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## Volume 1, Issue 1.

“So whatever else poetry is freedom. Let  
Far off impatient cadences reveal  
A paddling for my breathless stilts. Swivel,  
O hero, in the fleshy groves, skin and glycerine,  
And sing of lust, the sun’s accompanying shadow  
Like a vampire’s wing, the stillness in dead feet –  
Your stave brings resurrection, O aggrieved King.”

Irving Layton - 'Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom'

Every poem, short story, essay or painting is a form of expression. Mediums and technique aside, they undergo a similar and often inexplicable process of metamorphosis from conception to final product. From brush to canvas, pen to paper, fingertip to keyboard, all we could ever hope to really observe of that process is the etching of lines, dotting of "i"s, and innumerable typos. It is not this intermediate step which interests us, but rather the artwork hidden in quotation marks and colour schemes.

There are few university students who are given the recognition they deserve for their work, and a very small number of those have only just recently entered university. Fewer still are able to procure the means to live off their work. So what becomes of their art?

Blank Page is an attempt to answer that question. The magazine strives to establish a community on campus for first-year artists. However, it can only succeed so far as it is read and shared. If you write, submit. If you know someone who writes, pass this along.

Writing is alive. It is all for nothing if you only read out of old anthologies. Come to our open-mics and see your fellow students - scared shitless - read their first published poem or story to a room full of strangers and you'll understand the importance of these words to the people writing them. You'll see that writing is alive, that art is alive and well in the world.

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**Settling**

Alana Fletcher

The dusty summer scent of late afternoon

Settles. The sounds are distant, fading:

Rustling, purring

A softly-whispered breeze.

The lullaby, sung low to the ground

Draws me down to rest,

My cares to sleep.

I am the warmth of the setting sun

On my own cheek.

## The Collector

Christine Ollier

Footsteps frantic up stairs. Along the hall, now, scrip, scrape of the stepladder, dragged out of a forgotten cupboard corner. Boxes clatter to the hardwood floor as she scrambles for the back of the shelf, clings to the box as a drowning swimmer would a thrown rope, and sways.

Catching herself, she calms, she has her fix now. Still, a slight tremor down through her eyelids to her stomach as she back-steps down the ladder. She opens the box on the bed, cradled in her arm. Inside this box, another box. Her rattling hands draw a key from a pocket, and when inserted and turned, the box makes a satisfying click as it pops open.

The transformation is so dramatic - is this the same woman? - then we lean forward from our hiding place, desperate to see the contents of this magical treasure chest. Almost as if she can feel our probing eyes, she tilts it towards her body, rocks it as a child. A beatific smile has spread across her face, her eyes closed in rapture.

-Oh, she breathes softly. Then, with an air of closure, she snaps the box shut; show's over, folks.

With the box held tight she sweeps out of the room and down the stairs. In the backwash of air that hits us as she leaves the bedroom we smell honey and relief. Quickly we follow her - through the hall and down the staircase into the kitchen.

Grinning giddily, she is whirling, twirling, tangoing with an invisible partner from cupboard to fridge to counter, snatching ingredients as she goes, the box watching from its place of honour-the kitchen table centerpiece. The cake rises before her. As it bakes, she lowers herself into a chair and pulls the box forward. The smile fades off of her face as she

her husband

stepped

again she

invisible

counter

table

stair

runs her hands over its contents. Most people collect the objects linked to important moments, happy moments. However, she thinks with a smile - garish slash of the mouth: I was never most people.

Her fingertips read the sad Braille of her life, their life - His life. He had embarrassed her, hurt her, hid her from his friends. She tilts her head back, and the memories come fast and cold and hard like sleet as she gazes at her collection. A saved page from when he threw out her books - she had better things to do with her time. She remembers the first time she used the colour corrector makeup for the tell-tale bruises on her face - there are five of the used-up concealer bottles in the box. When he cut her off from her friends - he knew best, of course, and she was running out of explanations for her swollen eyes - she saved their phone numbers. Most painful of all - the twist of the knife - the forced secret trip to the doctor, the forced secret needle. There wasn't an object for that one, but stains in the wood - salt-water rain from her eyes. He had said that one of her in the world was enough. She knew she was odd, but she was his wife, damn it. Well. No longer.

The cake is ready, now. It stands dark and majestic on the kitchen counter, chocolate perfection. It is a mockery of a wedding cake, dark smugness spitting marriage's white naiveté. A divorce cake. Death by chocolate. It is their anniversary. She forgets how many years. She uncovers a compartment in her memory box, and unveils the second part of her collection. The bee venom smiles at her from its vial, reaches out and takes her hand. I'm on your side, it buzzes. I can give you what He won't. Her hand tightens decisively around the venom. Release. Freedom.

A glance at the clock - nearly time - and she quickly slides the box under the couch. Soon there will be no need for hiding places, no secrets. When he shoulders the front door open, has thrown his suitcase to the ground and taken off his shoes, she greets him.

"I made a cake".

"Better than wasting your time with all those damn books, I suppose". He rubs the back of his neck, his bracelet chimes. Medic Alert: Anaphylactic. "Better not be anything fancy," he grunts. "You know I only like chocolate cake".

As he waits in the patio chair, she cuts two pieces. Making sure he can't see her, she blends the venom into the icing. There. Undetectable. If he can taste it, it won't matter. Too late. With a smile on her face so wide she is afraid it might split right open, alert him before he takes a bite, she sets the plates down. That uncontrollable smile - a smile made up of all the repressed happiness spilling out from inside her, determined to make up for lost time. She smiles as his throat starts to swell, smiles as his face turns purple, smiles as he gradually stops thrashing. It remains in place as she finishes her slice, and then - why not? - helps herself to one more.

not, he <sup>impresses</sup> ~~impresses~~ <sup>same</sup> ~~same~~   
 doing the ~~work~~ of cultivating aculids act:   
 in favor of others kids need things to make   
 and. Every wednesday and Friday night   
 Sweet, selfless, collected gentleman   
 to be control.

**Through the eyes of a 6-year old**

Mentalla Abdel-Iatif

Lying here on the hard, cold floor  
In the bathroom of my flat  
I felt my heart beat in my jaw  
As I saw the blood-stained mat

Closing my eyes to stop the tears  
From falling, I shook in fear  
I hoped with all my heart and soul  
That my husband wasn't near

Moments later I found myself  
In that night in '63  
I saw my parents quarreling  
While I hid behind the tree

It was Christmas Eve that day that  
My parents had a fight  
I watched them yell, and scream and swear  
Until well into the night

At that time these things were hard  
For my brain to understand  
I recall asking God that night  
To help our family stand

Through the eyes of a 6-year old  
What I saw I thought unfair  
They were fighting on Christmas Eve  
I felt they did not care

to be control.



I heard a slam and then a sob  
I saw mother on the floor  
Her figure was covered with blood  
By the man who slammed the door

I told her then it was her fault  
For making my daddy go  
She told me if I was older  
I would never have said so

I helped her wash off all the blood  
But with blame deep in my heart  
It was because of her, I knew  
That dear daddy did depart

Now sitting here at 21

In that same position too

My heart went out to mommy

I knew now, what she went through

It made no sense  
during the months of cultivating a child's acti-  
in times of stress kids need things to make  
and. Every Wednesday and Friday my heart  
Sweet, selfless, collected gentleman  
to be control.

## **The Estuary**

Lucas MacKenzie

Meet me at the estuary  
Mouth to mouth, by mouth, we'll carry on.  
Your secrecy is necessary  
We'll load our boat, then sail away and make the coast by dawn.

Does the rushing water scare you?  
'Cause I know this aqua thunder scares me too.  
We'll feast on relief, and taste our freedom.  
We'll stay away from pillared salt  
And never look back.

Don't look back on burning cities -  
Those flames will lick your pretty face no matter where you  
throw your gaze.  
Those burning tongues will steal this moment  
From your broken fingertips.  
Honey let me kiss your bloody hands.  
Let me be the one who understands, and let me run with you.

The deck of our boat creaks and shatters  
The sea encroaches on our soaked feet  
This pleasant vessel wasn't made for the high seas,  
And the rumbling of the rude sea just gets louder.

I see now how he walked on water  
And what I see is how I cannot follow you to safer shores  
This boat was made to carry you, and carry you alone.  
I won't live to see you drown.  
Drown because I wanted to stay close.  
Drown when this ship's hull gives out.

Well this is me, and this is your only way out.  
I've washed up by that estuary  
My plans are as lifeless as the blood still in my veins.  
My blue soaked lips are warmed by embers  
From the blackened cityscapes.

There are two things that divide us  
I've passed on but you've retained the pinkness round your  
cheeks.

But most of all there's this great water  
Protecting you from seeing all these honest and terrible  
things

That I never wanted you to see.  
Because those cities are me.

### **Lady Grey**

Curtis Perry

I want sugar in my tea -

I want to sip the rim  
as though it were sin;

I want you to meddle  
with my kettle, as you know

Earl Grey would  
want it this way,  
steeped leaves whispering low  
through the din.

## **Driven to Distraction**

Norm MacQueen

She smiled a wry smile. “You’re really very cunning,” my psychiatrist mused as she folded her hands behind her head and stared at the ceiling. “On the surface, you offer those around you a genial, open façade that makes people feel inimitably safe, as if you’re inviting them to know you.” I began to gnaw at my little fingernail; strange how it seems to grow faster than the rest. “Yet all the while you keep your inner self hidden, suppressed. The fear, the angry self-loathing, the desperate solitude, it’s all so cleverly concealed.” I bit too deep. A tiny drop of blood trickled down my hand as she went on. “It must be exhausting being you. You’re one of the most duplicitous persons I’ve ever known. Where do you go?”

As I listened to my doctor’s telling insights on how I might achieve some greater peace of mind, I couldn’t help but think to myself, “Her chest is perfect.”

While she rambled on about some such “key to my healing” or another, my eyes fixated upon a watercolour hanging across the room. It was a rather ordinary, yet not unpleasant pastoral scene of dairy cattle grazing idly upon a springtime dell. It got me to thinking.

My Uncle Lyle always reminded me of the old cliché that counselled “Still waters run deep.” At first glance he was not much more than a quiet, self-effacing dairy farmer from the lush grasslands of rural Eastern Ontario. It wasn’t until you took the time to get to know him that it became clear he was no dimwitted hayseed. He had a keen, quick, informed mind; conversant in such diverse topics as economics, world affairs, aviation and, curiously, the latest fashion trends from Milan. He was nothing if not eclectic.

However, despite his impressive intellect we once shared an experience which demonstrated there is no substitute for good communication.

I was six years old. Chubby for my age, with an active imagination owing, I believe, to the fact that I had no siblings. Mother and I had left the confines of the city to visit Uncle Lyle on his vast farm in the early spring of 1972. One afternoon, while I was attempting to sculpt a Snickers Bar with my teeth to look like a Basset Hound, he asked almost inaudibly, “Er, wanna’ go for a drive?” I replied in the affirmative. Given the absence of television in his rustic farmhouse, any excuse for distraction was most welcome. I quickly ate my artwork, downing the canine figurine in two gulps, and followed Uncle Lyle outside.

The first indication that something was untoward came as we strolled across the yard past his brand new Chrysler Newport Royal hardtop with plush leather interior, eight-track cassette, white wall tires and air. It was the only car around. What were we to use for transportation? Surely not the tractor, it only had one seat. We proceeded along the far side of the older of the two barns. Rounding the corner, I quickly came to realize that the Chrysler and the tractor were not the only vehicles to be had.

Once upon the nether reaches of time, circa 1950 or so, perhaps it had been a truck. Doubtless owing to the ravages of time and rough handling, it had transformed into an immense, red-rusted, flat bed leviathan. It must have been missing some front-end springs because, regardless of being loaded down with hay bales and an all too apt pitchfork, it tilted ominously forward and to the left like a predator ready to pounce. The old style running boards bore a thick-crusted, hardened primordial soup of mud, manure and straw.

Habituated to the spacious, sleek, comfortable cars common prior the first Energy Crisis, I was fearful of this imposing behemoth from yesteryear. It wasn't a car or truck the like of which I had ever seen. It was more of a... a thing. A beast. A gruesome, self-aware colossus that looked like it wanted to be left alone. I was happy to oblige. Nevertheless, putting my trust in Uncle Lyle, I raised no objection as he lifted me inside.

The interior offered no solace. It was even more disturbing, given that I was now seated within the bowels of the beast. The windows were cracked. Metal springs jutted out of the torn, sunken seats like twisted stakes waiting to impale my delicate, pink, freckled flesh. Everything was filthy. The air was garnished with a nauseating aroma of gasoline and cow dung. Two bulbous dials hung precariously from an inoperative radio, like sinewy eyeballs that had neglected to fall from a lifeless skull.

Between the steering wheel and myself rose ominously from the beast's innards a long, black metal stick shift. The handle, ostensibly lost long ago, had been replaced by a cut out tennis ball. Someone, in a fit of irony, had drawn a typical "happy face" onto it. It challenged me with a broad, cynical smile, as if it knew something I didn't. In short, the truck's cab was a bizarre, worrisome, mechanized cavern and I, most indisputably, wanted to be elsewhere.

In contrast, Uncle Lyle climbed in with all of the offhanded routine of someone who had been here a million times before. He turned the key, which, unusually, was not attached to the steering column like the cars and trucks I knew. Rather, it was located on the front panel wall next to an old sardine can that stood in as an overfilled ashtray.

The grizzly titan roared a roar that surely would have shaken Zeus himself, had he been in or around the vicinity of greater Belleville that day. Undaunted by the beast's angry growls and the plumes of smoke and soot enveloping the interior, Uncle Lyle pumped the gas hard; repeatedly, heavily. Finally the engine reluctantly obliged, like a circus lion that in time decides to give in to its trainer. Grasping hold of the happy face tennis ball with the remaining three fingers on his right hand, he put the motor in gear to the harsh sound of metal on metal and a woeful lack of lubrication. Astonishingly, the thing moved. We were under way.

Heading down the drive toward the highway, Uncle Lyle's conversation consisted of nothing, which was his usual wont. But he was calm, relaxed, and in observable control of the beast, despite its guttural spits and spiteful sputters. I reasoned I had little to fear with him behind the wheel.

Or did I? With the main road only yards away, he made a hard left turn off the driveway and onto the rough-hewn pasture. This wasn't right, I thought to myself. Cars and trucks, even as hastily as this one, were supposed to drive on the road. One time at home in the city, Daddy had parked our car on the grass. He got a ticket from a cop that, Dad explained, needed a girlfriend in a very bad way. Pavement was for driving on. Asphalt. Concrete. Gravel. Perhaps laneways worn down to dense earth over time. But not a hayfield! I politely asked Uncle Lyle where we were going. But the noise was now so loud he couldn't hear me.

Indeed, the din was most extraordinary. Rumbling across the divot-ridden field the beast seemed to find every available rut, tunnel, hump and hole to be had. It was mid April and much of the soil was still hard and near-frozen. The windows rattled, the doors clattered, the engine snarled and the radio dial eyeballs swung in wild, circular arcs, rapping smartly against my arm with disdain. The happy face gyrated madly. We bounced and bounded about like human laundry inside an industrial-strength clothes' dryer. I began to re-taste my chocolate dog.

From out of nowhere Uncle Lyle produced a tattered rope and fixed it to the steering wheel to, evidently, keep the thing moving reasonably straight while freeing his hands. Thereupon, he reached over the stick shift to handily clasp a large rock that had been rolling about the floor beneath my dangling sneakers. He placed it heavily upon the gas pedal. He looked at me for a moment with a dull, vacant expression. Then, suddenly without rhyme, reason, warning or explanation, he opened his door and threw himself out!

To say I was shocked, horrified, would be inadequate. As the beast plodded onward, ever onward with no driver, I began to weep as if the Apocalypse was nigh. Moreover, I was perplexed. My young mind raced with frantic questions. Where did he go? Why did he leave? Why does everyone always leave? What'll I do?

Looking out over the dashboard I saw a far off horizon line of dense forestry at the end of the field. I figured I was destined to crash into the dark woods and be crushed by the pitiless beast, whereupon it would engulf me in flames, followed by the arrival of the inevitable woodland monsters that would emerge to gorge upon my charred remains.<sup>1</sup> The happy face on the wobbling stick swiveled and shook in a bitter, gruesome dance of delight. I was in trouble. And all it could do was laugh.

I knew I was too small to actually pilot the thing. Most likely, it wouldn't allow it anyway. How then was I to escape? A desperate opportunity suddenly occurred. It was dangerous to be sure. Under normal circumstances, it was the sort of stunt that would scarcely have crossed my mind. But these were hardly normal circumstances. Risking a very real and injurious fall under the rotating wheels of the beast, I decided the only chance I had was to bail out.

With tears streaming down my cheeks I fought madly with the unfamiliar door handle on my side. It wouldn't budge! Stuck! Rusted shut, most likely. This wreck probably hadn't seen a passenger since Uncle Milty wore dresses on Tuesday nights. I struggled and struggled until I realized I was trying to turn it the wrong way. With a flick of the wrist in the proper direction, the

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<sup>1</sup> Every inner city boy of my generation knew as a matter of course that the forest was a hostile place, populated by ravenous monsters with a particular taste for fat little white boys.

door opened. After a moment's hesitation on the dirty running board, watching the unsentimental earth relentlessly rolling past, I leapt. I was airborne.

I don't recall much of the tumble itself. Dazed, I came to spread eagle on the unforgiving ground. I got to my feet and surveyed the damage. In addition to various and sundry scrapes, I could feel a lump forming atop my head. My hands were especially frayed and bloodied. Gauzy, outer layers of skin on my fat little palms had peeled back into a kind of mush, like a wet onionskin. I must have instinctively thrust them forward during flight to try and cushion the landing.

Still, I cared not for my wounds. I was in pain, but I wasn't hurt. And the tears had stopped. I was free. I had saved myself. I didn't need anyone. It was with sovereign pride that I surveyed the six-wheeled satanic conveyance chug along its merry way, minus one frightened toddler.

Wiping the dirt out of my eyes, I then looked closer at the truck. There, in the back, stood Uncle Lyle whistling a muted but apparently pleasurable tune. Using his pitchfork he was casually baling the hay out onto the pasture. A small herd of Holsteins followed lazily behind, sampling the feast. In that instant I came to recognize there had been an unspoken rationale behind his abandonment.

Uncle Lyle had not seen my dramatic exodus. So it was with much ferocity that the truck's brakes squealed after he got back into the driver's seat. With uncharacteristic rapidity, the truck made a wild, wide, turf-shredding U-Turn and stopped. I could tell he saw me almost immediately. Slowly, he drove up to where I was standing.

Odd. As it drew near, the truck was no longer intimidating, no longer a beast. In fact, there were benevolent qualities I hadn't noticed before. The broad, swooping curves of the fenders and hood, emblematic of its era, gave it a sort of symmetrical warmth. The big, round, open headlights were like glimmering cartoon eyes looking forward in hospitable anticipation. I could imagine the twisted bumper as a congenial grin. Rolling to a gentle stop, the truck's brakes rang out like a whistle from a friend.

I looked up at Uncle Lyle and he looked down at me. He seemed relieved that I wasn't seriously wounded. There ensued an awkward silence between us as we stared blankly at each other, unsure as to what to say. Clearly, neither of us had ever been in quite this sort of situation before. The only conspicuous noise came from the comfortable, reassuringly regular "lug lug" sound from the truck's idling engine.

Eventually, Uncle Lyle spoke in his customarily dry, dispassionate way. "Where'd you go?" he said.

"Jumped out," I replied, imitating his matter of fact tone.

"Why?" he asked.

"I thought you were trying to kill me."

His world-weary face assumed a sort of pained, confounded grimace, though his vocal pitch remained as flat as ever. “No,” he said, “As a matter of fact, I was not trying to kill you. Get in.” I got in.

Even at such an early age I was embarrassed at having come across as such a panicky flake. Uncle Lyle must have thought I was the strangest kid in the world. We never spoke of the incident. Though, to be fair, he never spoke much about anything. He died in 1992. After the funeral I drove out to his now abandoned farm and looked for the truck. But it was gone. Inside the old barn, only a few loose pages from a book on the history of aviation bespoke of he who had once lived here.

As Uncle Lyle and I drove back to the house I gazed dreamily through the cracked, passenger side glass; watching the dairy cattle mulch their lunch. They were lucky. They didn’t demonstrate a care in the world. Three stragglers gathered in a small glade just south of the house, to forage on some new grown Timothy and white clover that was beginning to sprout in the sun. I envied their serenity.

I changed my mind. My physiatrist’s painting wasn’t so commonplace after all.

“...So, I daresay, with these techniques, you’ll achieve some inner healing. Neil? Are you listening?” The doctor leaned over to get a closer look. A respectable blazer now covered her provocative sweater. I noted with interest how the jacket augmented the inspiring contours of her superb thighs which....

“Huh? Sorry, what? Oh, sure. No, I was just admiring your picture over there.” I motioned to the modest panorama that had just been my escort down memory lane.

“Mmm,” she said amiably. “Nice, isn’t it? A gift from one of my former patients. We’re not supposed to accept them, but it was such a kind gesture I couldn’t refuse.”

“Former patient?” I asked.

“Yes, a young lady.” She replied. “She went off to Europe to study. She lives in Milan now. Well, that’s our time.”



**Dress-Up**

Alana J. Fletcher

Dress me up in muslin and lace.  
My superficiality swirls around me in tandem,  
Whispers softly, sweetly in my ears  
And leaves me empty,  
Leaves me still.  
You are the same. So Dionysian,  
Your satyr's flowing hair  
And liquid eyes invite only yourself,  
Only reflections are your true loves.  
Your form and shape  
I wish to hold so badly, to possess what lies within;  
But what if truly you  
Are Praxiteles' hollow cast  
Of perfect shape and empty soul?  
Another costume change, another scene.  
I want this pretense, not the pain, so  
Whisper softly to me, in my ear  
And wait at least  
Til curtain falls.

**Two stanzas on roses and swans**

Curtis Perry

my rose blooms blue, with bated breath  
against the evening violet  
then pride subsides, the pigment drawn  
through the stem like poison lead  
but this swan, full in milky plume  
mature and mannered for her swoon  
will break the dam of Philistines  
to set forgotten Gaia free.

## Charlie

Oil slicked safety jams, ram it down and  
pop clip  
round down  
pop clip round down pop clip  
Charlie's gored to ground meat  
can't hear can't hear can't -  
run fast to the trench ahead  
he's dead for sure, I'm senseless, so is he,  
round down round down  
pop clip

"Outta my way, Charlie... I gotchur flag right here..." I say, so he says,  
"Oh my Christ, Soldier... Don't move, yur lookin real good... What's yur  
name kid... Charlie what?... MEDIC!" he says,

Charlie got me a medic and everything is rounding down.

(Excerpt from an upcoming Remembrance Day  
chapbook by Nick Culhane and Justin Million)

Look out for it on magazine racks everywhere:



Brought to you by In/Words

god flies a fighter jet  
heather m. martin

life will take you in circles, on  
the merry go round up and down  
on horses painted pretty like you, and you  
tell me that you're beautiful, divine, right

so the civilians will look up at your  
statue in the square thinking you  
show truth as a webster's definition

freedom is dead when they hoist  
their guns over their  
shoulders, freedom is dead to them

they do it to be like you  
and i go somewhere on sundays so

i'm a christian too  
we know not what we do  
but we all do it to be like you

striving for truth-simple but unreal  
and that dictionary burns with our  
hope, for all we are and all we've come to be,  
standing in front of our god,

is a lie.

and. wednesday and friday night  
sweet, selfless, collected gentlemen  
to be control.

## **Spirit's Attrition**

Armin Forouzan

Laughing at the fact that everybody's lacking the wisdom  
Conducting experiments on a teen attacking the system  
Looking for a way to come back in the aftermath of collision  
With the novelty of a God who tried to convince him  
That this world was a façade and life was revealed through religion  
And that eternal happiness came through facing repentance  
If he didn't follow God then he'd be taking his sentence  
An early death, shredded to pieces and cut in a million  
Sucked into the darkest vortex and reduced to oblivion  
A visionary, he laughed and refuted his statement,  
"I've already suffered the greatest hell I could've been placed in,  
You refused to see that human beings greedy and jaded  
Would fall to gluttony and wickedness,  
Us as creatures greet Satan,  
Invite him into our homes, our souls as every heart laments,  
While evil-doers are consumed and hateful objectives run rampant."  
Saddened and angry, that religious God retreated in peace  
Wars in the Middle East struck families in Tel Aviv  
And southern Lebanon, while the greatest power supplied weapons  
To fuel a conflict that was born out of evil's presence  
Religion and politics danced hand in hand as the essence  
Of self-intentions consumed a world where boys and girls were the  
peasants  
White collared men took control when God decided to leave  
Leaving a billion people stranded with nothing to eat  
A thousand years later, a million trees stripped of their leaves  
Decorate a barren land where human beings were believed  
To have once populated the place where organisms now sleep  
Single celled patriots in a nation of viruses  
Now religion fails to prove that life really is just  
A fucking cycle where nobody even exists  
To spread a fairy tale about a man who was the son of a God  
Who still can't tell the difference between a president and a fraud

## Plague of My People

Brandon Wint

We pursue empty traditions, forgetting the lost lessons of religion

Claiming the actions of men, but possessing minds not unlike children;

Neglecting to realize that while we give motion to this cycle, our impressionable minds die. We are not too blind to see it, just too cowardly and jaded to open our eyes.

We've become slaves to the death mechanisms which man did create and oppress our own psyche, as our flaws only perpetuate.

Lost with no one to guide, the gun you hold in your hand is not where the true evil lies, contemplations of evil begin first in a dark mind.

We have no oppressors; it is our own ill fated transgressions which do not allow us to rise, as feelings of purgatory leave our souls crucified. Swearing by false principles... believing that the extent of our manhood is expressed by the way we twist our fingers... the gun is but a lifeless tool, but it is one's mind which pulls the trigger. We continue to kill each other over unwritten codes of honour that we swear by

Releasing empty battle cries as we engage in self-inflicted genocide, conflicting thoughts of good and evil materialize in one's mind as the internal war wages on, ravaging your insides. The beating of one's heart is like the soul's procession as we murder our brothers, those who we mistake for foes... and then cry the tears of injustice when faced with cruel repercussions

**BLACKS** kill **BLACKS** behind **WHITE** lines because the colours blue and red are mistakenly validating our lives.. our tendency to murder for greed is what keeps our mothers' tears running.. instead of our people conversing.. Gun Clapping is our only form of discussion.

Why?

## Realizing the truth at this volume could be dangerous

Jeremy Auyeung

Max took a step forward and fell into a response he had given out for the hundredth time that night: "Hey there. How's it going? Yeah, it's been a while. Oh thank you, no, no, I've just been in Ottawa for school lately. Yeah, well have fun tonight and I'll see you around." The latest well-wisher waved and walked off, off to the next bullshit pleasantries. It's not that seeing old friends from high school were a particular anathema to him but the same old run of the mill responses had taken their toll on this supposed former lost cause. It was a lifetime ago and it was two years ago, when high school ended and he swore off the old bottled-up suburb for greater horizons. University was the next obvious step and his entry into those hallowed halls was nothing less than a miracle to his peers: "Max got into five universities? Get out!" After all, Max was the one sniffing lines in the girl's washroom, Max was the one who would eat shrooms on the school bus, Max would dose ecstasy for school assemblies, Max was the one who made a coke game by doing a line every time the short uncomfortable Law teacher would stumble into one of his 'um...ok's.' Two years had passed and it seemed like everything had changed. In a way it had but Max's displeasure still seethed within him. No matter the obvious; Max couldn't find himself agreeing without anger boiling within him.

The music was raging all around him, the club was packed with bright precession lights shooting all around him, the bass shook the floors, the percussion mimicked his heartbeat as the revelers, his friends all jumped and danced around him. He was surrounded but he was alone. Standing there enclosed with all the things that he was supposed to like, things that were supposed to make him happy.

Breaking his trance was a short girl tapping him on the shoulder, with the music booming Max moved his ear closer to her mouth. "Yo - You need tonight?" The solitary voice was almost drowned out by the pandemonium but the gaze of these types of people were always the same. No matter the differences in facial features, race or sex, the desperate look of want would always be familiar to him. Max nodded.

The exchange took place flawlessly. Though Max had been out of the game for some time, the transaction reawakened old instincts and the monotony of such cravenly deceptive acts. It was everything he hated about the so-called drug culture: the sketchy drug dealer always acting as if some major drug sting was about to go down, years of organization from the most zealous law enforcement officials in the country were hunting that particular dealer and only her/him. The reason would always be a squalid mix of latent schizophrenia, now active from their own drug use or worst of all, trying to play to their own ego. Trying to create a sense of power and danger in the attempt to establish their own street cred - it disgusted Max. The idea to him was like watching someone masturbate and

having to nod along as if his acknowledgment was the only thing that could get them off.

The three pills went down without a fight and his quick entry into a bathroom stall reinvigorated old memories of disgust. This had all been done over a thousand times before and this time was no different. The situation was no different, the drugs were no different but somehow he had garnered the sense that *he* would be. That he just might have beaten the demon back, cravings and addiction, the forgotten defeated enemy with his victory being a parable of both caution and strength to all. He was awkward at first, taking out his tools slowly and accidentally dropping his bill on the grimy shit-stained floor. But once the crystalline powder poured out of the packet he regained his focus, the body completely in tune with the mind. His muscles remembered everything about his dreaded ritual, exactly how much pressure to exert, when, and where. And before finally using his health card to scrape up the crushed powder, he paused. A slight hesitation held his body but he released his held breath and a circle of thoughts began to bombard his mind. This is what you need, this is who you are, this is your release. He inhaled another big gulp of air, released it quickly and dove in.

He walked out of the washrooms in a daze. His unsteady gait drew some looks but he made his way to the back lounge where the seats were situated. He sat down and leaned his head back with his eyes closed, taking a loud snort before slowly reopening them. His heart began to race as he saw everything through a fuzzy haze. It wasn't a new view, it was an old view. The rail thin girls all pasty white turned vampiric and deathly, the men seemed diseased and reeking of extremes; all were decadent. Gluttons of envy and chemically happy. His face held a contorted look of horror as his stomach rumbled from his swift intake of old poisons. A girl tapped him on his shoulder and the speed of which he swung his head startled her. "Are you ok?" she asked with a face mirroring her deep concern. At first he was touched but the size of her pupils revealed her own taint to the wanton death all around him. He nodded, got up, and walked away.

He wandered the club without purpose, slowly nudging his way through the crowd as the music drove up higher and louder than before. He wasn't sure where he was going, what if anything he was looking for. He was passing the bar for the third time before a hand appeared in front of his chest stopping him.

The figure slowly turned around, the lack of light gave his outline a shade of dark only a little less dark than the open spaces of nothingness between them. It was Sam, the old friend who had goaded him into coming to the club in the first place. He started talking but the noise all around him drowned it out. Max just nodded and gave no effort to decipher it. Sam patted him on the back and passed him a shot of tequila. Sam moved up to his ear and said, "Here, this'll loosen you up and lube the synapses too." Max held the shot in his hand but only continued to stare at it, his face drained of all emotions and his eyes were wide open giving only a sense of shock. Sam ordered one for himself, clinked the two glasses and downed it, all in a quick second, a natural reflex. Max surrendered and did the same.

He leaned on the bar and watched the MC shoot out indecipherable lyrics at lightning speed and with a sniper's precision. His face remained emotionless, his eyes were still wide open. His stomach gave one last loud rumble as an inner burn started to set in, he felt himself sink and his sense heighten. The pills had started to kick in.

Warmth filled his body as somewhere in his brain, little currents of electricity began to fire rapidly and flagrantly. The sight of the dancers slowed and trailed into dozens of fragmented images of one movement, the sound of the music roared, the tempo one with his thoughts, his skin tingled and bristled at a dying cold breeze brushing his wet clammy skin, his mouth drained of all moisture leaving only a faint bitterness of tequila, the smell of sweat and musk filled his nostrils of all the bodies all around him. All powered and moving to the same energy, he knew they were there but now he felt them.

With several more shots of tequila, he felt his worries and revulsion dissipate into the stifling hot air. He loved this moment more than he ever loved anything, he loved the club, his friends, himself, and everything in the world. For what in the world could ever transgress this moment, this beautiful moment of darkness and brummagem umbrageousness. It was with this that he felt it all melt off of him, those nights of uncertainty and naked wants. He felt as if he had it all, anything he could ever possibly want. It was with this that he decided to do another line.

Upon his return to the bar, he scanned the room trying to see the setting that should've fit his mood. But the nagging doubt built up with every haggard breath; he was high, on the road leading to a horizon of happily-ever-afters, the ultimate escape. He had spent one half of his life growing, becoming, a state of transition from dormant cells to an individual ready to define him. He spent the other half of his life dancing with chemical wraiths, the search for meaning usurped by the instant highs of synthetic smiles. Max had been the underdog his whole life, always written off, always underestimated, always summed up in the eyes of ignorance as categorical and cliché. But his return home had proved otherwise, his alienation and frustration channeled into a focus to betray the roles forced onto him. This was his crutch, the piece of the puzzle which made the flickering images of fear and insecurity into a cohesive portrait. A work of art, in progress, but destined to be finished. Yet this night, this term of ten hours where the sun retreats from the sky and darkness envelops, one night out of seven hundred and thirty, one moment where the stars aligned and every outside variable met the conditions to hit critical mass. He had become what he wanted, the opposite of what everyone expected of him, and still he was standing alone, ill at ease, high on the habits he'd learned to hate, and drunk on the excess of lies.

He wandered the club in a daze, his face frozen in a condition of desperate want. But what was he looking for? A friend, a love, a belief, a thought, a kiss...or should he just settle for a line? He tried to dance but felt his limbs heavy and uncooperative, the music shallow and gossamer. Max was lonely, Max was bored. Max decided to do a couple more lines.



He passed the piling of kids waiting for the john and locked himself into the out of order stall – there was no point in hiding his intent. Shame was never a justifiable reason to distract his task. The toilet was overflowing with toilet paper and thick water a shade of pure brown. The smell of piss, vomit, and shit overwhelmed the jib, simmering and dissolving within his nose. A stink sinking in against the odds. As Max crushed another shimmering transparent rock, his hands began to shake rendering them near useless. The peak was fading, the consequence was beginning.

A vague sense of fear and panic sat in slowly, the sickness of withdrawal, a state all too familiar, rolled in as the crest of the wave sank and retreated. Sank and retreated, only to become the one tidal wave that drowns. His mind scattered into several different delusions; one of defeat, one of fear, one of need. Why would he throw it all away? The one chance to prove himself as something more than a chemical skid-mark. It's no secret the disparate peculiar noises all add up to one illicit action; the soft crush of the rocks, the suspicious tapping of the card, the hard snort of air and meth forcing its way into a body. My god, is this it? I need more than this, this'll only last half the night and after that I'm going to need more, and more, and more, and more. If I stop I'll meet a fate worst than dying, if I stop everything I hold together as myself will unravel...

He re-entered the bar a half gram heavier and three lines lighter. He poured down three ounces of fiery liquid through his poisoned drain. The drugs entered a stage of restlessness, the ecstasy fighting with alcohol, the meth trying to reach its effect, and Max just stared out into the crowd. This mix of people from all different ages, race, religion, class; all together for one fleeting night of electronic affection and frenetic movement. They were bonded by the music, the party, the drugs. And Max couldn't help but despise them, for compartmentalizing their life and emotions. For not chasing the dream of joy through excess in every moment relying instead on the scheduled hours of performance. Max believed himself pure, unadulterated in his intentions and actions. He was all or nothing, his dream of being something, his misguided endeavors in drugs but then what was tonight? Playing the reformed miscreant, now on a path to societal acceptance. A piece of paper, a diploma proving his worth, and the encroaching horizon coming to replace the scorched earth he built his home on. He was everything he should be; why wasn't it enough?

The crush of thoughts grew to be unbearable, he couldn't feel the last three lines despite his racing heart and corpulent pupils. The rush to the washroom became torturous, his long dormant paranoia returned explosively as he felt every eye in the vicinity latched onto him and saw the whisperings and voices around him becoming jagged weapons for malicious harm. He found himself in front of a sink, onlookers around him wondering what the hell he was doing. Max brought his quaking hands to the taps, turned on the cold water and rested his hands underneath the glacial water.

He felt entranced by his reflection; chubby cheeks, wide eyes bearing two fresh coffee stains, greasy skin, a new layer of wear. A little tired but a face just as normal as any young adult. Why you can barely tell that he used to... Cupping his hands, he brought the

cold water over his face and rubbed it in. Hoping to somehow wash it off. Pushing jaggedly on the paper towel dispenser, he proceeded to dry himself, the paper scratching his face. He remained transfixed on this image reflected in front of him, this false portrait of what he thought he was, of what he'd convinced everyone what he now was. His eyes slowly closed and he saw himself as he really was, scarred skin marked by fresh lacerations. The scars run too deep; far into everything he was, is, and forever shall be. He gives a small chuckle before opening his eyes, marching out of the washroom, the club, and into a taxi.

He marched through his house possessed with a purpose, leaping through his things and fishing through deep drawers before finally stumbling to grasp the small black bag. He drew it out and unzipped the cover, revealing a tool long forgotten but now his sole purpose. Taking out the revolver and a single bullet, he released the barrel letting stray bullets fall asunder. He carefully placed the single bullet into the chamber, spinning the barrel into oblivion. He could barely contain his excitement as his wiry lips spread into a smile as wide as the night sky residing in his mind. Closing his eyes, he began a whispered chant, saying and believing that if failure was to be his greatest success, then he would do his gold medal to all seeking to fawn. His breathing became slow and the long slow gentle hum greatly distilled his mind as he aimed the pistol at his forehead... and pulled the trigger. He muttered something indecipherable immediately after the shot shattered silence like glass but this reader believes it went along the lines of: "now's the time to shine."

not, he was inconsistent. It was no sense  
doing the wrong of cultivating a wild act.  
in times of stress kids need things to make  
and. Every Wednesday and Friday night  
sweet, selfless, collected gentlemen  
to be control.

## Content with Imperfection

Mathew Klie-Cribb

I've taken trains and ascended apartments  
-Through the complexities of modern life-  
Just to be here.

Here your smile withers,  
But your traditions last.  
Is this belonging

When irrelevant quarrels pierce me with connections  
Formed somewhere in my soul?  
It's not love, it's just tradition.

When I burp up gas from the  
Sleep inducing hormones of this feast,  
I realize I'm more content here than I thought.

END

## **Blank Page Editorial:**

I was recently at a press fair where I got to talking to an older guy—he had recently mailed Health Canada to inquire about a pill that could help him with his insatiable need to publish authors. On a more poignant ramble, he also happened to mention something that struck me in a very profound way—that we have all been loaned a small piece of Canadian literature, to do with what we will.

We, as writers, have all been given a loan. It is up to us to keep this loan from being retracted—to do as much with what we've been given as we possibly can, and not to waste it. And a good place to start is right here.

The editors of **Blank Page** want to thank each and every reader and writer who helped us put together a great first issue. Please come out to the **Avant-Garde Bar** for the next **In/Words open mic** and meet up with us for a chat—for more information, see [www.carleton.ca/inwords](http://www.carleton.ca/inwords) and click on “events”. There will be an open mic on campus specifically for our **Blank Page** issue release at **Mike's Place on Monday, October 30<sup>th</sup>**. Write something scary for Halloween, or write something completely different. Come out, enjoy yourselves—read or just listen.

We will be publishing more issues in 2007. Please see the opposite page for ideas and submission guidelines. Our next deadline is Groundhog Day of 2007 (that's February 2<sup>nd</sup>, by the way). Make Bill Murray proud!

Thanks again for reading,

**The Editors**

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