

VAUGHAN STREET DOUBLES

ISSUE 4

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A Fair Amount of Ghosts
Zach Murphy

He plays the trumpet brilliantly on the corner of Grand and Victoria. He doesn't look like he's from this era. He's impeccably dressed, from his crisply fitting suit to his smooth fedora hat. There aren't many folks that can pull that off. He's cooler than the freezer aisle on a sweltering summer day. He performs the type of yearning melodies that give you the goosebumps. I've never seen anyone put any money into his basket.

There's a formidable stone house that sits atop Fairmount Hill. It's been for sale for as long as I can remember. The crooked post sinks deeper into the soil with each passing year. It isn't a place to live in. It's a place to dwell in. There's a dusty rocking chair on the front porch. It's always rocking. Always rocking. I'm not sure if the chair is occupied by an old soul or if it's just the wind. Maybe it's both. I guess the wind is an old soul.

This town is full of posters for Missing Cats. There's one for a sweet, fluffy Maine Coon named "Bear." He's been gone for a while now. I've searched through every alleyway, under every porch, and inside of every bush for him. Sometimes I think I see him out of the corner of my eye. But then he's not there. The rain has pretty much washed away the tattered posters. If he ever turns up, I worry that the posters will be missing.

I met the love of my life in Irvine Park, near the gloriously spouting water fountain, beneath the serene umbrella of oak trees. We spent a small piece of eternity there together. We talked about whether or not the world was coming to an end soon, and if all of our memories will be diminished along with it. After we said our goodbyes and she walked off into the distance, I never saw her again. So I left my heart in Irvine Park.

Bad Gardeners
Haruna Abdulmajid

You pride yourself as a nursery where bright minds are nurtured, yet in your nursery are Bad gardeners. The unpleasant taste from the sullen pill she swallowed still lingered on her tongue. When the women at the stream talk about their children in colleges, It reminds her of a son that left for the city to get a degree but returns in an ambulance. Because plants grow best in this nursery by parroting the gardeners, and he has shallow roots that finds it difficult to gulp down complex equations and formulas, he was labelled a failure and uprooted from the beds. Depression is a perilous voyage where only the spirited survives. The following morning he drank hemlock for breakfast.

Oh self-acclaimed hot bed! aren't you ashamed of yourself? You've separated the cat and the kitten. wrapped the cat in a foil of grief. Your gardeners irrigate the flowers with torrid lessons, without minding if they hurt their roots trying to absorb them. This nursery is a forge where metals are heated and reheated, until they lose their inert properties.

Cancer Surgery
Ronald Tobey

I park my Tacoma crew cab pickup
my black lab in the back seat
sniffs the warm roasted salmon
lightly sprayed with olive oil
flavored with lemon and capers
on a white plastic dinner plate
wrapped under aluminum foil
perched on the seat beside me
by the curb of the drop-off portico
of the hospital's darkened surgery wing
waiting for you to emerge
to smile to claim your night shift meal.

Some person shuffles by
fifty yards away
pushes an empty grocery cart
among the row of hospital outbuildings
single-wide trailers without windows
filled with local servers and data storage
stacked in grounded metal shelving
alive with red and blue LED illumination.

The worlds revolve like ancient
women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

Adjacent the crowded ER
A box ambulance painted orange and black
lights flashing red arrives
Rear door is flung open
Two elderly women wrapped in winter coats
kerchiefs boots gloves
a girl and a lean young woman
in black skinny jeans stylish sneakers
hoodies mask their faces
slip along brick and concrete walls
shadows
follow the paramedics,
they push the dolly with wheeled folding legs
the patient strapped down

You drive our truck
270 miles one tank of gas
to metropolis medical campus
a religious university private hospital.
I withdraw into numbness.
We pass through miles of forest and fields
skirting farms villages national parks
rest stops at Sheetz
seldom converse
emotional tunnels.

GPS maps route to a recommended hotel
next to a strip mall of franchise stores
restaurant bakery pharmacy
with no access sidewalk.
The inn offers complimentary coffee
and breakfast sausage biscuits and eggs.
Too late for us.
I'm fasting pre-surgery.

Day begins 4 AM
bathing in the shower
washing with antibiotic soap
that makes my skin itch
hospital lobby registration
at 5
a hundred patients' families
helpers
printed forms check-in lists
electronic notification tablets
identification driver's licenses
proof of insurance
cushioned plastic bucket seats and benches.
Few talk

heart attack / stroke / logging accident
/ drug overdose / vehicle crash /
suicide attempt?

heads nod low eyes averting
enter the neon lighted ER lobby
chairs and benches clustered
privacy for fear and grief
register their names to be called
when somber physicians appear
stethoscopes dangling at their necks
from windowless locked side-doors
to consult about living will directives.

I am moved by fancies that are
curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely
gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

You hurry back to the radiation lab
solo tech tonight
to wait for ER physicians' orders
computerized tomography scan
fluoroscopy
radiographic film imaging
you smile though you will endure a long shift
on-call after.
A teenage girl tries suicide
helicopterized in
2 AM
hospital parking lot
slashes deep across her throat her neck.

Driving home my dog sleeps.
November's full moon a cloudless night

curt last-minute checks
complain about the parking garage
expansion under construction
maze of rising declining ramps
yellow stripes guide-paths
arrows pointing contradictory directions
on concrete floors
banks of elevators.

Surgeons
anesthesiologists
third-year residents
visit bedside greet me
read a chart.
Does it mean anything?
Am I a phenomenon?
Nurses fill out checklists
mark the prep room screen "Ready".
In the surgery room
six doctors and nurses.
The da Vinci robotic surgery machine
hovers over the narrow operating table
an octopus.
Intravenous anesthesia.
I am under.

Ninth floor
hospital cancer tower
my room at midnight
red and yellow city lights below
a well-insulated new building
no street noise intrudes
funereal silence.
You leave at 11 PM
after I wake from anesthesia
know who you are
where I am.

Nurses come into my room
frequently from their station

Illuminates in profile West Virginia hills.
I listen to songs from my iPhone
randomized playlist
T. S. Eliot reads Preludes
then Philip Glass
Annunciation piano quintet.
In dark mountain depths
hollows along ancient creeks
gravel roads hidden under fallen foliage
glints of house light
blink distantly
behind leafless trees.

across the corridor
to check the metronomic beeping
of my body's vital functions
on digital monitors.
Every twenty minutes other nurses
gently ask if I need pain medicine
administer shots and pills
check the drainage tube
sutures at 5 incision slits
abdomen blown up by inflammation
change Foley bags
blood in discharge
blood in urine
hold straws for me to sip water
I can't eat
vomit pushes up from my stomach.
I'm constipated,
I pull my gown up to my waist
the nurse rolls me onto my right side
at edge of the bed
knees up to my chest
lubricates the slender plastic nozzle
of the enema pump
inserts it into my rectum
streaming the watery saline solution
into my colon
enemas to shock
anesthetized intestines to life.
I trail diarrhea
splatter gown bed floor toilet.
An assistant nurse wearing nitrile gloves
strips me of my soiled robe and sock-slippers
washes with sanitary gel my entire body
as I stand in front of her
removes dried blood from my abdomen
and shaved pubes
avoiding the puffy stitched seams
sanitizes my penis
around the inserted catheter
anus and scrotum.
I should not be embarrassed.
I am.

First Breath
Fabrice B. Poussin

The dust comes alive with the world's new born
Snuggled in soft cotton of white and silk
Slight motion eye lids hesitate
In slow deep awakening

Arms shake off the numbness of the night
Into the door fresh of Autumn morn'
Delicate feet barely floating
She puts on her daily life

Sparks remnants of her nightly dreams escape
To hide in the folds of the sensuous drapes
There patiently to await the signal
When she will exhale the exhausted hours

They will contemplate her every moment
Until again time comes upon them and she
To reconcile into the realms only she knows
Up above, and beyond all perception of real

For now, her hand on the frame of what awaits
Her breast seems to glow with the beats
Of a boundless heart, as her breaths
Precious of pearls and diamonds enchant

Light in the day she wears, the sky in her eyes

Softly bid hello to a world that knows her entire
The complicity of all things reminds them all
It is time to mean, again, to her, to live

Now it awaits, dwelling in the waves of the butterfly
Calm, preparing a surprise as only it can
So her return will be in celebration, a fete
When she will shed a burdened shroud.

Flambeau River
Michael Igoe

A colder terrain
tends to stretch
between suns
of another land
You begin to only
seek out dwellings
under colored suns.
They serve as engine
force you to assume
the role of a busy agent.
When you are provoked,
they will fade and sputter.

Inspiration
Kristian Beatty

It's raining.
Ideas flow in rain like, well.
I'll hop in my car
Drive downtown
Get a view from the bridge.
That'll spark something.

There's something about rain.
The smell
And the chills.
It feels like it's nature's way of saying,
"Write something."
"Nothing else to do."

The wind messed my hair.
I take the time to fix it.
Someone might see, I say.
That someone is me.
It's cold out.
I'm cold.

You can see the gallery from the bridge.
They keep ideas there, don't you know.
You're even allowed to see them.
No touching though.
They don't like that.
Can you blame them?

The bridge is up ahead.
My coffee isn't the best.
The rain is letting up too.
My hair looks good though.
Well, I think so anyways.
I think.

I hit the bridge.
I'm met with a spectacular view
Of a ten foot wall
Blue as the river I can't see.

“Under Construction.”

I suppose it is.

The radio says we live in uncertain times.

But it's okay.

Dairy Queen is still here.

We don't live in uncertain times.

If anything,

we've never been more certain.

Invisible Pain
Charlotte Murdoch

When the world slows down,
you speed up.
Running at a million miles,
your energy is powered by my exhaustion.

Your deafening scream
confirms I will never be good enough;
it's always the same.
The 'outsiders' cannot see you,
cannot hear you,
because you hide behind your name.

Your complexity astounds psychologists,
but your individuality causes my pain.
You will never leave me alone,
because you reside inside my brain.

Will a lullaby soothe you,
and stop the baby cry?
For this baby has never grown her wings,
depression will never let her fly.

Letter To Deaf Eyes
Fabrice B. Poussin

Strings flash through the grays above
Chirps die under the fist of pounding storms
While a star shies away from the dark dawn.

Hours of impossible dreams come to a halt
Under the feeble flame of a forgotten lamp
Wild locks wet with flowing pains he aches.

It is a familiar scene of hope and despair
An aura shaped like a shade on wishes falls
upon the letter begun when he could still inhale.

Like blood to the rivers of forgotten slughters
The ink traces a story upon the velvet sheet
Prolonging the comfort of a refuge found in the alcove.

The future suddenly brighter enlightens the darkish orbs
As his soul screams through the cosmos under the quill
The same eternal plea to echo on to touch its goal.

There is a warm spark titillating deep below
And he smiles for a moment embracing the form
Of the apparition who does not yet know she is.

Letter To Her Lover Post The Shipwreck of Depression
Busamoya Phodiso Modirwa

I have bled onto everything that has stayed past the midnight of my smile

Yet you are still here on our almost rudderless ship

You say, 'I will voyage with you'

And the troubled waters beneath us gurgle up foam

The voices wail inside this ruin of a body

They dance around me like witches in the night 'till you can

only see a swirling as if of smoke

An inferno brewing somewhere, even you know

You say, 'I will stay still'

And the madness says, 'This haunted house is ours alone'

I have been depressed long enough to never mistake

Amorous love for a rescue boat

I've come to terms with my plight so much that if you chose to leave

I would help you find the bits of yourself you

Pushed into the cracks to ghost-proof this sinking ship

No one deserves the 'saving the princess' journey before being loved back

But you are still here so tell me my love

Is this a dream?

Nothing But Nothing

Emily Gledhill

Misty fields splintered by rain

Light no longer exists

Buried behind clouds

I feel no welcome for me

Nothing to hear or listen to

But the rushing wind

Causing the trees to cower in agony

As the darkness hums

The mourn of an owl

Cuts the air

Before the shower

Cleanses the cry clean

The tired nothingness surrenders

For it can give no more to the day

Even if it wanted to

I stand masked

Pasture Statues
Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi

Millie mooed.

Cate mooed with her.

The cow stared at them.

Millie giggled at the old joke, a pure, authentic song.

Cate giggled with her, exaggerated, trembling notes.

The cow stared at them.

Millie continued to pet the cow's cheek. Cate stroked the other, looking for signs of impatience in the otherwise stoic animal, searching its blank yet somehow knowing eyes for knowledge of her charade. What made her want to release the scream that had been lodged in her throat for inconceivable minutes was how Millie, sitting comfortably in her numb arms, was so far away from screaming; Millie, who had every justification for adding her shrill voice to the one behind them.

She hadn't asked Millie if she was all right; doing so would have given her the impression something was wrong. She hadn't asked Millie her actual name; as far as the little girl's amiable behaviour indicated, they had known each other all their lives, and names didn't matter. She hadn't asked Millie her age; from the moment she took the little girl into her arms, she could tell the small human being was no older than her career.

Three-years-old, Cate mused again, as she transferred Millie from one desensitized arm to the other, careful not to break contact with the cow. Three years, and once again she imagined the retirement banner, growing longer and larger as the idea cooked in her mind, advertising the pitiful number.

Cate was grateful for the brown-and-white animal's presence. Moreover, she was grateful that the cow was the first thing Millie had noticed. She wouldn't have thought to mosey on over to the cow; instinct—training—would have told her to immediately transport the dishevelled little girl to her car; and there they would have waited for the next routine steps. And then she would've known something was wrong, she thought. And then she would've started screaming.

A scream perforated the ambience, a cocktail of pain, fear... and perhaps a note of anger.

"Mooooo!" Cate issued her loudest impersonation yet. Millie echoed her sentiments, prolonging and exaggerating the bovine language until it devolved into more giggling.

Another scream smothered the laughter, and, for a terrible moment, Cate thought she felt Millie stiffen; thought she saw registration on the little girl's suddenly sagging face.

"Moo mooooo moo moo moo mooooo moo," Cate interjected, the single word spoken in the rhythm of conversation. She fixed upon Millie's eyes, hoping the little girl would take the bait, ready to shift her little body should she decide to go peeking behind her back, toward the scream.

Millie's bowed lips glistened, saliva pooling as she gathered her thoughts about the conflicting sounds. Cate readied her own lips with another string of nonsensical cow-speak, when Millie broke out of her trance, and fired off a meaningless statement of her own: "Mooooo mooooo mooooo"—laughter—"mooooo moo moo moo."

Relieved, Cate kept the dialogue flowing for as long and as loud as was necessary to beat the intermittent screaming from Millie's ears. As their banter rose and fell with the outbursts behind them, she imagined how the others must have seen them: vulnerable backs; a revolving red light highlighting Millie's arms wrapped comfortably—Or is she in shock? Cate couldn't decide—around her neck; mooing from unseen lips; the cow itself unseen, blocked by their combined bodies. How unreal it must have appeared to them.

How grotesquely real it was to her.

How beautifully real it was to Millie.

A terrible thought returned Cate to their cozy huddle: This is your first time, isn't it? The scream she struggled to keep deep down in her gorge threatened to erupt. It occurred to her that this cow—not the pair grazing further down the fence, dangerously close to the break; not the calf flanked by several adults; not the others standing nonchalantly, laying nonchalantly, living nonchalantly; not the countless others that might have been a blur in Millie's passenger window—but this cow might very well have been the very first cow Millie had ever seen.

Cate mooed, and wondered if Millie could detect the underlying melancholy. You don't need to meet a cow, she desperately wanted to assure the little girl. Not now. Not like this. She was certain that when Millie was one day no longer a size fit for one's arms—There's no guarantee of that, Cate sadly

reminded herself—she might learn to hate the cow. All cows. The way Cate hated them for what they had done to Millie. To her.

To Millie's mother.

The human sounds behind them were less frequent now, quieter, the pain, the fear, the anger—if ever there was—giving themselves to realization. Cate hoped Millie's mother would soon forget how to scream; hoped her mother forgot her daughter's name. This line of thinking was drenched in selfishness, but Cate had accepted it... for now; may guilt torment her later. It was just that she and, more importantly, the cow had worked so damned hard to keep Millie occupied.

Or are we keeping the cow occupied? Cate thought for the first time.

She looked into the animal's eyes, glossy black islands surrounded by thin halos of bloodshot white. Pulses of red light, rotating like an angry lighthouse—an eye of its own—searched those eyes, much as Cate was doing now, for knowledge.

Do you see the red light? she mentally transmitted to the cow. Do you understand it? Did you see what happened before the red light? Do you understand what happened?

The cow stared.

Do you understand that this little girl I'm holding, the one mooing at you, the one petting your face... do you understand that her mother is the one who killed your calf?

Based on its indifference, she couldn't tell if the calf was blood-related to the cow. Would he or she—Cate couldn't tell which—bite Millie if it understood the situation behind them? Would he or she reconsider biting if it understood the whole thing had merely been a matter of a broken fence? Would he or she refrain from seeking revenge upon Millie if it understood that the calf had wandered through the broken fence, onto the asphalt, and before Millie's mother's car? Would he or she rethink their potential bite if it understood that Millie's mother had, from the looks of the finale, done her best to avoid the calf, but instead clipped its behind, sending her speeding vehicle into the ditch? Would he or she accept that the calf had been mercifully put down, quickly and painlessly, unlike Millie's mother, who found herself wrapped deep within her metal womb, gasoline-for-placenta everywhere, unable to be reached or moved, lest she perish sooner?

The cow stared.

Cate focussed on Millie's silhouette within the animal's sheeny eye: Do you understand?

A voice answered the question. Cate couldn't make out the words, only the harshness of the voice. She sensed an approaching presence, and immediately understood what was happening. In a voice tailored for Millie's benefit, Cate said, "Please, don't come any closer," and resumed mooing along with Millie.

"Officer?" The voice didn't sound so harsh. Perhaps it hadn't been at all. Perhaps, Cate decided, she was prejudiced against voices outside of she and Millie's precious bubble.

Cate sensed the intruder take another step forward.

"I said don't," Cate said in her rosiest voice.

"Officer, I need to examine the little girl," the soft voice said.

The well-meaning plea incensed Cate. She's fine. I checked her when I pulled her out of the car. Some scratches, a few bruises, but she's fine. I checked her. And I named her. She knew someone close to Millie must have known her real name, but for tonight, in her arms, the little girl would take the name of the first girl Cate had lost on the job.

Footsteps crunched behind them.

"Don't," Cate emphasized, momentarily breaking her character of utter serenity. Before the intruder could interject, she added: "I... just give us a few minutes, okay?"

And then what? she thought.

Once again, she caught Millie's silhouette in the cow's eye. Do you have a father? Grandmother? Grandfather? Uncles? Aunts? Anybody? Do you know your name?

What would become of Millie when Cate decided enough "few minutes" had elapsed?

What would become of the little girl when the cow was gone?

The intruder's footsteps—a paramedic just trying to do her job—retreated, but Cate sensed she hadn't gone far; Millie did need to be examined.

She realized the screaming had died. It made sense to her, not because the outcome was inevitable, but because the paramedic now had time to check on the only survivor.

But they still had a few minutes.

And so Millie mooed.

Cate mooed with her.

The cow stared at them.

Regarding What Comes Next
John Grey

Days are long gone
when I expected to finally see
Jimi Hendrix in concert
in the afterlife
or reunite with family
or be greeted by
that know-all St Peter
regaling me with my sins
while I tried in vain
to speak up for my good points,
and reincarnation
was trendy in my early twenties,
even welcome
as long as I didn't come back
as a tsetse fly or a Mason,
and there was all this stuff
about attaining a higher plane
which saw me through a month or two
and there were the cheesy seances,
rapping, tapping contacts
from the other side
though I couldn't see myself,
post-funeral, as a rapper or a tapper,
and my spiritual awakening
got abstract there for a while

like there was a painting
on the wall at MOMA in New York
just waiting for me to be part of it,
followed by the resignation
that it's all meaningless, purposeless,
that we're flesh and bone
and nothing more,
food for the soil, the worms
or the fire,
that there may be an eternity
but it doesn't involve me
or the ones I'd miss
if I was capable of missing
when I'm gone –
in other words,
right now I'm living
and just you try and stop me.

Second-Best Bed
Sophia Mold

a spinning
torchlight
words

were	stars	
	my body	softer
now		his
verb		noun
nights		written
beneath his		hands
	touch	taste
the other		dozed
dribbling		love
in	my	head
	next	

The Advantages of Having an Indoors
John Grey

In twilight, rose petals fight against the sinking sun.

Overnight, camelias work hard to stave off frost.

No question about it, the outdoors is a struggle.

In the afternoon, on the veranda, I blanketed myself in light,

considered the effect that everything has on everything else.

Then I went back inside, where the effecting's mostly done by people.

Much of myself is entrusted to you.

Something's cooking. The hugs bring order.

I am no longer that rose or that camelia.

Come the wind, the trees look vulnerable. I pity them.

And rain has at the nests in their branches.

When the snow arrives, living has no place to turn.

But there you'll be still with your summer tan.

And a smile to convince me nothing could possibly go wrong.

I'll light the fire but, really, the fire's been lit already.

The Mystery of Consciousness
John Gabriel Rodi

Perhaps consciousness is a kind of shared template
upon which all souls are dependent;
It is where the psyche is staged.
It is a formula of self,
a cosmic consciousness or a knit of identity.

Perhaps the key to the mystery
is not that we are self-conscious,
but that we are God-conscious:
Consciousness being the forum for prayer.

I say this because the creative imagination
is the one place where we can find a model of omnipotence,
or an imperfect counterfeit illimitable creative potential.

The idea of unlimited representation exists in nature, in our minds,
where we can imagine a world
that can only be imagined.

The Swords
Patrick O'Shea

The swords of loss slash deeply into the citizens and homes of the world, the sharp edges cutting into
The spirits of those who not so many days before were content,
Suddenly it is as if a wind has been whipped up by some dark wizard which cloaks an invisible killer, and
Carries it across so many lands and seas of the earth,
Then deposited, the killer begins to spread its touch, and to reach out for the grandfathers and the
Grandmothers, for how else can one remove a generation,
No armies are required to carry out this removal of souls from among the living, no weapons except the
Virus that can be inhaled with a breath and exhaled with a breath,
There are no shields of protection against these swords, for no one yet knows how a protective shield
Can be made for the hearts and minds of those suffering loss,
And no magicians have yet been found that can fight this invisible killer, no one with that ability as yet,
So, the fear continues to grow along with the anger and confusion.

It seems that people in so many places are acting like those waiting for the fall of the headman's axe, or
Perhaps the sword of justice to pass a final judgement on them,
There is no running that can offer the suggestion of safety, the killer can come to so many after a kind
Word has been exchanged, or an unprotected health worker on a visit,
The swords of leadership are being used in some countries to make sharp and simple points about what
Is required, but In other countries they seem to be sadly lacking,
There are no swords of hope, perhaps because swords were not designed to provide hope, but just to
Remove citizens from the world who were deemed unworthy to someone,
We speak of a cutting remark, a sharp tongue, or cutting someone off from their friends, and in all of
These words are the sharp cutting edges of the swords,
We are now in a period of loss, and the old methods do no longer seem to work, new methods must be
Found, and perhaps we must reconsider living with the swords.

Thistle&Thorn
Justene Dion-Glowa

Redemption lies on a path tangled over with thistle and thorn
The brambles left to stick are reminders of a lack of
Warmth and depth
That have led to this nettle imbroglio
If the cuts get you deeply then you're failing as a woman
If the cuts leave scars then you're triumphant in recovery
But there's simply no way there will be no cuts.

Writer's Block
Kristian Beatty

Writer's block is a mixed blessing.

Sure, your creativity comes to a ceasefire.

Sure, you ponder what to pen.

Writer's block is a mixed blessing.

It means there's something up there to block.

People go through life

Frustrated and mad.

The world never lets up.

It never says, let's take a breather.

It just keeps going.

You better hold on tight.

People go through life

Without that creative voice.

They want to express and emote.

Instead they stew and spin in the mud.

That stream doesn't flow.

That block isn't blocking

What's never been flowing.

They feel and they cry.

They laugh but they die.

Can't handle goodbyes.

Just always been shy.

Writer's block is a mixed blessing.

It means it's blocking back something that's flowing.

I'd much rather have writer's block

Then just blocked all together.

Without a word to say why.





