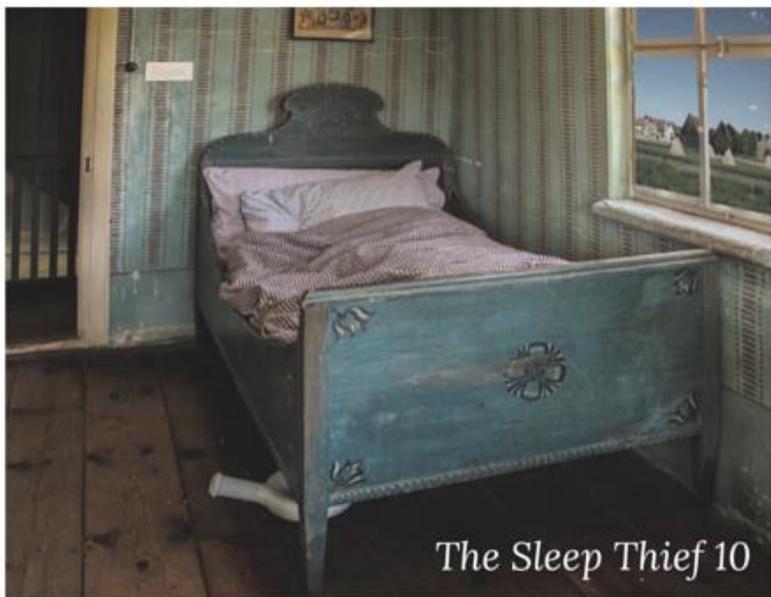
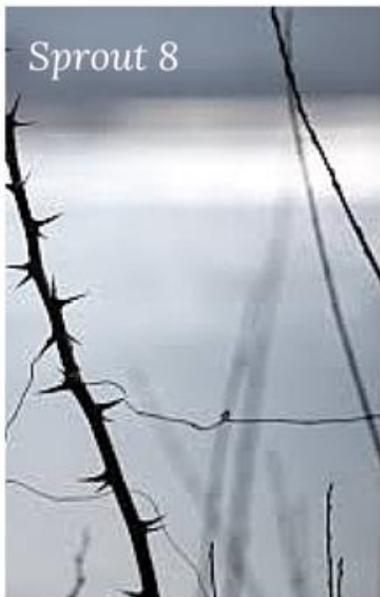


VOICES

Vol. 1 Issue 1
May 2016

Literary Art from the #MillionsMissing





Issue 1, May 2016

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ME

I live within a sonnet's four white walls
staring at the ceiling from my bed.
I shuffle ten small steps before I fall
and lie in darkness like this line, unread.

A fractured sequence, we can only meet
in cyberspace, a million sonnet poem.
Our hearts, once sure of their iambic beat,
recite perverse arrhythmias of their own.

When every muscle aches and exercise
brings on a dose of multi-organ 'flu
it hurts to know some shrinks hypothesize
malingering... hysteria... Would you
choose life confined to ten steps by fourteen,
malignant, redacted, spurned, unknown, unseen?

Trish Davis

Close Call

Millions of spaces dissolving the sequence
Let go of the order, the place in the fiction
The bookmarks are missing, the pages fly free

Millions of pictures, the past seen in fragments
Let go of the remorse, the truncated branches
The unsteady limbs and the longing remains

The day you went missing, I measured the falling
with proven equations and logical methods
Mine wasn't a life where the real people thrived

So what was I missing, the landing, the impact
To hit the hard surface of pain everlasting
The coma that dragged me down under the sea

And soon I was missing and dreaming of kissing
No, dreaming of nothing like never before
Emptied in darkness upon the sea floor

Then waking to sirens and millions of questions
While nurses went poking the veins in my arms
A lecture, a scolding, referrals, dismissals

Millions of judgments that weaken your core
The two-faced, the righteous, the barkers of
brightness, the self-helping gurus promising more

Millions of moments to lie in this bedroom
Let go of the thinking, the hoping, the grieving
Come rest with me now in in the fetal repose

Weave me the story of when you first slipped up
Those shoes you were wearing, how shiny the
leather, do tell me again how you fell at my feet

These stories, please tell me, in case all those
karmas took place in a sentence, with millions of
commas to offset the words, please give me the

Reasons, the millions of reasons I wasn't your girl
Or if you're still lying as I'm busy dying, how
strange how the missing will never be closed

Tami Russel

Not Yet Dead: Paper Weight

I was shocked instead by her
rapid descent, overnight a
flour sack, a rag doll with
expressionless face, flaccid
paste or wax, human essence
seeping out unstaunched

He carried her everywhere
like a child and the guilt of
dependence crushed her soul
Some thought her selfish

They never spoke of pain
air thickly infused with it
she could barely form words
not without great effort

mute exchanges between them
played all sides of fortune
poised as they were over every
inhalation except for that rare
abandon to a vibrant riff of
irrepressible, childish laughter

Emma Blake

A Million Complaints

Chirping cicadas
sing endlessly in my ear
a serenade of torment.
Ghostly voices of
insects that don't exist.
Twitching eyes,
twitching fingers,
little lizards running amuck
under my skin.
I can't rub them away.

My toes trick me.
They pretend to be
fuzzy caterpillars
tickling my feet.
I'm not giggling.

My brain, a cold mist
over a warm water pond
clouding memories,
irretrievable names,
lost treasure chests.

Gremlins stab me –
repeatedly. My bowels
bellow and legs tremble,
rusted joints,
tired parts.

Sleep offers refuge
when the elusive night
can be found.
I think often of
That Good Night.

I don't fear that
eternal night –
misery isn't living.
I fear the pain
unabated, unending.

James Davis

Music Soars Aloft

Today he put the music in the attic
where I won't have to see it and remember
I once could play. That flute went everywhere
serenaded cicadas by Cretan sands
hogged the bathroom in snow-bound Salzburg dorm
attracted rats in Holland Park marquee
when, locked out of the hostel after Hamlet,
surprised rodents scampered
from the shrill pitch. It took me to
Connecticut, New Jersey and New York
while the dots stayed home and rested on the shelves.
Bach was tired and old, his spine grown weak
from my demands, while Mozart never aged.
Good friends, constant companions, barely touched
since illness sucked the power from my lungs.
Just paper, taking space, redundant, useless
best out of sight in boxes in the dark.

Elenor Dent

Fate Rape

He put words into
my mouth forcing
me to gag on them
slipping them into
Tabasco sauce
foul oyster shots

for love
I let them slide

scalloped childhood photos cannot save us
had he ever cared to ask exactly what I had for
breakfast or how I managed to dress myself

this interminable illness
millions of absences

these daily Passovers, when the lentils of the
house bow low to supernatural forces and no
amount of blood letting spills the truth

Waiting in fading biscuit tins
on shelves where desiccated
cockroaches dress themselves in
dusty promises and locks of platinum hair

out of reach to those who swallow pain whole,
spitting out bones and skin like barn owls do

Lena Reed

Under the Snow

Snow slants in from the north
sliding down an invisible hill,
no wind, just this arctic bias
as if we did not already know
what cold is.

White sky, white earth.
Hiding so much, this layer of serenity,
making us want to believe
the surface is everything
while below

earthworms lie in torpid seclusion
beyond the solace of dreams.
Chipmunks curl up in leaf-lined darkness
wrapped only in their tails
and the conviction of spring

a conviction
deeper than knowledge
a thin persistent reservoir
of still water beneath thick pond ice
where waiting happens.

Who knows how many
lie beneath white sheets?
All the small sleepers
wrapped in their silence
are easy to forget.

How many linger in small rooms of grief
hope gone dormant
waiting under the ice
not for snowmelt
but for a different kind of spring

Barbara A. Tourgee

Third place: Geneva Pierce

Sprout

The pain is a seed buried deep in my hip;
It is green and thorn; it runs down my leg and out each toe.
A golem sits on my chest
and pins my arms and legs and head.
Sometimes, I cannot get enough air;
sometimes my scalp tingles like the leg, to the point of pain.
Worse than these, though, is the brownout of my brain,
like a library shut down for the night, doors locked –
Each book rests on the shelf, and in its proper place,
not (yet?) gone, or erased –
but who can find anything in this darkness?

I am sister to the women who died of polio,
of scarlet fever
of sepsis
when the men did not know to wash their hands –

I can trace my problem in $-CH_3$, in NOS^-
I can discern which pathways are malfunctioning.
I can follow the branches with my fingers
Except as far back as the root.

I excavate myself;
I exhume myself;
I dig
 And I dig
 And dig

But none of it fits together. (None of it is the right kind of wrong.)
It is a tangled, thorny labyrinth of possibility
That is branched and choked and long –
Still, I persist.

Which of us can say he knows how to sing a better song?

The primitive-me and the intellectual are in agreement, for once.
They chorus, drum-beat steady, and steadfast, and strong:
Fight.
Fight.
Fight on.

Second Place: Marion Mitchell

Mirror

Then fatigue throws a blanket over me, thick and felted,
fills mind and limbs with hush. The nervous system
catches fire though, stokes long forgotten pains, strikes

hammer blows in curious places. I want to map them
in red string, trace their trajectories – on skin,
through muscles, organs, bones.

Instances of can-do dwindle. Body is cold
and clammy, sallow hued, as if I had rolled in ashes
and morning dew, but then I neither bathed

nor washed in days. Insomnia scoops eyes
from hollows, the better to see me with; strips skill
and craft of constellation; sews daytime shut.

When the pain goes I half suppose my flesh
marked, transformed. A growth of lichen, say; layers
of cool, slippery fish-scales; traces of a glacial burn.

But there is nothing. Not a wound, not a bruise,
not even the flushed tone of a limb pressed
against the mirror, straining elsewhere.

We wake, each and every morning, delirious
with hunger for an active day.
Eyes wide, so a bit of the world pours in...

First Place: Katherine Reynolds

The Sleep Thief

for ME patients everywhere

She lives inside my house and steals my sleep.
Some nights, she tiptoes silently around the bedroom
like a bare-footed slow walking zen student,
holding my sleep in her cupped hands then
slipping back into the dark corners of the zendo.

Some nights, she lurks under my bed
using her hard fists, her sharp elbows, her bony knees,
so I toss and turn on the painful lumpy mattress.

Some nights, she crouches out in the starless night
teasing the beagle behind the grey battered fence
rattling the gate latch with her invisible hands
until the beagle barks and barks,
the tired neighbor popping his head out his door,
screaming at the dog to shut up at nothing.

Some nights, she crouches in the bathroom
giggling in the dark, her nimble fingers
quietly turning the faucet,
just enough so that water drips:
a splash that sounds like a slow crash
into the white porcelain sink.

Some nights, she stands forlorn in the corner,
her mournful voice moaning about how I am *bad* daughter
for not sitting vigil at my dying mother's bedside,
the one night she didn't blow out a breath,
the one night when she finally rested, finally dropping
down into sleep, the deep sleep.