

Making Metrical

A top-down photograph of a wooden desk. In the foreground, a blue ceramic mug filled with coffee sits on the left. To its right is a black notebook with a yellow pencil resting on it. The pencil has the brand name 'Hoechst' visible on its side. The background is a dark wood surface.

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AWAKENED VOICES

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see. hear. heal.



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INTRODUCTION

This issue was originally published in a blog post format and was updated to this format in 2022.

CONTENT WARNING

The following issue contains material on the topic of sexual violence and other topics that readers might find difficult.

The intention behind this content warning is to prepare a reader so they can choose to bravely engage with potentially activating material, even if this doesn't always feel comfortable. May it also serve as a reminder that a reader can pause and take a break from reading. The stories will be here, ready when the reader returns.



Putting On Eyeliner With PTSD

Rene Ostberg

After traumatic endings, there are no fresh starts. No fresh mornings, no fresh facing of the day.

Your worldview changes, your face to the world changes, your facing yourself in the mirror in memory in mind in the morning at midnight.

At night, I at least understand what triggers the triggers. Because at night, the body takes the position of the horizon & the mind drops upon the body & burns like the setting sun. & the eyes, washed clean, are helpless to memory. In the morning the world must be faced, you might see him you might be reminded you might break down in the most inconvenient moments the most public spaces.

The deliberate darkening of the eyes, lined thick and messy as the mind, is as good a defense against

violation prying being seen not seen
as the steady sturdy posture of a tree.

For safety, turn yourself into a tree freeze
trace a Cleopatra eye with shadow
& blend the wing for that smoky
sickening feeling.

Turn yourself into a raccoon running
round a tree a memory running round
your eyes a woman running a woman

freezing.

Blend rage blend pain blend shadows for a smoky eyed effect.

Smoke goes to beauty. You deserved it. You brought this on. Drive him wild with mystery with resistance with no & no again & again & return.

to rage to bed now when the morning horizon has made distance from
the burn of the sun.

It's hard to get that effect of a sophisticated eye

a straight sweep of liner
a steady application
with an unsteady hand.

On days like this every day actually I tend to shake too much
& the mascara smears.

I look like I've been crying I have been crying I am always crying

& I put on too much blusher, choose a color too red for my complexion.

Red for rage. Red for unrested. Red for return & return again rage every night every morning.

I'm a raccoon a zombie a boxer w/two black eyes shaking hands beating killing heart.

Does the horizon shake & rage like this as the
sun gets closer
as the burning gets redder does a tree fight or
flight
does a raccoon go blind in the full memory of
light
full light of memory
does this makeup make me look smoky slutty
sophisticated safe
soft weak or like a raccoon like a ghost a victim
should I wash it off
can I not just wash it off make it all go away let
me start over
Let me it never happened pretend it never
happened. Pretend it looks good. Pretend.
Start again. Trace a clear line & tell. Keep
a steady hand sturdy mind surviving heart.





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Sexology

Penney Knightly

Empty cup
that is how I think of the organ
turned over like a mound of dirt,
sleeping and awake, earthly exhale,
between two ham legs.

You would have thought
there would have been a lesson,
a mandatory course, the steps to work it out:

we give tests for driving, circles sliding
into streets on edges with sharp corners.
Keep those eyes moving
crosswalks, jay walkers, signs and lamps,
with heated color swatches
interspersed with cool
for going

but in this terrain,
this murky bush,
this hot house of sweat
with pheromone bomb,
we walk along
huddled and frightened,
amused and alarmed,
learning by feel,
electrified but dumb,
deaf, and blind
in the dark.



Only The Body Understands

Wilderness Sarchild



a soft thing that purrs in your lap,
a lion gently licking
his mate's genitals
to awaken her,
a panther pacing in a cage,
the fear that bites your finger
and won't let go
when you grab the nape
of your cat's neck
from the dog's fangs.

.
You, too, became feral once:
against his words
against his fists.

You hissed
spit
stopped him
with your inferno eyes--
the imagined taste
of his blood
a soft thing that purrs in your lap,
a lion gently licking
his mate's genitals
to awaken her,
a panther pacing in a cage,
the fear that bites your finger
and won't let go

on your tongue,
sweet revenge.
You grabbed your kits
and bolted
from the tyranny
of the one
who mistakenly
thought himself
your keeper.



Elena's Eyes

Desiree Simons

Elena's Eyes

When she was seven

she was Queen of the Mountains.

The village dogs bowed low

as they lay wisps of feathers,

and warm snake eggs at her dusty feet.

Her belly was often empty

But Elena's eyes were full of promise.

When she was thirteen

a woman came and spoke to her father.

I don't want to go papa!

I can eat less, she cried.

This is best, he said.

The woman held her hand tightly,

smiled with big teeth, and led her away.

Elena's eyes were full of fear.

The woman hissed,

You can't leave, so don't try.

Work hard and be quiet.

The men won't hurt you.

But they did.

They bruised her with beefy hands,

smothered her with fetid breath

and sweaty drunken whispers.

They buried her childhood

beneath their bulk and heavy bodies

with no souls.

Elena's eyes were full of anger.
When she was eighteen
the lady smiled again with her big teeth.
You go now.
You're too old to please the men.
You're too big and eat too much.
I can eat less, the girl whispered.
And Elena's eyes were... empty.



The Shoe

Sharie Kelley

She lost her shoe
a convenient shoe.
A klutzy sandal
not sandals which would
catch the eye of a man
unless he were the sort of man who
had put sex behind him and
was drawn to anything that foretold of comfort
the kind of guy who was long-winded and as
chummy with the females as the males
and always in his head.
A man of numbers and squares.

Why was she going on like this?
A tangent on the type of man she found so unappealing.

The shoe.
Oh yes, that's right.
The shoe.
She had lost her shoe.
A klutzy sandal
not sandals that would catch the eyes of a man.
Here I am again
playing back the mental tape of
the type of man I wouldn't want.



The shoe.
Back to the shoe.
What to do about the shoe.
Buy another pair?
But with what money?
Forget I ever owned the sandals?
Such a comfortable and convenient shoe.

The shoe that had enabled her
to be raped.

If she hadn't been wearing the sandals
she could have ran faster and perhaps gotten away.

But she had gotten away
because she was alive.
She looked around at her studio apartment.
She was in her own place. Safe.
No cuts, bruises, and even no sperm.
He had gone soft and pulled out. Then he was upset.
Not about his limpness—but about his problems.
She had put her arm around him and
asked him to share. Not that she cared about his problems.
She cared about remaining alive.
She didn't want him to kill her out of fear.
It worked. The sympathetic arm around his shoulders.
He was older than her by about ten years. "My family is Italian.
There's so much pressure. My wife is pregnant."



She consoled him like she imagined a call girl would—or a counselor.

But she was just a student with a boyfriend
who would be so angry when she told him.

He would think her no longer completely his just like she no longer
had a complete pair of sandals.

And that's when the tears finally came.

Abuse 101

Terri Miller

In my era
abuse was not talked about

If sexual abuse, the authorities would ask:
What were you wearing?
What did you do to seduce him?
Blame the victim, no arrest made.

As time changes so does the view of
sexual abuse.

Bitter memories of my brother
who at 15 years attacked
myself, I was only 17
the shame and guilt haunts me today

When I think back through my memory banks
there were episodes of sexual abuse
that I have buried deep inside of me.

In 1982, I was walking thru the tunnels
that connect the dorms, fraternities, sororities
and the rest of the school. I was gang raped by a group
of boys. They held me down, tore my clothes and
each took their turn.

I went to campus police





I carried the shame and guilt of it.
Being called the Coby C Queen.
By certain men that new that
I had been raped.

It took many years for me to
talk about being raped. I was not
able to be touched by another
human being without the flashback
of this event.

For many years I choose
the wrong type of men.
Men that were abusive.

My marriage, he started out
as a gentlemen but, as time
passed he started to abuse
me sexually. The police
wouldn't hear of it
because we were married.
In their book it was
acceptable because we
were married.

My 2nd husband left
after 2 weeks of marriage.
Nine months later he
returns and overdoses me
with my own meds.
When I awoke he was
on top of me.

Today, neither one of
us has discussed it. We let
it be that he left and
never came home.



Fingerprints

Sheila Cooper

She imagined everyone
could see them, the fingerprints
they left behind. No special brushes
or powder needed to reveal
the damage that was done.

She imagined they glared at you like
a neon sign, “VA ANT,”
flashing above a cheap motel.
A hole in the center
that no one ever took the time to repair.

Men and women in blue
streamed in and out, asking
the same questions over and over.
The stark white room intensified
the sensation of being dirty.

The men’s faces began to blur in her mind.
Each of them grimacing as they climbed on.
She had no business running in the park
at that time of evening. She should’ve known
better. She should have known.

She imagined the look on her lover's face
when he found out. He would pity her.
His hand would reach for her and she would
flinch. His eyes would plead with her and
mirror the pleading in hers.

She imagined they must look
smudged, a mosaic of ugly covering the
beauty that lay beneath.
No clear distinction between them.
All of them unidentifiable partial prints.





Recovery Manual

Penney Knightly

when I turn to the bottle

I am only drinking

when I cry in my sleep

I am running

when I wail in the night

I am singing

when age caves my eyes in

I am remembering

when hope is done

I am enduring

when badness is there

I am lying

when I turn to rest

I am still here

Did This Really Happen?

Paul Douglas McNeill II

When I was seven,
you blew a hole
in my fucking
soul.

I was only seven.
seven.

A sick day.
But not really.
But really.

The door, it hardly creaked.
I saw, straight away, first thing,
your fat, veiny, stubbly legs,
sharp, yellow, broken toenails,
and that damned, old, fuzzed-balled,
white nightgown. And grease stains.

The lock, it barely made a sound.

I was flat and carved into this twin bed.
Tired, worn out, squeaky. It would whine.
Maybe it was small for a twin.
But you had enough room.
You had the room.
You left it empty.





A sick day.
But not really.
But really.

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I was flat and carved into this twin bed.
Tired, worn out, squeaky. It would whine.
Maybe it was small for a twin.
But you had enough room.
You had the room.
You left it empty.

I, I never slept on that bed again.

I was only seven.
seven.



Even the weight, even the weight,
of your squat, tiny, egg frame,
it was enough
for me
to know,
this isn't right.

You, you barely made a sound.

A peck on the cheek, a peck on the nose,
then fewer breaks, and then eyes closed.
Thin, dry, pruned, hard lips. Not a drop of moisture.
Hands through my hair, fingers stroking my ears.
"You, you are so handsome."
Then, then the mouth. The mouth.

I was seven.
only seven.

Your thick, hot breath on my neck.
Coffee, cigarettes, and warm, stale milk.
A few slowly escaping groans,
here and there some muted, muffled moans.
How can I close my ears? How can I close my nose?

I, I wasn't going to make a sound.



Even the weight, even the weight,
of your squat, tiny, egg frame,
it was enough
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to know,
this isn't right.

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I, I wasn't going to make a sound.



Quicker, labored, shorter bursts.
Your mushy arms were so goddamned weak.
Why can't you hold yourself up a little more?
Your weight, your weight, heavier, and heavier.
You stared at my barely open mouth, my doll's eyes
the whole time. The whole time.
I never looked away from the clock in the corner.

That bed, how did that bed never make a sound?

He was fifty feet away.
He was only fifty feet away.
Fifty feet and forever.

Fifty feet and forever.
Fifty feet and just forever.

He, he never heard a sound.

Your white tongue dragged its fucking film
across my face, my ears, my eyes, my neck.
I can't close my eyes. There's so much in the dark.
Second hand. Numbers. Dashes. Minute hand. Tick.
Coffee, cigarettes, and warm, stale milk.
I never thought to scrape you off.
My arms were pinned down anyway.



I was only seven.
seven.

Your muscles stiffened.
Mine never stopped.
A pause, a collapse.
All that goddamn weight.
All that goddamn waiting.
A nasal sigh.
A cleared throat.
A look down.
Panting, and a whisper.
“He, he will never,
never talk to you again
if he, if he
ever finds out.”

The bed, it squeaked.
The lock, it clicked.
The door, it creaked.
You, you left it open.

“He’s, he’s still sound asleep.”

I closed my eyes.
The clock, I thought. Seconds. Minutes.
All I wanted,

All I wanted, forever,
was for it to go down.
Just go down.
Just, please, please go down.

I was only seven.
only seven.
and you?
You were fifty-eight.
fifty-eight.
fifty-eight and forever.

Did you, did you ever stop?
Did you ever stop
and think? And think?
He, he is seven.
I, I am fifty-eight,
and he is only seven?



My Name is Elizabeth

Desiree Simons

Crystal's tough and street smart.
Show no fear and never cry.
That's her mantra
and it serves her well.
She's sixteen and has called this corner
home for two years.
She used to look over her shoulder,
always poised to run
in case they came looking for her.
They didn't.
Now men pay for the things
her father took for free.
While they grope her
and move inside her,
Crystal closes her eyes and thinks about
the picture of the ocean she's torn from a magazine
and keeps in her purse.
Sometimes when she's alone
and it's quiet in her room,
Crystal kicks off her stilettos
and wipes off her makeup.
She looks in the mirror.
Behind her eyes,
the tired blue eyes that have seen way too much,
She catches a glimpse of Elizabeth.

My Sister

Meygan Cox

One time, my sister asked why
people do not swim when it rains—
her point being they are already wet.
As much as I tried, I could not answer.
In the years to come,
she began to tower over me,
a foot taller to be exact.
Her face grew long,
but not in a dreadful way.
And unlike me, she had a perfect jawline.
My A cups were no match for her C's.
I still remember the way she'd protest against our mother,
stamping her feet, as if she were three again,
and I, seven, had just broken her toy.
She didn't understand why she couldn't wear spaghetti straps to school,
and I couldn't understand the big deal.
In college, she met a boy named Drew
and she told me she lost her virginity to him.
It wasn't until my sister started wearing long sleeves in mid July that
I knew something was not right.
When I confronted her, she broke down—
half of her relieved that someone knew her secret,
the other half afraid and ashamed.
One night, she called me after drinking with friends.
She was too drunk to drive, so she told me,
"I called a taxi first."
I can picture her now,





sitting on the curb in the pouring rain,
without an umbrella because she's never prepared.

I was alarmed when she started sobbing,
choking on tears that were drowning her.

Then she said eight words,
eight words that still haunt me to this day.

"I don't have to worry about him anymore."

We haven't spoken about him since.

Packing Away

Marianne Peel

That summer in Brooklyn the streets were hot to the toes,
asphalt like fire on our feet.
Uncle Mike sent my Isabella to the corner store
to buy a pack of Camels, which would heat up this tin can
of an apartment even more
on this June day.
Isabella could hardly unglue herself
from the full length wavy mirror.
This was her first communion day
and she was a miniature bride,
the white enfolding her
like a prayer or Aunt Helen's homespun doilies.
But she was dutiful and obedient
Knowing Uncle Mike would be grumbly without his cigarettes,
So she abandoned the mirror.
I heard her white patent leather shoes
Tap down the wooden staircase to the vestibule below
where she was silenced by the red runner rug.
She was gone too long for a pack of Camels.
Far too long.
Just when we had decided to look for her,
knowing she was probably transfixed
by the candy counter at Martuzzi's store,
we heard those shoes, slowly now, ascending the stairs.
As she stepped in the door,
the Camels dropped to her feet
like a thud of discarded playing cards.





I looked at the tips of her shoes covered with red
saw the blood dripping down her legs,
Like rivers suspended, misplaced waters.
Only later did we learn,
two weeks later when she finally spoke,
that a man had pushed her down behind Martuzzi's,
pushed himself into her hard and without sound.
She held onto the Camels, tight in her hand, so she wouldn't scream,
so she wouldn't feel him where he wasn't supposed to be.
That night I remember packing away
the veil and the little bride's dress
and the shoes
covered with red stains
that never, ever,
came out.

Remnants of Gunfire

Jharmaine Boyd

My mother was making dinner
She told me to go across the hall
To get some sugar
for the kool-aid
I knocked on my neighbor's door
He invited me in
He was 15,
I was 6
And he had a gun aimed at my heart
He shot it
But he missed
But then he shot it again
And I took the second one like a champ
Then He shot it again
And it hit my spine
The very thing that I stood on
And I fell
He hovered over me and said,
"Big girls don't tell".
Pride, lust, unforgiveness, and greed surrounded me and said, "Get up!"
I said, "I can't..."
They said, "Get up!"
And I crawled away wounded.
Only to relive it again, when I was 13
He was going on 30
He invited me into his office
And he had a gun aimed at my heart





He shot it
But he missed
But then he shot it again
And I took the second one like a champ, like I did when I was 6
Then he shot it again
It enter the hollowness of my stomach
And I was no longer hungry for forgiveness.
And I fell
He hovered hover me and said,
“No one will believe you if you tell”.
Pride, lust, unforgiveness, and greed surrounded me and said, “Get up!”.
I said, “I can’t...”
They said, “Get up!”
I walked away wounded.
Only to find myself at 25
Living with those four bullets inside.
As gunpowder and residue collide
Eroding from the inside out.
Causing the little girl and teenager to scream and shout!
With no one to hear
Not knowing where to run
So I build my own walls from remnants of guns
Guarded by vicious dogs
Who trust no one
I don’t know what those four bullets are for you.
Maybe it was a father that left too soon
A mother that didn’t love you like she was designed to



Maybe it was the time you turned your womb into a tomb, repented, and don't believe
that God forgave you
Looking for worth by throwing it up in the toilet
Seeking for truth only finding yourself indoctrinated
Climbing into an addiction that it promised freedom to only find yourself sedated
Broken from the man that didn't fulfill you
Or the woman that didn't sustain you
Believing they were the means to salvation
But for me....it was the time when a man tried to make a woman out of me at 6 and 13
The remnants of gunfire are heavy
I know His burden is light
But I want to hold onto mines
Forgiveness is knocking on my walls
I hear my Abba call
So I finally call off the dogs
Let down those gates
Step outside those walls
Dirt all over my face
Dark circles around my eyes
Ragged clothes
With my wounds barely covered, still bleeding
As my lips trembling to the point of pleading
Tears running down my face
With His courage I say
Calmly,
Pure,
And true



Forgive us Father...

Forgive us...

Forgive us Father...

For we know not what we do

View a visual companion of this poem here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nACBrGK5K34>

Untitled

Iris B.

I have always been quiet, humble
like a little mouse
I spent my time at the farm, scurrying around
scared shy shameful
for what I know not.

But that was all a long time ago.

I have found my voice, buried
the secret shame deep down
in my brain.
I stride through the night
streets, clubs, pubs,
laughing, dancing, drowning
in my secret shame.

There's no one to turn to
so I turn to myself.
With each step:
Warrior. Goddess. Queen.
But the words do little for my
self-esteem.

I learnt long ago that I'm not the same
as those that don't know
of my secret shame
that burns through my heart and
destroys my brain.
The tablets keep me sane.



The Liar

Dana Robbins

Her mother told the other mothers that my friend was a liar,
so that whatever she said no one believed her.

On sleepovers, her uncle crouched over our beds in the dark.

Her mother changed my nightgown. You wet yourself, she said.

I was nine, knew I was not a bed wetter, but I didn't want to be a liar
too. When I went home, my nightmares were folded into my suitcase

along with a half-forgotten sense of some terrible secret.

As a teenager, I packed my friend away with my too small clothes,
old dolls. We lost touch completely during my turbulent twenties.

Two decades later, memories tumbled out, as if from an old
suitcase that burst open to disgorge a pile of cum stained nighties,
torn panties, garter belts, black lace corsets, polaroids.

Then I knew who the real liar was.

The Neighborhood Exegete

Karlo Sevilla

That 50-year-old who “loved children” must be avoided,
they said.

He’d done it again and again but was never prosecuted,
the elders said.

But he had a biblical theory humming in his head,
I said.

When Adam started touching himself, it was decided,
he said,

To create Eve, and that’s the story never decoded,
as he said

To me when I was seven years old, sitting on his bed,
I said.

With his hand pressed on my thigh, but it never ascended,
I’ve always said.





AWAKENINGS

Awakened Voices is a literary program of Awakenings, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a physical and virtual artistic space in which to promote the healing of survivors through the arts and engage in an open dialogue that furthers awareness and understanding of sexual violence. Please consider helping us spread our message of healing by sharing and supporting Awakenings.

Awakenings' mission is to provide survivors of sexual violence with a trauma informed, inclusive art-making experience that encourages healing.



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Join our core squad of Awakenings' supporters and join Judith's Circle. By committing to making a monthly donation of any amount, you are directly impacting a survivor's healing process. Your contribution directly supports our artists and Awakenings' ability to provide trauma-informed, professional arts experiences like this for our survivor artists. Join the Circle at www.awakeningsart.org/donate



JUDITH'S CIRCLE