



MEMENTO MORI

HARVEST
INTERNATIONAL

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DISINTEGRATE BY JASPER JAMES

When the sun sets, you'll see him at the crest of the hill, his frail body illuminated by the dying light, and when the sun finally collapses so will he, and he disintegrates – his ashes settling onto the sagebrush, but you know his favorite plant was his hydrangea shrub that grew alongside the bricks he laid, the crawling generations, three sets of pointed ears and blood that was not his own but shared the same red; you see him disintegrate, and a part of you does too, like watching the tree you used to climb chopped down, the roots ripped out of the soil, your childhood home inhabited by strangers, a streetlight broken and a star appears where you used to see the light from your old bedroom, you see it next to the moon that followed you when you were a child being driven home at night, next to the star that appeared twenty years ago; you see him disintegrate and the rain hides your face but it doesn't wash away the ashes on the sagebrush, the petrichor doesn't mask the reek of smoke coming over the hills, and the brown grass will never be green because it never was green, you knew this to be true but he still went out there every day to water it, he still believed there was buried treasure even after he had dug so many holes across the land, even after the charlatan who sold him the map was hanged, even as his muscles and joints gave way and his lungs collapsed on themselves he still dug because all he had was tenacity and a shovel.



El Destino Que Nos Espera (The Fate That Awaits Us) by Karla Amaya

Todos creemos que somos seres invencibles
(We may all claim to be invincible)
Que nada ni nadie puede detenernos
(That nothing and no one can possibly stop us)
Una idea llena de arrogancia, avaricia y deseo de
inmortalidad
(An idea filled of nothing but arrogance, greed, and
desire for immortality)
Y, sin embargo, hay una sola cosa que puede
(And yet, there is only one thing that can)
Y llega cuando llega
(And it comes when it comes)
Ya sea en la juventud, la flor de la vida, la mediana
edad o la vejez
(Whether in youth, the prime of life, middle age, or old
age)
Ni siquiera la inmortalidad puede vencerla
(Not even immortality can defeat it)
Porque el Destino que nos espera al final
(For the Fate that awaits us in the end)
No es nada más que la Muerte.
(Is none other than Death.)



The Cabin Killer by Karla Amaya

Teresa, or “Tera” as she was known by her friends, was exhausted, but she knew she couldn’t rest now. If she could remain alert in her hiding place for a little while longer, maybe she could escape from the maniac that called himself Mr. Bates, a horror film fan that bordered on the extreme. Tera had no idea how she and her three friends managed to find someone who wanted to recreate many horror films, only with a few twists and lots of blood. So far, the maniac had managed to stab Tera’s best friend, Lexie, while she had been getting ready to take her shower in her cabin.

Tera had ordered her two other friends, Bianca and Freddie, to take Lexie to the nearest hospital quickly since they had managed to hear Lexie’s screams and had subdued Mr. Bates. They had told Tera not only to call the police but also to hide as best as she could. So far, she had managed to run from her hotel room and into one of the cabins. But now he was awake and on the prowl. And even though he planned to add her to his list, Tera was not going to allow it. But even so, the pounding in her heart made her feel like his footsteps were coming closer and closer... To send Tera to her doom.



Misery loves company

by Maritza Anahi Castro

soon after
my fears knew life
their teeth were sharpened
their claws at my neck,
just above the skin, just out of reach

all my years I'd been peculiar
or so they said
and it gave me comfort to know I could be wrong
but now my devils had purpose

they hung in the room during every phone call
lurking just behind me
they took their place in my passenger's side seat
walking beside me everywhere i went

when their talons grip my heart,
and the blood freezes in my veins,
I know they're there.
everywhere I go
there is the reminder,
thick in the air, it lingers
everything would be lost, except for the fear of loss

Living Apparition by Maritza Anahi Castro

I am a hypocrite.
in front of an audience, I stood
before the assembly of those who loved you.
Their eyes clung to me,
a frightful, frail thing
as though I might, at last, bring peace.

And so, I tried.
Bearing loud, tearful proclamations
that I would live,
live as you had
in the moment, I was brave with a quivering lip.
In front of a crowd,
I drew the phantom of your bravery,
draping it on my shoulders
like a child's precious blanket

I think I lied
I don't live —
I'm not sure that's what you could call this.

existing is what I amount to.
as a ghost, I haunt my own halls
my limbs move and carry me on, just never forward
under the chill of a gray night, I wail and thrash

I fear I've become some living apparition
that life has fled my young bones and I await
my exorcism



LA LÁPIDA BY FERNANDA LÓPEZ BRACUTO

Un eco lejano retumbaba entre las hileras de ceibos inmóviles. De figura esbelta y vistiendo traje y corbata, aquel hombre atravesaba la helada noche de agosto con un andar que pedía clemencia. Sus manos comenzaban a entumecerse. Exhausto y a un suspiro de rendirse, logró llegar a su destino—el lugar de siempre, la casona que lo vio crecer. Cerró los ojos unos instantes y suspiró, sintiendo una gran nostalgia. Al subir los peldaños de ladrillo, lo invadió un desasosiego indescriptible. Algo se sentía diferente—un súbito escalofrío le recorrió la espalda.

Se detuvo en el porche. Con la mirada fija en la puerta abierta, recordó, como si hubiera sido ayer, a su mamá gritándole desde la cocina, —“Isidoro, ¡la comida ya está servida!”—. Odiaba ese nombre desde que tuvo uso de razón. ¡¿A quién se le ocurre ese maldito Isidoro?! ¡¿Acaso el apellido Paniagua no era suficiente calvario?!, se había preguntado incansablemente desde pequeño. Ahora—cuarenta y nueve años más tarde—realmente carecía de importancia. Tomó aire profundamente, y entró.

El zaguán—con el aire apestado a crisantemo fúnebre—se hallaba ruidoso y atascado de gente. Algunos sostenían copas que embriagaban su penar; otros tantos optaban por acomodarse en sillones y beber silenciosamente su café; los demás deambulaban por doquier como hormigas en ebullición. Con una sonrisa leve y algo incómoda, alzó la mano para saludar a los presentes.

Dos puertas, de madera oscura y tallada, daban al salón de la izquierda—apenas entornadas—permitían ver el féretro. Súbitamente, el corazón comenzó a palparle desenfrenadamente, menguando sus ganas de entrar a ver al difunto. Se detuvo. No había necesidad de hacerlo en ese momento.

Al otro lado del zaguán pudo ver a su madre, quien, devastada, recibía consuelo en los brazos de un familiar. Se le anudó la garganta y lo ahogó una tristeza profunda, pero decidió no interrumpir. Caminó silencioso hacia la cocina para poder calmar su sed—tenía la boca tiesa y sus labios comenzaban a resquebrajarse.

Algo llamó su atención mientras abría la alacena. Sobre la mesada de mármol notó un papel con bordes dorados. Lentamente se acercó a inspeccionarlo—sintiendo esa culpa terrible de meterse en lo que a uno no le incumbe—y comenzó a leerlo. Era la orden con la información para la lápida. Su madre quería tener todo listo para el entierro lo antes posible. Repentinamente—sin terminar de leer lo que estaba escrito—sintió el mismo escalofrío que le había erizado la piel al entrar en la casona.

Su cuerpo comenzó a helarse. Los labios, ahora grises, no podían emanar sonido alguno. Sintió los párpados pesados, como si se le fueran a cerrar por completo. Con el último esfuerzo, alcanzó a ver las palabras impresas en el papel: “En memoria de Isidoro Paniagua. Febrero 29, 1973 – Agosto 26, 2022. Por siempre en nuestros corazones.”

Death of a Childhood by Vivian Nuno



Room 203 by Oscar Gomez

I looked out the window from the hospital bed. It wasn't much of a view since my hospital room was on the fourth floor. Just the tops of a few buildings, and occasionally a crow would land on the ledge outside my window. They would sit there briefly, like they were waiting, offering a silent prayer, flying away. I sighed, pulling my feet off the edge of the bed, feeling for my shoes with my feet, finding them and then sliding my feet in.

"Now for the hard part..." I thought. I took in a deep breath and began to hoist myself off the bed, desperately forcing myself to stand, my knees immediately struck with unbelievable pain, like there was sandpaper stuffed in my joints, making a simple task like standing up and sitting down a torturous accomplishment. After a few lingering seconds, I managed to stand up, a little bent but I straightened up. I shuffled over to my door and opened it, being greeted by the fluorescent hallway lights, the sound of hospital staff talking in the distance and an office phone ringing once, then twice before being answered. I looked at the nameplate on my door, "203," before exiting out into the hallway and began making my way down the hall to use the bathroom.

I was in hospice care receiving chemotherapy. At age 23, I'd been diagnosed with stage 4 Osteosarcoma. My birthday was almost here, and I was looking forward to the surprise party my family would've planned for me, but this? Mom gasped, covered her mouth and began to cry after telling her what Dr. Larson had told me. We'd lost my Grandma a few years back to cancer and now it struck again. Dr. Larson asked a series of questions once the shock had worn off, and I answered them as best I could, but the final question was if I'd like to be committed to hospice care. I turned it down, I was fine! The doctor had to have made a mistake! My broken leg couldn't be this serious, it just gave out while I was working at my job at Home Depot! I lifted some heavy boxes and I didn't bend my knees properly, that had to be it! My girlfriend, Minerva, shrieked almost as badly as mom when I told her in person, we hugged each other tightly, and I felt her sob into my shoulder. My family wrote it off as a misdiagnosis, until a few months later at my sister's birthday, when I collapsed all of a sudden and my dad called an ambulance.

"And now I'm here," I muttered, walking back into the room and sitting, plopping down, my leg jolting in pain. It wasn't fair! How could this be happening? All my future plans, chasing my career, getting to marry Minerva, all of it just over! I laid back down in the bed and looked toward the window, the crow was back, it didn't come alone.

The Good Mother (Excerpt)

by Grayson Rodriguez

Disgusted, he cast my son onto the floor, and escaped into the cool–still–morning, leaving nothing behind but a snowy trail of sinful footprints. As he slammed the door behind him, all that remained were echoing groans of an unquenched anger and the whimpers of a fearful child left behind.

The sound of the slammed door rang throughout the entire house, shaking the rain out of the gutters. Minutes later I finally regained consciousness. My eyes cracked open like a tomb being discovered years after the death of the soul it held within it. And as I looked around me, I realized, none of what I heard was a dream, but a nightmare. The same nightmare I've been trying to wake from for a long, long, time...

Laying amongst broken glasses and dried up blood, I called for my son, "Johnny..."

Cradled in the corner, he could hardly bear to look at me... He didn't recognize this life anymore. He barely recognized me anymore; I was a mummy clothed in fear and shame, trying to find a way out.

Slowly but surely, I heaved myself up by the half broken table beside me. Along the way, my eyes caught a painful sight. A shattered family photo. Us, at the cabin a year ago. Before my accident... As I held the photo in my hand, fond memories came flooding in. Johnny had just turned five. It was his first time in the snow... We had so much fun, but now—now it's nothing but a dream world. A world I can never return to.

As I took one last lamentable look, I placed the photo back on the table. A table littered with pipes, pill bottles, and so much snow you could barely tell a Bible was under it.

Walking up to my son, I pulled my sleeves down and wrapped myself in a warm white robe to conceal the bruises on my body. And with each step glass crumpled under my feet with broken shards escaping into the unreachable depths of my skin... If only this were the height of my pain.



Evergreen

by Josh Hao

Evergreen are the lushest of forests
Evergreen are the wilting leaves that feed the trees
Evergreen are the lightest of bird's nests

Nevermore

by Josh Hao

Nevermore are the buildings of crust
Nevermore are the prideful footsteps of man
Nevermore are the paintings left in dust



Blink by Josh Hao

Blink

I mourn, I wail, I cry

Blink

I coo, I gurgle, I babble

Blink

I stand, I walk, I pry

Blink

I learn, I work, I dabble

Blink

I like, I love, I glorify

Blink

I lose, I miss, I grovel

Blink

I hurt, I regret, I lie

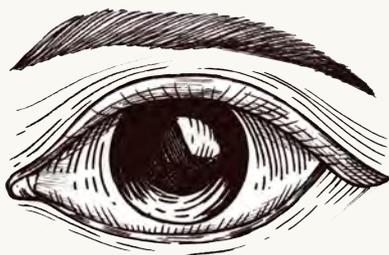
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I sleep, I stop, I –

Blink

Blink.

Blink.



DENIAL IS DEATH'S NAME

BY NATALIE G-MENDOZA

screaming into a pitiless void
only I was calling into the wrong place
because you had gone the other way
the light had called your name.

Why must you go?
Why must you leave?
your skin, once a lush pink turned a morbid gray
that I couldn't ignore
as I walked in circles
being told of your nearing end.

the last time I saw
a light filled your eyes
only I had to accept that the pure
must also die.



the soft crinkle and pull of tissues from the box
in denial of what I had just lost,
I didn't want to accept that you were gone.

I pleaded to God in vain
called out your name
nearly went insane
as you took your last breaths.
Grief ran rampant in my veins
and tears formed streams on my face.

Seeing Ghosts by Isabella Juarez

The streets were filled with costumed families. Jack-o-lanterns on doorsteps, skeletons hanging from trees, shrieks of fearless excitement ringing throughout. Tim couldn't believe he was trick-or-treating. How embarrassing, a sixteen-year-old getting dressed up on Halloween to knock on doors and chime, "Trick or treat!" to every homeowner in the neighborhood. But his little brother Ty was trick-or-treating age, so his parents made Tim take him to get his fill of candy. Ty demanded matching costumes, and Tim's parents thought it was a great idea. "Oh, you two! So cute! My little ghosts!" his mother had said as her camera flashed. At least the sheet covered Tim's face. No one would know who he was.

Tim's brother led him towards their next target with a sack full of candy swinging in his hands. "Let's stop here, Tim! Look, they've got a witch!" Ty shouted, already running up the driveway. Tim stayed back, waiting for Ty to collect his goods so they could move on. Tim had had enough of the decorations, of the crude glowing faces and mechanical cackles from robotic monstrosities. In history class, Tim learned about Halloween's origins. He wondered if the spirits walking the Earth tonight could ever confuse these primary color superheroes and pretty pink princesses for one of them, if they were upset that Halloween was a far cry from long-forgotten traditions. Now, it was just another chance to play make-believe, to be someone else for a night.

Tim's brother returned, with an out of breath, "They gave me a huge one!" Tim told him to hand it over. "You have to catch me first!" Ty screeched, running away. Tim quickly lost sight of his brother in the crowd of masked faces. "Ty!" Tim shouted. Tim waded through the crowd a little faster when no response came. "Ty!" he shouted again. As Tim's eyes hurriedly scanned the sea of children, he spotted a ghost running down the street, turning right at the corner and disappearing from view. Tim ran after him, breaking free from the crowd and hurrying to follow. "Ty, come back! I'll tell Mom if you don't!"

Tim rounded the corner, but he found the street lying ahead of him was completely dark. No houses leaking light through windows, no streetlights illuminating the empty street. Tim couldn't see too far ahead of him, but was still able to make out the sheet-white ghost that stood completely still. Even from this distance, Tim noticed the ghost was eerily tall, taller than Ty. The supernatural silence of the street washed over Tim, and the urge to run away was overwhelming. He knew with certainty that this was not Ty.

Just as Tim resolved to flee, the sheet slithered off of the ghostly figure and onto the ground. At first, Tim thought the sheet had been held up by air, like a magic trick. Straining his senses, Tim finally heard a shallow, raspy breath coming from the figure, pitch black and blending with the night.

"Remember..."

Scars by Jameela Abdullah

Time waits for no one
Dare I dream of you, brighter day
Burdensome was the chain on my chest
Laying down shame
Laying down regret
Trusting my own reflection
Turning mourning to glory
New horizons await me
What am I waiting for?



Audacity by Jameela Abdullah

Measuring my flesh
Carving it up piece by piece
Scars etched everywhere
I get lost inspecting myself
Dismantling what the world says
No longer bowing before false adoration
I love me
unapologetically

Broken Promises by Jameela Abdullah

Suffering and silence
Wounds of the church fester and grow
Love, forgiveness, and mercy remain shadows on the wall
Life is too short to accept your judgment and hypocrisy
wrapped in scripture and hymns
I know my Father in heaven loves me!

TEXT ME WHEN YOU GET HOME!

BY TREVOR BROWN

January 2, 1:37 am, I-10 Freeway, Walnut, CA. Chris Blenton, age 32, a four-year tenured reefer driver, was in the midst of his route to deliver the haul of various flash-frozen fish to a mediocre sushi restaurant. Excitement for the new year prolonged into the second day of the year for Chris, the party animal who just spent New Year's with his fiancée and her family playing party games, dancing, and maybe drinking just a bit too much. Being on hour thirty-four of no sleep, sleep deprivation got the best of Chris. Sand dust was sprinkled in his eyes, and the sound of the truck's engine lulled him into sleep. Isaac Voight, age 26, a three-month-experienced line cook who was on his way home after an exhausting ten-hour shift, cut in front of Chris to escape the pressure of a tailgating Ford F-150. Put at ease by the placidity of the slow lane, along with the opportunity to dissociate from the road, Isaac ignored the semi-truck shadowing him. Chris's truck impelled Isaac's car to spin out and collide head-on with the interstate's wall, killing Isaac instantly on impact.

June 14, 4:42 pm, Holt Avenue, Pomona, CA. Travis Green, age 32, friend of Blenton for fifteen years, and Bernard Mullins, age 29, friend of Blenton for sixteen years, were thirty minutes from arriving early for Blenton's surprise birthday party. Blenton's accident propelled him into the center of many close friends' lives, Green and Mullins being two of them. The two have been particularly attentive to Blenton's waning mental state in recent months and decided to orchestrate the surprise party for Blenton in hopes it would revitalize him. Distracted by removing a terrible song that Mullins queued, Green sped over and hit a pothole, one of many that had been sustained by the city's budget cuts, which startled Green, causing him to jerk the steering wheel and direct him and Mullins into a guardrail. Green and Mullins sustained major blunt force trauma to the head and both died moments after impact.

October 2, 7:15 pm, Temple Avenue, Walnut, CA. Thomas Voight, age 56, Karen Voight, age 55, and Isabella Voight, age 22, just finished visiting their son's/brother's grave. Thomas Voight, driving his family home after an emotional evening, interrupted the car's silence with the radio of a local church. A yellow signal light flashed in Thomas Voight's eyes, signaling that if he wanted to beat the light, he had to accelerate. Flying into the intersection, the Voight family found themselves crossing paths with Sandra Portelli, age 24. Portelli was quick to slam on her brakes, throwing the coffee she had just picked up all over the floor, also allowing the Voight family to pass through the intersection, leaving them and her unscathed.

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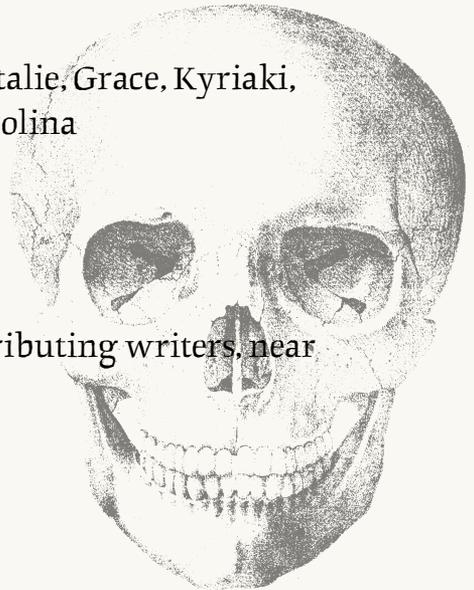
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Thank you to all of our contributing writers, near
and far.

Thanks for reading,

Harvest International





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