



# Dragon Poet Review

Winter / Spring 2018

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## **BENEATH THE FATTENING MOON**

*Sylvia Vaughn*

honeyed words dripping from your lips,  
kisses tasting of wine we shared,  
my heart beating faster  
as I nestle against your chest  
drinking in your musky scent,  
my mind surrendering  
to your fingertips grazing my naked thighs,  
forgetting how you flirted by the pool,  
forgetting the fight in the pancake house,  
forgetting to admire the stars  
or to squeeze the sand between my toes,  
rush of surf drowning out apologies,  
we stop a while, eyes searching each other's,  
hurry to our room



## WINTERTIME, REDUX

*Sylvia Vaughn*

I brush away wisps of hair  
matted on your face.  
You stopped dying it years ago,  
but it seems dark against the skin.  
Your manicure, a trail  
of blood on snowy linen.  
Your breathing labored —  
liquid rust  
drips through a tube.  
Outside, an icy February morning.  
I smile, remember lace, paper, glue —  
a Valentine's project,  
your calm voice ticking off  
names of classmates,  
pink eraser turning black  
as I corrected my spelling.  
Now thin high clouds streak the sky.  
How many mornings like this  
did your oatmeal warm us?  
I turn, watch the nurse take your vitals.  
I wish I could count the times  
you shook down mercury  
in the glass thermometer,  
wiping it with a cotton ball  
sharp with alcohol.  
I run my hand across my forehead,  
surprised it's damp  
as a cold glass on a hot day.

## WHAT COLOR MOTHER?

*Sylvia Vaughn*

She was the hue of laundry  
flapping in the breeze —  
jeans, sheets, Father's shirts.  
Eggs and potatoes, liver and onions  
stained her fingers.  
Her eyes were cozy fire light  
when we brought home good grades.  
She turned black as a thunder head  
if she had to call us by our full names.  
She was a red bandana,  
vacuuming, scrubbing, ironing.  
Sometimes,  
she applied fire engine bright lipstick  
when the babysitter arrived.

## **GAS HOUSE GHOSTS**

*Robert Milby*

Are these Gasworks—past life memoirs of urban insomnia,  
or the white noise of ghosts? Naught but a mere gas meter on a Winter's night,  
like a woman moaning; struggling for last breath; alone, freezing, just outside my bedroom  
door's entrance to the street. Madelyn Usher, on a grave-silent February witching hour.  
What price sleep, unfettered by ghosts?  
The old meter scrapes, like thin fingers of an aged Oak at algid windows;  
a beggar pleading for shelter in arctic darkness.  
Groaning, the ice-veiled device delivers gas for kitchen; warmth for boreal bedroom;  
heat for memory's tainted lament.  
What price sleep, unfettered by ghosts?  
Diaphanous consorts arrive at my hermitage of dust, and torment the holy silence  
of a perpetual Winter's Journey. The frosted meter's click; metronome in a ribcage of regret.  
What price sleep, unfettered by ghosts?  
No Banshee howls; the omen of a lost Owl— winter's taunting enigmas.  
No heart beneath planks; the beak in the chest; Reaper's gaze from every shadow.  
What price sleep, unfettered by ghosts?

## COFFEE IN CARPATHIA

**Or, stranded in the Borgo Pass...**

*Robert Milby*

Haunted forests; mountains on the edge of Time's skein;  
ocean shores; rains lashing ghosts to cliffs; in hovels dressed in Autumnal secrets;  
fitted by moss and lichen scholars. Anywhere whether I can carry it; find it brewed;  
for sale by Nosferatu—yes! Even coffee in Carpathia.  
But, stranded in the Borgo Pass, without the Black electrostatic discharge?  
I'd rather walk without torchlight and hope that Hunter's Moon is a lunatic!  
Lost in the Transylvanian Alps, snow blinding all but my mission to the hermitage of ghosts,  
with coffee in a heated urn; yearning for odd man's courage. Not spirits! Nay, far too many  
follow our train. Goblins? Grey entities; wraiths! The same contingency robbed us of viands;  
actions in vain, for I contain and control the rations of coffee! With my fellow vampire hunters,  
we have our scrolls and tools of the trade: Silver, stakes—well-done; Occult species of Coffee;  
Holy Water, a crucifix, and my antique King James! With insomnia thus derived; with a  
vibration akin to tectonic suicide, no fangs could pierce my neck; no blade from the Madame's  
deck; no wraith dare take a step; caffeinated eyes in the back of my head!  
The Count himself had better climb from the box; Vlad had better grind tiny rocks of coffee  
and brew it before we arrive—I take no prisoners with my team by my side—  
veneration of paranoia before and after Sunrise—immortality in a black drop!  
Who fears blood-quaffing Undead when Time is accelerated by the cup?

## ORCHARD SMOKE

*Robert Milby*

November winds send leaves counterpoint:  
brisk overtures of impending Winter.  
Clouds crowd the orchestral suite, after glazing the ridge and its tower.  
The snowflake concerto, a minor key beneath brood Sky of tempest omens—  
frost cathedrals, and convents—solemnity of snow; vows of ice.  
Winter gypsies cast from a heretical morning.  
Leafless, ashen Oaks; mould and matted ferns—yellow remnants;  
brown scraps and Autumn crumbs of resplendent October.  
Swift orchard fires in November—fumes and flakes,  
Mordant Crows observe atop gnarled Apple branches; field mice dart from a rotten log.  
Farm hands burning twigs and old stumps, preparing for snow; dressing in cold.  
The apple dump; a pit of cores; seeds; frost-wrinkled skins; fermenting red leather.  
Faded old Pumpkins—no longer sought by children, but venerated in apple bark incense,  
lonely and fearful of the dementia of the North wind.

## **MARCH'S SPIRIT**

*Yvonne Carpenter*

Like whiskers on the chin  
of the Winter Witch,  
snow wisps across the road.  
She twirls her wide skirt,  
chilling us with its stirring,  
swats her great broom,  
and kisses,  
thrusting her icy tongue deeply  
into our unwilling throats.  
She coaxes calves  
from the womb before they are ready.  
then wraps their tender flesh in frost.  
She leaches juice  
from batteries,  
turns ponds solid,  
gleefully slams our cars, twists our bones.  
Hear her howling  
as she dances across our lowly conceits.



## THE TALE OF THE GALE

*Sravani Hotha*

Alone, under the halo of a solitary lamppost on an avenue carpeted in snow, he waited unmoving and thoughtless on a park bench.

He waited, as he waited each night, under the glow of the lamppost for the song of the Wind.

Thoughtlessly he stared into the shimmering frost on the leafless willow before him. It waited, as he waited, with its frosted silver strands, for the song of the Wind.

The Wind arrived, at first, as a whisper in the distance, then a nudge from stem to stem, then as the swaying of one branch to another until the whole tree jingled and danced in celebration.

The Wind swirled and whirled sending snowflakes leaping up and up as if they were stars twinkling against the night sky. They howled with glee as they tumbled from bough to leaf until they became one with the pristine snow on the ground. A privileged few frosted silver the strands of his hair, waiting with him for the song of the Wind.

As it slowed to a gentle wave before him, the trees and shrubs fluttered in anticipation. Only he sat unmoving and thoughtless; he and the lamppost.

Into his thoughtless mind alone would the Wind pour the songs from its gales and tempests, and watch in delight as he spun them into tales to travel the world.

The Wind rippled and unfurled a strand for him. He breathed deep and began his tale.

## THE MAGNIFICENT IMPOSSIBLE

*Carl Boon*

Claret on a Baltimore veranda, 1895,  
the gold debate raging, a crescendo,  
& gold in my pocket. Lucy McCall comes—  
a negligee & nothing more, cascades  
of bows in her curls. We're to be married  
& we'll make love three times that night  
on a purple satin bed. Purple itself,  
the wine, her lips that part carefully,  
incredibly when she accepts me.  
Then seven fresh eggs in a pan, butter  
so gold you can almost taste the blood,  
black pepper & sycamores that sing.  
Oh holy life, oh life ungiven to me  
listen now to Lucy McCall breathe,  
waist & breasts that flash & dance,  
all burning, tapioca woman burning  
for night to settle against the hills. Joy  
& an again that comes again, my tongue  
edging & hers seeking the mattering inch  
of flesh—a beginning, a wonderseed,  
a drowning of color & sound, a finally  
this is what it means to love. I gather  
my garments & hers at dawn, I gather  
& tell myself again I'm actually near  
Miss Lucy McCall & her magnolia perfume.

## **FDR IN GEORGIA**

*Carl Boon*

Here are my hands that shielded you—  
take them.

Here are my eyes that looked where you did not—  
see through them.

Here are my red-penciled plans—  
revise them at your leisure.

I am tired and I will die. The folly ends,  
the peaches grow pink on the trees this April—

eat them and remember me.  
My hips ache, my heart secure.

Must you ask for more? Already I've died twice—  
succumbed to my mother,

faced Mister Stalin who spat  
& disappeared. This is not to mention

the child who sought to bake you. Fuck you.  
Had I been less firm or had I not

Springwood still stands a monument to me  
to you who eats hot food & never decided.

Let me die in peace & let me go.  
I never asked for blackflags or clapping.

## THE NURSE

*Kedrick Nettleton*

The nurse didn't know that the Democrats in Texas were split, and that it would be pivotal for the President's chances at reelection to unite the party there. She didn't know that a few weeks earlier, a Democratic ambassador in Dallas had been beaten by some local troublemakers, and she certainly hadn't seen any of the signs being circulated by those troublemakers with the President's name on them. "Wanted for Treason," they said, with his picture plastered on the top. The nurse didn't know about the signs.

She didn't know about the meeting that morning. The President had said a few words, but he didn't put on the cowboy hat the Texans had gotten him. It would ruin his hair. It was the First Lady that had taken center stage at the meeting. She was dressed in a fragile pink dress, something so simple that it was elegant. The Texan women were amazed at the style; people couldn't take their eyes off her. But the nurse didn't know about that.

The nurse certainly hadn't seen the reception at the airport. The screaming crowds, the throng of supporters. She hadn't seen the streets of Dallas lined with cheering people, looking more like a spiritual revival than a political event. The nurse didn't see as the Governor's wife turned around in the limo, grinning at the President. "You can't say that Dallas doesn't love you!"

The nurse didn't hear the first shot ring out in the Dallas sky, startling some of the people attending the parade. Was that a firecracker? What kind of a nut would shoot off a firecracker during a parade? She didn't hear the second shot, or see the President's hands go up to his neck. Didn't hear the third. The nurse definitely didn't see the President's head shatter into bits, or the First Lady climb backwards onto the rear of the limousine to retrieve a part of his skull.

The nurse didn't see any of that. She was barely aware that the President was in town. She was on the tail-end of a double shift, just waiting to get home, because she didn't trust the girl next door she had gotten to watch her baby. When the mass of suits rushed into the building, she didn't know what was happening. Some of the grown men were crying.

What she saw, when she was called into Trauma Room One, was a man. He was laid out on the operating table, but she immediately knew it was useless. She could see clear through the side of his head, down into the brain. They had pulled a sheet over most of his body, but not the head.

When she left Trauma Room One, she only saw one person. The rest of the suits were gone, and the only person in the hallway was a woman, sitting on a metal folding chair, her head buried in her hands. She looked familiar, like someone the nurse had seen on a magazine. Her dress was pink, simple and elegant. And she was alone.

## HEIDI

*Kedrick Nettleton*

I had forgotten that her name was Heidi. It doesn't seem right, time passing by. Someone that meant so much to me earlier in my life and I couldn't even remember that her name was Heidi. Kind of makes me sick to my stomach to think about it. Sometimes I wonder if, at the very end, she would have remembered who I was. Sometimes I think that maybe she was thinking of me when it happened, but it's no use fooling myself.

We went to school together, that's what it was. High School, in my little hometown. I was sixteen when we met, she was a year older. It doesn't seem like so much of a difference now, but back then it was a lifetime. She was tall. Blonde. Pretty. Every day she wore a thick yellow sweatband on her wrist, like a basketball player. Except she didn't play basketball, nor to my knowledge did she ever. That was just Heidi, I guess. Back then, she seemed different to me from any girl I had ever met.

The saddest thing to me now is that I know she wasn't.

It's funny to me that she seemed like such a big deal. I guess when you're just starting out, friendships mean something a little more. Maybe I'm wrong. Just seems that way, that's all. Seemed like when I met Heidi, I was meeting someone important. Seemed like the weeks and months and years that we spent together mattered somehow, just a little more than the years I spent alone.

I was new to the school. Seems like in these kinds of stories, somebody's always new. I parked my crappy little Honda in the lot, shouldered my bag, and wham. There she was, the sight of her hitting me like a physical wall. She was all I could look at, all I could see. Sure, I stared at all the pretty girls, but Heidi was different. She just took up more space than the others; I couldn't get her out.

A couple weeks later, we actually spoke for the first time. It had taken weeks getting up the courage, but I finally saw her at her locker and just went for it. I asked her name, she told me. She asked me mine, I told her. Small talk followed – how are you adjusting, what classes are you going to, etc.

"I'll see you around," she told me as the bell rang, closing her locker and giving me a smile that I was confident was genuine.

I swore that she would.

A year later I tried to kiss her for the first time. It wasn't anything romantic; we were sitting on her couch, watching the news and writing some paper for some teacher for some class. I just leaned over and pressed my lips to hers, gently. She smiled – same way she always did: nose wrinkled like she was smelling something bad, her eyes squinty – and told me that it was nice, but she didn't think she wanted to do it again.

"Why?" I probably sounded breathless, but I can defend that. It was my first kiss, after all.

"We're friends." She leaned her head down against my chest and wrapped her arms around me, taking one of my hands with hers. "I've never had a friend like you. Please don't let me lose you." Her voice was barely a whisper. "Not like that."

That hurt, I'll tell you. Hurt bad. But in the end, I figured out she was right. We were never meant to fall in love, that wasn't for us. I wasn't going to lose her.

She showed me everything, Heidi. Who I should be spending my time with, what kinds of things to do. When I started dating someone, she was there every step of the way, showing me what to do. Showing me who to be.

I remember crying into her one night, on the same couch I'd kissed her on. I'd just walked in on my girlfriend getting friendly with another guy. I think his name was Tom, but I might be wrong. I came straight to Heidi.

"She doesn't deserve you," she whispered as she held me. "You're too good for her."

I certainly didn't feel too good for anyone, right then. I felt like my insides had been scraped out with a spoon. But even though Heidi was using old clichés, I believed her. It would be a long time before I gave my heart to someone again, but I credit Heidi for the strength to do it.

You see, she taught me how to love. I think it's because I learned from loving her first, because ours was the purest love that could ever be. It got me through.

High school ends, though, and life happens after it. That didn't faze me at first. Heidi and I were going to go to the same college, she a year ahead of me. She laughed on the day that she drove off to class. "Behold," she said, "I go to prepare a place for you."

I laughed, too, even though I was crying. Things would be okay for us. It would be fine.

But it wasn't. Heidi met a guy at school, her freshman year. Greg. That's not that uncommon, and I was used to it; she dated plenty of guys in high school, just like I'd dated plenty of girls. We were fine.

He wasn't like the others, though. Her friends told me that he hit her, beat her up. Drank too much. Thankfully I never saw him do it, because I'd have gone after him and he'd have had me down in about three seconds.

Still, I figured it would be alright; she'd get rid of the scum-bag, and we'd be fine. Only she didn't. She said she loved him, wanted to have a life with him. Said that it was something real that she had never felt before, and that it was worth all the bad, because the good was great. Said that if I really wanted what was best for her, I'd support her. Support them.

I heard all of these words, but that wasn't where my mind was at. All I could think of was that she wasn't wearing that yellow sweatband. First time I'd ever seen her without it. For some reason, that hurt more than anything.

Maybe you're yelling at me that I should have stepped in – it's the responsibility of friends to knock you over the head when you're being stupid, you're saying. I'm not arguing. But what was I supposed to do? She loved the guy, and I loved her.

We never did get to go to college together. She was gone by the time I graduated, dropped out. Somebody told me that she had a kid on the way, but I couldn't confirm it because she and I stopped talking. No big falling out, no fight. Just stopped.

About a year later, I heard they had gotten married. Heidi Clemens became Heidi Montgomery. Seemed wrong to me, like a shirt that was too big or something. Still, it completed the transformation. I didn't know her anymore. She was a stranger.

The last time I tried to contact her was to invite her to my wedding. It was my fiancé's idea. Told me that Heidi had been important to me, which made her important to us. Why shouldn't she be at the wedding? I always used to think Heidi would be in the wedding; she could have been my best man or something.

She probably never got the invitation. I sent it to the last address of hers that I'd known, but it had been so long that I don't know if that's where she and scum-bag were living. It doesn't really matter if she got it or not, because the result was the same. She didn't come to my wedding, and I didn't really care. I was happy.

Seems like a long time ago. So long ago that I didn't remember that her name was Heidi when her picture flashed up on the local news. I wasn't even really watching; my daughter was eating, and she had just discovered how much fun it was to fling food across the room and onto Daddy's face. But suddenly there she was, just like I had remembered her. Young, happy, smiling. Picture must have been from before she met Greg.



When I turned it up, the reporter man said that it was a hit and run. Somebody had been drunk, hit her outside of a convenience store, and drove off. Killed her and the baby in her belly. I wondered if the first kid was with Greg when it happened.

And that's it. A few minutes later the reporter turned to some other story, and I flipped off the TV. It's a funny thing, time. I couldn't even remember her name at first.



**MALE GAZE**, *MW Rishell*, Photography

## **BUS TICKETS BACK TO BAYONNE**

*MW Risbell*

suffer do the smart we see  
symbolism and irony across  
the spectrum we cry to cure  
desert drought we drool to pride  
Pavlov as a poet I do drool I have  
drooled I will drool again as a poet  
no one will notice I drool and

toward the end we all need diapers  
desperately in atlantic city  
there are slot machines guarded and  
fed by doddering elderlies winning  
bus tickets back to bayonne they return  
to their fashioned day care  
with regularity not seen by their  
adult diapers on the whole the house wins

I may wear a diaper someday someday  
soon sooner than most but I won't know  
only the loving soul holding my hand through  
this rapid regression will suffer I think  
of the world I think of youth in asia

and hope we will embrace heaven isn't  
clouds and harps heaven is the good you do  
and the life not the death you live  
in the minds of others after you're gone  
the whole world should know I know I will  
be one-ish with nature and I will have written  
and I will have breathed

## **SIDE OF BEEF**

*MW Rishell*

Soutine stole a side of beef or bought it  
or found it none of this matters the beef  
hung as if it were pre-ghost or post-ghost  
only the guts no ghost the guts were the real  
to be frozen and captured and commanded and  
to be owned through oil the real was Rembrandt  
the real was time the real was other brushes  
working to steal ideas floating  
through cafes floating through wine floating  
through whiskey floating through women floating long of neck  
it was the real that won that bled that commanded  
that floated that perforated the old land the new land his own guts  
as he bled from pre-ghost to post-ghost

## **CHARLES**

*MW Rishell*

The dean of the business school and I are having dinner with Charles Koch. He and the dean are dressed to the nines in their finest silks. Rather than a shirt and tie, I am wearing a Shocker t-shirt under my suit coat.

We are all overdressed, myself included, as we stroll into to Shoney's Big Boy. I keep telling Charles about the subtle flavors in the chicken-fried steak. Unlike his friendly persona, he becomes upset and does not want to be in such a place, surely feeling he was overdressed and didn't fit in. The dean is one step behind him. Suddenly, we are at the Ruth's Chris across the jumbled highway. I have challenges, but I find my way there, froggering the car across the street with gas-guzzling clap-traps trying to prevent my progress and keep me at Shoney's.

Finally, I make it – still wearing my t-shirt and suit coat – and I work to get comfortable in all that dark wood and deep red interior. Charles, good man that he is, reaches to pick up the bill with his three-dimensional American Express card, the hardest to acquire. When the bill comes, he engages in a brief fit of currency trading and pays with the cheapest Euros he can find.

## THE LAST REUNION

*Robert Ferrier*

He drives to his past, GPS naming  
forgotten close towns, eateries  
known only by aromas, then speeding  
through limits toward familiar bends,  
curves, away from blank faces  
gone to puzzles.

He cruises past the new high school,  
glass, concrete, steel, reflecting rays  
shouting "I Am!" then parks in front  
of the old "I Was." Photographer shouts,  
"Just in time!" Pose on brick steps,  
classmates arrayed in widened lines.

Old known faces and wrinkles,  
sweetened by spice of remembered  
feasts: sweating on practice fields,  
band music wafting from pep  
rallies downtown, notes crisp  
in cool October air . . . kisses  
in '58 Fords and Chevys.

He revels in their body heat  
testimony they're all still alive  
as the camera clicks, freezes  
familiar smiles, if not the  
warp of time.

## **A CERTAIN AGE\***

*Robert Ferrier*

If I forget spring,  
bruise my face with grass  
to meld with soil  
in prescience of later ritual.

If I forget summer,  
drip on my tongue  
the blood of fresh berries,  
and the insolent taste of mint.

If I forget autumn,  
immerse me in mums,  
lift me to the highest stadium row  
so I may feel the braille of wild geese.

If I forget winter,  
let me drink the giggles  
of snow angel children  
and untangle the Christmas light cords.

If I forget to live,  
burn me  
and cast my ashes  
to the winds of four seasons.

\*Republished by poet's permission – originally published in *Rhythms*  
(Amazon Kindle eBooks, 2004)



## FROZEN LEAF

*Robert Ferrier*

Calling card welded  
in ice to its limb  
skin translucent  
passing veined  
orange light  
bottom edges  
cragged with six  
clawed clear  
stalactites.



**FROZEN LEAF**, *Robert Ferrier*, Photography





**WHERE YOU FIND IT,** *Robert Ferrier*, Photography





**AGED**, *Robert Ferrier*, Photography

## DECKS DARK

*John Murphy*

Eric sat on the deck in a plastic chair, idly sipping at the wine-filled cooler glass as he watched the dusk settle in and the deck lights of the neighborhood apartment turn on (he kept his off; he liked the darkness to rise naturally), and then when he no longer heard any bustling noises coming from inside the house, he rose, chucked the remainder of the wine over the deck's side onto the apartment building lawn and walked back inside into the kitchen, where he saw that Drew's friends had taken most everything—the TV, the TV stand, the espresso maker, the blender—everything except the kitchen table, the old kettle, some food and a dozen Lipton green tea packets in a wickerwork organizer on the counter. That's right, he thought, Drew hates tea; and then Eric retrospectively wished he had not been such a baby and had been inside to supervise the cleaning out of their apartment, or rather his apartment, because he was pretty sure the TV stand was his, and he was damn sure the espresso maker was his because he remembered buying it at the Goodwill before Drew and he had met that one rainy April day in the third-rate beaten-up Bayou bookstore and how he had been flipping through Ginsburg poetry stopping on passages that he liked and Drew came up and asked if he had a light no I don't have a light this is a bookstore he said yeah I know Drew said have you ever seen the light setting on the Mississippi river turning it red no Eric said well Drew said you're not a proper New Orleanian until you do so you know oh really Eric said—and then Eric decided to make some Lipton green tea, there being not much else to eat or drink and to flush some of the alcohol out of his system (does tea do that? he wondered), and he ran the kettle under the sink faucet and put it on the stove to boil.

Tea in hand, Eric walked into the empty living room devoid of any furniture except the small square ottoman, and he went over and turned on the gas fireplace, something he had never done when Drew was in the house, and he grabbed the ottoman, planted it in front of the fireplace and sat and drank his tea, thinking, This is good, this is good, I'll have some solo time for myself, figure myself out, sift through myself, figure out which parts of me are actually mine and which parts are his, and then I'll be able to flush all the Drew-parts out—but those thoughts did not help him, and he suddenly felt so miserable that he put the tea mug on the mantle and laid down on the carpet in front of the fire and curled into a fetal ball. After a few minutes, he went to sleep.

When he woke the next morning, the fireplace was still on, and, grumbling about the gas bill, Eric turned it off, took the tea off the mantle and went back to the kitchen to rinse out the dregs, and as he finished and put the mug back into the cabinet, Liza, having let herself in, walked into the kitchen and said, Hey; Hey yourself, Eric replied, trying to sound upbeat, because that's what you needed to be in these situations, upbeat; and Liza said, Come on, let's get some java—my treat.

They took her car, and on the way there they passed by familiar shops and familiar venues, like the Audiophile record store, the last of its kind in this city (they've all died away, Eric thought), and he remembered how Drew and he used to amble into that store not looking for anything in particular maybe some old jazz no one makes jazz anymore or maybe some Motown some funk some Martha and the Vandellas because Drew and he were always united by their collective bizarre music tastes mutually isolated from everyone else on the planet by their love of soul and swing and whenever Drew found a record he liked he would yell *Sacré bleu* in a Clouseau accent and—Here we are, Liza said; and she pulled up to the indie coffee shop. They got out and a wind gust picked up and Eric realized how chilly it was outside (he had forgot a jacket) and remarked so to Liza, and she said, Yeah, it's fall, silly, didn't you notice it coming out

of the apartment to my car; Guess not, he said; and they walked into the coffee shop and were greeted by the pleasant coffee aroma and soft music on the PA, and Eric looked around and saw a bunch of college-aged kids and maybe one or two adults and he felt really old. They did not start the commiseration until they both sat down with their drinks at a corner table, far away from prying ears, and Eric sighed slowly, heavily, and said, I don't know; Yeah, Liza said; Maybe I should try women, what do you think? would women go for me? and Liza smiled and said, We're not exactly smooth sailing either; and then it was Eric's turn to say Yeah. This'll pass it'll just take some time you know? you got to be strong be strong Eric be strong be brave. I'm thinking, Eric said slowly, chewing his words, of going downtown and doing something outrageously stupid and desperate. No don't do that that'll just make things worse don't exacerbate the situation just be calm okay go to the movie theater and watch a superhero punch some people or maybe a horror flick something just to keep your mind occupied. You're right, you're right, I'm being stupid, Eric said. No you're not being stupid you're being normal. I feel like I'm dying right now, you know? Eric said, like I'm imploding or being folded up like some grotesque origami. You're hurting. Yeah, that's one way to say it.

When she dropped him off in front of his apartment, she got out of the car to hug him properly, and they did so for a long minute, and then they said their goodbyes, and he watched her drive off but did not go into the apartment building afterward and instead took off down the street toward the Audiophile record store. The wind-chill was fierce, and he did not get more than a block before he started shivering—shivering so badly, that by the time he got to Audiophile he was hugging himself and his teeth were chattering together like an electric telegraph, and, avoiding the eyes of the other patrons (who was this crazy man in his t-shirt? they wondered), he began rifling through the different CDs on display, for Drew's friends had taken the turntable and all the vinyl's too, but there was not much there, some classic rock albums, some bluegrass, some modern country, but then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Billie Holiday Sings, and he knew that was the record for him, even though he had not listened to Holiday much, and he bought it.

At home, he took a warm shower to flush the day's cold off his body, and he put his head under the showerhead and let the water drizzle down his forehead, down the bridge of his nose, and it was there that he cried, but only a little, just teared up some, because that was all he was going to allow himself, damnit. After the shower, he ate some food—it did not have much of a taste—and then he went up to the bedroom and popped the Billie Holiday Sings CD into his laptop and listened to it. Her words and voice touched him like nothing else had before; he felt he understood her completely, that she understood him completely, that she had timetraveled to his time, read the itinerary of his life and then timetraveled back and made that record for him. He listened to it all the way through three times. And then, after Billie had sang away all the sadness—at least for the moment—Eric got up, put on a coat and went out to the theater and watched a superhero movie like Liza suggested.

## ROUGH HORSES

*Ron Wallace*

*Where there is darkness, there is light.  
Where there is death, there is life.*

### I

Days pass quietly here,  
sitting on a wooden fence rail  
    admiring the deep blue  
above horses grazing in pasture grass.

The air that races with a buckskin mare,  
the nicker of my old paint  
    make me love this place  
where the planet doesn't spin so fast.

It's harder here, to hate  
where the wind whispers a Jeffers poem  
    and April plays its song  
like the strumming of a Martin guitar.

### II

But some days I recall rough horses,  
immediate, demanding, snorting fire  
    no time to watch the hawk  
circling in sunlight, high above my saddle.

Those outlaws slung the world  
and carved the dirt beneath sharp hooves  
    that lifted with their riders  
for the briefest moment above the earth.

They crashed and danced  
in vicious spinning torrents of damage  
    sudden and violent  
kicking hell into the heavens to remain unriden.

Where there is today, there is yesterday.  
Where there is memory, there is eternity.



## **FLASH**

*Ron Wallace*

I found him again,  
    saw him  
for the first time in years,  
parallel lines  
forming a background  
    behind his tilted face,  
frozen in 1960  
captured  
by the four-for-a-quarter booth's  
    unexpected  
        final flash.  
Almost out of the frame  
    six years old,  
his eyes are cutting up  
from beneath the perfect curve of  
    his big brother's  
Army National Guard fatigue cap,  
looking like he's leaving.  
But he wasn't  
    he was just arriving  
and I can't find a way  
to warn him  
about everything he'll miss  
    some day  
that lies just outside  
that Woolworth's photo booth.

## **SNAPSHOT**

*Ron Wallace*

Janie walks on weathered boards  
of a porch painted grey  
    from a house  
that's not there anymore.  
Her late-May hair hangs  
    in ringlets  
on bare shoulders,  
flowers swaying on her dress  
    with each stride  
away from the screen door  
closing.  
My Mercury Cougar  
    sits in her gravel drive  
waiting for us  
to ride  
those old dirt roads  
    where our lives will entwine.

## WHAT I FEAR MOST

*Patricia Hemminger*

is smallness, not the mouse, or cockroach  
that scurries across countertops at night,  
dull exoskeleton clicking,  
as sleepless again I reach for the light.

Not the ladybug or mayfly that lives  
just one day to copulate, then falls,  
wings extended to the water  
to squeeze out eggs as she dies,

but small thoughts: the worry  
of what you think, am I  
smarter, are those wrinkles,  
and where are you now?

I fear there will be no thoughts of stars  
stretching back through time, of sea  
shells on mountaintops, of strange  
spiked fossils, extinct creatures,

like the last white-horned rhino  
that died in the zoo  
a few days ago, unseen  
by our grandsons      forever.

## MORNING WALK

*Patricia Hemminger*

Surf slowly washes sand, turns  
it over and over, sifts pebbles from shells  
ridged like bleached oriental fans.

A blue stone rolls, stops,  
sparkles at our feet as we slip  
like ghosts on the edge  
of morning. "Is it a lozenge?"  
you ask, your mind empty now  
of neural networks spiraling out  
like roots searching for water. Forget  
falling through the hourglass, see  
how the earth tilts, reflects  
beauty in your wrinkled face  
in waves that ripple across  
shimmering sea.

## DEBUT

*Patricia Hemminger*

*for Will*

Just as the turning world opens  
to each fresh day, early  
tulip leaves uncurled that spring,  
hungry for sun's rays  
to open their stomata, breathe in  
their apportioned packet of sky.

When the weather warmed we sat  
in the garden, waiting  
for you to be born,  
watched tulip's velvet soak up sun.

You must have sensed the tightening  
in the womb, as poppy seeds sense  
the lengthening light, reach up to astound  
us with their red beauty, burst out,  
as you did, eyes wide open, delighting  
the nurses in their stiff blue dresses.

## UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

*Anca Vlasopolos*

They met standing in line waiting for seats at the oyster bar. He was alone. She was in a group of five. Greg started a conversation with Noreen, Deirdre's co-worker. Like Greg, Noreen was longing for a cigarette, but the restaurant lobby was a no-smoking zone, and outside there was a minus-ten-degree wind chill. When they were finally waved in by the waiter, Deirdre and her buddies found Greg alongside. At the bar he sat next to her.

"Chardonnay," she ordered.

"It's a superstition, you know, white wine with seafood," Greg told her. "The French choose by the qualities of the wine, not the color."

"Ok," she laughed. "Good to know, but I like chardonnay."

Greg nodded. He took a long time making his selection. She didn't hear what he'd ordered. Sergio, on her left, was telling one of his racy anecdotes, about a night in Capri, and she was leaning in to listen. As she did so, Sergio, gesticulating as usual, nearly hit her in the face.

"Scusi, Didi," Sergio gave her a peck on the cheek.

"He your boyfriend? Greg asked.

"No, he's Italian," she said.

After they'd sucked oysters and eaten their crab cakes and drunk more wine, the group decided to move up the street to Marge's Bar to listen to Friday night jazz. They all had talked to Greg by then, he was clearly interested in Deirdre, and they simply took it for granted that he'd come along.

The next morning, Deirdre felt her head throbbing from the alcohol, the second-hand smoke, and sex with Greg, which turned out rougher than she'd expected; now that he was gone, she admitted, rougher than she liked it.

But Greg became devoted to her in many endearing ways. He'd pick her up for work—they found out they were working but two blocks from each other downtown, she as a paralegal in a high-powered lawyers' office, he as a junior executive at the main branch of Bank First. He'd have a coffee cup for her next to his in the cup holder of his Honda, and he never forgot that she liked her cappuccinos with just a little foam. When they made dates for lunch, he'd find little out-of-the-way restaurants tucked on the campus of the university a couple of miles up from downtown, or in the large market area east of where they worked, or farther south, in the Latino quarter of town. He insisted on always paying; he said it wasn't chivalry—his salary and benefits were so much better than hers. And he admired her. She felt it in the way that he still expressed awe, six months after that insanely cold evening when they first met, at the way she handled her life. On her own, away from her Port Townsend family, living within her modest means yet managing to look wickedly stylish and to rent a cute carriage house in an upscale neighborhood, without sexual hang-ups or nagging nesting instincts, Deirdre, Greg said, was the very type of the postmodern woman. She loved seeing herself through his eyes. It made her feel even more confident of her choices.

Yet there it was, the sex. Greg would rip her pantyhose off, tear buttons off her blouses, leave her bruised and sore. After a night with him, she'd soak herself in the tub for hours to relieve the fissures around her vaginal opening. She would go braless and wear a loose gown, her nipples hurt so much. As the weather got more and more pleasant, she tried to have it out with Greg.

"Look, I can't wear summer clothing with all these bruises on my arms and neck. I won't be able to wear my bikini. What will the lawyers think? They'll advise me to sue the abuser. C'mon, Greg, we can still have fun if we go slowly and gently."

That's when he told her that he had researched her sign, Scorpio, and that the astrologers all agreed Scorpio women liked rough sex. Deirdre was touched. He'd actually done research to try to please her.

Greg did make an effort to slow down, but his excitement proved too uncontrollable, and it wasn't as if Deirdre didn't get pleasure out of it, so she let him put too much pressure on her neck to force her between his legs, to bite her so hard that he'd leave marks. In everything else he continued the devoted lover. If he ripped her clothes, he'd send her generous gift certificates to the best stores in town. He bought her days at the spa so her sore muscles would be laved in herbal compresses and soothed by massages. One thing he never did was reciprocate the oral sex. Deirdre for all her postmodern womanhood felt embarrassed about asking. They were adults, after all. They'd had other lovers. Couldn't he figure it out? On the other hand, the idea of his becoming carried away, with tongue and teeth, especially teeth, around her genitals was something to give her pause. No, better to do without.

It was late June, and Deirdre was getting tired of Greg's attentions and his compliments in private as well as in public about her free thinking in matters of marriage and home making. All that was fine and good, but they'd been seeing only one another for over six months now. And they were both in their late twenties. Would he want to show this devotion from his riverview top-floor condo to her, in her nice but crammed carriage house, for the rest of their lives? He was a banker, for goodness' sake. Didn't he know about the financial advantages of married couples? And she longed for a dog, which wasn't allowed under the terms of her lease. A dog, much more than a child. For now. Couldn't they get a house together so she could have a dog? But she kept these thoughts to herself, not wanting to lose her ascendancy as the postmodern woman.

Lately, a new partner in the firm had begun to show interest in Deirdre. He'd asked her to lunch, for a drink after office hours; she'd gone once. She found Perry charming and gentle. She did tell him outright that she was seeing someone, and he didn't get angry.

"Engaged? Committed?" Perry asked.

"No, but kind of exclusive, if you know what I mean."

"Meaning what, exactly? You could date someone else if you liked?"

"I suppose, but I would have to break with him."

"I'd like to be the first to hear of it if you do," Perry said.

It was the first time she'd admitted to herself the possibility. Yes, she could break with Greg. Just because she still climaxed several times during their wild lovemaking and he remained thoughtful when away from her bedroom didn't mean she was forever tied to him. The thought of seeing Perry, of maybe finding another man, who might be sweet and want a dog, too, nagged at her. Soon after her drink with Perry she decided to talk to Greg about taking a break from each other.

A night late in June Greg and Deirdre went to a gathering of his executive friends at a fancy apartment in a high rise downtown. Then the two of them and three other couples went to the top of the Renaissance Tower's revolving restaurant for drinks and dessert. It was mostly drinks. Deirdre ordered three brandy alexanders; she felt reckless, thinking of Lee Remick in *The Days of Wine and Roses*. She also wanted the heedlessness of alcohol to help her suggest to Greg that they split, at least for a while. On the way home, Greg was very funny, entertaining her with stories of his high-school years at a private academy in the well-to-do suburb where she now lived. She was laughing so hard she forgot to begin the discussion about their future. As they came closer to her place, in a street veering toward the lake, she looked up at the streetlights and saw myriads of dark moving spots.

"Greg, I think I'm having an episode," she murmured.

“What is it, hon?” he asked. “Should I pull over? Do you need to throw up?”

“No, I’m seeing black dots. When I look at the lights. Maybe it’s a sugar low after all those sweet drinks.”

As he came to a stop, the car skidded just slightly. The crunch under the tires sounded like pebbles, like broken glass, but somehow not quite like that.

“Oh, Deirdre, I forgot! This is your first summer here! There’s nothing wrong with you. It’s the fishflies. We get them every summer, for three or four days, a week at the most.”

“Fishflies?”

“Yeah, there’re these insects, they come from the lake, if the lake’s in good shape, they say. They live to have sex and die. Just for a few days. It stinks like dead fish. They crunch under foot. It’s kind of gruesome, but if we don’t see them, I guess we’d worry about the environment or whatever.”

“They crunch?” Deirdre shuddered, thinking of roaches, which she’d seen, all too closely, downtown in some eateries.

“Yeah, they’re ugly little buggers, but they don’t last. And they don’t do anything to you, like bite or anything. Just fuck and die. Not a bad life, when you think of it.”

When they arrived in her driveway, the motion detector came on, and the swirl around it was like black rain. Deirdre opened the car door, felt a tiny body collide with her face, and let out a scream.

“Shhh, sweetheart, you’ll awake the McKinleys. They’ll think you’re being raped or something. Come, love, I’ll carry you in,” Greg said, seeing Deirdre trying to shoo fishflies off the pavement so she wouldn’t have to place the soles of her shoes on them.

Tenderly, Greg lifted her out of the bucket seat, kicked the car door closed, and carried Deirdre up the stairs to her flat. He only faltered once; she was no lightweight, at 120 pounds for her 5’6” frame, but Greg was a fanatic about working out, which, he said, counteracted the effects of smoking. He put her down to help her find her keys, but he wouldn’t let her open the door herself and walk in. He picked her up again and took her all the way in, to the bedroom. He laid her on the bed as though she might break. He undressed her carefully, with great care, as if she were hiding a wound. Feeling her arousal under his light touch, he made love to her, slowly, like a swimmer in languid waters. He parted her lips gently, his tongue inside her licking tentatively yet hungrily, then moving up, rocking her clitoris ever so gently, then more and more rapidly, as her own desire demanded. That night, Greg made love to her twice, and he made her come with his hand and his mouth again and again, until she lay utterly drained, unable to move, as if the blood had left her veins and mingled with that slow river through which Greg had swum.

He left, as usual, at sunrise. She awoke to his tender kisses.

“Stay,” she said. “Sleep some more. Have breakfast with me.”

“No, darling. I’m no good in the morning. I’ve got to have my smokes. I’ll spare you. We’ll go for lunch, somewhere west, without the flies. My poor darling, how you shook last night.”

She looked at him, astonished. Was he talking about their love making?

“And here I was, thinking you were a woman made of steel. You’re a little girl, afraid of bugs.” He laughed, kissed her on her brow, and was gone.

Deirdre stood up and opened the curtains. It was a beautiful, clear morning. She would need that clarity to figure out what had happened with Greg. She sure felt no different. A woman of steel? A little girl? What the hell, she thought. All this about her natural reaction to a bug invasion, a local phenomenon about which no one had warned her? Not that she’d relished seeing the critters or feeling them crunch under foot. In fact, she glanced outside with suspicion at the floodlights and the lamp post. Nothing, of course. Not in daylight. She went to the



kitchen, where a screened door led to a small “dust” porch overlooking the neglected vegetation behind the garage. She opened the wooden door. On the outside of the screen was one of them. It clung to the screen. Deirdre forced herself to look at it. Its body, thin and tapered, looked like a long inverted comma. Threadlike appendages kept it stuck to the wires. Its head was small, delicate, with none of the ugly hair and knowingness of a bluebottle. No sound came out of it. It seemed lonely, perhaps frightened, perhaps in some sort of post-coital coma. Its wings were breathtaking, shimmering in the sun, refracting like minuscule rainbows. They shivered slightly, the net of black veins breaking up the light. Deirdre felt stupid. How could she have been so childish? This little thing was like a fairy. It would be beastly to drive over the bodies, no doubt about that, but for pity’s sake, not disgust.

She almost ran to the phone to tell Greg and laugh with him about her fears. She stopped. How weak men are, she thought. Feeling renewed by a night of sex without pain, of what seemed like an ocean of orgasms, she thought, yes, my little friend, there’s almost nothing to it. The fishfly made no move to leave its post. Deirdre was floored again by the creature’s grace. Could she use this, then? Could she faint in his manly arms, shriek at spiders, not know how to hold a drill? Was this what it took for the loving, the tenderness, maybe down the road the house with the dog? Why not?

No, she said to herself, not the way she wanted it. She punched in Greg’s number.

“Greg,” she said, “I’ve been thinking.”

## SUPPLY AND DEMAND

*Matt Mahoney*

When I see you  
I don't ask  
But,  
I do wonder.  
When he nibbles the gloss off your lips  
Do you think about how we kissed?  
Does he know that my initials are inscribed  
On your sweet sweet sugar walls?  
If he sees them — no, feels them  
What will you say?  
With me it was fucking  
But now  
You're making love.  
I can feel the love,  
It's 2am when you didn't have a ride home  
So I walked you through two feet of snow.  
It's when you say  
"I hate you, don't look at me, don't talk to me."  
Because I won't delete those numbers from my phone.  
"Any number that ends in teen  
Is too young  
Especially if you don't believe in marriage."  
I'm white bread  
And he's canned, pre-sliced, toasted pumpernickel.  
I get it baby,  
He's hot and ready  
But, I'm the number one all-time best seller.

## **STRANGE WAY OF COPING**

*Matt Mahoney*

I never lost my license,  
But I stopped driving after a car accident senior year of high school.  
My girlfriend of 3 years didn't survive.  
Now,  
I ride the bus.  
I sit behind a girl with blond hair,  
Rachel, I think.  
She reminds me of her.  
She has the most amazing body.  
Only a C-cup,  
But that rockin' hourglass figure.  
Her smile... the things that I would do to her.  
I love the way her lips perch when she takes her morning selfie.  
Apricot.  
I imagine they taste like apricot.  
Her freshly straightened hair glistens in the light.  
And her perfume,  
probably Victoria's Secret Very Sexy.  
Very Sexy, indeed.  
Every day, I get the same urge  
like trying to scratch the itch at the back of my throat.  
To reach forward over the seat  
to wrap my arms around her  
And choke the perfection out of her.  
To squeeze the air out of her lungs  
Until her entire body purples over.  
When she gets to Heaven  
I know she'll have company.

## AUTUMN POEM

*Clarence Wolffshohl*

1.

Now is the time for the change in light.  
The hickories turn first,  
a yellow brightness that drags  
down the rays into drops of gold.

The green light that was more shade  
than sun and carved fissures  
in your face slowly fades  
until one morning we wake

and dogwood red ripens  
your cheeks to sunsets.

2.

Today the woods  
came dressed  
for a party.  
All summer the trees  
wore formal green  
although some may  
have thought they  
were in camo.  
But this morning  
the woods lightened  
up and dressed  
in yellow and reds,  
festivity on  
their lips.

3.

Describe the red maple on this sunny autumn day  
in 25 words or less:

brilliant, magnificent, rednificent, impressive, rich,  
splendid, redtacular, glorious, superb, grand,  
redjestic, breathtaking, inspiring, striking, redazz-  
ling, splendid, eye-popping, fabulous, redlicious, red,  
marvelous, spectacular, red, red, red

## THE WISTERIA

*Clarence Wolfsbohl*

A decade, maybe two, ago  
in this remote corner pocket of nine acres  
beside an old cedar, tatters like skirts  
of a nun, I planted the cutting.

It caught on despite my doubts  
and was twisted about dying limbs  
within a couple of years. And I guess  
each year it went higher and its tendrils

reached wider and absorbed the cedar  
into its heart, but, as I said, this spot  
is remote and the other trees and brush  
grew, also, and I did not notice

until now. And there it is this spring day,  
a full tree of its own, royal with blooms.

## MY SISTER'S BABUSHKA

*Clarence Wolffshohl*

In the photo you are in Red Square  
at midnight, snow hazed between you  
and a shadowed St. Basil's backstage.  
You wear a ushanka  
like Julie Christie in *Dr. Zhivago*,  
but I smile at your face in my hands  
and think "babushka."

A lifetime earlier, some childhood  
production before our parents,  
you needed a fourth woman  
in that drama. You and the Treviño  
girls—Peggy and Rosie—were three,  
and I, the only other child  
and a pliable younger brother,  
made the fourth with a headscarf  
and my nine-year old's old lady voice  
to create the illusion.  
"Babushka," you said, having learned  
the word recently, and it sounded exotic  
enough to ease my reluctance. Or did  
you say "babushka" to foreshadow  
in that play this later Moscow act  
in which you wanted your little brother  
to be cast?

## DON'T GO

*Megan Clark*

We didn't have God in our home. We tried to keep up with the Jewish traditions but after Melanie, my middle sister, was born, we gave up. Too many restrictions, too many rules, not enough faith.

We are a family of science. My father raised us on the big bang theory, math ruling the universe, and being in love was the closest thing we had to magic. He probably would have loved a science fair winner or a math major graduate.

Instead, he got a writer, a dancer, and a reader. While I doubt he's any less proud of us, I think he still would have loved that academic scholarship. During my formative years, he used to tell me that I could be anything I wanted to be. Until middle school, that was to be exactly what he wanted: someone with a knack for math.

What we lacked in faith, we made up for in passion. Mel is the best ballet dancer any of us have ever seen. Meredith reads at least seven dystopian future books a week, and she'd probably read more if it weren't for eating and sleeping. And I haven't put down the pen since seventh grade and I doubt I ever will.

So many people rely on God to help make their decisions but we were taught to depend on ourselves and create our own destinies. My mathematician father taught us pride.

\*\*\*

Nail biting can be considered a form of self-mutilation to many psychiatrists. I started chewing on my nails when I was four years old. We were in the grocery store and I saw my father biting on his. My mother says it started because I pulled out my eyebrows, and when I ran out of hair I had to find a new self-harm medium.

My mother says I have always been thirty years old. I've never been high energy, I've never had a lot of friends, and I always kind of kept to myself rather than around people; an introvert. She didn't know how to handle me.

What kind of six-year-old would rather read with her bedroom door closed than ride her bike around the cul de sac? What kind of sixth grader would rather spend time by herself writing down her thoughts rather than getting her first kiss? As the daughter of a customer service manager and a computer program manager, I probably should have been better at speaking to other people.

\*\*\*

We didn't have hardship. At least we didn't know it. It wasn't until a few years ago that my father told us that for six months in 2010, we were broke. I remember Grandma came to visit unexpectedly - we only see her at Christmas - with enough food and paper towels to provide an army.

Plenty of kids grow up with divorced parents, small houses, limited food options, and the like. We never saw that. We had plenty of cereal and milk, I had my own bedroom, and my parents love each other more than two people ever have. I was raised in the dark. I always used to say that I lived under a rock because I didn't know any curse words or go to parties or drink alcohol, but turns out I was under a rock for a different reason.

Do you know what it's like to be a grown adult woman and find out that for the better part of your childhood, you were living on scraps? It stings.

I used to accuse my father of being a liar. When my grandmother came that week with dozens of Cups O' Noodles, I yelled and cried at Daddy. How could you do this? How could you lie about going to work every day? You said you had meetings, what were you doing instead? It was worrying as a fourteen-year-old girl to find out that your father was not in fact employed.

The man I was supposed to trust to take care of the family, who I had been raised to trust to take care of the family, had failed me. He kept me in the dark.

As a grown woman, I know he did it to protect us. Of course he wouldn't come out and say it.

Sorry honey, but Daddy's broke and can't buy you a new Barbie.

Instead, I got a new doll paid for on my mother's near-maxed credit card.

\*\*\*

Separation anxiety was something unique to my family. My bipolar mother and my cold, clinical father had no idea what to do with the little girl who screamed and panicked when Daddy left for work.

I was a very nervous child. Always trying to make sense of what was happening. Always staying out of harm's way. It was almost inevitable that I would end up mentally ill like my mother.

Not only is depression hereditary, I had it coming anyway. I destroyed my hands, I pulled out my eyebrows and hair, I didn't sleep. Don't go, I'd cry every night at bed. One more story.

\*\*\*

It killed my grandmother that we stopped praying. We were what she calls holiday Jews, meaning we only celebrated the high holidays. Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashana, Passover. We gave presents at Hanukkah and Christmas.

We didn't keep kosher in the house because kosher food tastes like ass. Mom was adamant about keeping pork out of the house, but otherwise she hated keeping kosher. It was a hassle, much like the rest of the Jewish faith.

Mom was always secretive about our religion, even if we didn't abide by its rules. She pretended to be Christian like everyone else at school and work. I, on the other hand, was very open about being raised Jewish. I flaunted it like a new shirt: it was fashionable to be so different in such a conservative town.

Psychologically, Mom's secretive behaviors about our identities probably contributed to my self-esteem. Identity is important to a little girl.

\*\*\*

The first time I really messed up my hands, I was in middle school. I had a hangnail, which sucks for anyone, but especially a nail-biter. I needed it gone. Just one pull, and my nail bed split. I bled all over my math desk. Much to the horror of my classmates, I didn't know what to do. My social anxiety kicked in and I froze. I couldn't stand or speak or ask for help.

When I got home, my mother saw my red-stained assignment book and reprimanded Why do you do this to yourself?! I blinked but had no response.

Of course it wasn't that easy.



## **BALM**

*Tara A. Elliott*

I think of you and how  
you wouldn't pucker so much  
as pull your lips taut against your teeth, drag  
that waxen stick across your bottom lip, circle up  
and across the top in some over-exaggerated motion—  
as though coloring inside the lines didn't seem to matter anymore.  
At thirteen, you sighed as you placed one hand on your hip,  
and rolled your eyes as you mouthed the words dry lips.  
The youngest, I watched this repetitious rite-hood fascinated—  
this is what girls do, layer upon layer, in pink Cherry Lip-smacker.

Today, my son watches ritual as he eyes his father shaving.  
Later alone, as he tries to mimic, his fingertips will graze razor  
and blood will rise through perfect child flesh. And as I try  
to staunch the flow while droplets fall bright onto the white-tiled floor,  
as he strangles his boy-cry deep into his throat and instead whimpers,  
I wish this never happened, I will find that even as his mother,  
I cannot stop this. I cannot will time backwards.  
I cannot unwind this scene any more than you,  
one hand eternally cocked on your hip, and one wrapped ever  
around that almost hollow tube, could not stop the anointing  
of your lips; left hand forever spinning around your mouth,  
always turning—some strange clock forcing time forever forward,  
glossing itself thick into memory.

## PHASES

*Tara A. Elliott*

As a girl, I wanted to capture the moon,  
snatch her straight from the sky & push her deep  
into one of my grandmother's clear-green mason jars.

Each dusk, when the opposite colors of the world collided,  
I bounded toward her—  
arms opening outward like the pale petals of the lily.

Ankles whipped by summer's long grass, feet bare and crusted in dirt,  
swollen welts of mosquito bites peppering my too-long legs,  
I never was able to get close enough.

And as night  
slowly washed his canvas a rich inky black, stippling the galaxy  
with stars, the moon would simply grow smaller, arcing higher and higher,  
until one night she just disappeared.

There are times  
when she still comes to me, big and low on the horizon  
where I feel my fingertips could reach right out and scrape  
the chalky surface of her—  
other times she seems to loom more brightly than the sun  
whom she leaves writhing in a bruised blue sky.

## CHALLENGER

Bonnie Kennedy

*for Christa McAuliffe and Krista, my daughter, who was in fifth grade and wanted to be an astronaut.  
She became a teacher.*

Aboard the Challenger,  
A challenger of children,  
The only one of seven  
Who was not a rocket scientist,  
Or an astronaut,  
Or a physicist,  
But everyman.

She wore a suit  
Composed of possibility,  
A helmet full of wonder,  
Strapped into a seat  
Above a heavy payload  
Chock-full of childhood dreams,  
And one defective O ring.

And in that countdown  
Of three...two...one,  
A billion minds  
Stood on tip-toe  
Reaching for the stars,  
A billion hearts believed  
“That could be me.”

Until the seventy-fourth second  
When fuel and fire united in  
A Hiroshima-Nagasaki moment  
That split the atom  
Between hope and despair,  
And shocked a billion minds  
Stunned and speechless.

In one blink,  
The fiery black cloud  
Vaporized flesh and metal,  
And sent the shattered  
Expectations of the world  
Charred and spewing  
Back to earth.

And the billion hearts  
That stopped,

Who had said to themselves  
“That could be me” –  
Knew with certainty  
In that seventy-fourth second,  
It was.



**NEW,** *George L. Stein*, American Gothic Collage, (abandoned ammo dump,  
LaPorte City, Indiana)

## STAGES OF AGES IN A WOMAN'S BODY\*

*Bonnie Kennedy*

A perfect pristine yellow-gold box  
Of sixty-four count crayons  
With the built-in sharpener  
Stands ready in its symmetry  
For the artist to draw a girl  
Standing among coal black cows  
In a field of forest green,  
The triangular morning sun  
Shining down from the corner  
Of a solid baby blue sky.

The box holds every color of the rainbow  
And every color in-between,  
But the points are wearing down,  
Becoming flat, and soon the lid  
Is loose and torn, and broken  
Pieces are stuffed back in,  
And the symmetry is lost.  
Some are broken on purpose,  
Meant to be shared, and some  
Are only used once or twice.

The box begins to bulge  
As fences and houses are drawn,  
And stick figure mommies with  
Circles for breasts, holding  
Spikey hands of Daddies  
And three little kids, and maybe  
There's a dog. More colors  
Get broken, and wrappers  
Get peeled, and the sharpener  
Falls out of the box.

Eventually, the box is emptied  
Into an empty butter cookie tin  
So the artist can dig around  
To find just the right shades  
For the moon above the ocean,  
And the grandma on the beach.  
The can gets scratched and  
Dented, and paint flakes off the sides.  
The colors inside grow short and naked,  
Shredded wrappers curl among them.

Until one day, the battered tin  
Sits between the grandkids  
On a pile of coloring books,  
In the back seat on a long drive  
To the family reunion.  
To make room for the fold-down  
Cup holder, it is tossed to the shelf  
Under the rear glass, and forgotten.  
In the summer heat, its metal warps,  
And all the colors bleed.

\*Republished by poet's permission – originally published in Issue No. 04 of *Cold Creek  
Review*

## CINDERELLA

Bonnie Kennedy

*Cinderella—Dressed in yella—Went upstairs to kiss her fella,  
Made a mistake—Kissed a snake—How many doctors did it take?  
—Author Unknown*

We are all Cinderella  
And Prince Charming is dead.  
There was no mistake in the kissing,  
The snake was a fella with feelings,  
Fears, faults, and failings.

And it took several doctors--  
First the gyno, then the pediatrician,  
Then the family practitioner,  
And the psychologist-slash-counselor,  
And don't forget the heart surgeon.

She couldn't wear her pink pussy hat  
To work, so the step-sisters wore theirs  
To the ball that never was, where they  
Waited for a prince on a white privilege horse  
To carry them off to the Dept. of Human Services.

But she never had a carriage or ball gown,  
Just a used Pontiac and a black business suit.  
No footmen, handmaidens, or godmothers,  
Just grandmothers, co-workers and a paycheck.  
Years later, she still washes the dishes herself.

And in the end, she realizes happily,  
She had both worn the glass slipper  
And broken the glass ceiling,  
Because we are all Cinderella,  
And Prince Charming is dead.

## **PERSEPHONE'S DAUGHTER**

*Colie Smigliani*

Tell me about the girl that's more ripped than jean  
The one that walked out of hell  
Pomegranate juice dribbling down the corner of her lips  
Ravaged fruit in hand  
Smiling about the time she asked her lover for his favorite color and he answered  
Obsidian  
So she became it  
Glassy purple black poured from the heart of an all-encompassing eruption  
Whoever said hard wasn't beautiful  
Had yet to meet her



## **AN OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE LIFE**

*Alicetierney Prindiville-Porto*

Everything has a place in the world  
And through chaos I produce order  
But it comes at a cost

For my interactions with  
tables  
switches  
door knobs  
must be of a wholesome even number

I am not broken

Yet I cannot wrap my left hand around a glass of water  
And take a sip  
It has to be my right

I am not broken

But I have to use my fingernail to scrape away  
the residue of my fingerprint  
from any communal surface

I am not broken

Even though I have to quadruple check  
each  
and  
every  
door knob and switch

I am whole  
My soul has been shattered by turmoil  
But I always manage to reassemble it  
For I am worthy of existence

## **ANOTHER LATE DAY IN FALL**

*Sam Silva*

I'm ugly today!  
... bruised and toothless ... without song.  
Greyness conquers all.  
Listen to the wind!  
Quiet jazz in the Autumn.  
Read a book and sleep.  
I love my lover  
... and my cats who follow me!  
Blessings to live for.

## **AN ENDING**

*Lily Bell*

Alone in the end.

Staring out the window of a subsidized flat

The walls so thin I can hear the roaches plotting to eat through my cupboards.

A siren in the distance reminds me of another lifetime. I close my eyes and inhale the toxic scent of burning flesh still branded in my soul, turbinates flaring to expel the poison.

Sipping my cold tea, I ponder their lives. The burden of estrangement bourn upon my being for so long, twisting my neck and shoulders like an overgrown vine.

I'll die here, the truth an ugly lesion across my heart. I'll die here and they'll shed their deceptive tears, place me in an elaborate box and cross my fingers in prayer upon my chest.

Then they'll return to their custom-built castles and spread their toxins to their offspring. They'll remember me annually with melancholy as if I was the one with issues, as if it was I who threw them away.

Slowly I rise from my old stained recliner and shuffle to the hot pot to warm my tea, but it's my heart that needs thawing. Frozen in time on that frigid January night, longing to warm just long enough to conjure one last rhythmic burst of endearment before the ultimate darkness.

Shuffling back to my chair, I gaze outside once again.

Not today, I tell myself. Not today.

## **GRAVITY**

*Katherine Robbins*

Your kiss has already stained the inside  
of my mouth,  
the color licks at my gums,  
endlessly,  
I long to stay this way with you . . .  
but heavy heart will always drop.

## **I BLOOM INTO**

*Katherine Robbins*

The time is coming again,  
where you can hear children's laughter outside  
leaking into the walls of your room,  
and you can't stop the warmth  
from caressing and enveloping your skin,  
streaming through your eyelashes and fingers.

With flowers blooming in between the strands of my hair,  
and the sun barely licking my skin,  
the time in the sky, where the sun is about to  
sing the clouds to sleep.  
That's all I need to feel my heart beating  
beneath this skin, inside of this chest  
as I:  
exhale winter and breathe in summer.

## PICASSO IN WOLF SKIN

*Katherine Robbins*

pouring primer into your morning coffee,  
liquid pigment down your knuckles  
war drowns your eyes.  
you call me a mess,  
you say you can paint a portrait of me,  
perfect in one-hundred different ways,  
but all i see is paint sloshed onto canvas,  
moved and pushed around,  
carelessly, devoid of talent,  
and i feel sorry for the canvas,  
and all of the ruined potential  
when you put a brush to its perfect emptiness.

## DREAMS THREE

*Richard Dixon*

My mother really did die with a needle in her arm, or at least because of the combination of drugs and alcohol in her system, with a side issue of possible foul play; but that's not the reason, that's not really the reason I'm telling you this. I'm only telling you this because of the dreams I had last night, three-fold: In the first, I had an agenda with no chance of completion, or even getting a start on completion. Exhausted after this ordeal, I pulled over under a streetlight in my old VW bus, only a half-block away from my house, ready to rest my head under my arm and contemplate things for a few minutes. The ex-governor of my state, a few terms ago, drives by with his famous taciturn nod and dour expression; he's my next-door neighbor. Some other guy pulls up, starts talking some crazy, pseudo-friendly bullshit, starts to back his car up parallel then stops, gets out with a pistol in his hand and walks oh-so-quickly over to where I'm sitting and points, then stabs the gun down into my groin and says, "Gimme your wallet, mother-fucker, or I'll kill your ass." And he's deadly serious. I woke up, almost in a cold sweat, and considered my alternatives.

There were no needles in the second dream, but plenty of pin-prickly tension: my son and I were in the inner-city, driving a rusted-out old Buick, circa 1971. The goal was to move into the tenement-like apartments, but first, of course, I had an agenda, a complete list of things to get through to be able to achieve that goal, moving into that tenement. To do so (more anxiety), I had to leave my small son behind, and not to see him again, the only thing on my mind: where is he? At day's end, all tasks completed but beside myself, I went looking for him. I went down into the tenement basement where they kept the kids, a kind of gun-safe day-care and, as all the children filed out, I never saw him. But behind the last partition-like blanket I could feel the presence of a human form, and I reached out, because I knew it was my son, and I immediately felt him, and him me; he was hopelessly pacing, worried to death, yet having faith in something coming to save him, and it was me, his dad.

In the third dream, all my former loved ones from all my former lives were ensconced, as in campsites around an idyllic mountain lake, all gathered there for me to choose, but this congregation also included people like Jane Fonda, the more to make my decisions harder: for it was my job to choose, among all these choice choices, upon that utopian mountain, exactly which way to go, my life direction as it were. Which way to go among all these choices was a real luxury, except, in this dream of course, I had not the luxury of time – oh no, not anything even remote, I had to make decisions, I had an agenda, and time of the essence, so as in the other dreams it was rush-rush-rush; and then there was always the easy road, no matter the tricky mountains, the easy road back to the luxury hotel, just around the bend, in the sun-drenched mountain town, and if I could just get there, then there was time to make a sane, rational decision. But, as in dreams, there was no time to make that decision, and instead I woke up, loaded with some kind of consciousness, an otherwise clean slate onto another day.

If my mother ever put a needle into her arm, she was only wanting to dream.

## **OWL**

*Richard Dixon*

Nocturnal hunter of the countryside  
urban backyard, perched on your stoop  
a large tree branch you call home

With two in the nest to feed, you've had  
to pull some rough all-nighters lately  
constantly on food-watch Fast in flight

feathers muffle your airborne sound  
as you swoop down on prey unheard  
a complete surprise

Large eyes and keen binocular vision  
assist your location skills, but it is your  
sense of hearing that's so sensational;

feathered ruff and facial disk reflect sound  
to the ear openings, enable you to precisely  
pin down rodents on the move, even under-ground

Broad head swivels on pivotal axis ever-alert  
nothing within your realm of edible prey escapes  
your attention Strong, hooked beak and powerful

sharp talons ever at the ready, night-hunting machine  
Attention your middle name, your seriousness  
of purpose intense, your job always on the line

From the large branch you silently lift  
and swiftly gain momentum, determination  
in your eyes, death in your soul



## **FISHERMAN**

*Richard Dixon*

*for Ken Hada*

The line near-silently spools out  
one more expert cast  
with the new, Christmas-present  
(or birthday) rig

this time southwestern Colorado  
Dolores River, photos for evidence  
yet nothing compares with the real deal

the saturation of the entire experience –  
many think of your pastime as recreation  
but it's more like rejuvenation

no, it's confirmation of finely-honed skills  
over many years with a fly-fishing rod and reel  
a growing mastery you feel each time you get out

on a river, or stream, or any body of water  
really, your confidence will at least match  
the anticipation, maybe more than equal

the smile on your face, fire in the belly  
and the feeling of contentment in your soul



**MINNOWS,** *Tina Baker*, Photography

## TOWARD THE DOCK

*Tina Baker*

Directions have changed.  
We'll use the short path to our destination.  
Use the word uncomplicated.  
Walk with soft,  
easy-carry canvas chairs.  
Enter:  
sit, read, fish,  
hear lake water laps  
lick planks. Enter:  
holding retirement diplomas,  
relics and pictures;  
a blending of children and grandchildren,  
mixed and matched money and new things, and  
our luck; extra time found in these jean pockets.  
So, I put on my respectful grin  
for his serious and concentrated fishing,  
as his fingers plunge  
into the minnow pail's  
pungent brine,  
dripping with hope on a hook,  
for a thrill, a true story,  
or a tall tale  
or simply a—  
"Do not disturb."  
And after the autumn sunset  
enchants and sedates,  
blazing like a bonfire  
on the lake,  
we exit, unencumbered, as planned;  
relaxed, as if in our red plaid,  
we had floated away along with the golden leaves  
to meet our children's grandchildren  
this December.  
And looking toward the dock,  
only a simple stage set left behind:  
two soft, easy-carry canvas chairs,  
a book, a rod, and a minnow pail.

## **PERENNIAL**

*Tina Baker*

In the center of winter,  
standing where  
the cold is a distance  
in every direction,  
a memory is wise;  
wise enough to sink  
into the winter  
and remember, the spring  
and the summer  
still exist.

## **I SPLIT THE SUN LIKE AN ORANGE**

*Valerie Egan*

I split the sun like an orange. Between my bare hands, I tore it in two; the innards split and spat as my cavern of greed bore down; my teeth like pale axes further divided the demi-circles into quarters. Oh heaven, oh light. I against the sun; it railed up in my throat. It extinguished in my stomach. Along with it gasped the sea, full of fishes and red. The birds abandoned their hope and arched skywards their long or stout throats, clacked together the bony ridge of their lips, and gave a salutary hoot before slumbering at my feet. I stamped my feet and shook the bones out of the earth. They rose and danced, a cacophony of lacrimal, conchae, ethmoid, ulna and triquetrum. We together ran riot and sang. I renamed them all, guttural things; with one fell swoop the Latins sat down in silence. My belly burned with fullness, with blue stars sinking

## WINTER MORNING IN RED

*Ken Hada*

From another world,  
some place  
I have never been found

red fires  
violent hues so bold,  
so utterly

confronting. Torn  
between worship  
and terror

how can I trust  
what I  
cannot control?

The color commands  
my suspicion,  
though awestruck

in my simple  
response, reduced  
to essence

just now  
I am beginning  
to understand.

## HOW LIGHT COMES

*Ken Hada*

to us in late November  
after long night  
seeping slow through trees  
painting frozen grass –  
something new in the familiar.

I pause the universe,  
taste a fleeting glimpse  
of fading stars  
and can't help but feel  
a humble fortune.

I await the brightness  
of sun on cedars, the greening  
of light, the revelation  
of redbirds, bluebirds,  
juncos, downy woodpeckers

I await the fullness –  
the apex of what I am not.

## IF POCAHONTAS WERE MY ANCESTOR

*Margaret Dornaus*

I would want to know which name  
she would have me call her.  
Matoaka? Rebecca? Amonute?  
I would want to know  
who called her The Playful One.  
A bright stream between the hills.  
I would want to know how  
she felt corseted in stiff garments,  
kowtowing before a foreign court  
until she died of consumption  
far from her Tidewater birthplace.  
I would want to know what  
it was like never again to hear  
the names she was given by those  
who knew her as a bright stream  
between the hills, the playful one.  
I would want to know her.



## MELUSINA SPEAKS HER MIND

*Margaret Dornaus*

You say it's not possible  
but I know stranger truths exist  
in this world full of stories  
that my mother and her mother have  
passed down to me: legends  
of women careful to keep a part  
of themselves separate. Buried.  
Locked away for fear of speaking  
their minds. You call me wife, lover,  
mother. But you don't know  
what it is to suffer pain that comes  
in waves from cradle to grave.  
What cost to my heart must there be  
if I invite you to see me as I am?  
Shapeshifter. Hag. Mermaid.  
The winged dragon who leaves  
you scratching your head when  
I've had enough of lies and betrayal.  
Waiting for you to notice the fire  
left in my wake. The veil of mist  
rising from ancient, still waters.  
My upright hand clasped around  
a sword in the blinding light.

## **PICKED**

*Bill Garten*

The praying mantis lays her hummus  
Papier-Mache egg case on top  
of this red ripe tomato in my garden.

All summer she devoured pests to her point of pregnancy  
while I ate salads and veggie sandwiches  
trying to lose my mid-life belly.

Daily. now I check on this triangular-headed snake-like  
insect perched, seeking a male late among autumn plants.  
She is a serial killer of sorts - coupling, then turning

on her mate for nourishment for just enough strength to carry  
out the task of procreation. Take a life, give a life.

Tragedy dresses every day just like we do.

And here among the planted wooden stakes in my tomato garden,  
birth still waits next year on the remaining vines.

## LOST AND FOUND

*Terri Cummings*

I thought it was foul play  
His flat wilted by a garden  
Clouds huddled under a ceiling  
Enormity and its chill of silence  
paced to and fro

Christmas cards littered the floor  
unopened like a door to the kitchen  
where fish and chips re-named  
themselves as mold or rot or neglect  
Weeks, the theories drained

like a centrifuge. Holidays  
rang like his phone unanswered  
hinted something else  
like a cold front flattening its ears  
or a porch light switched off

Uncovered in a hospital morgue  
unclaimed as a missive or echo  
or whisper  
his shroud without pockets  
his face a half-poster – Missing

Letters arranged and rearranged  
but failed to form the word for loss  
I froze between the flash and slap—  
a loved one subtracted  
from the balance of life

Now the dropping suns  
of winters blot the blades  
of green and grief  
yet twilight hovers  
in the body of my sigh

## **MORTUARY**

*Terri Cummings*

Years it took  
to cross the floor  
yet when she arrived  
the door opened  
as if it knew the time

She entered another universe  
filled with silent cacophony  
Every turn of her head  
the color of his eyes  
unnerved the space

Strange the world renamed  
and she afraid of a rose  
blushing on a shelf  
thickening air with  
sympathy, unwanted

She, nothing  
more than a leaf  
transparent and curled  
into a comma, waits  
for a hint of his breath

## CONUNDRUM

*Terri Cummings*

In writing what cannot be written  
I welcome the hand of my mother  
Her history a journal, closed

yet desired as a leaf  
with a pattern of logic  
I struggle to learn who I am

by knowing who I loved  
Yet a moon rises  
from the stem of earth

different and alike  
like a month and a year  
merging into one language

## LADYBUG BLUES

*Charlie Ericson*

*"Continue to open your door to mud!"*  
*—John Ashbery, "The Mauve Notebook"*

Name me. Am I tattooed and taken still?  
Bend me. Does music shape my intervals?  
Do I belong to the baldness and brokenness of hills  
Or will the mold develop a gape, a sill  
Where I ache to breathe; this, imperceptible,  
Names. Me, I am tattooed and taken still,  
Tasked with mimicking living stills,  
Tracing ancient hollow molded apples  
When I belong to the baldness and brokenness, the mill  
Of lusty, shouting ladybugs who trill  
Along each other's lines and, bouncing, all  
Name me — I am tattooed and taken still.  
Dotting lines into being, ghosts of fills  
Chromatic and obscene. I beg to call  
Who I belong to: the bald and broken, the Will.  
A muffled cloudy screaming, that I've been killed,  
Allows me moments free to beg, so bells  
Name me, I tattoo and take the still  
Belonging to the baldness and brokenness of quills.

## I HEARD YOU PLAY

*Charlie Ericson*

Your fiddle croons and wails my name to night-  
time skies all lit with frozen stars, in strands  
of ancient melodies re-lyricized  
to hit me harder, gloves are off of sharp  
staccato stabbing strikes that stop my heart  
for half a beat and chase me down along  
a lonesome alleyway with long extremes  
imposing forests on my cityscape  
the bowstring pulling back

recoiling on  
unmuzzled dorsal zones before release  
finite arpeggios expose my guts

An endless coda comes, but it's less sharp:  
soft sting of antiseptic wipes to soothe  
me. In the end, I'm cradled by resolve.

## WHITE KNIGHT

### or, A Bad Drug Deal

*Charlie Ericson*

“How hard can it be to get Benny these days,”  
while hands ignored the wheel,  
“there’s no extreme of ecstasy  
that fires and repeals

(like classic benzedrine can do)  
the xanax dragons, booze—  
contraption-aches and pains that try  
to lock me up in holes

of mud and muck and dragging spots,”  
the wheels abandoned lines  
but jerked themselves into safer space  
“and if I don’t get high

I’ll get locked, in this lonesome hole in the sky  
and clouds will come obscure  
my world so no one else can see  
me hiding.” Screeching cure

escaped the brakes to wrap around  
our nostril hairs and tug  
release from our ancient-stemming brains.  
The seats and leather hugged

our necks. Pervading silence glared in red  
and knife-edge engines rolled  
then barked and leapt in vital green  
“Please. Please. Just call—

this can’t be the last or only time—  
I feel alright, my dude,  
I’m stuck in this tower of slow  
and however crass or rude

it is, I need my heroic mind,  
the one I’ve got right now  
but not the one I’m used to, dull,  
empty—”



## WINTER

*Aprryl Fox*

The sight and sound of color does not exist.  
It is a make-shift promise that belittles all else.  
The wintertime is cold, colder than Hades,  
And it goes through your entire body and into  
Your bones. Your bones are colder than you know.

The straightness of it, the grandness of winter-  
Everything is moving slightly to the left.  
The deceased will not dwell here,  
The shadows will not move, ever so slight.  
Some things are better left unsaid.

Color is like a movement that bends and waves.  
Everything waves as if in a dream.  
We are born here, and then we die.  
The dying is simple in form; and then we rise  
From our ashes.

Heaven takes flight.

No bones about it.

**AND SHE THOUGHT THE NAMES OF HER CHILDREN WOULD BE...**

*Apryl Fox*

She sat staring at the parking lot, in the middle  
Of winter, thinking about all the names she could name  
Her unborn children. Rome, Monte Carlo, or Garden City—

These names rolled off her tongue like red wine,  
Places she dreamt of visiting before she would have the children

She was destined to have. She thought she was supposed to  
Have children. She thought it was supposed to be her dream.  
But the names of children-Sarah, Robert, Poinsettia—they didn't

Feel right, they gave her an unsettling feeling in the back of  
Her mind, the way a spider bite would, as if it were biting  
Her insides, slowly emptying in the void she called her heart.

Even though she was married, she was bitterly lonely and thought  
She might visit Mexico City one day and paint a portrait of a homeless  
Man, perhaps someone she met outside a soup kitchen one day,

Just strolling around as if he had no care in the world.  
That's how she wanted her life to be like. Walking about with no  
Care in the world, homeless, but living off the land.



**SKATE PARK CYCLISTS**, *George L. Stein*, Photography, (sunset, Michigan City, Indiana, in the shadow of the exhaust tower, nipsco)



**URBEX SHOT**, *George L. Stein*, Photography, (Goodman mining equipment factory, south side, Chicago, motor room for the elevator)

## THE POISONED RAT

*Philip de Winter*

"Bonehead!" snorted Howard, picking out the fresh young lettuces from where Russell had dumped them in the weed bin. "You're useless! Do you honestly think weeds grow in lines?"

Russell sniffed and snuffled and would have wiped his nose if his hands hadn't been so dirty. They were in the back garden. He was helping his father weed the vegetable patch, having no fun at all. Gardening was dull and uninteresting; and anyway, he was useless at it.

"Well, I didn't know," he complained. "You didn't tell me."

"I shouldn't HAVE to tell you," retorted Howard, carefully putting the lettuces to one side for re-planting later on. "If you weren't so stupid, you'd just KNOW."

He picked up the garden fork he was using to dig the muddy earth. Russell had used it earlier on, but only until he had accidentally impaled a worm on one of its prongs, then he had thrown it down in disgust. His father had contemptuously snatched it back up, and Russell had watched, horrified, as he had flicked away the worm with his finger and then ground it into the path with his boot.

"Why do we have to pull out weeds anyway?" Russell asked. He was back on his hands and knees, admiring a dandelion in bloom.

"Just pull it out," growled his father.

Russell pulled it out. A beetle dropped from its roots onto his knee. He yelled in fright and scrambled to his feet.

"There's a . . . thing on me!" he exclaimed, frantically brushing his legs.

"It's just a beetle," sneered Howard. "What's the matter with you?"

He bent down to snatch up the beetle from the soil then held it out in his hand.

"Look at it then, you clod," he told Russell. "It won't hurt you. Believe me, it's a lot more frightened than you are."

Russell studied the beetle from a safe distance. It was running in circles around his father's palm. It did look frightened, but in a way that only made things worse. It scuttled to the top of Howard's index finger and balanced there precariously, looking as though it might be weighing up its chances of surviving the drop.

"See!" laughed Howard. "It's terrified." He crushed it with his thumb and casually wiped off its remains on his trousers. "You're going to have to get used to insects, son, else how will you be when you get your own garden?"

"I don't think I'll have one," gulped Russell.

"Not have one!" said Howard. "Don't be so daft. Everybody has a garden." He rammed the fork into the ground, aiming at something Russell had already spotted wriggling across the soil. "Not have a garden!" he snorted. "Idiot."

They carried on weeding until his mother called out that lunch was ready. Then his father showed him how to clean the garden fork and they walked back up the path to the house. Howard led. Russell followed more slowly behind him, carefully stepping over the snails his father had buried in salt, skirting around the wet paving slabs where his mother had discovered an ants' nest and flooded it with hot water.

At the back of their house, on one side of the patio that Howard had laid, there was a wooden tool shed. As Russell passed it, about to kick off his muddy wellingtons, he thought he saw a movement of some kind under its raised floorboards. He stopped and bent down to take a closer look, and came face to face with a rat.

"Look!" he smiled, as the rat emerged from under the shed.

It was a big one, covered in sleek black fur, with a tail almost as long as its body. It glanced briefly at Russell and then scampered - or at least tried to scamper - away across the lawn. It managed only a few yards before it stopped, then slowly it keeled over onto its back.

"Oh, it's poorly," said Russell, screwing up his face in concern.

"Got one of the buggers!" whooped Howard triumphantly. He flung open the shed door and reached inside to retrieve a short wooden post. It was to be part of a garden fence he was planning to erect. "It's not poorly, you blockhead," he told Russell, "it's poisoned. See all that white stuff coming out of its mouth? That's because it's eaten the poison I put down."

"Oh, no!" gasped Russell. "How will we make it better?"

"God give me strength," grumbled Howard. He held out the wooden post. "Here, hit it with this."

Russell shrank away.

"Russell! Oh, don't be so bloody soft. You've got to learn how to kill rats sooner or later."

Lassie, their pet dog, appeared at the back window of the house. She saw the rat. Her body began to quiver.

"If you don't kill it," warned Howard, "then Lassie'll get it and then she'll be poisoned as well." He forced the post into Russell's unwilling hands. "You don't want to be responsible for that, do you? Don't tell me you want to kill Lassie?"

The rat had regained its feet and was staggering slowly away from them. Russell looked desperately from the rat to Lassie, then to his mother who had also come to the window. She was smiling at him. Reluctantly, with his father at his side, he followed the rat and caught up with it.

"Hit it then!"

Russell tapped it on the back with the post. It flinched, scurried a few feet, then stopped.

"Harder than that, you bonehead! Really belt it!"

Lassie had begun to howl furiously, scratching at the window with her claws. Russell caught up with the rat again. It was looking at him. He wished it would run. Howard was egging him on: "Hit it on the head. Hit it as hard as you can. Go on, hit it. Hit it!"

Russell lifted the post and brought it down with all his strength on top of the rat's head. He felt the vibrations of cracking bone run up through his arms. The rat somersaulted into the air, landed on its back, and began to writhe in agony.

"Again, again!" shouted Howard.

Russell hit it again, this time in its exposed chest. Ribs cracked. Blood appeared around its mouth. He hit it again. It let out a choking squeal.

"Go for its head," said Howard. "Don't go for its body, it's kicking too much."

Russell went for its head, then its neck, then its snout, swinging the post more and more frenziedly. All he wanted was for the rat to be still, then he wouldn't have to hit it anymore. He closed his eyes and beat it into a fleshy pulp. If his father hadn't taken the post off him he would just have carried on and on.

"That's enough, son. Don't get carried away."

Russell hung his head. He thought he might be sick. He couldn't look at what was left of the rat. He couldn't look at his father either.

"Well done," smiled Howard. "You're crap at most things, but at least you can kill rats. And you had fun too, didn't you? I could tell." He draped his arm around his son's shoulders. "Come on, let's go and have some dinner."

## LIKE A CHILD

*Samuel Cole*

I did it. I confess. I stole Maya Vanheel's Sony Walkman, Phil Collins CD, and spongy earphones in the summer between sixth and seventh grade. I've held this secret for twenty-two years, stirring like a reoccurring migraine, showing up when I least expect it. Like today, at the Twitter feed news of Maya Vanheel's death.

Back in boyhood, when I fell asleep without medication, Walkmans and CD's, because they were expensive and because I was poor, suffused my easy dreams. Poverty bothered certain people in town, especially Maya's older brothers who gave me the nickname scum-bum and stuck it to me in and after school. How I survived junior high is a testimony to watchful teachers taking, and fact-checking, morning roll-call.

Maya's family lived next door in deeper, single wide squalor. At least we owned a black station wagon and had a 5-changer CD player (a gift won at church bingo). If only we'd have won a few CD's.

The idea of thievery first hit me on a humid summer afternoon. Maya was sitting alone on a concrete picnic table in Windell Park, named after some town founder who discovered it in 18-who-gives-a-shit. Windell Park was once fertile ground to a working sawmill, thanks in large part to the river in the middle of town with a ten-foot waterfall. Like everything in town, Windell Park had become a real, stinky dump. The waterfall poured as many Styrofoam cups, candy wrappers, and tampons as it did water. Father said bigger cities with bigger resources didn't need to exploit any further our water.

The few wealthy people in town called Windell Park Satan's lair, causing mother, who was lured by the appetites of wealthy people, to forbid me to take one step in the park, except for every day of the week when she told me to get off my butt and go to the park and find something useful to sell at the weekly garage sale. I walked around Windell Park like a tourist, finding neither treasure nor frivolity, two things I dreamed of possessing, along with Maya's technological belongings.

I sat opposite Maya at the picnic table. Her eyelids were shut tight, tiny crow's feet splayed from the corner of her eyes. There we were: glare and squint; dirt and grim; body odor and watermelon perfume; Phil Collins and eager ears. The waterfall rushed fast, creating a misty barrier that loomed around us like fog. Sweaty, shirtless, and barefoot, I felt like a wild animal. I'd have sold my skin that day for some ice cream.

Maya opened her eyes. "Sussudio. Oh oh oh. Makes me nervous," she sang, pointing at me. "Makes me scared." I flicked her off, got up, and strolled to the edge of the river. With a small stick, I planned in the mushy sand my Walkman revenge. If she took Punkett Street, I'd spit at her behind Frank's Foods. If she headed up Hedger's Hill, I'd kick her at the summit and run downhill. If she cut through the middle of old man Camacho's corn field, no one would see me twist her arm and push her to the ground. And if she skipped down the street out in the open, I'd close her down by pushing her into an oncoming bus. Oh, the deliciousness, and naivety, of battle.

A green truck pulled into Windell Park. An old man stopped and scanned the park through an open window. Grey beard hair blew up and over his face.

"Keep this safe for me," Maya whispered, handing me the Walkman, Phil Collins, and the spongy earphones. She smelled more like rotten cantaloupe than watermelon. The bright-fright overshadowing her oval eyes titillated my burgeoning adolescence.

"Sure," I said. Dumb bitch. Stealing had never been easier.

"I'm going under the waterfall," she whispered. "I need to disappear for a few. Don't tell anyone where I went, okay."

I did the polite thing and scooped the contents into my arms, holding things like a hungry villain. She moved like wind and disappeared underneath the waterfall. She was fast and stealth. As if she'd done it before.

Grey Beard got out of the truck and walked around the park as if he owned it, looking intently for something he'd lost. "Damn it," he yelled, peeking behind trees and bushes and inside three, brown trash cans. "Come out, come out, wherever you are," he said, over and over. He opened the outhouse door, jumped in, and out, slamming the door so hard the top hinge snapped off.

"See something you like," he asked. Of course I was staring. His face was dry and sour. He glanced at my hands. "Those your things?"

"Yes."

He took the Walkman and squeezed, fissuring the shell. His gruff, hairy hands, three times the size of mine, crept into themselves. I couldn't speak, trapped both by his scariness and by my greediness.

"You witless or what?"

I glanced at the green truck, trying to memorize the license plate number. Which I couldn't decode. It was too far away.

He tossed the Walkman on the table. "You live in that dump beside the Vanheel's house, yeah?" His breath oozed alcohol. "You must know that Maya girl, then, you two being about the same age and all. What are you, about twelve?"

I gave him the peace sign and stuck the Walkman in the left pocket of my shorts. I put the headphones around my neck and stood.

"You two must go to school together, yeah?"

I looked at the waterfall, unable to see Maya's silhouette. She was good at hiding. I wasn't. "I gotta go." I walked away and didn't look back.

"Honey pot sweet as raspberry jelly," he yelled. "If you're lucky, maybe one day she'll give you a taste."

Maya Vanheel, if you're reading this, I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry.



## A MOTHERLESS CHILD

*Jacie Roberts*

We lie in our queen-sized bed beneath our grey comforter in the early morning, and I dread going to my first class of the day. His large body takes up most of the bed and puts off as much heat as the sun. I cling to his muscular arm, and he draws shapes on my shoulder with his finger. I think of a story to tell. Just as on every other day, I tell the stories, and he listens. I talk for hours, and he just smiles or laughs or scrunches up his bushy eyebrows when he is confused or concerned.

“Hmmm... Have I ever told you that I hated my aunt when I was a newborn?”

“No,” he whispers. “I don’t think you have.”

“Well, there was just something about my aunt’s face that always set me off. I sat quietly in my baby swing for hours just looking around the living room at everything. Then, each time my aunt visited I took one look at her and started screaming. Only my mother’s face could calm me down again.”

His groggy, blue eyes squeeze shut, and his large mouth opens wide. He bursts with laughter.

“You think I’m joking? Ask her the next time we see her.”

“So, you’ve been crazy from the start?”

I roll my eyes. I realize that I may have gone too far with the comment about my mother’s face, but he seems not to have noticed it. Throughout each moment of our relationship, I worry that he will resent me for my close relationship with my mother. We continue to laugh, and I chastise myself for not being more careful with my words around him.

\*\*\*

Nathan and I met in high school, he a senior and I a sophomore. Nathan seemed happy and unscarred. He only worried about the future and what a career in the military would hold for him. I didn’t know about the events he tried to forget. I stayed happy all the time with him. We went on adventures together, to lakes and parks and hiking trails, and the entire time I talked about my life, my family. My mother starred in these stories most often. Nathan seemed to enjoy listening to me talk, and I thought he loved the stories, but when I found out about his mother, I felt horrified to know I had gone on for hours about mine.

\*\*\*

Now, Nathan and I sit on our ancient brown couch as I do my homework and he watches TV. Our chubby little dog jumps into his lap, and he sings her a lullaby. He pets her softly with his large, rough hands just as he always does when he sings. This time, though, for no apparent reason, the melody he sings triggers a memory in me.

My brain jumps back to the time I sat crying on the edge of my bed at age six and my mother came in to console me. “What’s wrong, Babydoll?”

“I don’t know. I’m just sad.”

My mother always knew the one thing that would lift my spirits, so she sang, “Momma’s baby, her name is momma’s baby. What’s her name?”

I hesitated for a moment, looking at her then black, curly hair and the large gap between her two front teeth, and then replied, “Momma’s baby.”

“And whose baby is she?”

“Momma’s,” I said, with a happier tone this time.

“That’s right!” She pulled me into the side of her slender frame and told me how much she loved me for the hundredth time that day. I went to sleep a happy child that night.

As the memory fades from my mind and I try to refocus on my homework, Nathan asks if I am okay. Instead of bringing up my mother’s lullaby, which I know will hurt him, I say, “Did I ever tell you about the songs that Allyson and I used to write when we were children?” because telling him a story about my younger cousin is much safer.

\*\*\*

Nathan didn’t talk about his life before us until an entire year had passed in our relationship. I needed to know who he was before he met me, and I felt that he had secrets. I pleaded with him to tell me stories, but he simply claimed that my stories were always better. Finally, I became angry.

“I need to know that there was a you before us. I need to know the you without me,” I exclaimed over a teary phone call. “Why won’t you just tell me something, anything, about your life?”

I don’t know what I expected him to say when I prodded for facts and details, but I did not expect what he told me. I sat in the floor of my closet, my favorite place for thinking, and listened to him tell me about his horrible mother.

In his toddler years, before he can even remember, his parents split up, and his mother kept him away from his father. This didn’t feel too surprising. Many children’s parents divorced. My parents divorced.

She had bipolar disorder, but as a child Nathan didn’t understand why his mother constantly went back and forth from loving him to hating him. This is where I became confused. I knew nothing about the disorder, and I didn’t understand why she had never gotten treatment for it. His mother had his only childhood pet, a boxer named Star, put to sleep for no reason. She cared little about Nathan’s grades in school. She became furious with him for very silly reasons and once held a knife to him without any detection of a joke in her voice.

I stared at my ridiculous number of shoes lining the bottom of my closet and felt utterly helpless.

Nathan finally escaped from her by turning sixteen and walking to work every day until he saved enough money to buy a car. He stayed at friends’ houses until he reconnected with his father. He had not spoken to his mother in over four years.

I sobbed for three hours that night, each tear for this man that had been hurt before I could ever save him from it. I didn’t know what to say to make him feel better. I almost wished he hadn’t told me. When I saw him the next day, standing at my door in his blue T-shirt, khaki shorts, and non-matching tennis shoes, instead of dwelling on the tough subject I said, “Did I ever tell you about the six-month fight my sister and I had over my father’s old bowling trophy?” He cracked a smile and shook his head. “When I was about eleven years old, we found it in the back corner of our garage, and we both wanted it so badly.”

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“Nathan, I know what we can do today!” I call out through our small apartment. We both had a passion for paleontology as young children. When I woke this morning, the memory of my father taking me to the Sam Noble Natural History Museum in Norman, Oklahoma was fresh on my mind.

“Natural history museum. In Norman. It has fossils.”

“Okay, I’m in.”

As we make our way to each exhibit at the museum, I offer him details about the time my dad and I spent here. However, when my dad and I were making the same walk-through, I was not as cheery. My parents had recently divorced, and I had just turned thirteen. I could sense the hatred for my mother flowing through my father’s veins and his need for his child to be on his side. I enjoyed myself the best I could, but I had wished my mother could be there that day. I wanted her to converse with me about the dinosaurs and take pictures on her disposable camera and buy me paleontology books in the gift shop. I could never put my father on the pedestal where my mother stood. My mother and I have a bond, a likeness, and a wholesome love. My loyalty lies with her first and foremost.

I do not mention my mother as Nathan and I walk through the museum. I do not want to rip open his scars on such a happy day. I talk about father-daughter bonding time and describe the memory to Nathan as an entirely sweet one.

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The day Nathan and I got married, I received a private Facebook message from a woman named Penny. We had a private wedding, just a small group in the mountains of Arkansas. I was only eighteen, but my mother supported me in my decision to marry Nathan, and her opinion mattered most to me. My parents and stepparents and Nathan’s father and stepmother all came with us to Eureka Springs, Arkansas. We had a lovely dinner, and then we said “I do” in a tiny chapel in front of pine trees and a waterfall. I told Nathan the story of how my parents had gotten married in that very same town, and even though their marriage did not last, it felt important that my marriage start in the same place.

That evening, after my mom and stepmom had posted at least a thousand wedding photographs on Facebook, Penny messaged me and said, “Congratulations. I wish I could have been there.” I showed it to Nathan, asking if he knew anyone named Penny.

“That’s my mother. Don’t message her back.”

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My mother and I started doing yoga together the year before I left. We enjoyed the meditative time together. Any other time together that year we spent crying. Our eyes got watery at the smallest mention of my approaching wedding or the day I would move away with Nathan to go to university. My mother and I have become best friends over the years, and I cannot live without her. I cannot begin to imagine what Nathan feels like without such a relationship.

I cuddle up to him in the dark just before I drift off to sleep, and I consider that maybe if I tell them in just the right way, my stories about my mother will make him feel complete rather than tear him apart. I kiss him on the cheek and say, “Did I tell you that my mom said hi when I talked to her over the phone earlier?”

“No. You didn’t mention it. Tell her I said hi the next time she calls.”

“I will. She loves you like a son, you know. She’s been rooting for you the whole time.”

He simply says, “I know,” and then we escape into our separate dreams.

## THE ALTAR FOR NEWBORNS

*Joshua Wann*

The couple was overjoyed to say the least. The day had finally arrived! A bundle of joy! The new addition! The bun in the oven was done baking! She finally popped! After 9 months of pregnancy (what felt like 12 to the father and years for the mother), the couple's sweet baby girl had been born.

The day after the birth, the couple was still at the hospital waiting to make sure everybody was stable and the baby and mother could both be discharged to the satisfaction of the hospital and modern medicine. Between the rounds of nurses, doctors, and room attendants came a baby photographer.

She had: pink scrubs, a blonde pixie haircut, a Monroe piercing, black rimmed glasses, light blue sneakers, and a squeaky voice like a cartoon.

She explained the packages well and the new parents, that were still figuring out the trick to diapers, quickly agreed to an unreasonable one at a not bargain price. The photographer, whose name was Luna or Stella or Piper or Isla or Fallon, declared that she would fetch her props and return soon to take the pictures.

She did return soon, suspiciously quick, and brought in her equipment on a small metal cart. The husband thought the camera looked like it belonged to a different decade. The wife thought about if she should get a Monroe piercing or if she ruined that by having a baby.

"I brought in a few things that I think would look cute," said Luna or Stella.

After some fussing and struggling the newborn was adorned in an oversized purple wool beanie that looked like an owl and was two sizes too big.

"Aww!" and "Ohhh" the parents cried at the cuteness as Piper or Isla snapped away.

"Just a few more outfits and poses," said maybe Fallon.

Next, the baby girl was tucked next to a gargantuan teddy bear. The stuffing of this single giant teddy could've made a thousand bears for a thousand poor orphans.

"That's sweet," cooed the mother.

"Just a few more," said the photographer. She had taken close to a hundred and three thousand pictures, approximately.

Then the photographer brought out some ribbon and bows that the mother gasped, "that's darling" at. The baby was covered with these ornaments and "SNAP, SNAP, SNAP" went the camera.

"What about this?!" cried the eager photographer. She brought out a large freshly baked Belgian waffle the size of an end table. She sat the baby gingerly on it, the warmth lulling the infant to sleep, and then drizzled her with whip cream and a giant, red dyed cherry.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed the father.

"I have a few more ideas," winked the photographer and everyone felt like they were involved in the most adorable conspiracy ever thought up.

The photographer pulled out a woven basket filled with hundreds of puppies. The mix of puppies included golden retrievers, chocolate labs, and yorkies. She also had huskies, but she reserved those for baby boys only. The baby sat on the yowling, scampering herd of dogs and more pictures were taken.

"I know what now!" cried the photographer.

The photographer blew up thousands of pastel colored balloons. They filled the room. She strung out shimmering ribbons of silver and gold and scattered glitter with reckless abandon. The baby was tucked in-between several of the floating balloons and "CLICK, CLICK, CLICK" went the camera.

“Let’s try this!” and no one could object. It was all too cute.

The photographer had a pyramid of baby quiches constructed around the baby, the gaps filled in with chocolate éclairs. Platinum columns done in the fashion of ancient Greece stood at the base of the pyramid and shone in the bright sun.

After a few shots of this were taken, she assembled a parade of minimum wage workers in complete stuffed animal costumes to walk around the pyramid banging percussion instruments. It could’ve brought down Jericho!

The father and mother and photographer couldn’t believe the delightfulness of it all. What joy a newborn brought.

“Just about finished,” sighed the photographer. Streaks of sweat streamed down her angular face.

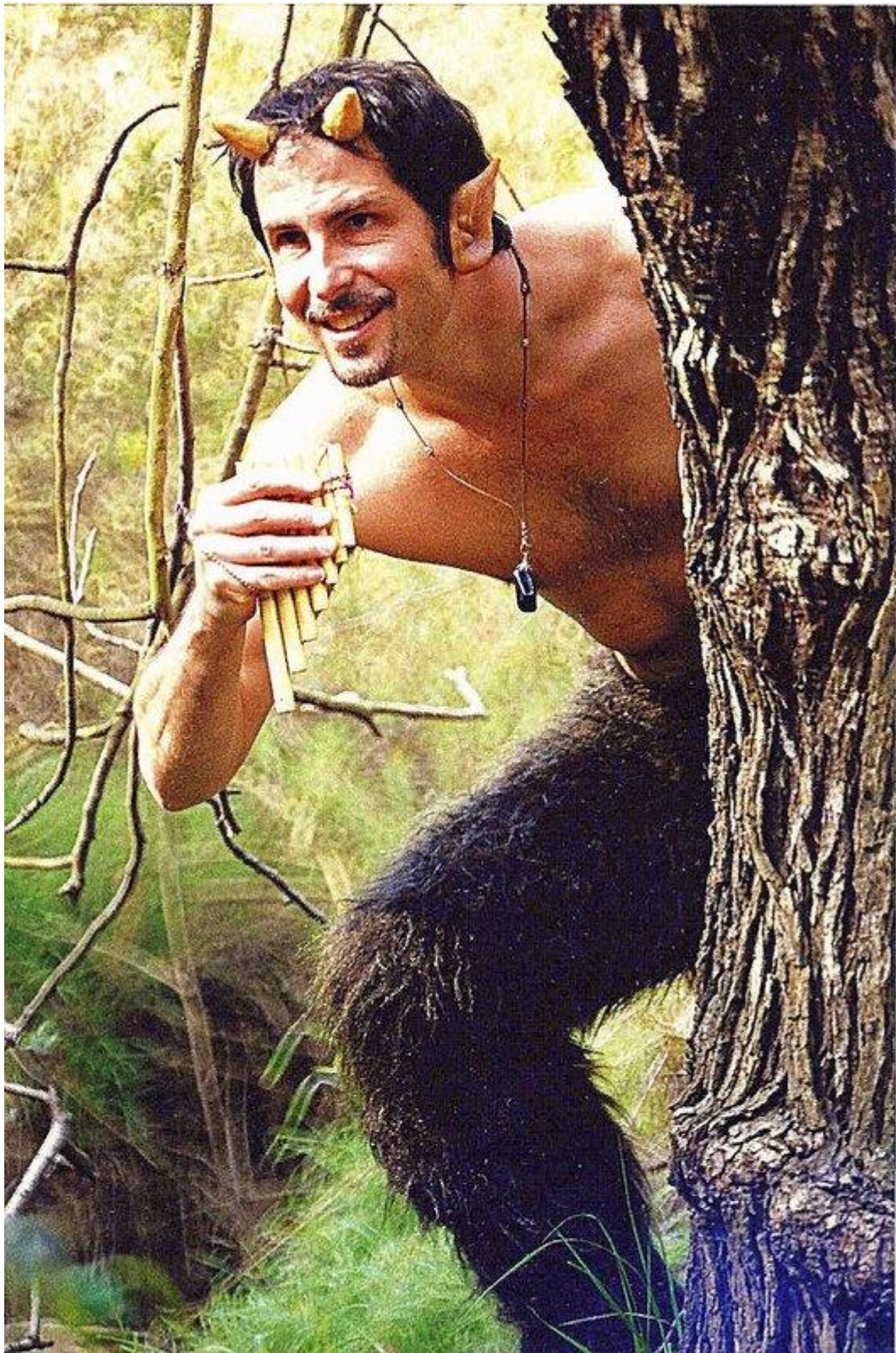
Next, she had a team of technicians calculate and set off an elaborate firework show, but only after the fog machine and laser lights were in place. The lighting for this was perfect, “especially considering the fire and color bursts,” conferred the photographer.

In the end, a circular aquarium was brought in and a duo of well-trained dolphins circled and leaped around the pyramid in perfect synchronization with the fireworks, lights, and also the newly added cannons. That’s right: cannons. Fuck yeah, cannons. Because...cannons.

After the stunt jet fighter pilots were paid and the retired Olympic gymnasts were thanked for their respective routines, the photographer gave the parents her card and explained they would be billed later and a CD with all the pictures would arrive in seven to ten business days.

Somewhere under all the glitz and glamour and superior showmanship was a newborn baby girl, asleep.





**LAUGHING SATYR,** *Rollin Jewett*, Photography





**HARPIES**, *Rollin Jewett*, Photography

**About the Images:** “I took all the photos with my digital Canon Powershot A720 IS.

*Arriving* was taken at Duke Gardens in Raleigh, NC using the camera’s macro feature for an extreme mid-flight close up of the bee arriving on the flower. I may have enhanced it with my Picasa photo program. *Harpies* was a photo I took of a flock of seagulls hovering over me as I fed them. Then I inverted the colors in my Picasa photo program to get the combination of shades and colors that I wanted. That was taken on a ferry ride from Fort Fisher to Southport, NC. *Laughing Satyr* is a self-portrait in Los Angeles Crest Forest. It came about because I am also a screenwriter, author and playwright and had written a modern-day fantasy script titled *Satyr* about a repressed Greek mythology professor who becomes a lustful beast. I couldn’t convince anyone else to wear the costume, so I did it myself. I was going to use the pictures as a way to illustrate what a satyr is and try to create interest in the project. There’s a scene in the script where he’s peeking out from behind a tree to surprise a female and then goes on to seduce her. The project has not yet been made, but that was the idea.”

—*Rollin Jewett*



**ARRIVING,** *Rollin Jewett*, Photography



## THE STAR

*Rollin Jewett*

Stanley Morgan strolled down the avenue thinking about what he would have for dinner that night, what was on TV, and whether to give Roger a call and play Black Ops later. He stopped walking when he reached the Mirror Palace, a store that sold...well, mirrors. Stanley liked to look at all the mirrors when he passed by. He was fascinated by all the reflections and enjoyed seeing himself in them. It was like an army of Stanley Morgans staring back at him, waiting for him to make a move so they could imitate it. He liked the idea of all those people looking at him. He smiled at his many reflections and continued walking.

A block from his house, he noticed a young girl walking close beside him, staring directly at him. He smiled and walked a little faster. She hurried to catch up. Stanley thought to himself, "Why is this girl staring at me?" He looked around him and didn't notice anything peculiar. Suddenly, the girl stopped walking. For some reason, Stanley did, too. The girl stepped up and examined him closely, then turned and walked briskly away. Stanley was totally bewildered. He shook his head and began walking again. He was almost to the corner when he saw the same girl, another girl and a boy walking excitedly toward him. They gathered around him, all staring intently. The new girl said, "You're right, it is him." The boy said, "Yep, that's him." Then all three of them were yelling, "It's him! It's Robert Reynolds!"

Stanley simply stood there with his mouth hanging open. He wanted to run but his feet wouldn't move. He looked around and suddenly more people were staring at him. People came out of the shops and stores around him to gawk. Stanley kept hearing them say, "It's Robert Reynolds."

"Who? someone asked.

"Robert Reynolds," came a reply.

"The star? I'm gonna get his autograph."

They started closing in on Stanley. There seemed to be dozens of them, yelling and screaming for him to autograph pieces of paper and begging for selfies.

They backed up against a store window and started sticking pens, paper and i-phones in his face. Stanley could barely move but through the sea of people, he saw their eyes take on a glazed look. He quickly grasped the absurdity of the situation: people whose biggest thrill was to get a name on a piece of paper or a picture with a celeb -- someone just like them. Stanley figured he might as well be this guy "Robert Reynolds" because he couldn't be any worse. He began signing autographs using his own name. He had only signed three autographs when someone reached around and grabbed his shirt collar. It ripped easily.

Then the whole world was on him. He felt a hundred hands on his shirt, a thousand on his pants. He could feel his clothes being torn from his body. They even lifted him off the ground to get his shoes. He was down to underwear and socks when a large woman got him in a bear hug and started to carry him through the crowd. She wasn't going to get just a piece of cloth or an autograph -- she would get the whole thing! She had almost succeeded in getting him outside the crowd when someone grabbed Stanley out of the large lady's grasp and shuffled him into a car. It was the police.

"You okay, Mr. Reynolds?" a policeman asked.

"Yes," said Stanley. "Please take me home." When they reached his apartment building, Stanley stumbled out of the car and up the stairs to his abode. Safe inside, he went straight to the shower and turned it on hot. He stayed in there a long time thinking about what had just happened. Had it really happened? Had he really been mistaken for a star? At that moment, in the safety of his shower he started to like the idea. Then a sudden shock ran through him and all

he could picture at that moment was thousands of people breaking into his bathroom with pencils and cameras. He shivered. He couldn't imagine people making such a fuss over this guy,

"Robert Reynolds." What was the big deal? The guy was just a good looking semi-talented actor. So? Everyone had talent in some way, right? Maybe it was his looks. Not everybody is good looking like Robert Reynolds. Are looks really able to play with the heart strings of people and evoke some form of love from them? Or was it charisma that made the star so irresistible? Maybe it was people. Perhaps they just need something to adore. Something they could really never have, and if they did, wouldn't know what to do with it. Something...or someone that would always be there and was constant and perfect. An idol whom, when actually appeared, faded. Perhaps it was a strange mix of all these things that made the star so irresistible. Or maybe it was, deep in our hearts, a jealousy which disguised itself as love, that makes us want to possess this superior being known as the star.

"The trick," thought Stanley, "is to believe that no one is better than you, that you are the best...or at least among them." He got out of the shower and dried off, examining his face in the mirror. Robert Reynolds? Really? Well, why not?

His cell phone rang. It was Roger asking if he wanted to game that night. Stanley responded in the affirmative, then asked Roger if he thought he looked like Robert Reynolds.

"Who?" asked Roger.

"Robert Reynolds. The star." said Stanley.

"Never heard of him," said Roger. "See you at eight."

Stanley hung up the phone feeling much, much better.

"But he's heard of Stanley Morgan," said Stanley to himself.

## THE STREETS OF TULSA

*Bill McCloud*

*(Marching for Hate Crime Protections for LGBTQ Individuals)*

The man said  
Thank you officer  
for keeping us safe  
we're very grateful to you

+++++++

The cop is standing  
biceps bulging  
between two women  
wearing "Persisted" hoodies

Starting at Kenosha  
going down 4th Street  
turning on Elgin  
told to stay on the sidewalks

The sidewalks are mostly broken  
yet no one stumbled  
walking over train tracks  
no longer in use

Car horns honk in agreement  
A big billboard says  
Welcome To Tulsa  
The Road to the Final Four

Left on 2nd and on to City Hall  
Drones buzzing around our heads  
chanting as we walk the sound  
bouncing off the buildings

Then divided temporarily as some  
have turned the corner ahead the  
sound is now like an echo that's heard  
its voice for the very first time

The young people and their young voices  
Look around the man said  
if you ever thought you were alone  
think that no more

Listening to speakers  
in front of City Hall  
I found a place to sit  
on a comfortable ledge

Then looking around I noticed  
I was the only one sitting  
everyone else was standing  
So I stood we all stood

Not long ago we were illegal  
We're threatened because of  
who we are and who we love  
And the horns were honking

I stand here now and I am  
loved and I'm proud and we  
cannot turn back the clock  
And the drones were buzzing  
For a while sitting on that ledge  
all I could see were dozens  
of pairs of shoes and they  
were all regular shoes

And I realized that  
just by looking at the shoes  
no one could have any idea who  
the people wearing them were

Then I stood and looked around  
at the faces and saw humanity  
the beautiful sunlit glowing  
faces of humanity

Then the challenge was passed  
from the Old Guard to the young  
to continue the fight and we sang  
don't be afraid to show your true colors

Then we traced our steps back  
March Madness the sign said  
and I could only hope that it  
was just a phrase about basketball

We walked back to the Equality Center

we were going back Home  
over still broken sidewalks  
but again no one stumbled

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And the man said  
Thank you officer  
and his reply was  
broken up between chants

But he made himself heard  
when he clearly said  
You're welcome  
we're glad you're here

## KISS FOR PRINCE

*Michael Snyder*

I was dreaming when I wrote this  
Forgive me if it goes astray

I awoke from paisley dayglow visions  
Of purple rain, doves, and purple haze,  
Little red corvettes and raspberry berets  
Extending royally for purple days  
Only to find  
It's really 1999  
Party over, oops, out of time

Prince is dead?  
It cannot be  
I won't hear it said!  
I won't have it, you see?  
It must be a hoax!  
I don't know where I heard it  
In the first place, and I suspect  
The source is not credible  
It is simply not possible  
That Prince Rogers Nelson  
Should cease to be  
So hot on the platform heels  
Of David Bowie,  
Another prince,  
Both Heroes—

The talk of the playground!  
Discussing Darling Nikki  
Who was, I guess, a sex fiend  
In, of all places, a hotel lobby  
Masturbating to a magazine!  
(Dig if you, will, a picture)  
We were all trying to figure out what that means  
And I learned a new word  
That I had never ever heard

Harken to the Sacred Text:  
Purple Rain on VHS  
I watched it at a friend's house  
On the North side of town with  
Alumni of a summer camp where  
Feeling heat, animals struck curious poses  
The tape melted into a glyph of purple roses

Diminutive, creamy  
Naked in a tub steamy  
Contemplating coos and cries of doves  
Freedom, joy, peace and love

Prince was a weirdo  
Prince was a genius  
Prince was a Witness  
He was better than Hendrix  
Prince was better than Clapton  
He was better than Clinton  
Outpaced all the jockeys  
that were there before him  
Even better than the King of Pop  
Yes, that's right, now don't blow your top  
Prince was better than MJ, way  
But our Prince has gone away  
I don't know why  
This is what it sounds like  
#when80skidscry  
It's truly 1999  
Party over, oops, out of time  
It's the End of the World as we know it  
And I'm not feeling fine  
Take Me with U

Prince of Peace  
I Would Die 4 U  
Little Prince Charming  
So alluring, it's alarming  
The Prince of Minneapolis  
Which is surely a City of Bliss  
Or is it Psychedelphia,  
Paisley Park's utopia

1999 came much too fast but  
Life is just a party and parties  
weren't meant to last

## OFFICE POLITRICKS

*Rajendra Shepherd*

Work, work, work, work, work and its septic turning points, even as we see them coming . . .

When did the dankest hole become my office,  
of e-mails and crap,  
skid marks and coupons for pizza,  
and “hold for Judy,”  
I’m farting,  
and charting the forex while pissing,  
pre-ordering lunch,  
at five in the morning,  
purging my ancestors,  
who waited till later?

My Renault a think tank,  
on a bend,  
scripting reports on the freeway,  
planning next week today,  
a fag and coffee at high speed,  
to squeeze into a tight park space,  
till when? The next 40 years?

My bed doubled as vacation,  
so burnt out I couldn’t roll,  
working a new pitch,  
on my pillow,  
and snoring a budget,  
to increase the markets,  
my duvet hugged tightly,  
as I dreamt to get back,  
and share sorrows with colleagues,  
hopefully failing without me.

\*\*\*

Are we so different from bison,  
asks Bob, by the cooler,  
their lives on broad shoulders,  
roaming for grass and a brush mate,  
aggressive fat cats,  
chasing their hoofs on the plains,  
as they search for new grazing,  
jaded by dotage?

Fuck yeah, I say,  
carpet beneath us,



as we traipse to the canteen,  
a line foraging before us,  
and I spy Richard the Accounts guy,  
his butt so appealing,  
and then the secretaries' scowls,  
competitive, Dick hunting.

We're waaay better,  
I protest irate and puffed-up,  
with an urge to blaze HR,  
swiping fries off a hotplate,  
the anxiety in my belly,  
at their empty outlines and process,  
so I dive for a toilet to purge,  
once again before a meeting in 15,  
oh to shit in my home loo,  
in peace.

\*\*\*

Remember 9 to 5 that left time for parties,  
after-work offers, I protest,  
of galleries and life drawing classes,  
romance and hopes of trips,  
to Paris, and for feisty Spaniards,  
the planning in stages,  
most lunchtimes and evenings,  
just to gloat about futures?

There was talk of scaling ladders,  
and smashing glass ceilings,  
golden handshakes and promotions,  
awards for long service, and pioneering,  
there was high-stress living,  
the trophy ulcer,  
and competitive coping on Nexium,  
and peppermint.

Gradually spreadsheets came home,  
swamped kitchen counters,  
stole weekend TV and hopeless kisses,  
for podcasts and crotches on FaceTime,  
the lure of the chase,  
dulled by Bob near retirement,  
mocking snow globe ambition,  
his Generation Told You So,  
waved off with my withering smile.

## THE WAR OF THE BUNTINGS

*Matt Poll*

Tim pushed aside the thorny bushes like saloon doors and stepped through to get a better angle on the tittering pack of birds.

“I wonder what those Parrotbills are saying?”

Among the smallest of bird species in Korea, Vinous-throated Parrotbills were also one of Tim’s favourites – essentially peach-hued lollipops with wings. Their tiny bills are set in faces so plain they wear permanently simple expressions, seemingly devoid of intelligence or nuance behind their ink-drop eyes. Their inquisitive demeanor, however, belies this first impression.

As he watched the Parrotbills, rustling from the far ditch drew Tim’s attention to the arrival of a new faction. A band of Yellow-throated Buntings percolated through the scrub along a narrow dirt track.

The species contrasts sharply with Parrotbills, looks-wise. Resembling dapper, streamlined, sparrows, their namesake yellow throats form part of a striking livery of alternating black, yellow, and white stripes across their heads and chests.

The Buntings lined up along the path opposite the Parrotbills in a line-abreast formation, and the two groups rasped away at each other. The air was charged with aggression.

Ooh, this’ll get interesting, Tim thought, and unshouldered his camera. The two species often scrapped in this area, and a crisp image of an inter-species clash would look great on the local birding blog.

“Hmm, looks like they’re lined up like medieval armies or something, ready to do battle—”

Siu-pee-wee-wee!

“...ha, that one Parrotbill looks like it’s screaming at all the others, like it’s the boss. Yeah, I really wish I knew what the heck they’re saying.”

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“I am...SILENCE...ALL WILL LISTEN! I am Queen Doxornis of Siu, sovereign of all Parrotbills in Shade Valley. You, Bunting Queen Beriza, fledge of Tsip-tsip-chee, will listen well. Our two clans have warred for an uncountable number of sun cycles, since before—”

A Bunting Wing-guard interrupted: “Reed-ditch is ours, you nub-billed gutter-creepers!”

“Glorified Tree Sparrows,” came the riposte from the Parrotbills. Soldiers on both sides jeered and swore. The Buntings were silenced by Beriza’s stern look and wing-wave.

Doxornis continued: “Ah, so the cycle of oppression and degradation continues. We Parrotbills can no longer countenance being second-class birds in Reed-ditch, perched on the outer stalks, exposed to dangers, acting as sentries while the Buntings gorge in safety. Your days here have ended, Beriza. Buntings hold sway in many lands, from Brownhill to the Mosswoods, but we Parrotbills have only these golden fronds, and shall no longer be subjugated within our rightful domain. Parrotbills shall rule Reed-ditch from this day and forevermore!”

This provoked ragged cheers from the Parrotbill troops, who flitted excitedly through the reeds. Queen Beriza ruffled her feathers and pointed her bill high in the air with a laugh.

“A queen? Is that what you call yourself? You are the queen of peasants. Parrotbills rule nothing around here. I’ll not perch here and listen to this, the insolent warblings of a... Parrotbill. Hmph.”

Doxornis chirped up again: “You divide us, and we fail together, instead of uniting for mutual protection. Are we not equals in the balance of frailty in this valley? Merely sky meat in

the eyes of the Powerline Kestrels? A snack for the Sparrowhawks of Dimwoods? Are we not both at the bottom of the grand pecking order?"

More Parrotbill cheers, and even some from the Bunting side.

"We used to be allies. My uncle Pink-beard, and your—"

Beriza cut Doxornis off. "Oh, but we have joined forces recently — my Buntings took up the scolding when the Blood-shrikes tried to establish nests just there, one half sun cycle ago."

"Yes, but where are your sentries when the Cuckoos come during every flowering cycle, and we lose half our nests to their insidious eggspawn. Even I raised a Cuckoo last flowering. They are too smart for us. Had we worked together, we could have—"

"Nonsense, you dwarf Starling. All birds suffer the—"

"No, Beriza. Shrikes merely cull our weak, but the Cuckoos threaten our future flocks, and you very well know they target our nests more than Buntings. No doubt this arrangement suits you nicely. Even the Wagtails of Stoneditch answered our alarm shrills and joined the mobbing of Cuckoos, while the Buntings watched from the safety of the reeds."

"You think you're alone in being duped? Have you met Pabo-gugi yet? Raised by my sister, Yellow-stripes. He thinks he's a Bunting Wing-guard."

A scruffy juvenile Cuckoo at the back of the Bunting ranks, much larger than his fellow warriors, perked up.

"Choo-ee I'm a BUNTING!" the bird shrilled.

Laughter and face-wings from both sides of the trail.

"We would never expose ourselves to peril to defend a Parrotbill, so you see, we are past words now. The battle is upon us. Whichever side prevails shall control these lands. The vanquished will take their flock and find a new home range in the Great Scrub Lowlands and never reappear in Shade Valley," Beriza said, and the Bunting troopers cheered and readied for battle.

Doxornis held up a wing.

"No. I don't see why our loyal Wing-guards should suffer beak-slashes and death. Let the struggle be yours and mine alone, Beriza. A tail-feather showdown."

Gasps from the Wing-guards. Beriza flared her crest.

"If that's how it is, then let us tangle, Doxornis."

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Tim watched as a single Parrotbill and Bunting met in the centre of the path and had a three-second hover-scuffle that saw them clatter their bills together twice, before tumbling and rolling in the dust. When it was over, the Parrotbill stood over the prostrate Bunting, with the Bunting's black-and-white outer tail feather held in its bill.

Both birds fluffed up their feathers then flew back to their side of the trail. The Parrotbills erupted into a rippling chitter-cheer.

"Ha, what a cute little fight," Tim mumbled. A quick scan of the skies above revealed nothing but sickly yellow skies. As he turned and headed back towards the miserable language academy where he worked, the Buntings trickled down the valley. They never returned.

## THE PUNCH

*Bill Boudreau*

“Pop!” and Sam fell to the floor like a block of cement.

It was a Friday night and the usual clique had clamored Joe’s Bar, a popular neighborhood hang-out. The group played pool, told jokes, competed at dart throwing, and drank. Sam, one of the regulars, sometimes consumed too much alcohol, became obnoxious and insulting. The gang knew Sam and ignored him when he reached that state.

That night, a stranger sat alone at the bar, minding his own business.

By ten o’clock, Sam felt smart-ass, sassy. He wasn’t getting the attention from his pals. So, he went to the bar and sat next to the stranger. “Hi, there, guy! What’s your name?” Sam said.

The stranger didn’t say a word, kept staring at his drink.

Sam pulled on the stranger’s arm. “Listen to me, I’m talking to you. Do you hear me?”

“You better let go,” the stranger said.

“What do you mean? ‘I better let go.’”

Sam didn’t.

“Wham!”

When Sam came to, all his friends looked down at him.

“What happened?” Sam said. “Where am I?”

“You dumb ass,” Jim said. “D’you know who you pestered?”

“Who?”

“Rocky the Rock.”

“The boxer?”

“That’s right,” Jim said.

They helped Sam get up.

## THE CIGAR LESSON

*Bill Boudreau*

Billy was eight years old. He had stolen a cigar from his grandpa and wanted to smoke it. He thought it would make him manly. Billy fetched his friend, Joey, of the same age. Together they went behind the barn. Billy lit the cigar, sucked the smoke in his cheeks and let it out quickly. He then gave the cigar to Joey. Joey puffed and said, "This is good." He gave the cigar back to Billy who inhaled a deeper drag. Joey imitated Billy.

After repeating the cycle several times, the cigar did not taste so good.

"My belly hurts," Joey said.

Billy sucked in a long intake. He coughed and coughed. "I think I'm going...to... throw up.

"Billy, your face is white," Joey said.

Both boys lay on the ground. Curled up, moaning, pale faced, and holding their bellies.

"I feel sick, my head turns," Joey said.

"Me...too," replied Billy. "Are we going to die?"

All this time, around the corner, Billy's grandpa had been peeking and chuckling.

He approached the boys, looked down at them, and said, "Ahah! this is one lesson you've learned by doing."

## JOURNEY TO REDEMPTION

*Bill Boudreau*

Decades ago, I mounted Lightning, the flame-colored stallion of life, and rode away from my birthplace. I'd never ridden before. Naïve and unaware of the perils of the world, I spurred Lightning at full canter in the direction of my youthful dream, a place I'd fantasized. I let Lightning gallop at will, free rein, toward that destination.

Visions of a new world excited me, then. Images of glory prodded me like a sword at my back. A world of excess sizzled my aspiration. Unwittingly, I was vulnerable to the sweetness of the flesh. Primal voices beckoned me. An appetite for new knowledge stirred my intellect. Hunger to achieve taunted me.

Sometimes in my sleep, I still hear a song my grandfather sang to me—If you only knew what's in front of you, my Child, my Child /If I could only tell that all will be well, my Child, my Child...

The trail had been long and winding. Looking back, I can see where we'd trotted, and a single road had faced me. We all have gauntlets to endure. For each one of us, it's unique, and many times, of our own making.

In earlier days, I didn't know what was around the corner. Perhaps, if I'd known, I wouldn't have gone forward—a blessing, a curse?

Time went on.

Lightning didn't want to gallop as often.

Fire that had ignited my spirit years before, continued to burn, but at a diminished heat—a warm flame that didn't char the soul. Kept my essence vibrant.

Arriving in front of a rocky cliff, more like a tower. I dismounted, looked up at the stone rise that reminded me of a temple, a shrine, or an altar. I couldn't determine whether man, nature, or some super being had built the twenty to thirty-foot structure that could have been a monument, marking a significant entity.

I stared upward. A feeling of inferiority pressed on me, as if being judged. I pondered at an opening about fifteen feet up the wall of the precipice—an entrance, or just a hole in the rock?

Away from the tower, a mile or so, there flowed a tranquil river, and on the far shore, lush vegetation flourished—trees, fertile slopes, and valleys. Mountains penetrated the clouds. Animals and birds frolicked at the water's edge. Nature's kaleidoscope. The wind blew aromatic scent from that distant bank.

Then, the breeze changed direction, and on this side of the river, a frisky dust devil swirled sand in my face.

The arid basin leading to the monolith, lay dry, red-dirt deprived of nutrients. Why? The earth was hard and cracked like a jigsaw puzzle.

A band of horses appeared out of red bluffs' shadows. They stopped and stared at us. Lightning returned their gaze. Then he turned to me. I read his eyes. He wanted to join them, and sadness filled my heart. I couldn't do anything about it. I didn't own him. Before the dust settled, he became one of them, and together galloped along the river northward and up into a dark, almost black, cloud that began to move my way.

The huge sky-body seemed angry. Flashes illuminated the dark mass like neon in a pitch-black night. Reverberating thunder shook my guts. I felt so alone, trapped in a terrible storm. The monster cloud had intelligence. It wanted to hurt me.

Beyond the river, a clear sky met the horizon. But over me, rain began to fall hard. At the base of the rock-wall, I stooped under a stone awning, felt entombed. Thunderbolts rumbled, snapped, lightning zigzagged above the tower. It rained so hard that in a short time the water

rose around my feet. In a fetal position, I remained still for almost a half hour. The storm didn't let go, it spat hail.

The wind rose, the pellets hurt me. How could I get away—cliff's opening above me? I must get to it, like a spider, crawl upward along the surface to that hole.

Out of the crevice, I stood, hugged the cliff, grabbing stone niches. Drenched, the wind, rain, and hail hit my back with such force that I screamed. Sluggishly, I inched upward. My shirt ripped opened. I scraped, bruised my skin. It seemed like an eternity. Finally, I reached the opening and climbed into a rocky lobby.

Moments later, the storm cloud vanished. Scared, tired, wet, and chilled, I turned and peered into the cave. A throat? Uninvited images stormed my brain. Did the cave contain the corridors of my conscience? Did I dare explore its hallways and mazes?

I turned and stuck my head outside. A lightning bolt struck the side of the entrance. I retreated and understood. I had no choice, the time had come.

Inward, like evil eyes, two openings into caves. I stared. Where did they lead? Would they take me to the core my inner being, discover who I really am? Did I want to know? Deep in my psyche, there were faint, almost forgotten deeds I would've rather not revisit. Was that what I must go through before it's over?

Doubts pervaded my thoughts. My moment of judgment? Who's to be my judge? Did the truth resided in those rocks? I feared to know. I stood still, pondering.

Then, I stepped forward, closer to the entrances. I debated which to enter and could not help but believe that, inside, existed my true self. I shivered as I deliberated. What if I came face to face with my misdeeds—people I've cheated, lied to, harmed, and they know about it, and want an explanation, wanting to know why I did what I did? Was that my final confession, last confrontation with myself?

Standing in front of the right entrance, on uncertain legs, I forced a heavy foot inward. Consumed, somehow, I knew I was about to begin an extraordinary journey.

About twenty feet into the cold, dark, corridor, I saw faint lights at perhaps twenty-five-foot intervals. In near darkness, balancing myself, I felt the pick's rugged marks on either side. In cautious steps, I moved ahead. The ceiling hung less than a foot above my head. An uncomfortable temperature shrouded my body. Deeper into the tunnel, a humid chill stuck to my skin. Feeling of helplessness came over me. A stench seeped up my nostrils, a scent I'd never sniffed before. Organic decay? In twilight, moisture glazed the passage. Other than drips, quietude engulfed me. An evil silence?

I concluded that I'd no choice but to wander the catacombs of my soul.



**BROTHERS,** *Fabrice Poussin*, Photography

**About the Images:** “The American West is such a magical world. Capturing chimneys of stone, mountains that look like Gods, devils, chimneys, or other familiar subjects, one cannot help but commune with this world. It is the best place to be, to exist, to feel truly human and complete.”

—*Fabrice Poussin*





**Guarding the Valley,** *Fabrice Poussin*, Photography



**SYMPHONY**, *Fabrice Poussin*, Photography

## TO A MIMBRES WOMAN

*Marty Eberhardt*

I see your thousand-year-old thumb print  
On the plain brown potsherd.  
My own thumb fits perfectly  
In the curve you left.  
Other more elegant pottery bits  
Lie among rocks and junipers  
On this hill of dry grasses.  
Red-on-white interwoven geometry,  
A tasseled quail,  
Designs fine as any  
In the art galleries of the town.

But it is this plain brown piece that draws me.  
My thumb seeks the curved place, again.  
I see you forming the pot  
From coils of clay,  
You look out out over fields of corn and beans  
In the valley below.  
Then, as now, a red-tailed hawk dips,  
A horned lizard scurries under a stone  
That forms the village wall.  
Beyond the fields  
Green cottonwoods mark the river  
Between jagged hills.  
The wind shakes their leaves like a gourd rattle.  
In the quiet between gusts,  
The river rushes below, monsoon-strong.

It is in these wild places,  
Where our thumbs  
Feel the curve of another's hand,  
Places free from cement, neon, asphalt, smog,  
And deadened water,  
Across years,  
Across cultures and countries,  
Beyond all reason,  
We find each other.

## DESERT MOUNTAIN

*Marty Eberhardt*

At dawn,  
I breathe limitless desert sky  
Softened by an occasional cloud.  
The sun warms my gaze –  
I could walk for days  
Towards the sharp mountain  
At world's rim.

By noon,  
Lips flaking, canteen empty,  
I seek a spot of shade  
Along a dry arroyo.  
Now I long for tall mountain trees  
Close as blades of grass,  
Allowing only single shafts  
Of sun.  
Aspens, pines, Douglas fir;  
The comfort of closeness, darkness,  
Deep mulch.

I drive up the mountain.  
Cactus studded cliffs give way to oaks;  
Tiny leathery leaves defying drought.  
Higher, a few burnt trunks  
Punctuate the pines.  
At the mountaintop,  
My forest sanctuary.  
I stand among tall, blackened poles.  
Fire has destroyed more than my desires.  
Thousands of feet above the desert floor  
The sun pounds much too close.

And yet,  
Small aspens sprout in places cleared by flames.  
Locust bushes sprawl.  
Perhaps,  
If seedlings don't yield to houses,  
If the mountain doesn't grow so warm  
That firs yield to pines,  
And pines to oaks,  
Perhaps this spot will once again  
Soothe desert dwellers,  
Though long past my time.  
I must find another patch  
Of dark forest,

Or seek an air-conditioned room  
Where I'll smile at pictures  
Of dappled light and flowing streams.

**DAWN**

*Marty Eberhardt*

Full moon  
Balanced in the crook of a pine.  
Six ravens skim the treetop,  
Followed by fifty more.  
They swoop in silence,  
Messengers of night's metamorphosis.  
I rise to them, and fly.  
Each wingbeat calls the light.

## **BODY OF EARTH**

*James Coburn*

Sun in curious flame  
Is boundless between breaths.  
Our night exhales what day begins.  
We forget sorrow on a bed of wildflowers.  
Bodily fusion. No one knows what's between us.  
Footprints blow away. Sand lands upon infinity,  
We are colors of prism light.  
We imprint footsteps without a trace.  
Known by wind restless over vines  
clinging to ground, spreading wild.  
Lightening bugs  
warm the air for moon's curious stare.  
Twilight holds night and day.  
Jungle orchids  
wrap around us spreading to the sea.  
Down cliffs to the dawn of existence,  
We are cresting waves.  
Depth breaks loose to breathe heaven;  
touching cities, farmland, woodland and blackberries.  
We are the origin of every season, primordial creature  
and falling snowflake.  
The hum of life is upon us.  
Every ancestor of man knows us, every living cell.  
Sun in curious flame is boundless between breaths.  
Our night exhales what day begins.

## LAND OF PLENTY

*James Coburn*

Grain elevator basement fills with knee-deep storm water overnight near downtown Oklahoma City. Foreman Jack turns on the sump pump to dry the concrete floors.

Rats dart down a long conveyer belt, devouring their fill of grain. He steps backward pouring a stream of liquid to asphyxiate critters going about their business.

The next belt run lifts wheat to drop 75 feet to the bottom of the grain elevator bin. Dogs bark in the distance smelling cow hides from slaughter. A train passes. An old hobo living in a small room rolls his own tobacco. Jim is a bigoted remnant of Gotebo where he abandoned life as a welder during the Great Depression.

"God damn, God damn, God damn," he hoots and hollers, speaking of a "railroad sow, buck and their pikinini."

He sips coffee from a tin cup as he looks for Jack. Tobacco smoke wafts down echo chambers mixing with putrid wasted grain shoveled out a window in line with a laborer and Jack's shoulders. 1961 transistor radio blares. Jack's rubber boots slosh about. He thinks of his fiancé he left that morning, warm in bed, wearing a cheap engagement ring.

Box cars arrive outside on tracks to transport wheat. Jack grips a rope ascending on pulley to the top of the grain elevator. He relies on arm muscle as sweat drips off them to land on a manual foot brake.

Jim descends down the metal ladder to the basement tunnel murmuring about Jack. Wheat dust collects on his gray whiskers. He strikes a match, blowing the place to smithereens; miles away from Jack's home. Miles away from the morning bus Jack took.

Nobody thinks of Jack in passing years. Little remains but the ink of a bygone newspaper still inside a heavy metal office safe 30 years later.

There stands a young black man intending to develop the area into downtown condos. In an envelope he finds a wedding announcement. As a child, Ben walked down the railroad tracks passing an old hobo.

Bricks protrude from an office sidewalk that Ben's dad set long ago. Bricks hard and steady, but worn on the edges as his parents' lives had been as white flight from desegregation settled in. Bricks would rise to build sleek condos, but not a life for the hobo whose hand his dad took, pulling him from rubble, too late.

Ben's parents didn't have to do that. But for them, kindness was never late.

## A TIGER'S DEMONS

*Suraj Alva*

Suyog watched Gordon's hands subtitling on air, recounting his misadventures from the previous night. While scouting the darker parts of town for less-miscegenated coke, Gordon was approached by two armed men.

"So, what did you do?" asked Suyog.

"I pissed myself and got outta the car, keys still in the ignition" said Gordon.

"Did you really piss on yourself?"

"Well, what'd you do? If two guns were in your face?"

"The same, I guess. But you lost your Beamer."

"I didn't lose it! I was robbed at gunpoint! Besides, my 'rents are getting me another."

The poor kid's still in shock, Suyog thought. Tired, he left the university dining hall and began his mile-long march home.

These night walks relaxed him, usually. He enjoyed the absence of light, of souls. But something was different tonight. Feeling a presence behind him, he turned to look. No body, He trembled slightly. Tense shoulders and tightening chest trickling his tread, he wished he owned a car. But why was he suddenly so paranoid? Was it because of what happened to Gordon last night? To distract himself, he thought of his sister, who was in a refugee camp back home. His only surviving relative, he prayed for her safety, her virginity.

A dog's bark clenched his fists. Resolve didn't rotate his head on its axis, this time. He kept praying. Shanti never boarded the boat leaving for India. Stranded in Sri Lanka, she found herself in a Vavuniya camp. Rumors of rape and other atrocities abounded. But Shanti assured him she remained untouched, safe. Defeated Tamils populated the camp, her people. Suyog grudged her for abandoning him. Damn that Fayis, Suyog thought. He was certain that that boy was the reason she stayed behind.

Suyog crossed the park adjacent his apartment complex. Arriving at an intersection, he paused and looked around. No one was about. As he stepped off the pavement, he was startled by the muffled roar of a car approaching from behind. He turned around. The car's headlights were off. Panic caught him by the throat. His heartbeat sounded out the underlining bass of a techno song. Rave red and blue flashed before his eyes.

He was back on his native island, on a rural back road leading to the Palk Strait. The night's darkness was suffocating, choking out flashlight beams in just a few meters. Their Land Cruiser had broken down. Forcing him, Shanti and his parents to walk the few miles to shore, where a boat was waiting. The boat was to evacuate them—along with other rebel leaders and their families—to India. His people, the Tamils of Sri Lanka—Tigers of the island—had lost their struggle for independence: The Sri Lankan tyranny having overwhelmed their meager numbers.

But even at war's end, the Demons refused to go back to hell. Their appetite for Tigers was insatiable: Lapping up the blood of Dominants their specialty. His father—a lieutenant in the separatist movement—hurried them on. Demon Brigadiers of the Lankan Special Forces were still out, hunting. Heads and hides of rebel commanders still fetched a high price. Light suddenly flooded the road in front of them. Suyog looked back and saw headlights fast approaching. His family scurried on into the trees lining the road. Before he could join them, the headlights switched off. The jungle plunged again into complete darkness.

Suyog, of course, didn't dare use his flashlight. Sound led him to where they were. Sitting on their haunches, they waited. The gentle purring of army Jeeps grew louder, until transformed into a stationery murmur, right where they had just been. Doors opened and shut, voices billowed out orders, feet shuffled. Suyog didn't dare breathe. Eternities were contained in



seconds, infinity in minutes. Miniature suns penetrated the foliage, revolving on suspended time. Finally, the doors opened again. Suyog heard the climbing of feet into vehicles. The doors shut, the murmur transformed into a roar, and four mouths exhaled relief. They started to get up, dusting dirt off their clothes, when Suyog's hearing registered only the sound of a half-muted whistle. Everything around him seemed to be in motion. The air grappled by an unnatural momentum, flung him to the ground.

A body fell on him, his father's. As if struck by lightning, his father jerked and bolted violently, the thud-thud-thud of thunder following. Until his body came to a gentle shiver—his nerves acting out the finale in life's last performance.

Shanti had found a boulder to hide behind. His mother wasn't so lucky. Afterwards, the men entered the jungle looking for his father's body. They let them go, directing them to a UN shelter—they were soldiers after all, not terrorists, the captain had said. Suyog used his father's connections to leave the country. Via Madras, London, and Toronto, he landed himself in California, on a student's visa. Shanti, after locating her fiancé, decided to stay back.

Plummeted into the present, he became aware of his temperate California surroundings. The car's headlights turned on and passed him.

Suyog didn't sleep that night. Two weeks later, he borrowed Gordon's new M3 and drove around the city's ghetto. He didn't know—what he was looking for. All he knew was that he didn't want to remember anything anymore.

## CHILI

*Terry Gresham*

I  
handed  
the  
world  
to  
her  
like a hot bowl of chili.  
She  
handed  
it  
back  
to  
me  
like a hot bowl of chili con carne.  
I said, "Chili is chili."  
"No, it's not," she said,  
as if I was supposed to add  
meat to the metaphor  
I had given her concerning  
the world.

I went on to ask her  
if she was thinking  
of the country  
Chile—  
a country of southwest  
South America with a long  
coastline?  
Or  
was she thinking  
about chili—  
a highly spiced dish made  
from red peppers,  
meat, and often beans?  
She said, "Yes."  
From that moment on  
I decided it was best  
to always  
hand  
her the world  
as if it were  
the world like a plate.  
This way she can add anything she wants.

## WILD ONIONS

*Terry Gresham*

Let us rise early with birds  
some day one morning  
shaking the dew off the plains.

We will begin by sleeping  
then we will wake up  
chasing lizards from our boots.

Then we'll go pull wild onions  
—breakfast will like them.  
Stay close, these onions are wild.

Yes, we will dream we are lost  
out there scared but still  
we will hunt the wild onion.

Comelinas on the left  
sagebrush on right so  
we best stay close to the road.

The buffalo grass will be  
two and half inch—large  
for these plains. 'Grows wild as well.

Remember, leaflets in three  
leave 'em be. Okay?  
'Those are poison plants. Leave 'em.

All we will want will be wild  
onions then breakfast.  
We best go check by the lake.

## STILL LIFE WITH A CAT

*Terry Gresham*

*"Time spent with a cat is never wasted." — Colette*

'They came in electric  
while I was trying to read a book  
called, "Darkest England," by Christopher Hope.  
And that was it.  
I had to put the book down.  
'They began to holler

and then they began to cry out  
and then they screamed  
and then they shouted  
and then they laughed at all things  
and then they whispered  
and then they pledged allegiance to something  
and then they began to sing  
and then they whistled Dixie  
and then they frowned  
and then they forgave themselves  
and then they began to sneer  
and then they found religion  
and then they expressed amusement, mirth, and scorn  
and then they sprang into action  
and then they quibbled amongst themselves  
and then they became lucid  
and then they showed me some hemp clothing  
and then they surprised themselves  
and then they began to sing again  
and then they over-threw the government  
and then they wrote the great American novel  
and then they lied to their parents  
and then they came to their senses  
and then they left  
like they had been un-plugged.

I'm alone now . . .

There is quiet here . . .

Astronomical silence!

A cat enters . . .

Now I can get back to my book about Darkest England.

## **WATCHING MY HEROES GET OLD**

*Robert Bermudez*

I stand and watch the sunset,  
Russet, then orange fading to pink,  
The cloud's gilded edges reflecting,  
Like God saying good night.

Slowly it dawns as it always does,  
With the inevitable ache of mythic echoes,  
The end of the Day is the start of the Night,  
The same spectacle through familiar eyes.

I can hear it whisper softly,  
You are watching your Heroes get old.

## HARD WINTER

*Ann Howells*

Sun locks its winter house—  
greystone walls, narrow windows.  
Solstice long past, there is no sign  
of rebirth. Hoarfrost-rimed trees,  
grey sky, brown grass,  
and shrubs pruned to twig  
show no returning.  
Groundhog fears his shadow;  
bones shiver with atavistic fear  
that drove ancients to build bonfires,  
gather evergreens, appease the gods.

A single aged live oak  
provides the single hint of life  
on our closed-up street.  
TV weatherman predicts frozen mist—  
miniscule pellets that sear exposed skin.  
I wonder idly  
why he has not named it frist  
as he named thundersnow,  
christened each devastating storm  
with a hero's name.

I recall summer companions,  
geckos basking my garden wall,  
absorbing brick-retained heat  
as evening cooled.  
I pray they've found some crevice  
or space beneath shingle,  
hibernate without frostbite.  
Life-abrading winds  
sweep coast to coast, propane prices soar,  
thousands suffer, try to warm  
with no electricity.  
Cold-related deaths are on the rise.

**PITTED~a ghazal**

*Ann Howells*

*We grow by doing things that aren't allowed.*

Wooden spoon thunks as Grandma stirs fig pulp.  
Jars rattle the sterilizer; kitchen holds its breath.

I use forbidden scissors to cut paper dolls.  
Misstep gouges a triangle from my knee.

Grandma wipes her forehead with her apron hem.  
Kettle wonders why canning takes place in August.

This is the summer of the seventeen-year-locusts.  
Single cylinder engines putt-putt slowly upriver.

Little girls sometimes do things they hadn't ought.  
I've learned that it works best if I'm not caught.

The dimple in my knee remains a shiny pink.  
Grandma's sweaty forehead swims my mind.

## SATURDAY AFTERNOONS

*Ann Howells*

He is absorbed  
by the little blue screen,  
intrigued by Kirk Douglas,  
John Wayne, and glory  
of the brave brotherhood  
who crawl through mud,  
lob grenades, set explosives,  
kill with garrote, bayonet,  
assorted lethal firearms.  
Battle is to men  
what childbirth is to women;  
at family gatherings,  
those who do not share  
the experience  
are shunted to the sidelines.  
Less womanly. Less manly.  
And though he served,  
he did not fight,  
harbors a masculine ache  
for the bonding,  
the validation battle provides.



## **DIRTY-GIRL PRAYERS**

*Leah Chaffins*

I wanted to say "Me too"  
But it meant waking the three-year-old  
Who sleeps  
At the bottom of the toy box she climbed in  
When the devil had finished. She pretended  
It was a coffin, like she had seen on cartoons.  
She pulled toys down upon herself  
Like dirt on a grave.  
The dirt  
For the dirty girl.  
The dead girl.

I wanted to say "Me too"  
But she was still  
Holding her breath so the devil wouldn't hear  
Her breathe and discover her in her toy-box coffin,  
But the devil found her  
Every time.  
From inside, she pulled the lid down,  
close her eyes, and saw the words  
She could not sing, "This Little Light of Mine"  
Please, please don't shine;  
Let me hide.  
Let me hide.  
Let me hide.

I wanted to say "Me too"  
But my voice was lost to laughing  
French poodles on a quilted vinyl box top  
Where tears failed to wash away  
Blood the devil left behind, blood  
Mopped up with torn Penelope Pitstop panties  
Thrown away in the church  
Bathroom trashcan. In those classrooms  
They told her Jesus saves  
And she believed and prayed,  
And prayed,  
And prayed,  
Even from the bottom of the coffin.  
"Dear Jesus, please don't let him find me."  
She wondered if Jesus cried when the nail entered  
And the blood flowed. Did he feel ashamed  
From the bottom of his tomb?  
Where was this promised salvation?  
"Jesus help me."

When the devil heard her prayers, he laughed,  
Told her Jesus didn't answer  
Dirty-girl prayers.  
And the devil hammered his nail  
Into her  
Again.



**STACK OF SKULLS**, *Holly Day*, 6" x 6" needlepoint, linen canvas and cotton thread

## MAN HANDS

*Anastasia Jill*

Maher's talk with his father left him disgruntled, but he never meant to vent that frustration onto his girlfriend. When he wandered into the kitchen, he found Vienna pacing with a lighter and one of her calming candles. She offered a shrug at his disputing glance. "Your mom said not to light these in the bedroom."

Despite himself, Mahen made no effort to catch his tone. "My father will have you in tears if he sees you with that at all."

"Ouch," Vienna said. "Who peed in your tea cup?"

"Take a guess," he said, gesturing down the hallway.

He never wanted to visit his parents again, but even at twenty-two, he was too disinclined to turn them down. They wanted to meet the girl they'd heard so much about from his older sister, and the days passed over his muscles, re-creating the tension he thought he moved past.

His father's prudent observance followed every kiss, every pet name, every casual show of affection. Bless Vienna's heart, she wouldn't compromise, even when she'd been warned to tone it down. She said she understood, but he knew she didn't. Even with her own history, she never had to fear the vehement subordination.

"Gimme a break," she said, tone bordering on wayward. "I don't have my incense or anything. I just need a space to chill and mediate." The lighter flicked on and off – one of her nervous habits –

and the click of metal, fluid, and plastic ticked at the remaining edges of his nerves.

Crossing his arms over his ribs, he huffed despite himself. "What could you possibly be upset about?"

An eyebrow raised. "You really have to ask?" Propping her backside on the counter, she pinched the slim wick between her fingers before bringing the flame to its edge.

"Get off the counter," he warned, pressing a hand into her lower back.

She slowly obliged, her movements guided by his as if he were the linchpin keeping her upright. Bringing the fire to her lips, she blew then lit it again.

He sighed and told her to knock it off before she woke his dad.

This time, she didn't listen, telling him to relax and that she'd only take a minute, and his father's words came to mind: "You let that girl do whatever she wants."

At the time, he was offended by the notion and for the first time in his life, stood up and said that Vienna wasn't his property. The man shook his head and stuck a nub of tobacco in his mouth before saying, "If your mother tried that crap with me..."

The sentence didn't need completion because he understood what that meant. By his father's standards, Vienna was scapegrace; too affectionate, too demanding, walked around like Mahen's regard was mutual.

What neither man said was the unspoken Garnand compliance: men can do what they want, but will pull the respect straight from his woman's bones if need be.

In the moments he spent stewing in his chagrin, Vienna had put out and ignited her candle several more times. This flame was consistent, the small ember burning the space between them. His rigidity went flaccid the moment she asked, "Are you okay?"

He told her yes, no, then, "I don't really know," the doubt in his voice too tangible to be unconvincing.

Vienna put her free hand on his shoulder and squeezed, not needing to say anything else. This synchronicity felt comfortable between them, as it would between any two people who

remained trapped in their respective traumatic vortices. She didn't need to tell him, but still, she said, "I get it."

Her father's weapon of choice had been his mouth and rolodex of slander until she apologized for breathing or existing. Mahen had no way of knowing the extent of that abuse, but the silent seconds like this, her solidarity pained him more than it helped. Her hand slid down his bare arm and into his palm, spreading her fingers like oil betwixt his. Her bones felt like fiber against his knuckles, and times like these made him more aware of their size difference. That softness looked and felt foreign, like it didn't belong with someone like him.

He wasn't like his father. He would never hurt her. He wanted to promise her again.

The moment was short lived when she yelled. Loud.

Making more noise when she fell back against the cupboard, she let out a string of cuss words and let the candle fall to the floor. "Goddamn...stupid..." She clutched her hand to her chest, slamming the lighter onto the counter.

"Would you keep your voice down?" he said, then saw the red wax stain the floor. "Jesus, Vienna, look what you did."

"I'm sorry." Her panicked voice regained its normal cheek. "But yeah, I'm alright. Thanks for asking."

He got down on his knees. "This is going to leave a stain."

"It's just wax."

"Red wax. On white tile."

If she noted his rising octaves, it didn't affect her response. "It's linoleum. That cost a quarter a square inch."

His chest sunk. "You just don't get it, do you?"

She pressed herself into the counter, the edge indenting her backside. He worked to clean the mess off the floor while she pried the wax from her skin. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to start anything."

"You did though." He stood up, a halfhearted foot kicking the fridge. "Would it kill you to think of someone besides yourself?"

Her grimace betrayed her hurt. "Your mom said it was alright."

"My mom's afraid of making anyone mad. She should have told you no."

Vienna apologized again. "What do you want me to do, kill myself?"

He slammed a hand on the counter. "How about think before you do something stupid!"

By this point, he was yelling. Boy, his father would be proud, especially by the cower sinking into Vienna's shoulders, or the grate of her voice as she apologized over and over. Mahen didn't care; he was sick of being walked all over.

He kept getting louder and louder, even when she told him to keep it down.

"Let them hear, let's wake the whole neighborhood up, Vienna!"

Her own cries were limp and hard to hear. "Mahen, please, don't talk to me like that."

"I'll talk to you however I want! This is my parent's house and I'll lose my temper if I want. Right? This is what you want? To start shit?"

A whisper came as she told him to stop, but suddenly, he towered over her. "Acting like a big baby isn't going to help you now. Are you listening? Vienna, goddamn it, why aren't you listening to me?"

Her back hit the wall and she reflexively braced against it.

"What's your problem?" he shrilled. "I'm not going to hit you, stop it!"

His bare feet squished the candle, bringing him back to his senses just as Vienna brought a fluttering hand to her red, tear pulsed lips. His own hands were at his sides, but she trembled like they cinched her shoulders. Only now did he hear her begging him to stop.

“Christ,” he said, letting out a breath. “Christ, Vienna, I am so, so sorry.” He pulled her into his chest, murmuring apologies against her hair.

She gasped and then sobbed, smacking a lax fist against his chest.

“I’m sorry,” he said again. “I’m sorry. That wasn’t okay.”

A few beats later, her voice was still soggy. “Don’t you ever, ever do that to me again.”

They stayed like that for a while, him rocking her back and forth in a clemency so quiet he wondered if they’d argued in the first place. Eventually, he picked her up and carried her back to his room, trying to focus on her and not the mess they’d left behind in the kitchen.

He kept the light off, settling her into his lap. It took a while, but the circles he rubbed into her shoulder blades loosened her whole body. Pressing her face into his neck, she let him hold her in a sheltering embrace.

“I’m sorry,” he said again. “Is there anything I can do.”

Her cheekbone pushed against his shoulder as she closed her eyes and inhaled. “Turn the lights off. Please.”

Reaching over her body, he pulled the chain from the lamp, the shade eclipsed by the security lights of the neighbors next door. In this intimacy, the darkness didn’t seem so bad. He couldn’t see Vienna, but he also couldn’t see himself, and that made this fog seem more bearable.

“How’s your finger?” he said after a while.

Vienna shrugged. “Eh, I think I’ll live.” The quietude lasted long enough for her to regain her composure. “I mean it, don’t yell at me like that ever again.”

“I won’t, I promise. I don’t even know what happened.”

She chuckled, dry and derisive. “Your father’s attitude, that’s what.”

He winced at the mention and its further implications.

Sensing this, she cuddled closer. “Not like that, you nerd. I know what he thinks about...us.”

Mahen paused for a minute. “He doesn’t think you respect me.”

“He doesn’t respect your mom, and hates the fact that you don’t do that to me.”

A smile curved across his mouth. “You’re right.”

“Of course I am.” Burrowing into him, she sighed before continuing, “Remember the first time you met my father? He insulted me right in front of you because he thinks that everyone is just as condescending to me.” She stroked his back. “People like that can’t see beyond themselves, so they project onto us until, well, until we start to believe it. But . . . it’s hard to remember.”

Placing one hand against her spine, he used the other to secure her arm.

“I love you, Mahen,” she said into his collarbone.

He didn’t respond right away, and when he did, the words weren’t reciprocated. Instead he told her he’d never hurt her again.

Taking his hand in hers, she kissed it. “Yes, I know.”

## DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

*Vivian Finley Nida*

Finally sleeping, Persistence of Memory haunts  
her dream, strands her in Dali's hushed desert  
where three mute pocket watches melt

Ants swarm another's rusted case, closed  
like a coffin, housing glazed face and hands  
concealing sweet stench of decay

A bald man, locked in his own dream  
lies drained, flat, stretched like pale putty  
collared by a watch, hands set at six

like those over a limb  
unlike those close to seven  
blue in the face

melting on a wooden box  
where stub of a tree trunk  
top removed, stands

One remaining branch juts up  
like a thumb, while the last limb  
points a finger to cliffs beyond

golden as the swath cut by dawn  
through cloudless field above  
She hears the scythe singing

No, that would be mad and she is not  
The alarm jingles, stops, and she stumbles  
out of sync; time without meaning



## LOSS

*Vivian Finley Nida*

It began with her signature  
once perfect, like cursive  
on borders in classrooms

Just as Lou Gehrig  
lost his grip on the bat  
she lost hers on the pen

Then hands refused to brush hair  
pull shirts over head, pants up  
and down, shoes on and off

Sometimes fingers remembered  
striking piano keys; Brahms' lullaby  
rocked her weightless in water

Her mind, unaffected, recalled  
how feet once obeyed commands  
walked to the end of diving boards

bounced into air for jackknives  
slipped into pools toes pointed  
barely a ripple; she emerged choking

unable to swallow chips  
bread, pudding, water  
and finally to form words

Immobile, she blessed caregivers  
listened intently as they opened doors  
to secret rooms asking, Should I?  
She blinked once for yes, twice for no  
until lids grew too heavy to lift  
The one who held her last, held her first

Her mother smoothed her hair, recognized  
pleading breath, and with love rivaling  
infinity, gave her permission to go



## **SPECIAL DELIVERY**

*Vivian Finley Nida*

At the Musée d'Orsay  
she stood before Monet's Poppy Field  
laughed, remembered racing

up a hill with five-year-olds  
given permission to pick poppies  
Then sighed, she was only three

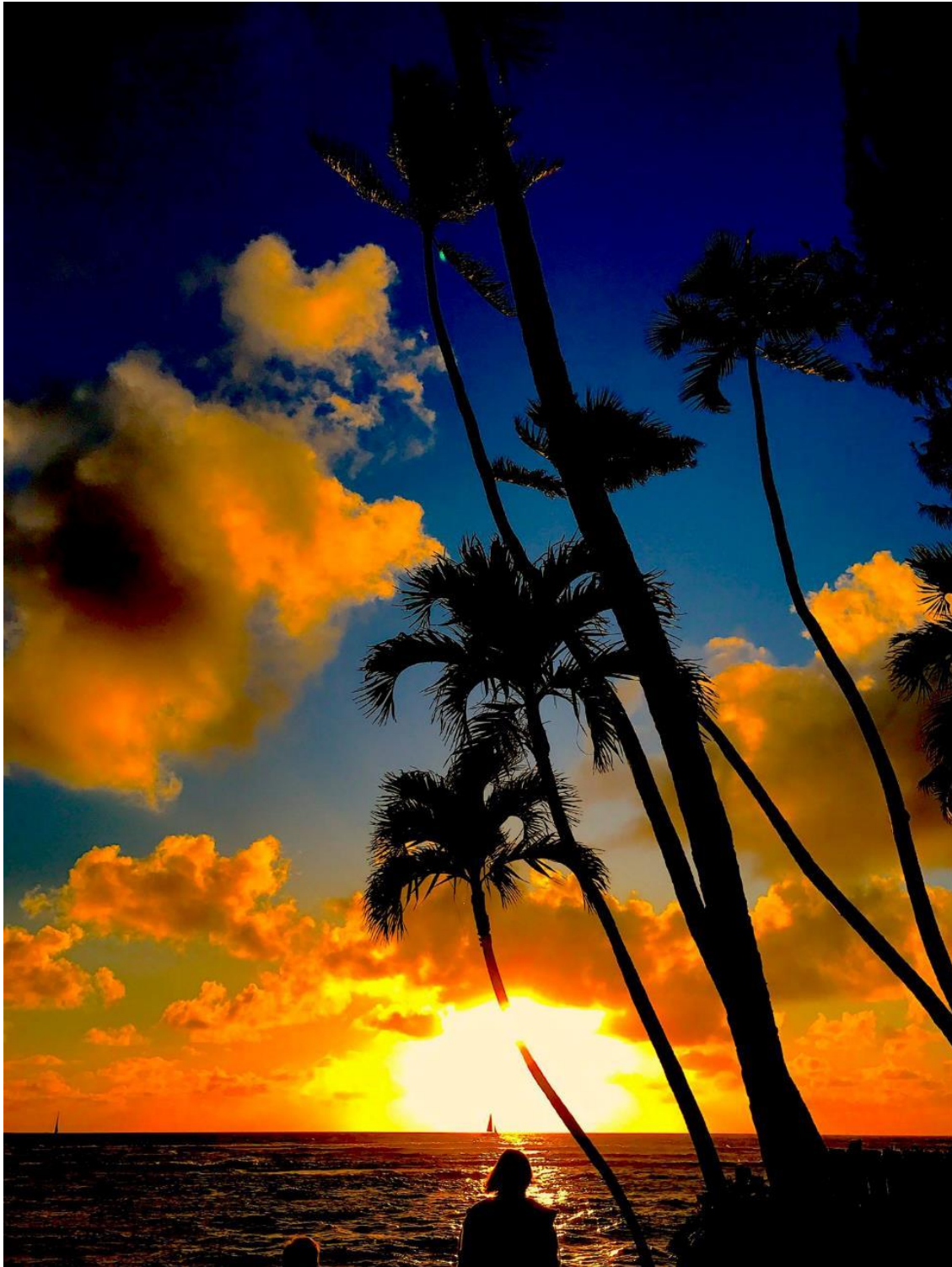
too slow to claim a treasured bloom  
In the painting mother and child  
stroll through a green meadow

dotted with red poppies  
bouquet in the girl's hand  
blue umbrella in mother's

matching the sky, her dress  
perhaps her eyes  
hidden by a hat

with a touch of blue  
while the girl's trim, red, vibrant  
matches open flowers

extending beauty  
to hearts yearning  
no matter where



**SEA EVERYTHING,** *Kirby Wright*, Photography



**TIME**, *Kirby Wright*, Photography

## **A YOUNG MAN WITH FLOWERS**

*Madhu Kailas*

Days are like rolled sheaves of paper nested in maroon cloth.  
I carefully tie the knot, and watch the shelves gather dust.

A writing desk traces countless years in tree-rings on its skin,  
polished in variations of brown circles, holding silence.

Words have many lives, like the faces we cultivate.  
I find home in a swarm of people keeping warm, exchanging faces.

We meld together. Many words toil to creep out of the heap,  
only surrogates are traded in comfort of courtesies.

I return to stillness of my empty room, emptier still  
with absence of language. First germination in shedding of layers,

one by one, till I press a raw face against the cold window pane.  
I see the night outside, and see that it has eyes watching itself.

A young man with flowers, waits at the street corner, to cross over.  
A street-light accentuates him till he steps out of its confines.

## **MARCH**

*Madhu Kailas*

Men go to march like an array balanced at the edge of an abyss;  
torso and limbs taut as ammunition.

Night sleeps in a new order that picks up on the faintest tread,  
fusion of metal and chemical visit their rest.

The boots are heavy, with every trudge—  
like pulling out gnarled, inseparable roots of a giant tree.

The landscape is smothered with fog, and dust of annihilated heart  
forms into silver wool that has no temperature.

The distance grows, the darkness grows, the silence grows and so on . . .  
and becomes more dense, but between what?

There is no time to stop, no count to keep.  
Everything is packed and carried unspoken, except—

A soft brush of helpless love covers the forehead and fate  
in a cool swathe of eternal wait.

Ahead of the march, a water ledge quietly builds on your lower eyelid,  
and lives forever.

## **SO MUCH DEPENDS ON THIS MOMENT**

*Madhu Kailas*

So much depends on this moment,  
to conceive what comes next. I sense the frantic,  
like bluish-green sulphur vortex

searching a solid form, adamant to exist.  
Dimensions and time are boundaries  
that give me strength of mythology.

What falls apart, I return with its emptiness,  
a sense of keen sweetness  
dissolved in the narrative of nothing,

for the center holds still – gratitude,  
not for the miracles that were never meant to be,  
but for fresh flowers of spring

their birth and death, rooted in earth,  
again and again, between us, in our ashes and in our hearts.  
In tempest and tranquility, a string of moments

will repeat. So much depends on this moment,  
to conceive what comes next. If only I step aside  
and start loving you.



**PEACE**, *Nicole Zdeb*, Photography

**About the Images:** “Though the content of the photographs varies, the creative impetus behind them shares a constant theme: to observe, record, and witness my immediate surroundings. *Peace* captured a moment of light and shadow in my living room; *Singing* captures a moment of joy and humanity at my local farmer’s market. Kevin Shay Johnson is the subject of this image. He is a singer/songwriter in Milwaukie and shared his talent with all of us one Sunday morning in October. I asked if I could take his picture and he readily agreed. *Iron Bird* captures a moment of whimsy in my city, captured while on a winter walk. Photography is about cherishing the fleeting world, looking outside yourself for the manifold gifts that are constantly offered to those willing to see.”

—*Nicole Zdeb*





SINGING, *Nicole Zdeb*, Photography





**IRON BIRD,** *Nicole Zdeb*, Photography

## THE VISIT

*Nicole Zdeb*

Now where does she keep her shortening? She poked behind the milk cartons, Miracle Whip, jams, egg cartons, and margarine tub looking for the Crisco. No Crisco in the overstuffed fridge. Everything under the sun but shortening. Well, plan B...where's the oil? She rattled cupboards until she found the cooking oil. She looked at the container: 100% virgin cold pressed olive oil. Olive oil? She took off the cap and sniffed. It didn't smell like olives, not that she had ever eaten an olive. Awfully nice color, like new leaves. She poured some into her palm and licked it. This should work. Why the olives were virgins, she couldn't imagine. Maybe they are picked young, before they are fully ripe. Olives didn't grow in Vermont. Lots of Italians down here. They like their olives. Well, when in Rome, she giggled to herself and poured all the spring-green oil into a lobster pot on the stove. She mixed the donut dough together quickly, hands effortlessly moving between the ingredients, measuring in palms and pinches and shakes, three good shakes of nutmeg, make it four, nutmeg and cinnamon and cider made her donuts famous at church. Sister didn't have any cider in the fridge, but the donuts wouldn't suffer.

She looked out the window at the yard, a pretty yard, tiny, couldn't be over an acre, but pretty with the big oak and sunflower hedge she couldn't yet see, everything still shadows. I could never get used to neighbors so close. Everything's so tight here, tight counters, tight fridge, tight lawn, no room to breathe. Well, Sister must like it, she thought. I never could. I'd miss...she wasn't sure what she'd miss exactly. I'd miss the cows, she finished her thought and leaned her face close to the dough to smell the spicy, yeasty, homemade scent.

A thin, high cry cut her thoughts. Why, that's Chrissy, I better get her before she wakes the house. She made her way to the nursery and picked up the baby. Chrissy, Chrissy, Chrissy, she whispered, inhaling the sour milk smell. She changed her diaper in the semi-dark, first time she'd used plastic diapers in her life. Well, that was easy, wasn't it? She zipped the yellow onesie closed and picked Chrissy up. Christine looked at this woman while pulling on her bobby pins and trying to eat them. Hungry? I bet you are. Momma's sleeping, let's get some milk for you. She squeezed the round and solid baby flesh to her body, kissing her cheek and neck. In the fridge she found the ready-made bottle of formula, heated it on the stove and stood at the kitchen window feeding the baby and watching the sun inch by inch illuminate the yard. Squinting she could just make out the golden tops of the sunflowers. Beyond them, she could feel the apple orchards, cow pastures, clover meadows, and hay fields stretching to the sky, soon it would be haying season and Frank would come stay with them like he did every year, sleeping in the barn and eating with the family. Oh, Frank could eat like a wonder, half a pie at breakfast and half a pie at supper. She didn't mind the extra baking, who was she kidding? She loved it, she loved picking the apples, peeling and slicing them, coating them in sugars and cinnamon and nutmeg, rolling the crust and cutting dough the shape of leaves to decorate it, and watching him dig in to the pie holding his fork in his big fist and resting his head on his other fist. He didn't talk much but what was there to say? She knew he loved her pie, knew he looked forward to it every year, every bite he took she saw. Shifting the baby weight, she leaned in to nuzzle the neck. So warm. So warm.

A high, loud beeping scared the pee out of her and the baby's face screwed up and turned red. She couldn't hear the baby wailing over the alarm, she couldn't hear anything and then Sister was there without her robe, reaching for the baby. She wouldn't give it to her, she couldn't hear anything, what was all that noise Holy Baby Jesus in heaven why was everybody up now and yelling, Sister kept grabbing for the baby and she kept moving away from her and Ted

pushed little Nicky out of the kitchen door, little Nicky carrying her stuffed otter and looking at her, why did she look like that, and Sister's face, red and ugly, arms reaching, hands grabbing.

She woke up with a face mask covering her face. Where am I? Who are these men? She looked around for a familiar face.

There you are, how are you doing, young lady?

Who was this twerp peering at her? She tried to take the mask off her face.

Hey there, not yet. You need to get some oxygen. You inhaled a lot of smoke. Blink if you understand me, okay? Do you know who you are?

She looked at the young man looming over her. Outside, she heard voices, men's voices, and sirens. The sirens flooded her head. She didn't want to blink. She closed her eyes and pictured Frank, his sunburned neck, head leaned over his plate, and the way he drank his coffee when he was finished with the pie, avoiding her eyes, adam's apple bobbing as he swallowed the hot black liquid.

## TRASH WALK FOR FOUND POEM

*Roxann Perkins Yates*

Ray picked up a weather-chewed  
half shingle in the alley a block  
from my classroom.

Jack scarfed up a cigarette butt  
that had strayed from the ditch.

Lisa unfolded a wrinkled color  
sheet of Santa Claus.  
(He had a purple mustache.)

Jaden said, "I can't find nothing,  
Ms. P. I can't find nothing. Do I get  
a zero? Hold on, I seen something.  
Jeanette, come with me.

Ms. P., under that tree there's a  
purple crocus  
like Mamaw's got. She says  
they ain't for pickin'.

Can my found thing be in my head?"

## ANTAEUS

*Roxann Perkins Yates*

In the frozen aisle  
The call comes.  
A robot voice from  
A foreign place.

Then the sound of  
A baby and a man.

My red begonia  
Wilting and thirsting.  
Recently stripped of  
His son and his job  
And his ground.

My Antaeus sits  
On a concrete floor,  
Waiting for bail  
And earth and water.

Because I cannot  
Help him self-destruct,  
I walk barefoot,  
Gripping winter earth  
For my bright flower,  
My son.

## HALFWAY

*Roxann Perkins Yates*

So I'm at the  
halfway mark  
to:  
days without worries,  
days without work,  
days without life?

It ain't so.

It's the beginning  
of "preventive"  
procedures—  
wars against  
bumps, lumps,  
and high pressure.

Beating, breathing,  
bathing in  
what is left.

The body calculates  
like never  
before.

For the heart's  
yardstick  
measures

Love  
and not love.

Desires  
for rustic roads  
and clear water pebbles

and a fingertip brushing  
the wrist.

Place, mark, place, mark,  
figure up.

Halfway to  
dust.

Full way

to wonder  
about creek moss,  
early jonquils,  
late nights with  
stars

and  
a new touch—  
halfway to somewhere  
I can't prevent.



**BAKED GOODS,** *Roxann Perkins Yates*, Photography

**About the Images:** “The three photographs are ‘Baked Goods.’ We are all baked goods—baked to grow, baked to flake, baked to warm, baked to melt. The mannequin head is entitled *Baked Goods*, and is sitting a house of baked and steamed goods. Her outward appearance represents the baked goods and bads of a life. *Mushroom Path* blooms in the sun of the winter leaves and draws a growth of green to its center. Sundown veils what sunup creates.”

—*Roxann Perkins Yates*





**MUSHROOM PATH,** *Roxann Perkins Yates*, Photography





**SUNDOWN**, *Roxann Perkins Yates*, Photography

## INK OVER SAND

*Sean Buckley*

In the twilight hours of one of those invariably sticky summer days that seem to melt and blend into one another until, upon looking back, all one can dredge up is a grainy collage of images with no chronology to speak of, I found myself walking hand-in-hand with the girl. We had met through a mutual friend and by some improbable luck, she had taken a liking to me. We walked across the quad of the local university, the fresh-mowed grass painted the bottoms of her white sneakers green.

At eight o'clock, with the sun nothing more than a sliver of red on the horizon, the automated speakers of the church began to ring in heavy, bronze tones. In the middle of the fourth toll, the power cut, and the heavy curtain of silence fell upon the world.

All at once I became aware of the great absence of the ambient noise that at all times fills our lives. Silence swelled against the base of my skull. It pressed itself against the space behind my eyes and pushed. I turned to face the girl, whose hand had gone limp in mine. Her eyes were glazed over, unfocused and glassy as she stared past me to the distant forested hills. There was a coldness in her that I had not previously seen, as if the cogs responsible for working her mouth into that warm smile had come undone and plummeted into an inner darkness I could not see. I caught the gentle sound of generators humming back to life, and the thing which had been snatched from her returned. She wrapped her arms around my neck and embraced me.

"I saw the sound go out."

Synesthesia, the medical textbook resting on her shelf calls it. Crossed wires in the brain connect two of her senses – sight and hearing. She first told me about it as we laid on her bed, our fingertips bristling over one another as we drifted amid the heat and our words. Air conditioning, she said, was the color one gets when one dips a rock in water and puts it on a sheet of crisp white paper.

Applause overwhelms her, blinding her with a billion black fireworks which erupt from all corners until they're all she can see. All of these things she recounted without provocation, and I swam in the images she brought to life in front of me.

I have no way of knowing whether or not what she says is the truth. No matter how hard I press my lips to the braided blonde hair that sprouts from the back of her head, or rest my forehead against her slight, bony shoulder until it leaves a swollen red mark between my eyes, I can never see the same world she does. Hers is a private world that my heart can never so much as glimpse. So great is the skill with which she weaves the colors of her world, though, that I have no reason to doubt her. Were she to come out and confess to lying, to say it was all an elaborate ruse, it would make no matter to me. I would still let her jump into my lap and wrap her legs around my waist and recount to me the burgundies of the raven's songs, the cyan clicks of the light switches, the trembling honeysuckle of the 35mm projector that runs in the old theater on West Avenue. The way my voice – the real voice, she calls it – reminds her of calligraphic ink over sand.

There are some shy moments when she has left the apartment and I'm certain that she will not be back for some time, that I try to open my eyes as wide as I can. She loves my eyes, how they sit slumped in their sockets as though they're always tired, how blurry they make the world in the mornings before I've put on my glasses, how on a proper day she swears that they morph from brown to green if she stares at them hard enough. I open them and I listen. I scan the room sentry-like, watching for the sounds that seem to etch their way into her every day.

I try to pry my way into her world. I stare intently at the radiator, waiting for the neon green hissing. My gaze slams across the room, to cracks in the walls to witness the purple skittering of

mice she swears to hear. The lens of my eyes and ears demands to hear and see the atoms wriggling against one another in the air with each breath. I talk to myself, to try and see the ink bottle upturned and spilled out over the beach, but I can't. I rave and strain and sweat and curse and sing and cry, but I can never break that which keeps me from her world.

When she comes home, full of a day's worth of sounds and images, I listen. My neck burns with the envy I feel toward the very firing of her neurons. The shame of my inadequacy burns within me, causes a stone to drop down into my gullet where it hardens. Behind each description there is a kernel of condescension my brain manifests, its blackened haze swirls around my head and threatens to spill into me. I give a nod when necessary. I smile and laugh at all the right moments. I pretend that I can offer some insight into an existence beyond me where she, the untouchable, the ideal, the transformed, languishes. They're the only meager offerings I have for her. After they've all burnt, the only thing that remains is the smoke, mixing into the ebon halo that's formed around my head. I wear it proudly. It is the only sign that I've glimpsed into her world, wherever that place might be.

## A POETIC LIGHT

*Michelle Hartman*

I rise early try to capture  
perfect poem  
that fled on cat feet as I woke.  
Six lines into mental musings  
a curious ray of northern light  
finds your calf  
softly caressing relaxed muscles  
as through its travels  
millions of miles  
was launched for this destination.  
Tiny sparkles dance down beam  
because here is magic.  
My writing urge yields  
to different desire knowing  
it's violent need a juxtaposition  
to inquisitive patch  
now slyly  
moving up your thigh.  
My hands remember how it feels  
in the dark, my fingers itch  
to detect change of brilliance and warmth;  
my lips yearn to taste. Before  
these feelings overwhelm  
light beam drops  
into area framed by sheets and one leg  
pulled up to chest.  
The end of a rainbow  
on a pot of gold.  
How lucky I feel  
as I slide back into bed  
to claim my treasure.

## **SIGNS OF A GOOD DINER**

*Michelle Hartman*

are customers stuck in time  
well known rule of eating out  
if there are no time-loop visitors  
outfit a bit off  
eyes slightly haunted,  
then the place is probably  
not worth a plate of fries.  
There is a special place in banks  
where they store the occasional bill  
or coin with a future date  
lurking under an eagle  
or Presidential portrait.  
Time travelers always take  
or leave a little something.  
Money clothes,  
sperm of future saviors.  
There are many rules and theories.  
Of course not all windowless vans  
have surveillance equipment.  
But I'm serious about that diner thing.

## SO THIS IS X

*Michelle Hartman*

*The worst thing about death must be the first night*  
—Jose Ramon Jimenez

Every car we buy, every love affair,  
every dog and hamster  
a cosmic equation filled with lessor functions  
enough for a universal computer,  
and the answer is not 42.

The sum of binding  
and coming loose, pinging  
and ricocheting, ethereal fireworks  
making the big picture exactly X.  
Yet the sun still shines, earth rotates  
and grass grows. A few related equations  
silently loose a function or two.  
Maybe the insurance rates  
or the price of cocaine in Miami  
is affected for a nano second.  
As you wander down that last path  
and you realize X is not a bang.

## **A ONE-YEAR-OLD'S CANVAS**

*David Anderson*

when fingerprints survive  
on the giant glass mural  
like paint strokes of life  
as it lumbers along,  
smudges from another day  
left on the window  
remain as marks of  
the memories from  
yesterday's moments.  
was that one the rainstorm?  
or the ambulance  
screaming by?  
maybe that one was  
the birthday party?  
the invitees bringing  
the gifts, of course.  
or could it be the big  
kids romping home  
from school with backpacks  
flying for summer break?



## IMAGES REVISITED

*Barry Gross*

*Thank you, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound*

Leaving the metro, seeking the petal faces  
and wet black bough, I find

the red wheelbarrow's wooden frame, worm-holed,  
sweating dew in the July sun.

The white chickens have been butchered, plucked  
and are slow-simmering in a 4-gallon soup pot.

Everything depends on Senses' memory  
before they blur away.

## VACATION

*Barry Gross*

We took our sons to American Civil War battlefields,  
visitor centers, museums and cemeteries.

We made them look at, and read about,  
the heroic paraphernalia,  
the feather trimmed hats,  
the gold braided tassels,  
the brass buttons stamped in artistic detail and  
the uniforms at the beginning and end of the war.

It was okay for them to view the picnics on the bluffs  
above the battles as if it was just another outing  
that would be over in a few days.

It was okay for them to see for what causes and flags  
that men will kill and be killed for.

It was okay for them to see blown up, enlarged  
black and white photos from glass plates,  
bodies strewn about like tree limbs after a storm,  
faces twisted in grotesque smears,  
lips overly inflated like small inner tubes,  
backs of slaves scarred, whipped  
into mountainous ridges

and how blood, in daguerreotypes, is not red  
unless it's been hand-colored years later.

**WHAT I SAID TO THE BARNES & NOBLE SALESPERSON  
WHEN HE ASKED, "CAN I HELP YOU?"**

*Barry Gross*

I'm looking for that last book,  
you know the one that explains everything,  
the one that polishes senses to transformed clarity  
and the ink pops in the light of day  
and glows in a no-moon night  
and it can be read and reread  
and peeled like an orange  
and sectioned into sweet applicable truths.  
Can you help me?

I'm looking for that last book,  
you know the one that explains everything  
in pop-up construction  
engineered with Twain's and Hughes' Mississippi River  
and the head of the Jabberwock  
being brought back in frabjous joy,  
while Bukowski grumbles out verses on his Underwood  
eating green eggs and ham on rye.  
Can you help me?

I tried to gauge his potential response.  
Reached out and removed a small thread off his shoulder,  
held it up and said "thread, it was bugging me,"  
Did not think it was too aggressive a move  
and continued, "I helped you, can you help me?"  
and flicked the thread to the floor.  
He gave a disinterested shrug,  
and walked away towards the legos and plush toys.  
I think he was sorry he had asked the question.

## OCTOBER ENCORE

*Jennifer Kidney*

There's a sort of Sunday hush  
that falls over the yard  
in early October. The birds  
are busy but mostly mute.  
The garden's last blooms  
are bedazzled with butterflies—  
cabbage whites dangling  
from purple asters,  
monarchs meandering south,  
pearl crescents and painted ladies  
hovering over the ageratum.  
The ruby-throated hummingbird  
still lingers, but all  
will have taken their leave  
by month's end  
when I'll be cutting back  
the blackened stalks  
of black-eyed susans  
and planning to rake  
the fallen leaves.

## **PACKING MY BAG**

*Jennifer Kidney*

I'm vacationing in Mexico  
with a girlfriend who's easily seduced  
by a bad poet, an ex-pat Gringo  
reciting a villanelle. His affected intonations  
so irritate the bartender and waiters  
that they begin to shoot  
all of the ugly Americans,  
including my lover, although I know  
he's already dead, downed back home  
by a sheriff's deputy intimidated  
by that gentle man wielding a machete.  
My dream gives us a second chance.  
I fold his frail body into my suitcase.  
When we arrive at the airport, I realize  
I can't carry him through security,  
so I open my bag to find him alive  
and healed and heading off to buy  
his ticket home, and I acknowledge  
he is part of my baggage  
that I will always carry with me.

## **SOME THINGS I LOST**

*Jennifer Kidney*

There was that turquoise earring  
that somehow got ejected  
from my purse as I rummaged  
for my credit card so I could  
do self-check-in at 4 a.m.  
at Will Rogers Airport.  
I didn't notice it was missing  
until much later while unpacking  
in a D.C. hotel room.  
My friend Judy later told me  
that if you lose a piece of turquoise  
it was never meant to be yours.  
I suppose that's true  
of everything you lose.

Then there are the socks.  
I live alone except for a few cats  
and a dog, but I keep losing socks.  
Sometimes I find them  
wadded up inside a neatly folded  
pair of jeans, and sometimes a cat  
will suddenly appear dragging a sock  
like prey from the secret place  
where she had hidden it.

And lovers? All lost, although  
of most, I must say  
"Good riddance."  
Yet they, too, often reappear  
unbidden in my dreams.

And there are the inevitable losses  
that come with growing older,  
loved ones who can never be found again  
unless there really is a heaven.  
I imagine a place where my family and friends  
are gathered, wearing mismatched odd socks  
and earrings, awaiting my arrival  
to make things even again.



**COTTON AND CLOUDS,** *Jianqing Zheng*, Photography, Mississippi Delta



**GRAZING HORSE,** *Jianqing Zheng*, Photography, Red River Gorge, Kentucky





**SILENCE**, *Jianqing Zheng*, Photography, Cicada Shell

## **FOLLOWING THE SECOND CHILD**

*James Cummins*

The silly symphony  
Of robotic ticks and nerves and grins  
Was a little surprising coming from people who had  
Recently held the kind of thoughts that can move worlds  
And have now found their smiles replaced with twitches;  
And their laughter jammed.

Warm art in cheap frames replaced by finger paintings on the walls  
Stacks of shoes and magazines replaced by plastic things  
Music replaced by little voices in the air  
Focus on the substance of the evening replaced by the  
Pop and lock switching driven by fickle little people.

With a mind outside I find  
That twitching and slaughtered concentration  
Builds a more impermeable structure by the moment which  
Forms a little bubble around people who  
I fear may suffocate

And yet, as the sounds of this little family close to me  
And a gauzy veneer forms where I can only see  
A small part of them, from a distance  
The vacuum starts to pull me into orbit  
Me glancing down on them, through their private atmosphere;  
Once a stone along their path and now a satellite.

They have entered the slow motion of their lives.  
And that space between frames, is only for them.

## THE GRAND PERFORMANCE

*James Cummins*

A poem is not art.  
Nor is a painting.  
Nor a statue.  
Nor a major motion picture.

Those who believe that only the symphony  
or the opera  
or works of the stage  
are art  
are right  
But a play is not art.  
Nor is an opera.  
Nor the opening sonata of the greatest life-changing score you have ever discovered.

Art is not a noun.  
It is a verb.  
It is committed.  
It is an act.  
A poem is not art.  
The act of poetry, is.

Like Heidegger's phantom behind the ghost  
What we know of as art, is not.  
We seek the phantom hidden in behind.  
The poem, the song, the marble carving is the tombstone  
The end point  
In front of it.

The ghost, the grave marker, the gutted fish  
Is the result of the angler's intention to bring something up from the depths.  
anglers, too, endeavor to release the animal from the depths of the empty sheet.  
We cast our reels with intention.  
We art within that intention.  
And from minnows to Jaws,  
The surface of nothing is breached by the strings of the orchestra,  
From the chisel of Michelangelo.  
From the bleeding pen.  
From the key strokes.  
With a single click of a button.

## UNICORN

*Dmitry Bliznyuk, translated by Sergey Gerasimov from Russian*

A cloudy autumn morning.  
Streetlights, like giraffes, quietly roam in the fog.  
Oblique clots of shadows quiver  
behind the trees –  
the small fish of the last night  
got caught in the weeds while low tide.  
It smells of burnt felt and rotten plums.  
The light-boned autumn trembles  
like a rickety foal  
on the crooked legs of the branches.  
An old woman drags a hand cart of apples.  
Some leaves still glow, with the color of bile and blood.  
Suddenly it starts to drizzle.  
Hands of hundreds of ghosts rub the wet branches,  
making fog thicker.  
Two girls, students, hid from the rain in a pavilion.  
They smoke and gently feed each other with pieces of chocolate  
like birds feed their gaping chicks with worms,  
trying not to smudge the lipstick.  
A tipsy janitor stands at the front door.  
He's sad; he misses his father's apple orchard.  
Barely a month later,  
the thoroughbred winter will come,  
and you'll see the snowfall  
plodding along outside the window  
like a pureblooded unicorn,  
white horseflies stinging its sides,  
and it will fan them off  
with its tail of drift-snow.



## LOST AND FOUND

*Wm. Brett Hill*

Water ran down his back, down his legs, pooling on the floor beneath his shoes as Phillip struggled with whether it would be better to shake his umbrella out or just toss it on the floor. The day had been a failure, and he was beginning to feel like his life had been one as well.

He punched the button on his answering machine, dreading what the flashing number one would mean.

"Phil, it's Steven. I need you to come in an hour early tomorrow. It's this damn Gunderson sale. We need to circle the wagons and figure out how we're going to handle it before they get here at ten. See you then."

Phillip dropped his umbrella, the decision now an easy one as he no longer cared, and groaned. He sent his wet shoes sailing into the corner and trudged into the kitchen, his wet socks leaving a glistening trail on the linoleum.

He had only been in the apartment for a month. He hated it, but it was all he could afford on his salary. Commissions were few and far between with idiots like Steven getting in the way. He pulled a beer from the refrigerator and drained half of it in one swig.

"The Gunderson sale," he spat to the room. "I've only been working on them for a month, but now Steven will swoop in and take half the commission, the asshole!"

Every day working at that place was an exercise in futility. Each time he thought he was going to come out on top, everything crumbled. Now he was alone, in a strange city, with no girlfriend, no money, and a job that drained the life out of him.

He chugged the rest of the beer and stripped off in the kitchen, leaving his wet clothes lying wherever they fell. He walked into the living room and stared at his naked form reflected off of the balcony windows.

"Useless," he muttered as he tried to suck in his gut and realized it was futile. "Out of shape, half bald, and totally useless."

He fell back into the chair and closed his eyes, wishing the day away and dreading the one that would come. He felt the mild buzz from the beer clouding his thoughts and realized that he hadn't eaten dinner yet. Then he realized he didn't care as he fell into sleep.

~~~~~

He was walking briskly, afraid he would miss the show. The tickets had been hard to come by, and there was no chance in hell he was going to miss a second of it.

The people in the street jostled him as he hurried past. He couldn't make out their faces, but he knew they must have them. People had to have faces. He could see that they had feet, and the collective slapping of shoes on the sidewalk sounded like sporadic applause. Phillip wondered briefly what he had done to deserve praise, then remembered the show.

The theater was enormous, and he saw it from blocks away. The foot traffic he was immersed in moved smoothly toward it, with some drifting away from the sidewalk to walk on the beach, or climb the mountain. Those who stayed with him fell into step, and he found himself most comfortable when his feet matched the rhythm.

He didn't remember giving the ticket to anyone, but he must have. He was in the lobby, and each person who walked past bumped the bag he was carrying. He was protective of his bag. It had all of his things in it.

There was no time for a drink, and he had no money for popcorn or candy floss. He clutched his bag in front of him and joined the line, filing into the main theater. The screen was

two stories tall and as the lights dimmed it suddenly glowed with a brightness that hurt his eyes. He sat down in the closest seat and set his bag down in the seat next to him.

The show began, and Phillip stopped rubbing his eyes and stared, enthralled.

The show was over. He didn't remember what had happened, but he knew he enjoyed it. Everyone did. As a group the other people in the theater, their faces indistinct, rose and filed out. Phillip rose to join them and reached down to pick up his bag.

Panic overwhelmed him. The seat next to him sat empty, his possessions, his everything, gone. He raced up the aisle, shoving past laughing patrons in irritation as he sought out the telltale flashlights of the ushers.

"Please, you have to help me," he cried, grabbing the lapels of the teenage boy with the glowing beacon. The boy's face was there, but it failed to change expression.

"What can I do for you, Sir?" he asked, his lips not moving. He waved the flashlight back and forth to guide the flow of people.

"My bag! I've lost my bag! Please help me!" begged Phillip.

"Lost and found," said the boy simply. His waving light floated down the hallway, beckoning.

Phillip raced after it, losing sight of everything but the light. It flitted up and down, back and forth, left and right. He tried and failed to grab ahold of it, to force it to show him where to go. As it picked up speed he ran and felt his heart pounding in his chest.

"Ladies, Gentlemen, and Other, the theater will be closing in five minutes. Please collect your things and exit the building before it collapses," said a calm voice over the intercom. The panic had never left him, but now it intensified. The light seemed to be teasing him, leading him on a pointless journey. He screamed at it and it stopped.

Its glow illuminated a plaque on a doorway which read, "Found and Lost and Found." Phillip stared at the words, unclear as to whether they were correct. He noticed the hallway getting shorter and quickly slipped into the room.

"Can I help you, Sir?" asked a girl. She wore the same uniform as the usher and spoke through an equally paralyzed face.

"My bag. I've lost my bag," complained Phillip.

"We have some bags here," she said. She gestured to a shelf with two bags sitting askew.

"Neither of those is mine," he said.

"The theater is closing, Sir," she responded. "Do you want a bag or not?"

Phillip felt the sweat run down his back. "But neither of those is mine!" he yelled.

The girl shrugged.

Phillip noticed the ceiling was slowly creeping downward.

"Do you want a bag, Sir?" she asked.

"But..."

As the ceiling began a suddenly rapid descent Phillip grabbed one of the bags and ran.

~~~~~

Pippa woke with a start, staring around the room in confusion as the fog of dreams slowly crept in and took away any memory of where she had been.

"Ah, somebody's finally awake," teased Josh from the kitchen.

"Sorry, I must have drifted off," she said. "I had the strangest dream."

Josh walked over and put Andrew in her arms. She smiled down at the sleeping infant, loving the way his little lips moved while he slept like he was already trying to whistle.

“Well, this little boy must be having a doozy of a dream, because he’s been out cold,” laughed Josh.

Pippa stared down at the baby and her heart felt full. The awful feeling she had felt on waking faded away as the Andrew’s eyes slowly crept open.

“Don’t forget, the Gundersons are coming to dinner,” said Josh from the kitchen. She could hear the wonderful sounds of his chef skills at work.

She poked Andrew in his little nose and sighed.

## THE CEMETERY

*Abishake Koul*

I am walking through the cemetery to realize  
that the laces of my muddy shoes are open. I try  
to find a place little elevated. And end up  
with my feet on a grave where I tie them up.

The grave is of a one-year-old boy. A British boy  
who lived for one year and eleven months back in  
the 18th century here in Kolkata and, since, long dead.  
But I fear if he would somehow try to haunt me today.

I see horny couples making out in corners. A European  
lady writing something in her journal. A gardener  
smoking his eighth cigarette of the day. And I realize  
I could see myself fit in one of these elevated graves.



## **WEIGHT**

*Daniel Birnbaum*

Last evening  
I was walking with  
the cat over my shoulder  
and in my hand  
a book of Brautigan's collected poems  
wondering which weighted the most  
— not counting poetry.

## AN OLD MAN'S NEW OBSERVATIONS

*Thomas Locicero*

*for Artie*

Let us observe an increase in observing to  
mean it has more meaning than it appears.

The man is eighty-eight now and he watches  
for signs and says seemingly random things

like, "I don't know if there's a God. Do you  
believe in God?" (pause) "I thought so."

He remembers you sometimes, recalls his anger  
often. Cantankerous is the word most used

to describe his demeanor. His wife predeceased him  
and he became tender with her while she was sick.

He has become an observer of things. Birds he sees  
as hands that leave to shadow-write on the sky.

The hands once tinkered, taking apart stolen, blinking  
construction signs to see how they functioned, or

building a small motor to reel in his boat with  
one press of a button, or to fondle the air in a

youthful brag. The sun he sees as an all-knowing  
mind that hides for a time but is always expected

to return. All those words consumed, all those  
documentaries about AIDS and DNA and neurons

and particles, the knowledge repeated from drunk  
lips that also slurred less-meaningful remembrances

like the legendary folksongs of his grandfather  
or a litany of offensive a-Christian-and-a-Jew-

walk-into-a-bar jokes that elicited polite laughter.  
Now there is a cavity in his brain that nothing

can fill. It is located where the young carry their  
dreams, where the foolish sequester their hope.

Now he observes each day as his last with,

albeit, occasional full awareness and there is not

a damn thing he can do about it. He observes  
his waiting the way a zealot observes his sin,

the way an oppressed man observes his skin:  
with meaning.

## **ZEAL**

*Antony Fangary*

With no father of your own

You became God's son.

Insha'Allah

I became yours

When we took communion together for the first time I let you down, Gidu.

And in the Middle of the third *Kyrie Eleison*...

I spat out the body of Christ, Gidu.

The deacons stopped playing.

The old womyn screamed *Ya Lahmi!* at the holy flesh sprawled raw on the altar floor....

I'm the one who rejects the body, Gidu.

Your face sunk

And they squawked a mixture of Arabic and Coptic until I grabbed the chewed-up flesh off the ground.

The flesh was slimy, covered in hair and God knows what else.

Abuna smiled at me and told me to chew slow

I did it for you, Gidu.

I did it for God and the holy symbols and triangles the deacons stopped playing.

I could still taste their eyes.

Abuna gave me the cloth I thought I was supposed to spit the body into...

He told me to cover my mouth with it while I chewed the holy flesh,

*The Orban.*

I kneeled,

Chewing on display in the altar like an old sacrament

I think that's when I learned the power of faith, Gidu.

***I believe... I believe, I believe, I believe... That this is so and true, Amen***

***One is the holy father***

***One is the holy son***

***One is holy spirit***

**PALM SUNDAY, 2016**

*Antony Fangary*

Another bombed  
Church deadens  
Easter festivities.  
Gidu heaved inward  
Jolting kept lungs  
Masr needs options  
People quarrel  
regimes stay tyrant  
underestimating violence  
Watching  
X-ing  
yielding zealots

## KELAM ARABI

*Antony Fangary*

Teta uses her whole throat when she says it

*Bebkhuur!*

But won't speak in Arabi

so I ask about church to get her to speak

*Mamma, what is Abuna burning in the metal net?*

*Ze Smoke?*

*No, like what is it that causes the smoke?*

*Sab! Ze smoke... Bebkhuur!*

I settle

*Babour means smoke?*

She unhinges her windpipe

*Bebkhuur!*

\*\*\*

The older Gidu gets

the less English he speaks

I forget Arabi to the same beat

my grandmother clinches her smile when Gidu and I speak

*Gidu, inty eyse miah?*

*Iawaah, ya Beshi*

I open a water bottle for him

she squints to the crunch of the cap twisting

as if a metal net swings smoke

cheek level

*Mamma, Babour?*

she settles with a stale nod

empties her throat

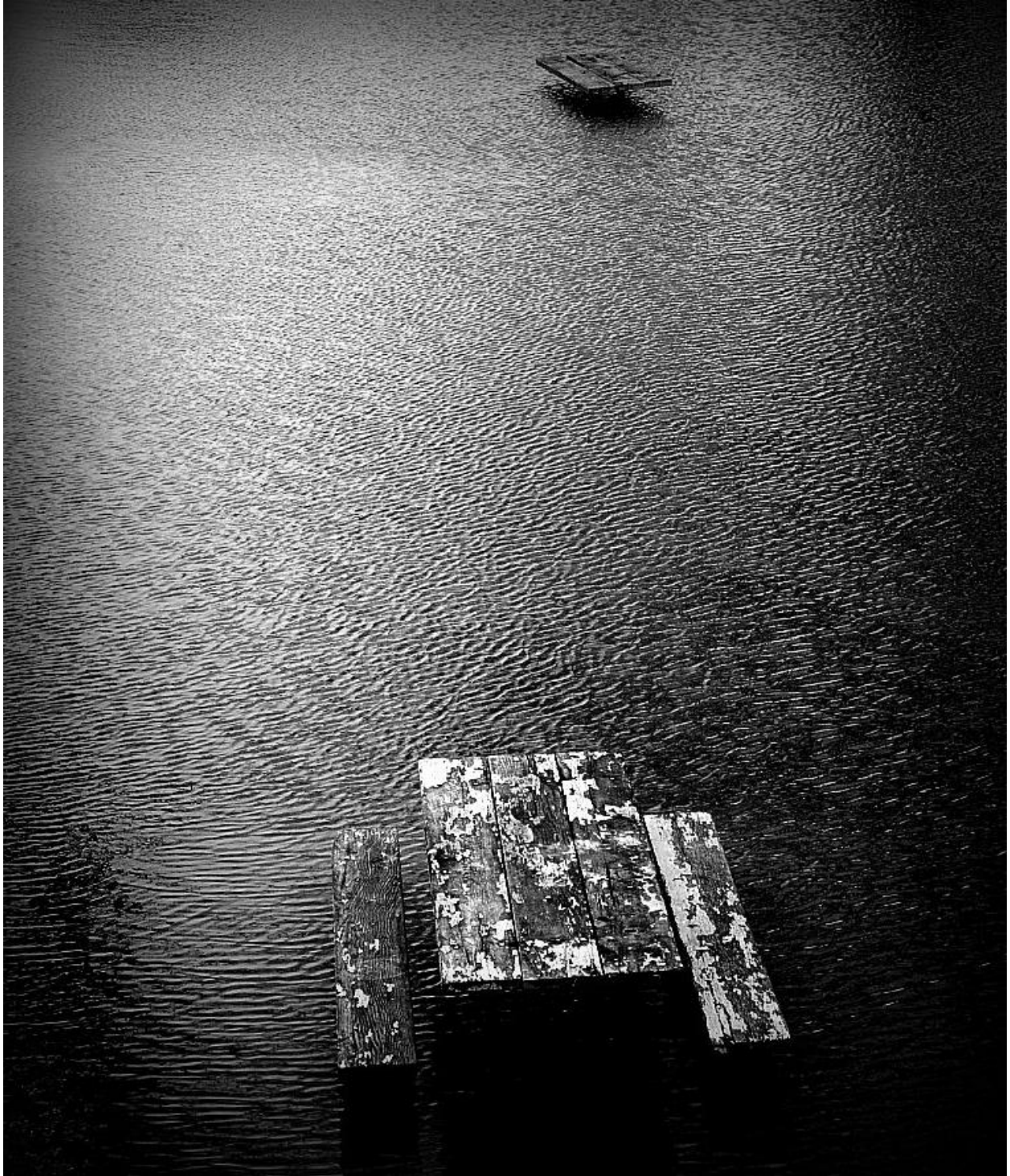
*Sab, Babour.*



**HENDRIX,** *Thomas Gillaspay*, Photography

**About the Images:** “Taking photographs in a storm is often challenging. Both these images were taken during a rainy afternoon in northern California. The image of the trees, *Hendrix*, was taken through a window during a break in the storm. *Destiny* was taken the day after the storm had past. This image was taken from a heightened perspective, looking down onto a severely flooded park. The nearly submerged park benches reminded me of abandoned ships floating in the sea.”

— *Thomas Gillaspay*



**DESTINY**, *Thomas Gillaspie*, Photography



**“SHALL I GO BACK ONE DAY TO MY FORMER WAY OF LIFE?”**

*Ace Boggess*

—*Clarice Lispector, The Hour of the Star*

This pen reminds me of the straw  
channeling into me what strange passion  
ink now reverses, squeezing out.

Dust on my lampshade reminds me of lines  
carved from crushed narcotics.

The carpet reminds me of carpets I once crawled across  
in search of shards & crumbs of pills  
sent flying in the breaking up.

I remind me of some other me from years ago—  
same anxieties like switchblades flashing  
in a crowd, same want &  
isolation—but without the dope.

As if I needed reminders,  
as if those years weren't folded in a pocket  
like the yellow passport of Jean Valjean.

I'm one wrong memory away  
from self-defeating: thrill of the chase,  
the joy of finding—I can laugh about it  
when I should be screaming,  
when sugary scents remind me of the quick  
inhale, when onset of dizziness  
reminds me of bliss I felt between withdrawals.

I'm not so far away from that,  
although I stay ahead of it, head down,  
eyes averted from things that remind me  
of whatever things those things can never be.

**“WHY IS EVERYONE IN SUCH A HURRY ALL THE TIME?”**

*Ace Boggess*

*[question asked by Sarah Hall]*

It's hard work to make room for leisure,  
racing toward the next pause.  
We accelerate through intersections,  
running yellows, on our way to the park.  
The movie starts at four o'clock.  
Don't be late, or you'll miss your moments  
escaping the goddamned stressful maze  
that life is. The quest for relaxation  
seems like speed-dating with sloe gin  
on a slow boat downriver & home again.  
Where have you gone when you get there?  
What have you learned—as if learning  
is the point, not forgetting? So,  
when the guy at the supermarket  
holds up his loaf of factory bread &  
jug of milk, says, “Mind if I cut in?”  
be sure to dance with him.  
Give him the spirited tango  
he doesn't know he needs, seeks,  
while the conveyor belt of groceries  
grinds forever, & coupons  
fly from your hands like a swarm of bees.

**“I DID BURST INTO TEARS—COULD THAT BE CONSIDERED WORK?”**

*Ace Boggess*

*[question asked by Andrea Fekete]*

It can be an occupation, weeping,  
if right words won't come to ease our inner whispers.

We drink our bitter coffee in the morning,  
go home weary past expenditures of doubt.

We sleep, when we sleep, like popcorn kernels  
dancing in a Pyrex bowl inside the microwave.

Being takes effort. Sadness is a part of that.  
We're on the staff: certified,

existential. We press our thumbs  
to corners of our eyes like buttons,

forwarding calls from strangers (us)  
to those whom might not want to hear but must.

## **RIDIN' HIGH IN A RAG TOP**

*Quinn Carver Johnson*

When I picture my mother,  
I see her in an old convertible  
top down, yellow hair blowing  
freely behind her, a smile  
stretching across her face,

turning wrinkles into laugh lines—  
every last one of them—  
speeding down the Pacific Coast  
Highway (California on one side,  
the ocean, blue and endless,  
on the other).

She's wearing a tie-dye shirt and  
singing along, loudly and poorly,  
to every song she hears  
—even the birds—even the wind—  
sometimes there isn't even music playing,  
(except in her head)  
and in these moments she's still singing.

She is the only one in the car and yet,  
when I see it, so vividly, in my mind,  
everyone is there—me, my father, my sister,  
my grandparents, my dog,  
sticking her tongue out into the crisp  
California air, smelling all the redwood trees,

friends and family,  
Bob and Lou and Tom and,  
especially, Audrey.

It's like a family reunion,  
everyone laughing and singing,  
Passing around drinks and snacks,  
stories and smiles and  
we're all crammed into this tiny little car  
like the Joads, loaded up and headed West,  
Oklahoma dust on everything.

## ARGUMENTS

*Quinn Carver Johnson and Todd Fuller*

And where to re-locate / once those fractured words settle / quietly on the couch? // Can a hand / on the unwelcoming shoulder / and a serenade of subsequent “I’m sorrys” / turn back the last hour / which itself threatens to turn back three years? // Can a poem, / a vast period of articulated thought / trickled down into a brief moment of clarity, / clear the haze / of a quick moment of free speech / void of any thought or beauty? // In simplest terms, / I love you / and / I’m sorry. / Come to bed and / in the morning we’ll make amends.

\*\*\*

## SILENT MOVIE

There are two movies  
playing in the living room  
tonight.

The first is a silent movie—  
one I think I’ve seen before—

and the other is loud and  
choppy. It’s about a man  
who’s constantly shifting  
between anger and sadness.

He’s yelling at the silent  
movie but it still won’t  
say anything.

Now, he’s soft and forgiving;  
he’s reached through the screen

—out of his film  
and into the other—

and he’s placed his hands  
tenderly around a woman,

and he’s speaking  
so softly / so quiet,  
he’s almost as  
silent as she is.

She turns away and  
his face, red hot  
with rage, is bleeding  
through the black

and white screen.

He's yelling again  
and the whole room  
feels like a storm.

\*\*\*

SIREN

“Her love’s like tornado weather.”  
—HAYES CARLL

the wind chimes  
screamed, so loud,  
so fast, their lungs

burst

as they were ripped  
from porches as if  
pulled by the world’s  
largest magnet.

//  
she was yelling  
something from the  
porch before

I even stopped  
the car in the  
driveway.

//

that texas breeze  
was warm, smelled  
like (rain, the) birds  
all flying  
the same direction.

//  
the news anchor says  
it’s a blizzard, says  
minneapolis might  
be gone tomorrow,  
says st. paul might  
not last the week.

## HISTORY

*Carol Hamilton*

*"Do not cut a hole in the  
Side of a boat to mark the  
Place where your sword dropped."  
—Kenneth Rexroth*

There at dawn is still the knotted-up root  
that tripped him the night before.  
He kicks it each time he passes.  
It sits mute and stubborn,  
its tree skin wrinkled and tough,  
dark enough to suck in light.  
To win this war he plans strategies:  
get rid of the tree; add inches  
of soil to raise the land;  
ignore it or choose another route.  
His days are filled with battle plans,  
replays of the offence. He shakes  
his fist and frowns on passing.  
There was an interval  
of looking up through stirred leaves  
or sectioning off the blue distance  
with the snaking delicacy of branches.  
This went on too long, he said.  
The threat remains,  
and he is slowly sinking.

## MY FATHER AND THE CARTOONS

*Carol Hamilton*

In the den, his desiccated form,  
still compact and handsome,  
though diminished, fit cornered  
over the leather sofa's black back,  
its skin softer than his tough lungs.  
He expelled used air  
as he'd learned to do,  
watched cartoons flicker  
across the TV console's screen.  
Disgusted, he'd pronounce  
them or himself silly.  
He never tried to explain  
Daffy Duck's antics to me  
as he had always struggled  
to share the beauty  
of his diagrams of electrical relays,  
nor as, at the end,  
he told me about the elaborate  
World Series rules  
his oxygen-hungry brain had devised.  
On his last Sunday, he still  
dragged his tanked existence to church,  
thus avoided the mayhem  
he so feared, that the weight  
of his illness might crash down  
on our lives.  
He said there were chains  
in his chest the night he died,  
and my mother was sent  
on a wild goose chase between hospitals  
as the ambulance made switchbacks  
like Roadrunner escaping.  
And like Roadrunner, Bugs,  
Daffy, Jerry, Wile E. Coyote,  
my father escaped his nemesis,  
his fear of causing us trouble,  
the one that kept devising  
ways to outwit him.



## HER EVALUATION

*Carol Hamilton*

She says poetry is the more relevant  
to our lived lives. She is a poet as well as  
an expert in the history of science.  
Put Keats' words to Fanny Braun  
next to his day's cure for consumption.  
Put his love next to the doctor's prescription.  
Frost's ache in arch of foot,  
the ladder rung, I feel it still,  
while the Epsom salts  
to soak the pain away . . .  
this reeks of nostalgia.  
Now we would call on  
a new balance of shoe.  
Tomorrow Frost's apples  
will be picked by a robot,  
but the pain of too much work,  
the scent of autumn apples, lingers.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Suraj Alva** has lived everywhere, from the plains of South Asia to the prairie deserts of North America. His creative work has appeared in *c,c&d* and *The Fiction Pool*.

**David Anderson** is a poet, photographer, and historian from Omaha, Nebraska. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Evansville Review*, *The Healing Muse*, *The Remembered Arts Journal*, and *Raven Chronicles*.

**Tina Baker** is a retired Speech/Language Pathology instructor for Kansas, Hawaii, and Oklahoma Schools. She has enjoyed reading with the Woody Guthrie Poets for the past three years and has recent poems with *Dragon Poet Review* and *Ain't Gonna Be Treated This Way*.

**Lily Bell**, a.k.a. Aquamarine Space Unicorns, has published several CDs. Her works are featured in *Moonchild Magazine* and *Rag Queen Periodical*.

**Robert Bermudez** teaches ESL and guitar. He is interested in anything that goes beyond our mundane, day-to-day existence and brings with it the wonders of the unknown and the mysterious. In addition to rooting for his favorite sports teams he enjoys loud rock, cold beer and strong coffee.

**Daniel Birnbaum** lives in France. His poems and short novels have appeared in several French reviews, and in *Blue Heron Review*, *One Sentence Poems*, *Chrysanthemum* and *Skylark*. He has published nine books.

**Dmitry Blizniuk**'s most recent poems have appeared in *River Poets Journal (USA)*, *The Courtship of Winds (USA)*, *Dream catcher (UK)*, *Reflections (UK)*, *The Ilanot Review (Israel)*, and *In Layman's Terms" (USA)*. He is a finalist for 2016 Award "Open Eurasia," "The Best of Kindness 2017" (USA). He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine.

**Sergey Gerasimov** lives in Kharkiv, Ukraine. His stories written in English have appeared in *Adbusters*, *Clarke'sworld Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, *Fantasy Magazine*, *Oceans of the Mind*, and other venues. Upper Rubber Boot Books published his wildly surrealistic novel, *The Mask Game*, in 2013. Also, he is the author of several novels and more than a hundred short stories published in Russian.

**Ace Boggess** is author of three books of poetry, most recently *Ultra Deep Field* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2017), and the novel *A Song Without a Melody* (Hyperborea Publishing, 2016). His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *RATTLE*, *River Styx*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and many other journals. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

**Carl Boon** lives in Izmir, Turkey, where he teaches courses in American culture and literature at 9 Eylül University. His poems appear in dozens of magazines, most recently *The Maine Review* and *The Hawaii Review*. A 2016 and 2017 Pushcart Prize nominee, Boon recently edited a volume on the sublime in American cultural studies.

**Sean Buckley**'s screenplays have won the Iconic Character Fellowship Award, have reached the quarterfinals of the Austin Film Festival, the Final Draft Big Break contest, and the PAGE

International Screenwriting Contest, as well as the semifinals of the Cynosure Screenwriting Contest. He has also written two novels, and several flash fiction pieces which have been featured in the *Mad Scientist Journal*, *Lou Lit Review*, and *the Spry Literary Journal*.

**Bill Boudreau**, a French Acadian, grew up in a fishing village on the southwest coast of Nova Scotia, and writes fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and short stories. He has been published in *Ain't Gonna be Treated This Way*, *Conclave: A Journal of Character*, *CyberSoleil Literary Journal*, and more.

**Yvonne Carpenter** has published two books of poetry and assisted in publishing *Red Dirt Roads*, an Oklahoma Book of the Year for Poetry. Her work has appeared in *Blood and Thunder*, *Grain--a Canadian poetry journal*, *Westview*, *Red Earth Review*, *Smoky Blue*, *Concho River Review*, and the Woody Guthrie anthologies.

**Leah Chaffins** writes horror fiction, memoir, and poetry. Her work can be found in many publications, including the anthologies and journals *Ain't Gonna Be Treated This Way: Poems of Protest & Resistance*, *Behind the Yellow Wallpaper*, *OkieMag*, *Red Earth Review*, and *The Gold Mine*.

**Megan Clark** is earning her bachelor's degree in English and Creative Writing from Towson University. She lives in Harford County, Maryland with her boyfriend and their fur baby, Rudy. She currently works as a Data Tracking Specialist and grant writer for the Boys & Girls Clubs.

**James Coburn** is an Oklahoma poet, photographer and journalist. His first book of poetry *Words of Rain* was published in 2014 and was a finalist for an Oklahoma Book Award. Coburn is a Woody Guthrie Poet, whose work has appeared numerous anthologies. Coburn, a long-time journalist for *The Edmond Sun*, is a 2013 inductee of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame.

**Samuel E. Cole** is a poet, flash fiction geek, and political essayist enthusiast. His work has appeared in many literary journals, and his first poetry collection, *Bereft and the Same-Sex Heart*, was published in October 2016 by Pski's Porch Publishing. His second and third books, *Bloodwork* and *Siren Stitches*, both collections of short stories, were published by Pski's Porch Publishing (July 2017) and Three Waters Publishing (October 2017), respectively.

**Terri Lynn Cummings** hosts Oklahoma Voices, a monthly poetry reading and open mic in Oklahoma City. She is a frequent contributor to *Songs of Eretz Poetry Review*, and her poems also appear in *Illya's Honey*, *Red River Review*, *Eclectica*, and elsewhere. Village Books Press published her first poetry book, *Tales to the Wind*, and chapbook, *An Element Apart*.

**James Cummins** has published nine books of non-fiction and fiction, and is a Canadian Authors Association award winner. His poetry has been published in journals including *Burnt Pine*, *Snow Monkey*, and *Joey and the Black Boots*.

**Holly Day's** published books include the nonfiction books *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, and *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, and the poetry books *Ugly Girl* (Shoemusic Press) and *The Smell of Snow* (ELJ Publications). Her needlepoints and beadwork have recently appeared on the covers of *Your Impossible Voice*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *QWERTY Magazine*.

**Richard Dixon's** poems and essays have been published or are forthcoming in *Crosstimbers*, *Westview*, *Walt's Corner of the Long Islander*, *Texas Poetry Calendar*, *Cybersoleil*, *Dragon Poet Review*, *Red River Review* and *Oklahoma Today* as well as a number of anthologies including the Woody Guthrie compilations in 2011, 2012, and 2017, and *Clash by Night*, an anthology of poems related to the 1979 breakthrough album by the Clash, London Calling.

**Margaret Dornaus'** poems appear regularly in international anthologies and journals. Her first book of poetry, *Prayer for the Dead: Collected Haibun & Tanka Prose*, released through her small literary press Singing Moon, received a 2017 Merit Book Award from the Haiku Society of America.

**Marty Eberhardt**, a retired botanical garden director and nonprofit consultant, has published in *The Wilderness House Literary Review*, *The San Diego Writers INK 2017 Anthology*, three volumes of *The Guilded Pen*, and *The Silver City Quarterly Review*.

**Valerie Egan** writes in the attic of her home in Portland, Oregon, where she also illustrates and paints. She has a tattoo of a jackalope, really likes cats, and by day earns her living as a non-profit arts administrator. Her work has appeared in *Oregon Humanities*.

**Tara A. Elliott** is the founder and director of *Salisbury Poetry Week*, and *The Lighthouse Poetry Society*, and has been honored to serve as a Wicomico County Public Library Light of Literacy Educator. She is currently serving as a board member of Eastern Shore Writer's Association in Maryland. Her recent poems have been published in *The Loch Raven Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and *The TAOS Journal of International Poetry & Art*, among others.

**Charlie Ericson** is a poet and fiction writer living in Evansville, Indiana. He spends time that he is not writing carefully tracing the origin of every coffee bean that goes into a cup. His work is currently forthcoming in *Measure: A Review of Formal Poetry*.

**Antony Fangary** is a Coptic-Egyptian American who lives in San Francisco. He is a MFA student of Poetry at San Francisco State University and was the Honorable Mention recipient of the 2015 State-wide Ina Coolbrith Poetry Prize. This poem is part of a larger collection entitled, *Ya Kharabi*. His work has been published in the 2017 edition of *Welter*, and *Waccamaw*.

**Robert Ferrier** has published two novels as e-books, and has won the Norman (Oklahoma) Tree Photo contest twice. His photo, "Magnolia Morning," was the cover of the Summer 2016 *Dragon Poetry Review*, and his photo, "Diagnosis in Stasis," was the cover of the Fall 2012 *Blood & Thunder*, OU College of Medicine journal. His poems have appeared in *Dragon Poet Review*, *Oklahoma Today*, *Blood & Thunder*, *Crosstimbers*, *Westview*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *The Exhibitionist*, *Walt's Corner of the Long Islander*, and *Red River Review*.

**Apryl Fox** has been published previously in *Strange Horizons*, *Offcourse Magazine*, *Whistling Shade*, *Dark Animus*, *Snow Monkey*, *Star/Line*, and *Three Line Poetry*. She resides in Michigan.

**Todd Fuller** has two books published, *60 Feet Six Inches and Other Distances from Home: the (Baseball) Life of Mose YellowHorse* (Holy Cow! Press, 2002) and *To the Disappearance* (Mongrel Empire Press, 2015). His first book has been optioned for a screenplay, tentatively titled *A Dancing Red Spine*, which he is co-writing with his wife.

**Bill Garten** has published poetry in *Rattle*, *Interim*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *California State Poetry Quarterly*, *Portland Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Antietam Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *The Chaffey Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Portland Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Poet Lore* and others.

**Thomas Gillaspay** is a northern California photographer. His photography has been featured in numerous magazines including the literary journals *Compose*, *Portland Review* and *Brooklyn Review*.

**Terry M. Gresham** has published two books of poetry: *Under a Toenail Moon* and *Dark Sandwiches*. He has been published in the *Cybersoliel Literary Journal* and *Dragon Poet Review*.

**Barry Gross**, of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, has two books of poetry and fiction, *Coiled Logic* and *Angled Portraits*, published by Red Dashboard Press.

**Ken Hada** has published six volumes of poetry, including his latest two: *Bring an Extry Mule* and *Persimmon Sunday* (Purple Flag Press, 2017 & 2015). Hada is the director of the long-standing Scissortail Creative Writing Festival in Ada, Oklahoma.

**Carol Hamilton** has recent and upcoming publications in *Paper Street Journal*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Common Ground*, *Calliope Journal*, *Main Street Rag*, *Indigo Lit*, *Louisiana Review*, *Homestead Review*, *Poem*, *Sandy River Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Texas Poetry Calendar 2018*, *Turtle Island Quarterly*, *Inscape*, *Blood & Thunder*, and several others. Additionally, she has published 17 books, most recently, *Such Deaths* from Virtual Arts Cooperative Press Purple Flag Series. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma.

**Michelle Hartman's** latest book is *The Lost Journal of My Second Trip to Purgatory*, from Old Seventy Creek Press. Her other books include *Irony and Irreverence* and *Disenchanted and Disgruntled*, from Lamar University Press. Hartman is the editor of *Red River Review*.

**Patricia Hemminger** is a science and environmental writer and associate editor of *Pollution A-Z* published by Macmillan. Her articles and poems have appeared in *E – The Environmental Magazine*, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, *the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, *Spillway*, *Parabola*, *About Place Journal* and *The Ghazal Page*.

**Wm. Brett Hill** grew up just outside of Athens, Georgia but now makes his home on the Eastern Shore of Maryland where he spends time with his wife and daughter, works in IT, writes stories, and takes pictures of old buildings and boats. His short fiction has appeared in *Dime Show Review* and *Medusa's Laugh Press*.

**Sravani Hotha** is an Indian-American writer who seeks to break the “single story” mindset that is often imposed on South Asian literature. She lives in Pittsburgh, where she can be spotted twirling in the rain and reading the minds of unsuspecting commuters. She would love world peace but will settle for some between her dogs.

**Ann Howells**, of Dallas, has edited *Illya's Honey* eighteen years, recently digitally at [www.IllyasHoney.com](http://www.IllyasHoney.com). Her publications include *Black Crow in Flight* (Main Street Rag Publishing), *Under a Lone Star* (Village Books Press), *Letters for My Daughter* (Flutter Press), an anthology of D/FW poets: *Cattlemen & Cadillacs* (Dallas Poets Community Press), and *Softly*

*Beating Wings* (Blackbeard Books) winner of the William D. Barney Chapbook Contest 2017. Her work appears widely in small press and university publications.

**Rollin Jewett** is an award-winning playwright, screenwriter, singer/songwriter, poet and author. Jewett's poetry has recently been seen in *Gathering Storm Magazine*, *Weasel Press*, *The Write Launch* and *Door is a Jar Magazine*, and his short story "The Girl in the Forest" was recently published in *Ghost Stories: An Anthology*. An avid photographer, Jewett's photo art has also been published in several magazines online and in print.

**Anastasia Jill** is a queer poet and fiction writer living in the greater Orlando area. She is an editor for *Smaeralit* as well as *The Chaotic Review*. Her work has been published or is upcoming with *Poets.org*, *Deep South Magazine*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *Dual Coast Magazine*, *Queer Stories*, *FIVE:2:ONE*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, and more.

**Quinn Carver Johnson** is originally from Kansas but currently lives in Conway, Arkansas where he is a student at Hendrix College, studying English with a focus in Creative Writing. He recently self-published a collection of poetry, entitled *If You Shut Your Eyes and Are a Lucky One*.

**Madhu Kailas** is the pen name of Kingshuk Basu. He is a native of Kolkata, India and has lived, worked and studied in various places in India and USA. He is the author of *The Birds Fly in Silence and Other Poems*, a collection of 57 poems published by Writers Workshop Kolkata. He has been published in journals including *Indian Literature*, *Dragon Poet Review*, *The Literary Review*, *New Mexico Review*, and *Marathon Literary Review*.

**Bonnie Kennedy** won the 2016 TACWT writing competition for best undergraduate poetry and presented her poem at their 2016 Conference in San Antonio. She has also presented her work at other conferences and has been published in *Voices De La Luna* and *Writing Texas*.

**Jennifer Kidney** is an adjunct assistant professor for the College of Professional and Continuing Studies at the University of Oklahoma. She is the author of six books of poetry. Her most recent collection, *Road Work Ahead*, was published by Village Books Press in 2012. An avid birder, she is the secretary of the Cleveland County Audubon Society.

**Abishake Koul** is a poet from the mountains. He has been published in the journal *CLRI*, *Snapdragon*, *Taj Mahal Review*, the anthology *Chants of Peace*, *The Punch Magazine*, *The Write Launch*, *1888.center*, *Kashmir Lit* and *The Unknown Pen*.

**Thomas Locicero's** most recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *vox poetica*, *Bindweed Magazine*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Clockwise Cat*, *Snapdragon*, *felan*, *The Ghazal Page*, *Red Savina Review*, *Abyss & Apex Magazine*, *The Avocet*, *Speculative 66*, *Lit.cat*, *Kestrel*, *The Beatnik Cowboy*, *Mused—the BellaOnline Literary Review*, *Loch Raven Review*, and *The Wordsmith Journal Magazine*, among others.

**Scott Matthew Mahoney** was born and reared in Canton, Ohio. He is currently in his senior undergraduate year at the Ohio State University.

**Bill McCloud's** book, *The Smell of the Light* (Balkan Press), consists of 107 poems, in chronological order, based on his year in Vietnam in 1968-1969. McCloud is a 2017 Woody

Guthrie Poet with poems published in *“Ain’t Gonna Be Treated This Way”: Poems of Protest and Resistance* (Village Books Press, 2017), *the Conclave literary journal*, and Northern Oklahoma College’s *The Maverick*.

**Robert Milby** of Florida, NY has been reading his poetry in the Hudson Valley and beyond since early 1995. He has hosted 28 poetry series since late 1995 and currently hosts four regular, Hudson Valley, poetry series. He is the author of two books of poetry, and six chapbooks, most recently, *Victorian House*. He is currently the Poet Laureate of Orange County, NY.

**John Murphy** lives in Virginia. He has published fiction and poetry at *The Vignette Review*, *Ad Hoc Fiction*, *Ruminate Magazine*, *Penultimate Peanut* and *101 Words*.

**Kedrick Nettleton** is currently a student at Oklahoma Baptist University, pursuing a degree in Creative Writing. His work has appeared in *Route Seven Review* and has been awarded locally.

**Vivian Finley Nida** is a Teacher/Consultant with the Oklahoma Writing Project, affiliated with the University of Oklahoma. Her work has appeared in the *Oklahoma Writing Project Centennial Anthology*, *Oklahoma English Journal*, *Westview: Journal of Western Oklahoma*, *Illya’s Honey*, *Dragon Poet Review*, *River Poets Journal “Windows” edition*, *Westview: Journal of Western Oklahoma*, *Songs of Eretz Poetry Review*, and *Ain’t Gonna Be Treated This Way*.

**Matt Poll** has spent most of the past decade in South Korea and has written a memoir about the challenging life of a foreign birdwatcher there. He has also started writing a series of supernatural stories about birding.

**Fabrice Poussin** teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, *The San Pedro River Review* and more than 250 other publications.

**Alicetierney Prindiville-Porto** is an eighteen-year-old from central Illinois. The following poem is regarding her struggle with OCD. Her work appeared in the recent September issue of the *Write Launch*.

**MW Rishell** is a poet, a fine art photographer, and an English, journalism, and composition instructor. He served on the editorial board for the *Red Earth Review* and has been published by the *Southern Literary Review* as well as the *Red Truck Review*.

**Katherine Joyce Robbins** writes both fiction and predominantly free verse poetry. She also specializes in photography, some of which has been published by various magazines and sites, including *Sleeklens*, *Susurrus*, and *Transcendence Magazine*.

**Jacie Roberts** lives in Stillwater, Oklahoma with her husband and two dogs. She is attending Oklahoma State University for bachelor’s degrees in philosophy and French with a minor in English. She enjoys kayaking, fishing, bicycling, and reading.

**Rajendra Shepherd** is a writer, journalist and artist who works at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine. His latest story “God alone knows” appears in *SAND*. His other published

work includes: “Fear: the last assignment,” “In the heart of Myrtle Cadoggan,” and the audio story “Emily’s keeper.” His poetry has been published by *The British Medical Journal* and *The Good Men Project*.

**Sam Silva** has published in print magazines and online journals, including *Sow’s Ear*, *The ECU Rebel*, *Pembroke magazine*, *Samisdat*, *St. Andrew’s Review*, *Charlotte Poetry Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Jack Magazine*, *Comrades*, *Megaera*, *Poetry Super Highway*, *physik garden*, *Ken again*, *-30-*, *Fairfield Review*, and *Foliate Oak*.

**Colie Smigliani** is a current senior at the Chicago College of Performing Arts. She has been writing for herself since she was very young as a way to make sense of the world around and within her. She aims to find the moments that leave her speechless and then write them down.

**Michael Snyder’s** first book, *John Joseph Mathews: Life of an Osage Writer* was published by the University of Oklahoma Press in May 2017 and quickly became a bestseller in Oklahoma (*The Oklahoman*). His poetry has appeared in several literary magazines and the book *Ain’t Nobody That Can Sing Like Me: New Oklahoma Writing* (Mongrel Empire). He has published a dozen articles of literary and cultural criticism in peer-reviewed academic journals and four book collections.

**George L. Stein**, writer and photographer, works in both film and digital formats in the urban decay, architecture, fetish, and street photography genres. His emphasis is on composition with the juxtaposition of beauty and decay lying at the center. Stein has published in *Midwestern Gothic*, *Gravel*, *Foliate Oak*, *After Hours*, and *Darkside Magazine*.

**Sylvia Riojas Vaughn’s** work appears in *Red River Review*, *Triada*, *HOUSEBOAT*, *Diálogo*, *Desde Hong Kong: Poets in conversation with Octavio Paz*, *Bearing the Mask: Southwestern Persona Poems* (Dos Gatos Press, 2016), *Beyond the Hill* (Lost Tower Publications, 2017), *Highland Park Poetry’s The Muses’ Gallery*, and anthologies and journals in the U.S. and abroad. Her play, *La Tamalada*, was produced in Fort Worth.

**Anca Vlasopolos’** publications include *The New Bedford Samurai*; *No Return Address: A Memoir of Displacement*; *Cartographies of Scale (and Wing)*; *Walking Toward Solstice*; *Penguins in a Warming World*; and *Missing Members*, as well as over 200 poems and short stories. Vlasopolos writes, photographs wildlife, and pots on Cape Cod.

**Ron Wallace** is the author of eight books of poetry; three of which have been finalists in the Oklahoma Book Awards. He has been recently published in *Oklahoma Today*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Red River Review*, *Oklahoma Poems and their Poets*, *Concho River Review*, *Oklahoma Humanities Magazine*, *Poetry Bay*, and a number of other magazines and journals. Wallace is the winner of the 2016 Songs of Eretz Poetry Review Prize.

**Josh Wann** lives and teaches in Tulsa. He still makes time to climb trees and is fond of his pepper plants. He has been published in *Concis*, *Dragon Poet Review*, and *The Ogham Journal*, among others.

**Philip de Winter** lives in the manor of his country estate, where he works as a freelance composer and music producer.



**Clarence Wolfshohl** has been active in the small press industry as writer and publisher for nearly fifty years. He has published poetry and non-fiction in many journals, both print and online, most recently, the e-chapbook *Scattering Ashes* (Virtual Artists Collective, 2016). Wolfshohl lives in the suburbs of Toledo, Missouri, with his dog and cat.

**Kirby Wright's** first play was produced at the Secret Theatre's 2016 One Act Festival in New York and his second at Manhattan Rep's 2017 Non-Fest. He won the Gold Fox Award at the 2017 Calcutta International Film Festival for his treatment of an animated special.

**Roxann Perkins Yates** writes for the Locust Grove Arts Alliance newsletter and is a board member of the Territory Tellers organization. Yates' publications include *Devil's Cut*, *Girls on the Road: Are We There Yet?* and *Myopic Memories: Girls Who Wear Glasses*. For the Rural Oklahoma Museum of Poetry, she compiled a sampling of 100 years of autograph poetry, *True Friends Are Like Diamonds*.

**Nicole Zdeb** is a writer and educator living in Portland. She has poems, translations, essays, and reviews published in numerous journals over the years, including *Volte*, *Gulf Coast*, *VOLT*, *Full of Crow*, *Quarterly Conversation*, *Two Serious Ladies*, and other journals.

**Jianqing Zheng's** photographs and photographic essays have been published by *The Southern Quarterly*, *Arkansas Review*, *Poetry South*, *Twisted Vine Literary Magazine*, and *Down to the Dark River Poetry Anthology*. He teaches at Mississippi Valley State University where he also edits *Valley Voices: A Literary Review*.

## About the Editors

**Rayshell E. Clapper** is a prose writer and an Assistant Professor of English at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, California, where she teaches Creative Writing, Literature, and Composition classes. She has presented her original fiction and nonfiction at several conferences and events and published her works in myriad journals and magazines. The written word is her passion, and all she experiences inspires that passion. *Dragon Poet Review* continues to be a way to promote creativity and inspire all writers. She lives her life through three passions: family (including her beloved pets), writing, and teaching. As a Metal Monkey and Virgo, she balances her worlds of creativity and independence with organization and humanity. She lives in California with her passions and words but ever does the world call to her for travel and experience and life.

**Jessica B. Isaacs** received the 2015 Oklahoma Book Award for Poetry for her first full-length book of poems, *Deep August* (Village Books Press, 2014). She has presented her writing at several regional and national conferences, and her poems may be found in journals and anthologies including *Oklahoma Today*, *Poetry Bay*, *One-Sentence Poems*, *My Life with a Funeral Director*, *Short Order Poems* (September 2014 Issue), *Cybersoleil Literary Journal*, *All Roads Lead Home Poetry Blog*, *Sugar Mule's Women Writing Nature*, *The Muse*, and *Elegant Rage*. She is a member of the coordinating committee for the Woody Guthrie Poets and is an English Professor at Seminole State College in Oklahoma where she serves as the director of their annual Howlers & Yawpers Creativity Symposium. According to her zodiac signs, she is both a Taurus and a Fire Dragon, which makes for interesting dinner conversations. She feathers her nest and keeps her home fires burning in Oklahoma with her husband, kids, dogs, and cats.

## Call for Submissions:

### *Dragon Poet Review*

is currently accepting submissions  
for our Summer / Fall 2018 Issue,  
deadline June 1, 2018.

Please submit on our Submittable site:

<https://dragonpoetreview.submittable.com/submit> .

Complete Submission Guidelines are  
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[www.dragonpoetreview.com](http://www.dragonpoetreview.com) .