, and elsewhere. Find her at [www.sgbigham.com](http://www.sgbigham.com).

Dana Chiueh is a New-York bred writer who lives in Hsinchu, Taiwan. Her work has been recognized by the Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards, as well as several online literary magazines. As a student, adverse reactions to or misunderstandings surrounding feminism motivate her to explore more about the world and use her words to effect small changes to benefit marginalized communities around her, such as silenced female or queer individuals.

Natalie Crick has found delight in writing all of her life and first began writing when she was a very young girl. Her poetry is influenced by melancholic confessional Women’s poetry, by writers such as Sylvia Plath, Sharon Olds and Louise Gluck. Her poetry is often inspired by connections between Women and the natural world. Natalie’s poetry has been published or is forthcoming in a range of journals and magazines including *The Lake, Ink Sweat and Tears, Poetry Pacific, Interpreters House and Jet Fuel Review*. This year her poem “Sunday School” was nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Grace Epstein is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Cincinnati. She has published two plays, short fiction, and poetry as well as scholarly work in journals such as *The Great Lakes Review* and *QU: A Literary Journal*. Four of her plays have been produced around the US. She came to feminism as early as childhood when she noticed the difference in opportunities afforded her male sibling in sports and summer employment, but more significantly, she became aware of the profound implications of language and form constraining women’s equality while working on her doctoral degree.

Alice Hatcher has published fiction and essays in *Alaska Quarterly Review, The Beloit Fiction Journal, 34th Parallel Magazine, Defenestration* and *Gargoyle Magazine*, and poetry in *The Storyteller*. Her introduction to feminism came at an early age, in 1975, when her aunt enrolled in medical school in Texas and discovered that the school didn’t have a women’s restroom, and that she was the only female student. Her aunt’s activism to redress the situation, and to recruit women applicants, inspired Hatcher, who believes that progressive artists have a moral imperative to write against the reactionary, anti-feminist tides rising in so many countries, now.

Eirini Ioannou was born in Sweden and lives in Crete, Greece where she works as a firefighter. She holds an MA in English Literature from the University of Dalarna, Sweden. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Literary Mama, Eyedrum Periodically* and *Shipwrights*. She believes feminism resembles poetry: you’d better show it, not tell it, and equality is a constant battle: you have to sleep with one eye open. She is the mother of four and hopes her daughters will also like writing.

Clara A.B. Joseph is Associate Professor of English at the University of Calgary. Her poems have appeared in journals such as the *Toronto Review, Mother Earth International*, and *Canadian Woman Studies*. Her first book of poetry, *The Face of the Other*, has just been released by ip Publishing, Brisbane, Australia. Both in her academic work and in her poetry, Joseph investigates experiences of the marginalized. Thus, her monograph, *The Agent in the Margin*, examines the feminist narratives of Nayantara Sahgal against the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. Joseph’s poetry similarly traces the voices of women.

Desirée Jung is a writer from Vancouver, Canada, whose question “what does a woman want?” has shaped her life and writing. She loves writing about women and reading about them too. She has published fiction and poetry in several magazines and journals throughout North America and Europe. Her book of short stories *Desejos Submersos* is published by Chiado Editora. More of her work can be found on her website [www.desireejung.com](http://www.desireejung.com).

Kathleen E. Krause was winner of *Phoebes* Greg Grummer Poetry Contest, chosen by Brenda Hillman. Her work has appeared in *Agni, canwehaveourballback?, LIT, Lungfull!, Pennsylvania English, Salonika, Terra Incognita, The Four Way Reader #2*, and *Provincetown Arts Magazine*. Her chapbook, *Broth*, was published by Linear Arts. She graduated from the New School with an MFA in 1999, and currently lives in Brooklyn with her husband (and fellow-poet) and their two sons. Surrounded by boys and men all her life, Krause pushes the limits of “woman” while embracing and re-defining the “appropriate” backdrop of her traditional Irish-Catholic upbringing.

Stevie Lamblin: Female Equipment: Boy Name: Androgynous Brain: Artistic Soul. Stevie was born and raised in Dayton, Ohio. Her 23 years of life have consisted of balancing artistic and scientific aspirations. It wasn’t until Stevie was an adult that she realized she didn’t feel like a woman. She felt very comfortable in her female form but was aware that cognitively she felt masculine. This contradiction created the feeling of neutrality and androgyny in her psyche reflected in her poetry. Stevie works as a dancer with the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and is completing her Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling.
Karen Loeb grew up in Chicago and has lived in western Wisconsin since 1988. Her writing has appeared over the years in The North American Review, The Louisville Review, Hanging Loose, Thema, Verse Wisconsin and elsewhere. She thanks her mother and grandmother, two strong women, who passed on a love of literature and writing, and she is trying to do the same with her daughter. Karen’s poem “In the Science Museum” won the 2016 Wisconsin People and Ideas poetry contest. You can read the award-winning poem at https://www.wisconsinacademy.org/magazine/summer-2016/poetry/science-museum

Ken Williams has worked as a social worker for the homeless in Santa Barbara, CA, and he is a disabled combat Marine veteran of the Vietnam War. His writings have appeared in numerous journals and newspapers both in America and abroad; his most recent novel is Fractured Angel. Ken’s early embrace of feminism taught him to never blame the victim of rape or physical abuse, thus establishing a level of trust that is hard to find on the streets. “Hard Hands” is deeply personal, as are many of his stories. These stories are both his and theirs.

Reality changes from moment to moment. That this is the reality for many women hardens Elaine Woo’s feminist resolve and is the spark for conversations like that in “All About Power & Control” and the mirroring in the wetlands backdrop of “Where Are All the Hens?” “The Myth of Barbie” was a visceral reaction to a night of viewing film stars’ online stories. Elaine is the author of Cycling with the Dragon (poems), Nightwood Editions 2014.

Mark Wyatt has been photographing (mostly people on) the streets wherever he has traveled since around 1980. He posts his photographs to mwwyatt.wordpress.com, usually one or two a week. Each of the images is uncropped and is processed only to the extent that it accurately renders what the camera saw at the moment that the shutter was tripped. In the end, his photographs aspire to be “simple and compelling snapshots of humanity, ones that provoke consideration of the human condition – of class, gender, age, nationality, and the random fate that put each of us in the place where we began.”